

## THE ACADEMICALLY TALENTED AND THEIR LEVEL OF STRESS

© Mohd ZURI GHANI & © Aznan CHE AHMAD  
(Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia)

[mdzuri@usm.my](mailto:mdzuri@usm.my) & [aznan@usm.my](mailto:aznan@usm.my)

*This study aimed to compare the stress experienced by academically talented students from three types of schools; mainstream schools, residential schools, and Mara Junior College MARA (MRSM). The difference in stress can be seen by the differences in the mean which are categorized as high, medium and low. The relationship between the stress variables with gender and type of school and its contribution to the academically talented students can also be seen in this study. A total of 177 selected samples, the sample consisted of students who earn all A's distinction in all subjects taken at the Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) examination (equivalent to lower secondary assessment). Correlations and Multiple Regression were used to examine the relationship and interaction between two variables by gender and type of school. The results showed that gender and school type did not affect the stress. However, academically talented students from MRSM are seen to receive the highest stress. Stress is also seen to contribute only 0.6% of the students' academic achievement.*

**Keywords:** Stress and Academically Talented Students.

Majority of previous researchers considered academically talented student as a special person and able to handle their stress. However, this view is a myth that should be ignored (Nik Azis, 1994). Tupper (1996), has concluded that the academically talented student is an easily stressed person. Tupper (1996), has listed types of stress that are faced by academically talented students such as pressure from outside (the environment), financial problems (social economy), and minimal opportunities for further studies. Tupper (1996) also stated that the academically talented students also have problems continuing their studies after completing their academic level-at a specific stage. This shows that not all academically talented students know their aims/ directions.

### Stress among academically talented students based on previous research

Just like normal people, academically talented student is also a normal individual, but possess an additional advantage that make them differ from other students. Although academically talented students possess high talent and intelligence, they also experience stress and emotional disturbances, social, and psychological problems as experienced by other students (Yewchuck & Jobagy, 1991). In addition, Nik Azis (1994), in his study on academically talented students have indicated that academically talented

students also faced failure to control their curiosity because academically talented students might possess multiple interest and might be active in various activities in schools and after school hours. In this context, they need to control their feelings of curiosity and to use their energy effectively so that they can complete the tasks given to them.

Parke (1989) has stated that academically talented students also faced problem in creating a good social interaction. Thus, the academically talented students sometimes are being pressured by the situation. Failure to create a good social interaction occurred because academically talented are those who prefer to work alone, do not like to go along with their peer group, and not easily influenced by demands culture (Parke, 1989). In this context, academically talented students need guidance to get along with peers and adults, but not comply with the requirements of others blindly. Instead, they must learn to be independent without isolating themselves from society (Nik Azis, 1994). Apart from it, academically talented students also suffer from stress as a result of circumstances. There is the myth that academically talented student love to be called as “smart student”, but in actual fact they feel very stressed with the situation. Academically talented students, in reality feel that they are actually as same as other students, and they have no special abilities. Academically talented students find such labels affect their emotional wellbeing and social interactions. Such feelings become more pronounced when the academically talented students enter their secondary school and their peers become a critical element in their social life. Academically talented students do not consider themselves possessing such extra ordinary abilities. Instead, they feel themselves as ordinary human happen to have different methods in their study and have interest in activities that are quite different from their peers.

In general, academically talented students do like to be isolated from their peers too. They also do not like to be referred as positive and negative examples in their classes. In such situation, their class teacher exposes them to sanction or social action organized by their peers. This phenomenon can create such a situation that the academically talented students feel afraid or less happy to reveal their true intellectual abilities.

In addition, academically talented students are also burdened with high expectation from their parents and teachers too. It is also possible that the academically talented students feel very stress if they failed to fulfill the high expectation from their parents and teachers. Some parents put illogical expectation on their academically talented children and as a result, this action put their children under immense emotional and psychological stress. Moreover, there are also some parents who forced their children to study without any adequate rest time in order to make them excellent in their academic achievement (Freeman, 1993).

Teachers on the other hand too used to create classroom climate that is not productive when making wrong conclusion that academically talented students “do not make mistakes in their study and with that, they do not need attention from the teachers”. We need to realize that academically talents students are just like other students that also need to satisfy their physiological, social, emotional, achievement, religious, and spiritual needs (Nik Azis, 1990).

Although the academically talented students possess high talent and intelligence, they also experienced stress and emotional disturbances, social, and psychological problems that have plagued other students (Yewchuck & Jobagy, 1991). Here are some of the problems that are faced by the academically talented students.

