

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# School Counseling Services for Gifted and Talented Students: A Systematic Review of Literature

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## ABSTRACT

Gifted and talented students are different from the other normal students and special attention is needed for due to their high cognitive ability and their socio-emotional conditions. Literatures show shortcomings and ineffectiveness of the counselling services to the gifted and talented students. The lack of effective interventions and approaches targeted to the students hinders the understanding on the importance of counseling services to the students. Hence, this study aims to explore the school counseling services for gifted and talented students. Based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 10 articles were selected and reviewed. Findings from different journal sources conducted in different countries were assimilated to attain better understanding of the relevance of school counseling services to gifted and talented students. The role of the school counselors and the challenges in the school counseling services were also identified from the articles.

**Keywords:** School counseling services, school counselors, gifted and talented students

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## INTRODUCTION

Gifted and talented students are individuals who have high ability to understand complex mathematical or scientific concepts easily as well as have high level of creativity and innovative thinking ability (1). In learning, these students are able to concentrate on topics or issues that are of their interest. The students are also characterized by perfectionism (2). Due to their high cognitive ability, these students are more succumb to high level of pressure and heavy commitment to activities (3). In fact, these concerns can be addressed by the counseling services in schools. On the contrary, research done by Ishak and Bakar (4) found these students prefer to solve their problems on their own compared to seeking school counselors. This situation keeps the students distant from the school counseling services.

Counseling services for gifted and talented children of all age groups are essential. However, there is a noticeable limited amount of empirical studies conducted on the counseling services for these students in the schools as addressed by Wood (5). Also, Moon (6) was concerned that "There is almost no outcome research available on the efficacy of specific counseling and modalities,

approaches, or strategies, with gifted individuals and their families". It is evident that studies which add to the literatures of the school counselors or school counseling services and gifted and talented students are needed. The findings of the future research could provide more insights on the development and wellness of the students and as a means for the formulation of more practical and empirically tested theories, activities, and interventions.

School counselors are responsible for the welfare and benefits of every student. They have to serve the students regardless of their backgrounds and differences. The effectiveness of the counseling services provided to students can be evaluated from progress shown by each and every student. From the perspectives of gifted and talented education, school counselors are responsible for the development, learning, and personal issues of the students. Neihart, Reis, Robinson, and Moon (1) stated that most of the socio-emotional issues of gifted students rooted in school environments that are not in line with their unique learning needs. From the statement above, school counselors should work as important persons in the advocacy of special populations in schools including the gifted and talented students (7). They need to play various roles not only in the talent development of these students, but also in term of the students' education and personal concerns.

This review aims to explore more on the school counseling services targeted to gifted and talented students. School counseling services function as catalysts to the learning, development, and growth of students. When dealing

with the gifted and talented students, school counselors have to be more alert of the relevance of counseling services offered to these students as compared to normal students. The orthodox ways of offering counseling services need to be changed to accommodate the needs of this population. At the same time, new challenges have arisen when school counselors offer the services to gifted and talented students compare to ungifted students. Therefore, school counselors have to adjust their roles in the education and development of gifted and talented students. In short, this systematic review of literatures aims to answer the following objectives is to investigate the relevance of school counseling services to gifted and talented students, to determine the school counselors' roles when dealing with gifted and talented students and to identify the challenges faced by school counselors with gifted and talented students.

**METHODS**

This systematic review was derived from an area of interest which is school counseling services to gifted and talented students. A search strategy conducted to retrieve literatures which were related to the objectives of the review. The objectives of the review served as guidelines for the selection of available and suitable literatures from different sources.

**The search strategy**

In order to conduct and report this review, the reviewer utilized the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses criteria (8). The reviewer attempted to look for more recent literatures that were published in the past five years (2012 to 2017). However, the limited number of articles broadened the review to articles which were published from year 2006 to 2017. Two databases were used in the search, namely Google Scholar and SCOPUS database.

The keywords used in the initial search were: (a) school counseling service, (b) school counselors, and (c) gifted and talented students. The initial search produced the highest number of results. The number of results found was decreased by considering the inclusion criteria as shown in Table I and exclusion criteria in Table II.

