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Prevalence and Diversity of Challenges Faced by Gifted Students in Saudi Arabia: Insights from Educational Specialists

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Abstract. Gifted students in high schools often face unique psychological, social, and academic challenges that differentiate them from their peers. This study aimed to investigate these challenges from the perspective of specialists in gifted education, with two primary objectives: to identify the most prevalent challenges and their respective prevalence rates, and to explore whether the gender of specialists influenced their perceptions. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 88 specialists (50 female, 38 male). Results identified five key domains of challenges: psychological distress, external expectations and pressures, emotional and behavioral regulation, social interaction difficulties, and academic and career-related concerns. Key findings revealed that the high expectations of teachers and parents, neurotic perfectionism, and limited school career guidance were among the most prevalent challenges faced by gifted high school students. Furthermore, gender differences were observed, with female students perceived as experiencing greater psychological distress and external pressures, while male students faced slightly higher rates of hyperexcitability and career awareness challenges. These findings underscored the need for gender-sensitive educational and psychological support systems to address the diverse needs of gifted students. Additionally, this study highlighted the importance of targeted interventions, including values-based career counseling and social-emotional learning programs, to mitigate the challenges faced by gifted students in high schools.

Keywords: Academic Pressure; Emotional Support; Gender Differences; Gifted Education; Specialist Perception

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1. Introduction

Gifted students often face a unique set of psychological, social, and academic challenges that distinguish them from their peers. Such difficulties typically arise from a combination of factors, such as heightened intellectual sensitivity, uneven developmental patterns, and significant external pressures (Neihart, 2021). An elevated intellectual sensitivity can foster increased emotional intensity and a deeper awareness of moral or existential questions, which might lead to their isolation from peers who do not share similar interests or levels of insight (Silverman, 2012). Asynchronous development, whereby children's intellectual, emotional, and physical growth unfolds at different paces, can result in feelings of frustration or difficulties in forming relationships, especially when an individual's cognitive abilities outstrip their emotional or social maturity (Cross, 2015). Furthermore, the expectations placed upon gifted students, whether self-imposed, from parents or societal, can create considerable stress, potentially leading to anxiety, perfectionism, or even burnout (Peterson & Ray, 2006).

1.1 Understanding Giftedness

Defining giftedness is a complex endeavor, marked by ongoing scholarly discussion and a lack of universal agreement (Reis & Renzulli, 2020). Although a precise working definition is vital, the term is frequently used interchangeably with terms such as "high ability," "high aptitude," or "talented," which complicates its interpretation (Reis & Renzulli, 2020). Additionally, the concept of giftedness is not fixed; it evolves throughout an individual's life and varies across different cultural settings (Simonton, 2020).

One perspective suggests that giftedness involves an advanced and accelerated integration of brain functions, including thinking, sensing, feeling, and intuition (Gardner, 2000). Although this view highlights the cognitive aspects of giftedness, a contrasting viewpoint emphasizes the developmental side, proposing that giftedness is a combination of intelligence that develops over time (Horowitz, 2009).

In the present study, giftedness is best conceptualized as a multifaceted construct that encompasses both cognitive abilities and the potential for exceptional performance when provided with appropriate educational opportunities and support. According to this perspective, giftedness is not seen as a fixed trait; rather, it is recognized as a developmental phenomenon that requires nurturing and cultivation (Valdés, 2014). Therefore, this study's approach to understanding the challenges faced by gifted students is grounded in the recognition that giftedness manifests differently across individuals and domains, necessitating tailored support systems that address the unique needs arising from these diverse expressions of exceptional ability.

1.2 Psychological Challenges

Gifted high school students encounter a variety of psychological challenges that can significantly affect their mental health and academic success (Helsper et al., 2025; Raoof et al., 2024). Among others, these challenges include stress and vulnerability to psychological disorders in high-achieving environments (Helsper

et al., 2025), depression and anxiety linked to underachievement patterns (Raoof et al., 2024), neurotic perfectionism characterized by anxiety and dissatisfaction (Bagheri et al., 2024; Liao et al., 2025), and issues related to self-esteem and identity development, particularly concerning self-demand and perfectionism influenced by parental expectations (Ramos-Solis et al., 2025; Željeznov Seničar & Kukanja Gabrijelčič, 2025).

Indeed, recent comprehensive research involving over 77,000 children demonstrates that gifted students exhibit distinct psychological profiles characterized by superior performance in verbal working memory, inhibition, and attention-switching, accompanied by heightened psychophysiological activity during complex cognitive processes (Kuznetsova et al., 2024). However, the psychological landscape extends beyond cognitive superiority to encompass emotional intensity and overexcitabilities.

Research on Dabrowski's (1964) Theory of Positive Disintegration reveals that gifted students demonstrate heightened responsiveness to stimuli, with intellectual overexcitability serving as the most significant distinguishing factor, followed by emotional overexcitability (Liao et al., 2025). Thus, these characteristics create unique vulnerabilities, as gifted students in high-achieving environments are increasingly classified as an "at-risk group" due to their elevated rates of adjustment difficulties and psychological disorders (Helsper et al., 2025).

Stress has received considerable attention from researchers. A cross-sectional study of 500 gifted high school students in Vietnam by Thai et al. (2020) found that 28.4% experienced moderate or severe stress. Furthermore, the study identified significant links between stress and external pressures, such as parental control and academic expectations. Additionally, recent research by Grugan et al. (2025) confirmed that performance perfectionism in gifted students leads to higher school stress, which in turn increases school burnout and decreases school engagement. Longitudinal findings from Peterson et al. (2009) further confirmed that academic challenges, academic overload, and social transitions are ongoing sources of stress throughout the school years.