### Failure to control curiosity

Academically talents students may possess different interests and may be active in various in and out of school activities. In this context, they need to control their feelings of curiosity and to use their energy effectively so that they can complete their school work efficiently. They need to balance their creative exploration with the discovery of systematic activities.

### Failure to form good social interaction

Academically talented students often have problems in creating a good social interaction. They prefer to work alone, do not like to be accompanied by their peers, and not easily influenced by peer's culture (Parke, 1989). In this context, academically talented students need guidance to get along with peers and adults, but not easily comply with the requirement of others. Instead, they must learn to be independent without separating themselves from the society.

### Failure to accept and understand own ability

Academically talented students sometimes have the feeling that they are "unique and different" from their peers. Such feeling can lead to situation where the academically talented students will isolate from other students. Thus, the academically talented students should be given guidance and awareness to enable them to understand the concept of individual differences and sense of self-conscious that every human being has certain advantages and disadvantages. This is all a gift from the God to test the level of human faith and piety.

### Failure to form a good noble system

A lot of academically talented students like to discuss issues related to the philosophy, values, and ethical life. But without the guidance of parents or other adults, they are not able to build a system of values that provide the appropriate place to knowledge of rational thought, empirical experience, and intellectual intuition.

### Failure to fulfill expectation of parents and teachers

Some parents placed senseless hope that creates emotional and psychological problems to their children. There are also parents who seem forcing their children to focus their time on study without giving them adequate rest time (Freeman, 1993). In other issues, there are teachers who seem to create a classroom climate that is not productive when they make the wrong conclusion that the smart students smart "do not make mistakes in learning, and therefore, they do not require the attention of teachers". We need to realize that the academically talents students, are just a normal person like other students, need to satisfy physiological, social, emotional, achievement, and spiritual needs (Nik Azis, 1990). To build a sophisticated scheme of action and scheme of operational, academically talented students need a good and conducive home and classroom climate. This is because the

process of reflection and abstraction to build a scheme of action and scheme of operational has been very difficult to run in uncondutive atmosphere.

### Failure to accept other people

Some academically talented and skilled students will focus fully on their own activities, the tendency to isolate itself, and is caught in the rain of praises until they develop the attitude of undermining the ability of others. They have become arrogant and proud of themselves excessively. In this context, academically talented students need to be given guidance to understand and appreciate the concept of spiritual awareness that only Allah (God) is perfect and worthy of our praise.

Sternberg (1991) stated that adolescence stage is the stage of emotional conflicts that cannot be avoided. They believed that hormonal changes during puberty cause changes or turbulence that occurs suddenly in teenagers. This turmoil is a biological change that is inevitable.

In conclusion academically talented students are no difference from any other normal individual that cannot avoid themselves from having problems. As such, they certainly are under stressed as what other individual are facing. However, the way how they overcome their stress is different from a normal individual.

### Research questions

This study aimed to determine the stress experienced by the academically talented students in three different type of schools which are normal school, residential school and Mara Junior Science College (MRSM). The research questions in this study are as follows:

1. Are there differences in stress levels among academically talented students according to their gender?
2. What is the level of stress of the academically talented students based on the type of schools?
3. Are there any differences in stress levels among academically talented students in the normal school, residential school and the Mara Junior Science College (MRSM)?
4. Are there there any interaction and contribution action on stress factors among academically talented student based on their gender?

### Hyphotheses

1. There is no defference in stress levels among academically talented students according to their gender.
2. There is no difference in stress levels among academically talented students in the normal school, residential school and the Mara Junior Science College (MRSM).

## Research design

This study involved outstanding students whom have scored grade A's for all subjects taken at the PMR (equivalent to lower secondary assessment). A total of 22 items must be answered by the respondents to meet the requirements of this study. The questionnaires have been developed by the researchers. A pilot test has been carried out and the alpha value was 0.666. This research is a quantitative study using correlation, regression, ANOVA, and also taking into consideration the mean value.

## Research findings

Table 1. *T-test for Stress Factor Based on Gender of Academically Talented Students*

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.p</b>
Stress	Male	88	3.5305	.46568	175	-.992	.322
	Female	89	3.6037	.51440			

*Significant level at  $p < 0.05$*

The t-test result showed that there was no significant difference in stress levels among academically talented students according to their gender ( $t = -0.992$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis of this study is acceptable. From Table 1, result shows that there is only a small mean different among the male and female academically talented students. In addition, the analysis also showed that the stress is not influenced by gender of a student. On average, the level of stress among academically talented students is at medium level. The following tables show the interpretation of the mean value interpretation and descriptive statistics for stress factor based on type of school.