**Table I:** Inclusion criteria of the systematic review

Inclusion Criteria Presented in Order	Particulars	Literatures Identified	Remaining Literatures
Key terms	School counseling services, School counselors, Gifted and talented students	348	348
Year	From year 2006 to 2017	123	123
Participants	Gifted and talented students, counselors, parents, and/or teachers in preschool, primary, and/or secondary school	78	78

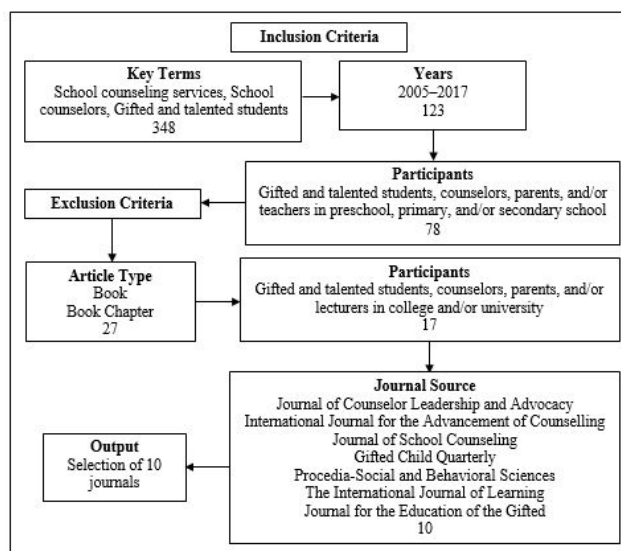
Filtration was then being conducted by limiting the search results into journals which were related to

primary and secondary school students, counselors, parents, and/or teachers (regardless of the country). The search was finally stopped when 10 most relevant journal articles were found. The journal articles were studied and reviewed thoroughly.

**Table II:** Exclusion criteria of the systematic review

Exclusion Criteria Presented in Order	Particulars	Literatures Identified	Remaining Literatures
Inclusion Criteria			78
Article Type	Book	15	
	Book Chapter	36	27
Participants	Gifted and talented students, counselors, parents, and/or lecturers in college and/or university	17	10

The flow of the systematic review (Figure 1) started with initial search using a few key terms. The search was followed by including the year of publication, population, article type, and journal source of articles as shown in Figure 1. There were 348 papers found related to the key terms in the search. Only 123 of the papers were published from year 2005 to 2017. The retrieved papers were screened based on their titles and abstracts. 78 of the papers were selected due to the participants – the gifted and talented students, counselors, parents, and/or teachers in the preschool, primary, and/or secondary school. Articles which set the teachers and parents of the gifted students as participants were also included, as the two entities have frequent and direct involvement in the growth of the gifted and talented students. The counseling services were also utilized by both the teachers and parents for the students' development of the students.



**Figure 1: Flowchart of systematic review process.** The flow of the systematic review (Figure 1) started with initial search using a few key terms.

This review excluded articles from books, book chapters, and literatures which set students, counselors, parents, and/or lecturers parents at the tertiary education level (colleges and/or universities) as the participants. Finally,

10 literatures were selected from different journal sources.

### Findings of literature review

The information of the selected articles pertaining to school counseling services to the gifted and talented students is shown in Table 3. The author, year of publication, title of journal articles, setting of the study, participants, and main findings of each literature are clearly outlined. Table 3 is to provide clearer and better view of the information related to school counseling services targeted to gifted and talented students. The literatures included in this review were studies done in only three countries, namely Malaysia, Romania, and United States, due to the limited empirical studies conducted on school counseling services to gifted and talented students in other countries.

## DISCUSSION

### The relevance of the school counseling services

Regardless of the setting in which the studies were conducted, school counselors are the key personnel who have integral roles in the development of the

students. From the perspectives of school teachers, Ignat (14) found that school counselors are perceived as the third out of seven main collaborators in the participation of the education process of gifted and talented children. The other collaborators include the school manager, the inspector, the school doctor, the teachers class team, the parents, and others individuals. On the parents' side, they rank school counselors at the second – which is higher than the ranking of the school teachers. Hence, by weighing the rankings by the school teachers and parents of the students, it is clear that besides school teachers, school counselors have also assume some integral roles and responsibilities in the education process of these students. They can function as advocates or consultants by engaging in conversation with students, teachers, and parents regarding the education program available such as the acceleration program for the students (10).

