

***Psychological Well-Being among Gifted Students at the National Gifted Center in Malaysia***

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**Abstract**

Psychological well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives. According to Diener (1997), these evaluations may be in the form of cognitions or in the form of effect. The cognitive part is an information-based appraisal of one's life, that is when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about one's satisfaction with life as a whole. The effective part is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings, such as frequency with which people experience pleasant/unpleasant moods in reaction to their lives. The assumption behind this is that, most people evaluate their life as either good or bad, so they are normally able to offer judgments. In addition, people invariably experience moods and emotions, which have a positive effect or a negative effect. Thus, people have a level of subjective well-being even if they do not often consciously think about it, and the psychological system offers virtually a constant evaluation of what is happening to the person. In this paper we have defined psychological well-being in terms of internal experience of the respondents and their own perception of their lives. This research focused both on momentary moods and long term states of the respondents' mental well-being. Besides that, the purpose of this study is to identify the level of psychological Well-being among Gifted Students in PERMATApintar™ National Centre, National University of Malaysia. A total of 61 gifted students participated in this study using a questionnaire as a research tool. The analysis showed that the level of psychological Well-being among Gifted Students at the National Gifted Center is moderate. The implications are also revealed at the end of the discussion.

Keywords : psychological well-being, gifted students, gender, ethnicity

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## **Introduction**

There are two contrasting views about the psychological well-being of gifted children: that giftedness enhances resiliency in individuals, and that giftedness increases vulnerability. There is empirical and theoretical evidence to support both views.

There is a long history of interest in how giftedness affects psychological well-being. As stated earlier, two conflicting views prevailed. The first is that gifted children are generally better adjusted than their non-gifted peers; that giftedness protects children from maladjustment. This view hypothesized that the gifted are capable of greater understanding of self and others, due to their cognitive capacities, and therefore, cope better with stress and conflicts than their peers.

The second view is that, gifted children are more at risk for adjustment problems than their non-gifted peers, that giftedness increases a child's vulnerability to adjustment difficulties. The hypothesis is that, the gifted are more sensitive to interpersonal conflicts, and experience greater degrees of alienation and stress than do their peers, as a result of their cognitive abilities. (Baker, 1995; Jacobs, 1971; Kaiser, Berndt, & Stanley, 1987; Neihart, 1991; Ramasheshan, 1957; Scholwinski & Reynolds, 1985). Thus, this study gives insights into the psychological well-being of the gifted students at the National Gifted Center in Malaysia.

## **Psychological Well-being**

Psychological well-being is defined as happiness, life satisfaction, and self-growth. It is about lives going well. It represents one of the most important aspects of efficient psychological functioning. In other words, psychological well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Research reveals that happy people experience a number of benefits ranging from physical health to better relationships to high level performance. Hence, people with high psychological well-being are reported to feel happy, capable, well supported and satisfied with life.

Theory and research have identified two aspects of well-being. The first aspect of well-being can be defined as the person's general happiness with his or her life (hedonic well-being), while the second one is concerned with self-realization or personal growth (eudaimonic well-being) (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Both aspects of well-being are said to be related. However, this study focuses only the hedonic aspect of the gifted students at the National Gifted Center in Malaysia.

## **Gifted Students**

Gifted students have always been considered as students who are at the upper end of the bell curve in academic abilities. At this upper end, the bell curve tail can continue for a considerable distance, representing increasingly extreme difference (Peterson, 2006). Gifted students grasp complex mathematical or scientific concepts with ease and exhibit creative and innovative work in many ways. They can concentrate for a long period on topics of their interest. They are not easily distracted, set high standard for themselves and enjoy intellectual challenges (Norah & Abu Yazid, 2010).

According to Neihart, Reis, Robinson and Moon (2002), gifted students show initiative, originality and flexibility in thinking, with the ability to consider problems from multiple perspectives, responsive to new ideas and often show social poise or an ability to communicate with adults in a mature way. Children and youth possessing these abilities can be found in all populations across all economic strata.

### **National Gifted Center in Malaysia**

Pusat PERMATApintar Negara (PPpN) is the national center of excellence for Malaysian academically gifted children, which has been launched in early 2009. The holistic aim for its establishment is to develop a comprehensive educational program that would be responsible to foster positive growth of the nation's gifted students, in terms of physical, emotional, intellectual and social aspects (Noriah, Rosadah & Siti Rahayah, 2009). The setting up of PPpN is a sign of commitment from the government of Malaysia to strengthen its national policy on special education which in turn should benefit the country in the long run.

According to Clark (2005) and Claxton (2003), for every 100,000 children, there is one gifted child. In the local context, Malaysia has 4.5 million children from the age group of 9 to 15 years old (Noriah, Rosadah & Siti Rahayah, 2009); hence, Malaysia would have 4500 gifted children within that age group for any particular year that need academic and psychological support from the present education system.

### **Problem Statement**

Various research in the field of education found that children with higher level of intelligence face adjustment problems compared to their non-gifted peers. Adjustment refers to an individual's pattern of responding to environmental demands. Persons with positive adjustment are able to cope effectively with the demands of life. Persons with negative adjustment have maladaptive coping strategies or lack coping skills to deal effectively with stress. The finding that high ability (typically defined as high IQ) individuals demonstrate superior adjustment is supported by empirical research (Freeman, 1983; Kaufmann, 1981). Grossberg and Cornell (1988) also found a positive correlation between high intelligence and adjustment.