Table 2. *Mean Value Interpretation*

<b>Mean Value</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
10.00-2.33	Low
2.34-3.66	Medium
3.67-5.00	High

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics For Stress Factor Based on Type of School*

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Type of School</b>	Normal School	63	3.500	Medium
	Residential School	56	3.551	Medium
	Junior Science College	58	3.655	Medium

Table 3 shows that the stress of academically talented students according to the type of school is at moderate level. From the table, it can be seen that normal school has a mean score of 3.500), boarding school has a mean score of 3.551) and MRSM has a mean score of 3655. Academically talented students in MRSM seem to have the highest level of stress. To see the

difference between the stress factors and type of schools, researchers have used one-way ANOVA and the analytical results are as follows;

Table 4. ANOVA For Stress Factor Based on Type of Schools

Source	JKD	DF	MKD	F	Sig. p
Among Group	.742	2	.371		
In Group	41.647	174	.239	1.549	.215
<b>Total</b>	<b>42.389</b>	<b>176</b>			

Significant level at  $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows that there was no significant differences in stress experienced by the academically talented students according to the different type of schools ( $F = 1549$ ;  $DF = 2.176$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore the null hypothesis has to be accepted. Result shows that different type of schools did not show differences in stress level experienced by the academically talented students.

Table 5. Interaction Effect Between Stress Factor With Gender of academically Talented Students

Trait	Standard Beta	Standard Error	T	Sig.
Stress	7.641	.077	.992	.322

$R^2 = .006$  Sig.  $F = .322$

The analysis showed that there was no significant interaction effect between stress factors among gender of academically talented students. This situation is expected and this means that stress factors only affect 0.6% of academically talented male students and academically talented female students. In other words stress factors only contributed 0.6% to the academic success of academically talent students.

## Discussion

The result of this study shows that the stress factors also influence the achievement of academically talented students, even though the influence of this factor is small (0.6%). However, the results of past researches as well as this study, researchers suggested that the ability of academically talented students may have absorbed the stress that they are facing. The finding of this study that gender is not a significant element of stress contradicted with findings from previous researchers who found that female students are more intense in having stress. The finding of this study also found that different type of schools did not determine the effect of stress among the academically talented students. This mean that the academically talented students who are studying in normal schools or residential schools or MRSM, do faced the same stress as other students, only the level of stress experienced by them distinguished between them and their peers.

Indirectly, through this study, we can see that MRSM students received the highest level of stress, and this was followed by residential school students, and normal school students. Therefore, researchers recommended that administrators and teachers in MRSM schools more sensitive to this situation because they feared that students would not be able to absorb stress

and then lead to other unexpected issues. This situation may occur because teachers and administrators in MRSM schools and residential schools emphasis more on academic achievement. Usually the pattern of learning in the residential schools also varies with the pattern of learning in the normal school. In addition, competition among students at residential schools is more significant than students in normal schools.

## Conclusion

The results of this study shows that the levels of stress among academically talented students are different based on the locations of the three types of schools which involved in this study. The study indirectly proves that academically talented students are able to take the stress. However, these unique characteristics of them should be understood to avoid things that are beyond our expectation. Therefore, teachers should always be aware of the unique features in each and every one of their students. The understanding of the teacher with regards to this matter will help students towards their excellent goal. We must also remember that stress only contribute 0.6% to the academic success of academically talented student. Therefore, excessive stress should be avoided to ensure that these students will excel and not continue to be drop out.

## References

- FREEMAN, J. (1993). Parents and Families in in nurturing giftedness and talent. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Monks, & A. H. Passow (Eds.), *International Handbook for Research on Giftedness and Talent*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- NIK AZIS Nik Pa (1990). *Program Pendidikan Pelajar Pintar Cerdas. Teori Dan Praktik*. Malaysia: Jiwamas Printers Sdn Bhd.
- NIK AZIS Nik Pa (1994). Mitos Dan Realiti Tentang Pelajar Pintar Cerdas. *Jurnal Kebajikan*, 16 (2), 87-112.
- PARKE, B. (1989). *Gifted Students In Regular Classrooms*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- STERNBERG, R. J. (1991). Giftedness According to the triachic theory of human intelligence. In N. Colangelo, & G. A. Davis (Eds), *Handbook of gifted education* (pp. 45-54). Boston: Ally & Bacon.
- TUPPER, J. M. (1996). Gifted Adolescent students' perceptions of barriers affecting long term goals. Disertasi Ph.D. Southern Illionois University at Carbondale. UMI Proquest Digital Dissertations-Full Citation & Abstract. (atas talian). Retrieved from <http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9911460> [23.05.2005]
- YEWCHUCK, C & JOBAGY, S. (1991). Gifted Adolescents: At risk for suicide. *European Journal for High Ability*, 2 (1), 73-85.