Despite having significant roles from the perspectives of school teachers and parents, the counselors are actually less likely to be attended by the gifted and talented students in Malaysia. The students prefer to solve their problems on their own compared to seeking help and advice from counselors (4). Even if they see

**Table III:** Summary of Selected Literatures

Author / Year / Location	Title of the Article	Participants	Main Findings
Yoo, and Moon (9) 2006 United States	Counseling Needs of Gifted Students: An Analysis of Intake Forms at a University-Based Counseling Center	120 parents or extended family members who perceived children aged 4 to 18 exhibited gifted behaviors	Parents concern about the social and emotional development of their gifted children. Differentiated guidance is needed for the children. Educational Planning and School Concerns were two prevalent concerns among preschoolers, preadolescent, and adolescents' parents.
Wood (5) 2009 United States	Counseling Concerns of Gifted and Talented Adolescents: Implications for School Counselors	153 gifted and talented adolescent in visual and performing arts and humanities	Counseling concerns experienced by gifted and talented students were multi-potentiality, perfectionism, fear of failure, and social acceptance.
Ishak, and Bakar (4) 2010 Malaysia	Psychological Issues and the Need for Counseling Services among Malaysian Gifted Students	180 secondary school gifted students participating in an enrichment program organized by the national gifted centre	The most prevalent psychological issue of gifted students was perfectionism. The students usually adopted inactive indirect strategies and showed introverted behaviors. The determinants of the counseling services were: the types of services, students' age and gender.
Wood, Portman, Cigrand, and Colangelo (10) 2010 United States	School Counselors' Perceptions and Experience With Acceleration as a Program Option for Gifted and Talented Students	149 practicing school counselors who are also members of ASCA	School counselors received no formal training on acceleration program for gifted and talented students.
Ishak, and Bakar (11) 2010 Malaysia	Counseling for Gifted Students: Implication for A Differentiated Approach	180 secondary school gifted students participating in an enrichment program organized by the national gifted centre	Students seek out counseling services for career exploration, academic issues, and study skills. They prefer counselors to use cognitive counseling approach.
Wood (12) 2010 United States	Best Practices in Counseling the Gifted in Schools: What's Really Happening?	153 gifted and talented adolescent in visual and performing arts and humanities	There is a lack of structured, standardized, and empirically tested best practices for gifted students. Some students claimed that counselors are not understanding of them and their concerns.
Wood (13) 2010 United States	Nurturing a Garden: A Qualitative Investigation Into School Counselors' Experiences With Gifted Students	8 elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools professional counselors	Relationships can be established based on knowledge of the gifted students' unique personalities and needs. The students are overwhelmed by stress, and do not have repertoire on emotional coping. Traditional counseling approaches are ineffective to them due to their high cognitive ability.
Ignat (14) 2011 Romania	The School Counselor and the Gifted Children Education	504 school teachers, 52 counselors, and 85 parents	School counselors as the participant collaborators at gifted education were ranked the third by the Romanian teachers; second by parents.
Ishak, and Bakar (15) 2014 Malaysia	Counselling Services for Malaysian Gifted Students: An Initial Study	180 secondary school gifted students participating in a 3-week school holiday program organized by the Malaysians Gifted Centre	Counselors were not the main psychological support system of gifted students. The students prefer to receive career counseling and academic guidance; They less likely see counselors for personal issues.
Carlson, Holcomb-McCoy, and Miller (16) 2017 United States	School Counselors' Knowledge and Involvement Concerning Gifted and Talented Students	328 elementary, middle, and high school counselors from the membership of American School Counselor Association (ASCA)	School counselors' general knowledge of gifted and talented students was associated with the involvement with them and the counselors' working experience.

the counselors, the issues they discuss are mainly related to career counseling and academic guidance. This is probably due to the career maturity developed by these students, as well as the concerns from parents regarding educational planning and some other school concerns of the students (9). The need for counseling services on career and academic issues shows the value of the counseling services. The services are still relevant because the students utilize the services for career and academic issues. On the other side, school counselors have also be more aware of the lack of attending to emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal related issues which are not fully benefited by the students yet.