Depression is another serious concern. Jackson and Peterson (2003) noted that depression in gifted adolescents is often hidden by their high academic achievement, with symptoms including shame, fear of harming others, and cognitive disengagement making diagnosis difficult. A study by Ghasemi et al. (2023) focusing on ninth-grade high school students in Tehran found that lower levels of social-emotional skills, such as self-awareness and decision-making, were significantly correlated with symptoms of depression.

Neurotic perfectionism—marked by an intense fear of failure, persistent self-criticism, and a strong need for parental approval—has been identified as a key risk factor for psychological difficulties among gifted students. Using the Student Adjustment Problems Inventory, Chan (2003) highlighted perfectionism as a major challenge for gifted students, particularly in relation to anxieties with regard to standing out from their peers and needing to meet parental expectations.

Recent research by Liao et al. (2025), found in Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration, found that emotional overexcitabilities are strongly associated with maladaptive perfectionistic traits, such as excessive concern over mistakes and fear of negative judgment, especially among mathematically and verbally gifted students.

Furthermore, heightened emotional sensitivity is frequently observed among gifted students (Liao et al., 2025). In addition, gifted students often exhibit heightened sensitivity to criticism, which can make them especially vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy or withdrawal when criticism is perceived as a personal attack. While Al-Kenani and Nawasreh (2022) found that sensitivity to criticism among gifted students was generally moderate and not significantly affected by gender or socioeconomic status, the potential impact on emotional well-being remains substantial. Collectively, these perspectives underscore the importance of addressing the unique emotional needs of gifted adolescents through educational and psychological support programs, with an emphasis on supportive communication to help students manage their emotional reactions constructively.

Low motivation is another risk that gifted students may encounter, often leading to underachievement. This is frequently linked to boredom and disengagement in classrooms that do not adequately challenge gifted learners. Students such as these often face tasks that are too simple or not stimulating enough, which reduces their natural desire to learn (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013). To address this, schools need to offer differentiated instruction and opportunities for advanced learning that meet the intellectual needs of gifted students.

Problems with low self-esteem and identity development are also widely discussed in literature. Chan (2002) reported that gifted adolescents' concerns about interpersonal relationships and self-recognition were significant predictors of psychological symptoms, indicating that struggles with identity and social integration are central to their emotional well-being.

Although social difficulties, including feelings of loneliness and peer rejection—appear to be common, they have rarely been systematically measured. A qualitative study by Shcherbinina and Grushetskaya (2023) demonstrated that gifted students often face challenges with self-presentation, cultural adaptation, and peer inclusion, sometimes leading to victimization. Chan (2004) also demonstrated that certain social coping strategies, such as avoidance or trying too hard to gain peer acceptance, predicted psychological distress, suggesting that poor peer strategies might increase the risk of gifted adolescents developing emotional problems.

1.3 Social Challenges

Due to common misunderstandings about giftedness, society often puts extra pressure on gifted students. Stereotypes such as the "troubled genius" and the "socially awkward intellectual" create unrealistic expectations for their behavior and achievements (Irvin, 2019). Furthermore, these stereotypes can lead gifted

students to internalize these pressures, feeling they must constantly prove their "gifted" status through unwavering excellence. This pressure can also cause decision paralysis when choosing academic or career paths, as many gifted students worry about making the "wrong" choice or not living up to societal expectations (Neihart et al., 2016). To ease these pressures, it is important to create environments in which giftedness is seen as a complex trait rather than being narrowly defined by academic success.

Recent research utilizing the Phenomenological Variance of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) framework reveals that giftedness creates unique stressors within social contexts, with gifted students experiencing significantly greater dissatisfaction in peer relationships and social interactions compared to their typically developing peers (Rocha et al., 2024). Asynchronous development exacerbates these challenges, as advanced cognitive abilities may be paired with age-appropriate or delayed social-emotional development (Helsper et al., 2025). Gifted students often encounter unrealistic expectations from teachers and adults, who might assume their intellectual abilities should match their social or emotional maturity. This mismatch can lead to frustration and stress for the student. Indeed, teachers might unintentionally encourage perfectionism by expecting consistently high performance in all subjects (Cross et al., 1992).

Gifted students frequently show a strong sense of personal responsibility and concern for societal issues such as poverty, war, and environmental problems. While this empathy is a strength, it can also lead to feelings of helplessness when they feel unable to effectively address these large-scale issues (Piechowski, 2006). Moreover, this heightened sense of responsibility can create psychological tension as these students try to balance their personal goals with their desire to contribute positively to society. Additionally, many gifted students feel responsible for the well-being of those around them. By regularly prioritizing the needs of others over their own, this altruistic tendency can lead to burnout (Piechowski, 2006). Therefore, educators and parents need to help these students to set healthy boundaries, encouraging them to pursue meaningful contributions without sacrificing their own mental health.

1.4 Academic and Career Development Challenges

Academic performance reveals a paradoxical pattern whereby exceptional cognitive abilities do not necessarily translate to academic success. Systematic reviews indicate that 9% to 28% of gifted students experience underachievement during compulsory education, with estimates suggesting that up to 50% may be underachieving at some point (Raoof et al., 2024). This phenomenon results from complex interactions between internal factors—such as motivational and social-emotional variables— and external factors, including family dynamics and socio-economic influences (Raoof et al., 2024). Educational environments often fail to accommodate unique learning profiles, leading to dissatisfaction with education and high dropout rates of 5% to 25% among gifted students (Raoof et al., 2024).

In addition to this, career counseling for gifted students often falls short because traditional methods do not adequately consider their unique traits (Cheavens,

2024). Standard career interest inventories frequently produce "high-flat" profiles, showing excellence across many areas but doing little to effectively narrow down options (Kerr & Sodano, 2003). As a result, many gifted students do not receive sufficient guidance when exploring potential career paths. Research indicates that values-based career counseling, which focuses on personal values rather than abilities, might be more effective in guiding gifted students toward meaningful careers (Kerr & Sodano, 2003). Such approaches encourage self-reflection and facilitate students to identify careers that align with their passions and long-term goals.

