

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

A widespread belief about intellectually gifted students is that they regularly score high on intelligence tests and are high achievers in school. Yet, during the last decade, a growing concern has been given to the confusing question of high ability students who are also underachieving. Many people have difficulty comprehending that a gifted child can also underachieve. A child is thought to be either gifted or an underachiever and it is impossible to be both. Even when educators first began to describe children, who showed evidence of being gifted yet also appeared to be underachieving, many viewed this as contradictory. Thus, children with special needs that result from both their high abilities and their learning problems are rarely identified and are rarely given the necessary help.

Gifted underachievers continue to puzzle their teachers and parents by the paradox of their obvious capabilities and their just as obvious lack of achievement in the school environment.

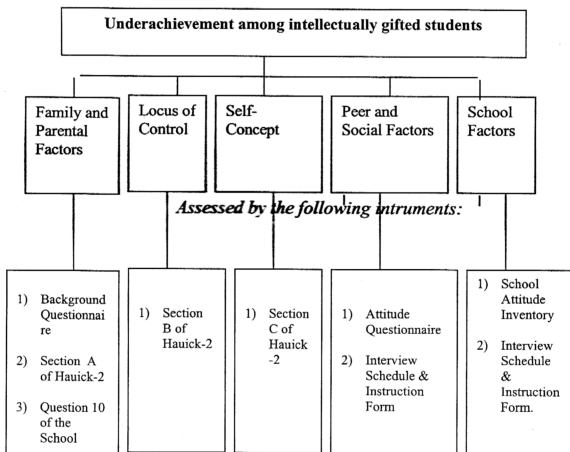
1.2. Statement of the Problem

It is often assumed that intellectually gifted students have no problems in their academic work and that they are developing at their fullest potential. However, the minority who is consistently achieving below their potential across time and subjects are often neglected. Many do not realize that they are performing below their potential. Gowan (1955) has described the gifted underachiever as "one of the greatest social wastes of our culture."

1.5. Research Paradigm

Based on foreign and local resources, there are many factors that contribute to underachievement among gifted students. However, these factors can be categorized into five main factors, namely family and parental factors, locus of control, self-concept, peer and social factors and school factors. To determine if the above factors contribute to academic underachievement among the four intellectually gifted Malaysian students, the following instruments will be used.

Figure 1.1
Factors of Underachievement



1.6. Significance of the Study

In this study, the strengths and potential the underachieving intellectually gifted students will be acknowledged instead of being unrecognized. Fine and Pitts (1980) warned that the underachieving intellectually gifted child is typically not detected as being intellectually gifted on entering school because of the school's penchant for equating intellectual giftedness with high academic attainment, as if they were the same. As a result, the student may be denied appropriate educational opportunities and his or her curiosity to learn may be killed.

Teachers may fail to recognize the child's giftedness and respond with inappropriate low expectations. As a result, the child may be intellectually unstimulated and indirectly led to set low standards and goals. With this study, teachers will have knowledge of the background, the nature and factors of underachievement in the intellectually gifted. This will help them to be able to cope better with the underachieving gifted students and in turn help develop the students to the fullest. **These study sheds light on the strengths and potential of gifted underachievers**

According to Whitmore (1988), parents believe that learning and school achievement are easy for all gifted children and they tend to demand more effort and tolerate little error or imperfection. Eventually, the child will try to avoid the risk of being less than "the best" or "failing." Parents also often believe that gifted children have very strong egos and require extra firm discipline to curb their independence and foster humility. These are misconceptions that can lead to potentially damaging consequences to the child's self-esteem and achievement motivation. Through this

study, parents can be made aware of the nature and causes of underachievement that can later contribute to intervention strategies.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Since the study is based on case studies of four students, the results cannot be used to generalize all underachieving gifted students in the country.

The identification of the sample is based on intelligence test scores obtained from IQ tests, public examination scores and scores from assignments and achievement tests. This restricts the perspective of broad issues and facts related to underachievement among the gifted. Other forms of giftedness or even underachievement such as creativity and leadership are not discussed in this study.

Terman (1925) had studied the issue of underachieving gifted for over a decade. Since these samples are observed and interviewed over a period of only one to two months, the study is limited in terms of duration of observation. It should be noted that some factors of underachievement that are studied may not surface within these months of observation.