### **The role of the school counselors**

To better involve in the education process of the gifted and talented students, school counselors must be cognizant of the characteristics of the students. The involvement of school counselors as advocates with the students is associated with the identification knowledge dimension (16). This means the school counselors' deep identification knowledge of the gifted and talented students is needed in order to get involved with the students. Greater experience in the counseling field is also important because it will relatively lead to more training programs on this particular discipline. The knowledge from the professional development programs will function as a medium for building relationship with the students (13) which in return lead to more effective counseling services to the students.

School counselors also need to ensure the comprehensiveness of the services provided in school to guarantee the overall effectiveness of school counseling services. In this aspect, more efforts need to be done by the school counselors as Wood (12) found that school counseling services are not comprehensive enough and do not cover the wide range of needs of gifted and talented students. This situation was due to the counselors being selective to certain components of the services. The selectivity could broaden the gap between the students and the counselors. In short, it is crucial for the counselors to be aware of the services' holism. The counselors must recognize whether they are being selective and biased to only one or a few of the components in the whole counseling services. They must also ensure more comprehensive services are tailored for the students in order to benefit the students from the counseling services.

Regarding psychological issues faced by the gifted and talented students, the students ranked issues related to perfectionism with the highest mean, followed by competitiveness, low self-esteem, identity formation, and extreme self-consciousness (4). Research by Wood (5) found that multi-potentiality, social acceptance, perfectionism, and fear of failure are among concerns face by the gifted and talented students. The findings of the two studies indicated a common issue of the

students, namely perfectionism. The role of counselors can be shown by attending to this issue. However, the counselors must also assess any other potential underlying issues that the students might face as the parents are also concern about the social and emotional development of their children (9).

School counselors also need to be aware of the students' preference on the counseling approaches used by the counselors. When gifted and talented students see counselors, they prefer counselors to use cognitive counseling approach rather than humanistic or behavioral approaches (11). This finding supports the research conducted by Wood (13) which characterized gifted and talented students as having rapid cognitive processing ability, high tendency to ask existential questions, and have high level of self-reflection and awareness. Hence, more new differentiated (9) and cognitive approaches are needed to enable the counselors to work effectively with the students. School counselors must be able to formulate and exercise approaches which are more suitable to the nature of the students.

### **The challenges of the school counselors**

In the pursuit of offering effective counseling services, school counselors always face with a range of challenges. Wood (5) found that gifted and talented students rarely see counselors. The reluctance is in line with the empirical findings found by Ishak and Bakar (11), which clearly stated that the students did not see the counselors to discuss and explore any of their psychological or relational issues. This serves as a hindrance not only to the students, but also to the school counseling services. The students do not get full benefits from the services. This situation might probably incur more behavioral, emotional, and interpersonal problems among the students as they did not possess emotional-coping repertoire and always were overwhelmed by stress and challenges (13).

Study by Wood, Portman, Cigrand, and Colangelo (10) reported that school counselors were not well-informed about the gifted and talented education in the United States as they received no formal training, particularly on the acceleration program for the students. School counselors received information about the students informally – either through their colleagues, informal meetings, electronic and printed media, and a few other sources. The lack of training among school counselors deprives them from providing effective services. This shortcoming spurs the negative perception of gifted and talented students on the counseling services. They did not approach the services due to the ineffectiveness of the services as perceived by them (11).

Another challenge which was faced by the school counselors also included the students' refusal to see the counselors for personal issues. This refusal was

due to a few factors, such as to avoid embarrassment, the negative perception of others towards them, time constraint, and ineffective counseling services (11). Research by Wood (12) indicated that some gifted and talented students recounted counselors did not imply something was wrong with them or their concerns. The counselors even dismissed and misunderstood the concerns of the students. These situations have high potential to affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the counseling services as the students will perceive the counselors and the counseling services negatively and as ineffective to their issues.