Collectively, these research gaps in the psychological, social, academic, and career dimensions of giftedness point to three critical limitations in the current literature. First, there is a notable absence of comprehensive prevalence data that is specifically focused on gifted high school students, as several studies include wider age ranges, which limits how specifically their findings can be applied to this crucial developmental period. Second, the lack of systematic measurement approaches, particularly for psychological challenges, prevents accurate assessment of the scope and severity of these issues. Third, the masking effects of academic achievement on psychological symptoms create diagnostic challenges that result in the underestimation of mental health concerns in this population.

In order to address these significant gaps, the present study aims to provide prevalent data on students' psychological challenges, specifically among gifted high school students. By focusing exclusively on this age group, this research can contribute to the body of knowledge by: (a) establishing baseline prevalence rates for various psychological challenges in gifted high school students in Saudi Arabia; (b) providing age-specific data that can inform targeted interventions during this critical developmental period; and (c) offering systematic quantitative data to complement existing qualitative insights.

1.5 Gifted Education in Saudi Arabia

Gifted education in Saudi Arabia has evolved since its early beginnings in 1969 (Alamrani_et al., 2024). Although its formal development only began relatively recently, Saudi Arabia has been actively exploring and implementing methods for identifying and supporting gifted students (Alfaiz et al., 2022). Two institutions currently provide programs for gifted students in Saudi Arabia: King Abdulaziz and His Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity (Mawhiba); and the Saudi Ministry of Education. Both institutions offer programs that are intended to cultivate intellectual and personal excellence among gifted students, aligning their development with national priorities such as Vision 2030 (Alfaiz et al., 2022).

The process of identifying and nurturing gifted children is structured around a rigorous and scientifically validated method. The cornerstone of this identification process is the Mawhiba Multiple Cognitive Aptitude Test (MMCAT), which plays a crucial role in the educational journey of potentially gifted students. Typically, students become eligible for gifted programs in Saudi Arabia by scoring within the top 10% on the Mawhiba Multiple Cognitive

Aptitude Test (MMCAT). Developed by the National Center for Assessment, this test serves as the primary tool for identifying gifted children from grades 3 to 10.

The MMCAT was crafted by an esteemed international consortium of experts specializing in gifted education, assessment, and evaluation (King Abdulaziz and his Companions Foundation for Giftedness and creativity [Mawhiba], n.d.). Its effectiveness and accuracy are well-documented, with several studies confirming its validity and reliability, including research by Al-Harbi and Dimitrov (2015), Dimitrov and Alharbi (2014), and Hitchcock and Johanson (2012).

Several studies provide insight into the effectiveness of Mawhiba's programs. For example, Alghamdi and Hassan (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental pre- and post-test study that demonstrated statistically significant improvements in critical thinking among gifted female secondary students after participating in a five-week Mawhiba summer program. The program emphasized cooperative learning, group discussion, and practical application in STEM fields. Similarly, Muammar (2022) evaluated the Mawhiba-IAU summer program across multiple student datasets, finding notable gains in achievement, soft skills, and satisfaction, although methodological limitations such as the absence of a control group were noted.

Other research extends beyond program impact to address structural and systemic factors. After analyzing grouping strategies in gifted classrooms, Batterjee (2014) found that separate-class enrichment and pull-out models contributed positively to academic and affective outcomes. Meanwhile, Aljghaiman and Maajeny (2013) assessed public gifted programs against pre-defined quality standards, emphasizing issues such as insufficient instruction time and variable teacher qualification.

Additionally, the literature examines the themes of inclusion and equity within these programs. Batterjee (2013) explored the role of socioeconomic status but found minimal SES impact on cognitive ability scores among gifted Saudi students in the Mawhiba program. However, this contrasts with international findings and points to the contextual distinctiveness of Saudi gifted education. Another line of inquiry examined programmatic goals related to non-cognitive outcomes. For instance, Saleh et al. (2025) reported statistically significant growth in student autonomy as a result of participation in a ministry-led gifted program, further supporting claims of holistic development across multiple competencies.

1.6 The Importance of Identifying the Challenges Facing Gifted Students in Saudi Arabia

Despite growing research exploring the psychological, social, academic, and career dimensions of giftedness, there remains a significant gap in prevalence data specifically focused on gifted high school students in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, identifying the challenges faced by gifted students in Saudi Arabia is crucial for fostering their potential and ensuring their well-being. Understanding these challenges—which span social, psychological, academic, and career domains—is essential for creating effective support systems and relevant educational programs (Alelyani, 2021; Alfaiz, 2024). Gifted students may experience social

challenges due to their advanced cognitive abilities and different interests compared to their peers. Therefore, they might feel isolated or misunderstood, leading to difficulties in forming meaningful relationships (Alfaiz, 2024). Furthermore, they are also prone to specific psychological challenges, including perfectionism, anxiety, and depression (Alfaiz, 2024). Moreover, the pressure to excel academically can be overwhelming, leading to stress and even burnout (Phillipson et al., 2024).

Consequently, a systematic effort to identify and address these challenges is essential for optimizing the effectiveness of gifted education in Saudi Arabia. Failure to do so not only restrict access and limits student potential, but it also undermines national development goals, which emphasize innovation, talent development, and a knowledge-based economy.

1.7 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges encountered by gifted students, as observed by specialists in gifted education. This research aimed to achieve two main objectives. First, it aimed to identify the most prevalent challenges faced by gifted students and quantify their prevalence rates. Second, the study aimed to explore whether the gender of the specialists in gifted education impacted nature, and the extent of the challenges observed.