### **Research Objective**

General objective

This study aims to identify the level of psychological well-being among gifted students at the national gifted center in Malaysia.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this study are :

- a) To identify the level of psychological well-being among gifted students in terms of social and emotional adjustment , based on gender.
- (b) To identify the level of psychological well-being among gifted students in terms of social and emotional adjustment , based on ethnicity.

## **Research Questions**

- a) What is the level of psychological well-being among gifted students at the National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia?
- b) Is there any difference in terms of gender, in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students at the National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia?
- c) Is there any difference in terms of ethnicity, in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students at the National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia?

## **Research Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of this study is formed based on the above research questions.

H a) The level of psychological well-being among gifted students at the National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia, is high.

H b) Both genders, male and female show similar social and emotional adjustment, thus indicate the high level of psychological well-being among gifted students at the National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia.

H c) All ethnicity, Malay, Chinese and Indian show similar social and emotional adjustment, thus indicate the high psychological well-being among gifted students at the National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia.

## **Research Design**

The study is conducted using quantitative research.

## **Location of Study**

Research site is at PERMATApintar National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia.

## **Samples Review**

Samples were selected by purposive sampling. This is based on the opinion of Chua Yan Piaw (2012) that purposive sampling (purpose sampling) refers to the sampling procedure in which a group of subjects that have certain characteristics are chosen as respondents. Accordingly, this research uses purposive sampling in which only gifted students were selected as respondents for the study using one set of questionnaires on psychological well-being.

## **Data Collection**

Quantitative method based on questionnaires was used in this study.

## **Data Analysis**

The data collected was processed using the program of Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS), and then analyzed using descriptive statistics and statistical

inference. Descriptive statistics used were mean, standard deviation, and percentage; while statistical inference used were t-test and ANOVA.

## Findings

a) Level of psychological well-being among gifted students at the National Gifted Center , National University of Malaysia

Researcher used descriptive analysis in order to obtain the research outcome of the psychological well-being among these gifted students. Therefore, the following table gives an overview of the research data which contains basic statistical functions.

Table 1 Descriptive of level of psychological well-being among gifted students

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Psychological well-being	61	148.00	228.00	195.98	17.414
Valid N (listwise)	61				

Based on Table 1, the minimum score is 148 while the maximum score is 228. Apart from that, the mean score for the level of psychological well-being among these gifted students is at (M = 195.98, SP = 17.414) which is at the average level of interpretation.

b) Difference in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students based on gender

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being among gifted students based on gender.

To answer the above hypothesis, *Independent t test* was conducted to identify the differences in the psychological well-being among gifted students based on gender. The analysis findings of the *Independent t test* is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Independent t test* difference in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T value	df	sig. (p)
Male	26	194.35	17.584	-0.630	59	0.531
Female	35	197.20	17.442			

Based on Table 2, the difference in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students based on gender is (t= -0.630, p<0.05). This is in accordance to H<sub>01</sub>, that is, there is no difference in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students based on gender. However, the mean score of female students (Mean = 197.20, SD = 17.442) is slightly higher than the mean score of male students (M = 194.35, SD = 17.484). Nonetheless, this slight difference does not portray significant

difference in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students in the National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia, in terms of gender.

c) Difference in the psychological well-being among gifted students based on ethnicity

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being among gifted students based on ethnicity.

To answer the above hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to identify the difference in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students based on ethnicity. SPSS was used to obtain the results of the research. The finding of one-way ANOVA can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation Difference in Psychological Well-being among Gifted Students based on Ethnicity

Ethnicity	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Malay	39	194.08	17.558
Chinese	13	193.08	16.312
Indian	4	204.75	15.945
Others	5	211.40	13.939
Total	61	195.98	17.414

According to Table 3, students of minority race had the highest level of psychological well-being (M = 211.40, SD = 13.939), followed by Indian students (M = 204.75, SD = 15.945). The Chinese students had an average level of psychological well-being that is (M = 193.08, SD = 16.312), whereas Malay students had the lowest level of psychological well-being (M = 194.08, SD = 17.558).

This is clearly portrayed in the one-way ANOVA analysis shown in the following table.

Table 4 Difference in Level of Psychological Well-being among Gifted Students based on Ethnicity

	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	sig. (p)
Between Groups	3	1747.341	582.447	2.018	0.122
Within Groups	57	16447.642	288.555		
Total	60	8.237			

Analysis of one-way ANOVA as shown in Table 4 signifies that there is no difference in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students based on ethnicity, value of (p = 0.122 > 0.05). Findings showed null hypothesis could not be rejected. Hence, there is no significant difference in the level of psychological well-being among gifted students in National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia, in terms of ethnicity.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, several conclusions can be made based on the analysis of SPSS. The findings show that the level of psychological well-being among gifted students at the National Gifted Center is moderate. This is measured by looking at the social and emotional adjustment made by most students. Majority of the students are aware of their surrounding and engage more in 'happiness-relevant activities'. In addition, being male or female, or being a Malay, Chinese or Indian student, does not affect the psychological well-being of these students. Together they live and learn and seek knowledge to achieve their goals in becoming future leaders of the nation.

## **Limitation of Study**

This study involved only 61 gifted students of National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia, due to time constraint.

## **Recommendation for Future Research**

A wider range of students with different age level are encouraged to participate in the study. In this way, we can see whether or not there is a difference in the level of psychological well-being among these students.

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