Ishak and Bakar (4, 15) not only found that the tendency for students to see counselors for personal issues was relatively low, but the situation was also influenced by gender and age factors. Female and older gifted and talented students tend to seek for counseling services more frequently. Ishak and Bakar (4) also found that the students adopted active indirect (AI) and inactive indirect (II) coping mechanism strategies rather than the active direct (AD) strategy when facing problems. The strategies used were: focus on their academic work and seek for spiritual assistance (AI), and forget about their problems (II). The findings show that the gifted and talented students used academic work as a strategy to cope with stress as well as to increase their academic achievements. They also demonstrated introverted behaviors (involve in spiritual activity, eat alone, keep a diary, remain silent for a long period of time, cry alone, and disengage in social activities) when dealing with problems.

### **Implications**

There is a growing trend of counseling services for gifted and talented students from different findings by researchers around the world. School counselors are recognized as the key personnel in the education process of gifted and talented students by parents and teachers. However, a few literatures suggested that gifted and talented students do not perceive counselors as their potential psychological support sources. They instead resort to ineffective and unhelpful coping mechanism strategies. The gifted and talented students are also said as having low emotional coping ability. Hence, these situations call for further research to identify core factors that trigger the above situation as well as to get clearer and wider understanding of psychological conditions of the students. Research-based counseling interventions or models that can be adopted by school counselors particularly for gifted and talented students must also be formulated as they need more differentiated and creative counseling approaches for their unique ability and potentials.

Research on the counseling for gifted and talented students that includes multicultural factors can be done. The factors include age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and personality factors, and so on. This can

provide more insights on the factors affecting students not looking to counselors. The findings of the studies will be beneficial for the school counseling practices. Counselors will be more aware of the trend related to counseling services as perceived by students of different backgrounds and cultures. Through the findings, school counselors can probably strategize more impactful initiatives to get the students closer to counseling services as well as to enable the students to better understand the benefits they can attain from the services.

From this review, it is evident that the structure of counselor professional development programs must be assessed and revised. The training programs must include more elements of counseling for gifted and talented students to make sure future school counselors are well-informed about the characteristics of the students. Interventions targeted at this population can also be taught to these counselors-to-be. As for in-service and practicing school counselors, formal training through workshops, courses, and any other necessary initiatives must be carried out from time to time. School counselors must be equipped with knowledge on personal, social, emotional, career, and academic development of gifted and talented students. It is also essential for the counselors to be competent at counseling skills, techniques, strategies, interventions and approaches to accommodate the differences and needs of gifted and talented students.

The reviewed articles, however, showed a lack of stress management program conducted in school for the gifted and talented students. These students are succumbed to high stress level (17) due to the external and internal expectations towards their achievement in the school. In order to address the challenges faced by the students, school counseling services must be more comprehensive. The services provided must be development, prevention, and treatment oriented. Regarding the high stress level of the students, school counseling services must include psycho-education component focusing on teaching stress management techniques to the gifted and talented students. This intervention could serve as a catalyst for the sound emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development of the students. The program must also be researched to test its effectiveness in helping the gifted and talented students.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations in this review. One of the limitations is that most of the selected studies were only limited to three countries, namely Malaysia, Romania, and the United States. This means the review only reflects the counseling services offer to gifted and talented students in these countries. There were only 10 journals selected in this review. This was due to the lack of available empirical studies conducted on counseling services targeted to gifted and talented students (13). Hence, this review cannot be generalized for the



counseling services for gifted and talented students across all the countries. Apart from that, the selected studies were also mostly conducted by quantitative approach. Thus, further research is encouraged to be conducted qualitatively to further explore the perspectives and beliefs of teachers, parents, students, and other relevant parties on the school counseling services for gifted and talented students.

## CONCLUSION

School counseling services are essential to the gifted and talented students. School counselors are the ones who determine the quality of the services provided to the students. To better serve the students, school counselors need to be highly aware of the changes in the services as well as the trend or level of acceptance among the students to the services. At the same time, school counselors must also be equipped with the knowledge on the characteristics of gifted and talented students as well as practice more research-tested interventions to the students. It is also vital for school counselors to have wide and deep understanding of the students. School counselors who are well-informed about the gifted and talented students' behaviors, needs, perceptions, social interaction patterns, and emotional responses are able to provide more effective assistance to the students for their development as well as to guarantee the standard of counseling practices.

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