1.8 Research Questions

1. What were the most prevalent challenges encountered by gifted students, based on the perspectives of specialists in gifted education, and what were their respective prevalence rates?
2. Did the gender of the specialists in gifted education influence the nature and extent of the challenges faced by gifted students?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study used a quantitative research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) because it enables the systematic identification and quantification of prevalence rates of challenges faced by gifted students through standardized measurement procedures that produce frequencies, mean scores, and percentages, which are necessary to describe the nature and extent of observed challenges. This descriptive statistical approach provides the numerical precision required for calculating prevalence rates, determining average severity scores across different challenge categories, and establishing the percentage distributions of various challenges as perceived by specialists in gifted education (Johnson & Christensen, 2024).

2.2 Participants

Simple random sampling was employed to select 150 participants from a population of approximately 1,500 gifted education specialists. Of the 150 specialists contacted, 88 responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 58.7%. The final sample comprised 50 females and 38 males, of whom 31 (35.2%) served in self-contained classrooms for gifted students and 57 (64.8%) worked in summer enrichment programs.

2.3 Instrument

In order to identify the key challenges faced by gifted students, a comprehensive review of the literature on gifted education was conducted. This review helped to document 31 challenges, cited in studies such as those by Cross (2015), Milligan et al. (2012), Neihart (1999, 2012), Yeung et al. (2005), Piechowski, (2006), Yaman and Sökmez (2020), and the Davidson Institute (2021). A questionnaire was developed based on the findings of these widely recognized, methodologically rigorous, and highly cited studies, regarding the challenges faced by gifted students.

The 31-item questionnaire underwent a comprehensive content validation process involving five experts in gifted education and educational consultation, each holding doctoral degrees and possessing a minimum of 10 years of experience in gifted education research, practice, and student guidance services. The expert panel included three gifted education specialists, one educational consultation expert, and one guidance counselor with expertise in gifted student support. The validation process followed established protocols for content validity assessment, including the calculation of Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and Content Validity Index (CVI) for each item. Items achieving CVR values ≥ 0.99 (Lawshe, 1975) and CVI scores ≥ 0.80 were retained without modification. Items with lower validity coefficients underwent revision based on expert feedback, focusing on clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the target population.

The expert panel demonstrated high inter-rater agreement (.87), indicating substantial consensus in their evaluations. Following the validation process, three items were modified for improved clarity and two items were restructured to eliminate ambiguity. The final 31-item instrument achieved an overall CVI of 0.94, indicating excellent content validity. Pilot testing with a subset of 20 specialists confirmed the instrument's clarity and usability, with internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of .94 for the complete scale.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Component Analysis as the extraction method was conducted on 31 items to identify the underlying factor structure. The analysis employed the Kaiser criterion for factor retention and rotation to achieve optimal factor interpretability, resulting in a five-factor solution. Factor 1, Psychological Distress, emerged as the most robust factor, with item loadings ranging from .375 (Sensitivity to Criticism) to .810 (Difficulty Adapting to a New Environment). Factor 2, External Expectations and Pressures demonstrated loadings between .310 (Challenging Societal Controls) and .653 (Heightened Personal Responsibility).

Factor 3, Emotional and Behavioral Regulation, was characterized by loading spanning .400 (Hyperexcitability) to .735 (Inadequate Emotional Regulation Skills). Factor 4, Social Interaction Challenges, exhibited loadings from .410 (Desire to Control Peers) to .800 (Difficulties in Making Friends). Finally, Factor 5, Academic and Career-Related Challenges, contained items with loadings ranging from .489 (Unaware of Skills for Desired Future Careers) to .616 (Persisting in an Unenjoyable Scientific Field).

Participants were asked to rate each challenge using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 ("not applicable") to 5 ("very high"). The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, resulting in a coefficient of 0.97, indicating a very high level of internal consistency among the 31 items.

2.4 Data Collection Method

For this study, data collection was efficiently conducted using an online questionnaire, which facilitated broad accessibility and anonymity, ensuring honest and convenient responses from targeted specialists in gifted education. The questionnaire was distributed via email to pre-identified specialists, with reminders to enhance participation, aiming to ensure a diverse and substantial response to improve the study's quality and validity.

2.5 Data Analysis Methods

Data from the questionnaire was processed using descriptive statistical analysis through SPSS version 28. Prior to analysis, data was screened for missing values. For each questionnaire item, descriptive statistics including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentages were computed to detail participants' perceptions of the challenges faced by gifted students. The analysis employed a 6-point Likert scale response format, whereby responses were coded as: 0 "not applicable", 1 = " very low", 2 = "low", 3 = " moderate ", 4 = "high", and 5 = "very high".

To facilitate the interpretation of results, a standardized scoring scale was operationally defined to categorize mean scores into five distinct levels of challenge severity: mean scores ranging from 4.25 to 5.00 were classified as "very high", 3.50 to 4.24 as "high", 2.50 to 3.49 as "moderate", 1.75 to 2.49 as "low", and scores below 1.75 as "very low". The author utilized the classification method proposed by Pimentel (2010) to categorize the Likert scale responses.

3. Results

Q1: What were the most prevalent challenges encountered by gifted students, based on the perspective of specialists in gifted education, and what were their respective prevalence rates?

The most prevalent challenges faced by gifted students, as identified by specialists in gifted education, span several domains, including psychological distress, external pressures, academic concerns, and social interaction difficulties (Table 1). High expectations of teachers as well as high expectations of parents were reported as the most frequent challenges, with prevalence rates of 83% and 82%, respectively. These findings emphasize the substantial stress gifted students experience due to the demands imposed by influential figures in their lives.

Table 1: Prevalence of Challenges Faced by Gifted Students

Factor	Item	Freq.	*M*	*SD*	%
Psychological Distress	Difficulty Adapting to a New Environment	88	2.62	1.35	51.4
	Loneliness	88	2.57	1.35	51.8
	Intense Self-criticism	88	2.76	1.33	55.2
	Depression	88	2.3	1.35	46
	High Stress	88	3.31	1.15	66.1
	Low Self-esteem	88	2.9	1.16	58
	Sense of Guilt	88	2.77	1.31	55
	Low Motivation	88	2.83	1.21	70.2
	Sensitivity to Criticism	88	3.51	1.19	56.6
	Low Self-confidence	88	2.59	1.27	51.8
	Fear of Failure	88	3.32	1.28	66.4
	Neurotic Perfectionism	88	3.68	0.89	73.6
External Expectations and Pressures	High Expectations of Parents	88	4.11	0.81	82.2
	High Expectations of Teachers	88	4.16	0.80	83.2
	Heightened Personal Responsibility	88	3.53	1.09	70.7
	Heightened Responsibility Towards Others	88	3.31	1.09	66.1
	Societal Pressures of Being Gifted	88	3.39	1.31	67.7
	Challenging Societal Controls	88	3.15	1.19	63
Emotional and Behavioral Regulation	Inadequate Emotional Regulation Skills	88	3.10	1.12	62
	Impatience	88	3.05	1.24	60.9
	Hyperexcitability	88	3.02	1.24	60.5
Social Interaction Challenges	Rejection by Peers	88	3.16	1.22	63.2
	Bullying	88	3.07	1.35	61.3
	Deficient Social Communication Competencies	88	3.11	1.27	61.6
	Desire to Control Peers	88	3.37	1.02	66.6
	Difficulties in Making Friends	88	3.02	1.02	60.5

Factor	Item	Freq.	*M*	*SD*	%
Academic and Career-Related Challenges	Limited Exposure to Diverse Academic Experiences	88	3.77	1.06	75.5
	Limited School Career Guidance	88	3.81	1.22	76.1
	Unaware of Skills for Desired Future Careers	88	3.74	1.17	73.9
	Unaware of Suitable Future Career	88	3.66	1.29	73.2
	Persisting in an Unenjoyable Scientific Field	88	3.58	1.12	71.6

Note: Freq.= Frequency; M=mean; SD= Standard deviation; %**=** Percentage of prevalence.

In the domain of academic and career-related challenges, several issues were notable for their high prevalence rates. Limited school career guidance was reported as being a challenge for 76% of gifted students, while limited exposure to diverse academic experiences affected 75%. Furthermore, unawareness of skills for desired future careers and unawareness of suitable future career options represented challenges for 73% of students.

Collectively, these findings reveal critical gaps in the academic and career support available to gifted students, highlighting that many lack access to the essential guidance and opportunities needed to make informed decisions regarding their educational and professional futures. Without adequate career counseling, diverse academic experiences, and information about future career options and required skills, gifted students may struggle to identify and pursue suitable pathways, ultimately limiting their potential for long-term academic achievement, career fulfillment, and personal growth.

Psychological distress was found to be another prominent area of concern among gifted students. Notably, neurotic perfectionism was reported with a prevalence rate of 73%, indicating that it is one of the most common psychological challenges. Additionally, high stress and fear of failure were reported by 66% of students, while low motivation was reported at a prevalence rate of 70%, highlighting the internal struggles faced by many gifted students.

According to these findings, gifted students are not only burdened by external pressures, such as high expectations from teachers and parents, but also struggle with internalized challenges including perfectionism, chronic stress, fear of failure, and low motivation. Internal difficulties such as these can lead to heightened anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and emotional exhaustion, ultimately undermining students' psychological health and impeding their ability to perform to their full potential in academic settings. As a result, the cumulative effect of both external and internal stressors may place gifted students at greater risk of emotional distress and underachievement compared to their peers.

Social interaction challenges also featured prominently among the difficulties faced by gifted students. For instance, peer rejection was reported at a prevalence rate of 63%, while challenges such as the desire to control peers affected 66% of students. As these statistics indicate, gifted students may have difficulties forming and maintaining healthy peer relationships, as they often struggle with peer rejection and issues related to social dynamics, such as wanting to exert control over others. Challenges such as these can hinder their ability to develop meaningful connections and a sense of belonging within their peer group, leading to increased feelings of loneliness, exclusion, and frustration. Over time, this social isolation can negatively impact students' self-esteem, emotional well-being, and overall school experience.

Lastly, challenges relating to emotional and behavioral regulation were highlighted as important concerns. A notable 62% of students were reported to have inadequate emotional regulation skills, while hyperexcitability was prevalent in 60% of students. Together, these findings underscore the importance of incorporating emotional regulation and behavioral management strategies into programs designed to support gifted students, as addressing these challenges is essential for helping them cope with intense emotions, as well as to manage stress, and navigate their unique sensitivities. By equipping gifted students with the necessary tools and techniques to regulate their emotions and behaviors, educational programs can foster greater emotional resilience, reduce disruptive behaviors, and promote overall well-being, ultimately enabling these students to thrive both academically and personally.

In summary, the most prevalent challenges encountered by gifted students include high expectations of teachers (83%), high expectations of parents (82%), limited school career guidance (76%), low motivation (70%), and neurotic perfectionism (73%). Collectively, these results underscore the need for comprehensive support systems that address academic preparation, mental health, emotional regulation, and social skills development to cater to the unique needs of gifted students.

Q2: Did the gender of the specialists in gifted education influence nature and the extent of the challenges faced by gifted students?

The most prevalent challenges faced by gifted students, as identified by specialists in gifted education, span several domains, including psychological distress, external pressures, and academic concerns (Table 2). High expectations from both teachers and parents were reported as being the most frequent challenges for both male and female gifted students. Female students were rated slightly higher, with prevalence rates of 84% for both teacher and parent expectations, compared to 81% and 78% for male students, respectively.

These findings suggest that gifted students, particularly females, experience substantial stress brought on by the demands imposed by key figures in their lives, as they often feel intense pressure to meet the high expectations set by both teachers and parents. This constant drive to excel and fulfill others' standards can lead to heightened anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of disappointing those they aim to please. Over time, such persistent stress may negatively impact students'

emotional well-being, diminish their enjoyment of learning, and potentially contribute to burnout or disengagement from academic and extracurricular pursuits.

Table 2: Prevalence of Challenges Faced by Gifted Students Based on the Gender of Specialists

Factor	Item	G	Freq.	*M*	*SD*	%
Psychological Distress	Difficulty Adapting to a New Environment	F	50	2.88	1.35	54.4
		M	38	2.29	1.29	47.4
	Loneliness	F	50	2.72	1.4	57.2
		M	38	2.37	1.28	45.8
	Intense Self-criticism	F	50	3.02	1.32	60.4
		M	38	2.42	1.29	48.4
	Depression	F	50	2.34	1.38	46.8
		M	38	2.24	1.32	44.7
	High Stress	F	50	3.56	0.99	71.2
		M	38	2.97	1.26	59.5
	Low Self-esteem	F	50	2.9	0.99	58.0
		M	38	2.89	1.35	57.9
	Sense of Guilt	F	50	2.9	1.4	58
		M	38	2.61	1.17	52.1
	Low Motivation	F	50	2.84	1.15	73.6
		M	38	2.82	1.29	65.8
	Sensitivity to Criticism	F	50	3.68	1.19	56.8
		M	38	3.29	1.18	56.3
	Low Self-confidence	F	50	2.56	1.28	51.2
		M	38	2.63	1.26	52.6
	Fear of Failure	F	50	3.5	1.36	70
		M	38	3.08	1.15	61.6
	Neurotic Perfectionism	F	50	3.88	0.87	77.6
		M	38	3.42	0.86	68.4
External Expectations and Pressures	High Expectations of Parents	F	50	4.24	0.8	84.8
		M	38	3.95	0.8	78.9
	High Expectations of Teachers	F	50	4.22	0.84	84.4
		M	38	4.08	0.75	81.6

Factor	Item	G	Freq.	*M*	*SD*	%
	Heightened Personal Responsibility	F	50	3.78	1.06	75.6
		M	38	3.21	1.07	64.2
	Heightened Responsibility Towards Others	F	50	3.38	1.09	67.6
		M	38	3.21	1.09	64.2
	Societal Pressures of Being Gifted	F	50	3.52	1.31	70.4
		M	38	3.21	1.3	64.2
	Challenging Societal Controls	F	50	3.10	1.23	62.0
		M	38	3.21	1.14	64.2
Emotional and Behavioral Regulation	Inadequate Emotional Regulation Skills	F	50	3.14	1.13	62.8
		M	38	3.05	1.14	61.1
	Impatience	F	50	3.1	1.18	62.0
		M	38	2.97	1.05	59.5
	Hyperexcitability	F	50	2.98	1.33	59.6
		M	38	3.08	1.12	61.6
Social Interaction Challenges	Rejection by Peers	F	50	3.24	1.17	64.8
		M	38	3.05	1.29	61.1
	Bullying	F	50	3.12	1.32	62.4
		M	38	3.00	1.39	60.0
	Deficient Social Communication Competencies	F	50	3.04	1.12	60.8
		M	38	3.21	1.45	64.2
	Desire to Control Peers	F	50	3.43	1.04	68.4
		M	38	3.29	1.01	65.8
	Difficulties in Making Friends	F	50	3.02	1.25	60.4
		M	38	3.03	1.42	60.5
Academic and Career-Related Challenges	Limited Exposure to Diverse Academic Experiences	F	50	3.84	1.02	76.8
		M	38	3.68	1.12	73.7
	Limited School Career Guidance	F	50	3.98	1.08	79.6
		M	38	3.58	1.37	71.6
	Unaware of Skills for Desired Future Careers	F	50	3.65	1.2	71.6
		M	38	3.84	1.13	76.8
	Unaware of Suitable Future Career	F	50	3.64	1.34	72.8
		M	38	3.68	1.25	73.7

Factor	Item	G	Freq.	*M*	*SD*	%
	Persisting in an Unenjoyable Scientific Field.	F	50	3.62	1.07	72.4
		M	38	3.53	1.2	70.5

Note: G= gender; Freq.= Frequency; M=mean; SD= Standard deviation; %**=** percentage of Prevalence.

Academic and career-related challenges emerged as significant concerns among gifted students, with several issues demonstrating notably high prevalence rates across gender groups. Limited school career guidance represented the most prevalent challenge, affecting 79% of female students and 71% of male students. Similarly, restricted exposure to diverse academic experiences impacted a substantial proportion of students, with prevalence rates of 76% among females and 73% among males. Career awareness deficits were also prominent, as 76% of male students and 71% of female students reported being unaware of the skills required for their desired future careers. Furthermore, uncertainty regarding suitable career options affected 73% of male students and 72% of female students. These findings reveal substantial deficiencies in the academic and career preparation systems available to gifted students, with female students experiencing marginally higher rates of guidance and exposure limitations, whereas male students faced greater challenges in terms of career-related awareness and preparation.

Psychological distress also featured prominently among the challenges faced by gifted students. Notably, neurotic perfectionism was one of the most frequently reported challenges, with prevalence rates of 77% for female students and 68% for male students. Other significant issues included high stress—rated at 71% for female students and 59% for male students—and low motivation, which affected 73% of female students and 65% of male students. Additionally, fear of failure was reported as affecting 70% of female students and 61% of male students. Thus, according to these findings, female gifted students are perceived to experience greater internal pressures and mental health concerns than their male counterparts, as evidenced by their consistently higher rates of neurotic perfectionism, stress, low motivation, and fear of failure.

This suggests that female students may be more vulnerable to internalizing challenges such as anxiety, self-criticism, and emotional distress, potentially due to a combination of personal expectations and societal or cultural factors. As a result, they may be at a higher risk of developing negative psychological outcomes, which can adversely affect their well-being, academic engagement, and overall quality of life. Therefore, addressing these gender-specific differences is crucial for developing targeted support strategies that can better meet the unique emotional needs of gifted girls.

Social interaction challenges represented another key area of concern, with female students again rating higher in prevalence compared to male students. For example, peer rejection was rated at 64% for female students and 61% for male students, while bullying affected 62% of female students and 60% of male

students. Furthermore, the desire to control peers was reported as a challenge for 68% of female students and 65% of male students. Together, these challenges suggest that gifted students, particularly females, may face difficulties in forming balanced and meaningful relationships with their peers, as the higher rates of peer rejection, bullying, and tendencies to control others indicate struggles with social acceptance, cooperation, and trust. Interpersonal difficulties such as these can hinder students' ability to develop supportive friendships and engage positively within social groups, which may increase their risk of feeling isolated, misunderstood, or emotionally disconnected from their classmates. Over time, such experiences can contribute to a sense of frustration and loneliness, potentially affecting their overall emotional well-being and satisfaction with the school environment.

Lastly, emotional and behavioral regulation challenges were also found to be prominent. For example, inadequate emotional regulation skills were rated at 62% for female students and 61% for male students, while impatience was rated at 62% for female students compared to 59% for male students. Interestingly, hyperexcitability was slightly higher for male students (61%) than for female students (59%). Collectively, these findings point to the importance of addressing emotional regulation and behavioral management in programs designed for gifted students of both genders, as a significant proportion of both male and female students struggle with controlling their emotions, managing impatience, and coping with heightened sensitivities.

Integrating targeted interventions that focus on developing self-awareness, emotional coping strategies, and constructive behavioral responses can help gifted students to better navigate their intense emotional experiences. Such support is essential for enhancing their resilience, reducing classroom disruptions, and promoting overall psychological well-being, ensuring that both boys and girls are equipped to thrive academically and socially.

In summary, the most prevalent challenges encountered by gifted students were high expectations from teachers (84% for females, 81% for males), high expectations from parents (84% for females, 78% for males), limited school career guidance (79% for females, 71% for males), and neurotic perfectionism (77% for females, 68% for males). Female gifted students were generally rated higher in prevalence for challenges related to external expectations, psychological distress, and social interaction difficulties, while male students faced slightly higher rates in areas such as hyperexcitability and career awareness. Together, these findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive support systems that address academic preparation, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships to meet the diverse needs of gifted students.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study highlighted several critical challenges faced by gifted students, spanning across psychological, social, and academic domains. Identified by specialists in gifted education, these challenges emphasize the complex

interplay of both internal and external factors that affect the well-being and development of gifted students.

4.1 Psychological Challenges

In this study, psychological distress was revealed to be one of the most significant challenges facing gifted students, with neurotic perfectionism and low motivation emerging as particularly prevalent issues. Female students were rated higher in neurotic perfectionism (77%) compared to males (68%), aligning with findings in the literature that stress the heightened emotional sensitivity of gifted adolescents (Liao et al., 2025). Neurotic perfectionism, which is characterized by a fear of failure and persistent self-criticism, has been linked to maladaptive coping mechanisms and emotional distress (Chan, 2003). This aligns with Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (1964), which highlights the ways in which emotional overexcitabilities in gifted students can contribute to perfectionistic tendencies (Liao et al., 2025).

Moreover, the prevalence of low motivation (73% for females, 65% for males) aligns with findings by Abu-Hamour and Al-Hmouz (2013), who noted that boredom and disengagement are common among gifted students in classrooms that fail to offer adequate intellectual stimulation. Asynchronous development, whereby cognitive abilities may surpass emotional and social maturity (Cross, 2015), can exacerbate these issues, as gifted students struggle to reconcile their intellectual potential with classroom experiences that fail to challenge them.

In particular, the gender differences observed in terms of psychological challenges suggest that female gifted students may be especially susceptible to internalized pressures, including perfectionism and stress, which can have long-term effects on mental health and academic performance. This finding is consistent with research by Peterson and Ray (2006), who noted that societal and parental expectations often disproportionately affect gifted females.

4.2 External Expectations and Pressures

Among the most prevalent challenges, the high expectations of teachers (84%) and parents (82%) were reported as substantial stressors, particularly for female students. These findings echo with earlier work by Neihart (2021), which highlighted that elevated external expectations could lead to anxiety, perfectionism, and burnout. Teachers and parents often assume that gifted students possess a level of emotional maturity that is commensurate with their intellectual abilities; thus, a mismatch can exacerbate psychological distress (Cross et al., 1992).

As noted by Irvin (2019), the slightly higher prevalence of these challenges among female students may stem from societal stereotypes regarding gender roles and academic performance. Such stereotypes often place additional pressure on females to excel academically while meeting social expectations, which can lead to decision paralysis and chronic stress (Neihart et al., 2016).

4.3 Academic and Career-Related Challenges

Furthermore, the findings also revealed important gaps in the academic and career support provided to gifted students, with limited school career guidance (79% for females, 71% for males) and limited exposure to diverse academic experiences (76% for females, 73% for males) being notable challenges. These results are consistent with research by Kerr and Sodano (2003), who argued that traditional career counseling methods fail to address the unique needs of gifted students, particularly those with "high-flat" profiles of excellence across multiple disciplines.

Unawareness of the necessary skills for desired future careers and of suitable career options was also prevalent, with male students being slightly more affected. This aligns with Gardner's (2000) perspective on the domain specificity of giftedness, which emphasizes that giftedness often manifests in specific areas such as mathematics or music. A lack of targeted guidance may hinder gifted students from fully realizing their potential in these areas.

4.4 Social Interaction Challenges

Social challenges—such as peer rejection (64% for females, 61% for males) and bullying (62% for females, 60% for males)— were also significant. These findings align with the work of Shcherbinina and Grushetskaya (2023), who documented that gifted students often face difficulties in self-presentation and peer inclusion, leading to victimization. The desire to control peers (68% for females, 65% for males) further underscored the social difficulties encountered by gifted students, who may struggle to navigate relationships due to their heightened intellectual sensitivity and asynchronous development (Silverman, 2012).

Additionally, the higher prevalence of social challenges among females aligns with findings by Chan (2004), who noted that maladaptive social coping strategies, such as excessive efforts to gain peer acceptance, are more common among gifted adolescent females. As suggested by Ghasemi et al. (2023), this highlights the need for educational programs that foster social-emotional competencies, to help gifted students navigate complex social dynamics.

4.5 Emotional and Behavioral Regulation

Inadequate emotional regulation skills (62% for females, 61% for males) and hyperexcitability (59% for females, 61% for males) were also found to be prominent challenges facing gifted students. These findings reinforce the importance of addressing emotional regulation in gifted education programs, as emphasized by Piechowski (2006). The slight gender differences in hyperexcitability suggest that male students may exhibit more outward expressions of emotional overexcitabilities, while females may internalize their emotional struggles.

Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of adopting supportive communication strategies and behavioral management techniques, as recommended by Al-Kenani and Nawasreh (2022). Educators must create environments in which the emotions of gifted students are validated, while providing tools to help them manage their heightened sensitivities constructively.

5. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by gifted students, as perceived by specialists in gifted education. The findings revealed that gifted students experience significant difficulties across psychological, social, and academic domains, with external expectations and pressures—such as high expectations from teachers and parents—emerging as being particularly prevalent. In addition to this, psychological challenges, including neurotic perfectionism and low motivation, were also prominent, highlighting the mental health struggles faced by this population. Academic and career-related challenges, such as limited school career guidance, further underscored the need for tailored support systems to help gifted students navigate their educational and professional journeys.

Gender differences in the perceptions of these challenges indicated that female gifted students are more likely to experience heightened psychological distress and external pressures, while male students face slightly higher rates of hyperexcitability and career awareness challenges. Collectively, these findings emphasized the importance of addressing the unique needs of gifted students through gender-sensitive interventions.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

Although it provides valuable insights into the perceptions of specialists about the challenges faced by gifted students, this study nevertheless has several limitations. First, the study relies solely on self-reported data, which can introduce biases such as social desirability, whereby respondents may not fully disclose their true perceptions. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, to mitigate these biases and provide a more comprehensive view.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of this study limits its ability to track changes in perceptions over time. Longitudinal research would provide a richer understanding of the ways in which specialists' perceptions evolve and how effective various strategies are in the long term for supporting gifted students.
Lastly, the study focuses predominantly on the psychological and social aspects of the challenges faced by gifted students, with less emphasis on educational outcomes. Therefore, future studies could adopt a more holistic approach, examining psychological and social aspects as well as academic performance, in order to better understand the full impact of these challenges on gifted students.

5.2 Implications and Recommendations

As illuminated by this study, the unique challenges faced by gifted students underscore the pressing need for tailored educational strategies and enhanced support systems. Gifted students often navigate complex academic and emotional landscapes that can significantly impact their development and well-being. In recognizing the multifaceted nature of these challenges, and particularly the influence of gender dynamics, it is imperative that educational stakeholders, ranging from policymakers to educators, reassess and refine their approaches to gifted education.

5.3 Educational Policy and Curriculum Design

The findings from this study suggest that current educational practices may not fully accommodate the unique needs of gifted students, particularly in terms of managing the high expectations and psychological pressures they face. Consequently, it is crucial for educational policymakers to consider reforms that focus on flexibility and individualized learning paths. Schools should be encouraged to develop curricula that not only challenge gifted students but also allow them to explore a wide range of subjects and disciplines. This could help mitigate the issue of students persisting in unenjoyable fields and help to align their academic pursuits more closely with their interests and passions.

Furthermore, integrating career guidance as a core component of the curriculum for gifted students is essential. This guidance should begin early and be tailored to help students understand various career paths, including those in non-traditional fields, especially for female students who might face stereotypical barriers in fields such as STEM (Stoeger et al., 2013).

5.4 Professional Development for Educators

The impact of the gender of specialists on the perceptions of challenges faced by gifted students highlighted the need for professional development focusing on gender sensitivity and bias reduction. Training programs for teachers, counselors, and administrators should include components that help them recognize and overcome their own biases as well as better understand the diverse needs of gifted students. This can lead to more equitable support and encouragement for all students, regardless of gender.

Additionally, educators should be equipped with sufficient skills not only to recognize the signs of stress and perfectionism but also to address these issues effectively. This involves training in psychological first aid, counseling techniques, and strategies for fostering a supportive and understanding classroom environment that acknowledges the emotional and social challenges faced by gifted students.

5.5 Psychological Support Systems

Given the high prevalence of neurotic perfectionism, inadequate emotional regulation skills, and high stress levels among gifted students, schools must enhance their psychological support systems. For example, this could involve hiring specialized school psychologists who understand the unique pressures faced by gifted students and can offer appropriate interventions. Additionally, schools can also develop peer support groups, in which gifted students can share their experiences and coping strategies in a safe and supportive environment.

Moreover, parent education programs can be instrumental in moderating the expectations placed on gifted students. These programs should aim to educate parents about the potential psychological impacts of excessive pressure and the importance of balanced growth for their children, encompassing academic, social, and emotional development.

5.6 Future Research

In order to further refine educational strategies and support for gifted students, ongoing research is necessary. This should continue to explore the nuances concerning ways in which various factors, including gender, influence the experiences of gifted students. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term impacts of the identified challenges as well as the effectiveness of different intervention strategies.

Additionally, schools should implement continuous evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of new policies and practices in real time. Feedback systems involving students, parents, and educators can provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches, facilitating timely adjustments.

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