

## **PARENTING STYLES AS PERCEIVED BY ACADEMICALLY TALENTED STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

Home environment and parenting factor have been suggested to affect students' performance in academic as well as their talents development. However each parent may employ different approaches to educate and deal with their children. It is an interest to find out how academically talented students were brought up, in specific to identify parental styles approaches that they had experienced. This study was conducted among 375 academically talented students from Malaysia. They were given Parental Authority Questionnaire to identify parenting style of each of their parents. It was found that the highest mean score was for authoritative mothers, followed by authoritative fathers, authoritarian fathers, authoritarian mothers, permissive fathers, and permissive mothers. Levels of parenting styles as perceived by academically talented students based on gender also showed the same pattern. Result of independent-samples t-tests showed that there were significance differences in means between female and male academically talented students for mothers' authoritativeness, mothers' authoritarianism and fathers' authoritativeness. Elements of warmth and control are important in children's development. Parents and teachers need to give attention to these elements to nurture their children in developing them to the fullest.

**Keywords:** academically talented students, parenting styles.

### **Introduction**

Much of the research about academically talented students has focused on the academic environment. These studies overlook the question as to whether giftedness is due to nature, nurture, or combination of both. Academically talented students do not grow up in a vacuum, but in families, and these families influence their performance in academic as well as their talents development. However each parent may employ different approaches to educate and deal with their children.

Baumrind (1971) identified three styles of parenting – authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Authoritarian parents tend to be restrictive, punitive, and overcontrolling. They value obedience and favour power assertion. Children are given no autonomy,

accept the discipline without questions. In contrast, permissive parents show little involvement in their children. They give high level of freedom and does not restraint their behaviours. In the West, an authoritative approach is most adaptive. Authoritative parents use discipline with reason and warmth. Guidelines are set out, but reasons for these guidelines are communicated in a way that signifies a warm and caring attitude. However, what parents in the West thinks might be different to what parents in the East thinks. Parenting styles in the west are different to parenting styles practiced in the east (Besharat et al., 2011). Therefore there is a need to investigate parenting styles practiced in Malaysia in the eyes of the academically gifted students. Parenting children in general also might be different to parenting academically talented students. In short, it is an interest to find out how academically talented students were brought up, in specific to identify parental styles approaches that they had experienced.

### **Parenting styles of academically talented students**

Academically talented students whose parents are warm, responsive, set limits and have reasonable expectations for their children tend to have better academic performance than their peers whose parents show less warmth, less responsiveness, and have low expectations. Results provide further support for the notion that authoritative parenting promotes positive outcomes for children, particularly those who have been identified as academically talented students (Craddock et al., 2009; Rudasill et al., 2013). Craddock et al. (2009) conducted a study of 264 first year students at the University of Sydney using Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri 1991). Their findings showed that the mean score for authoritative parenting style was the highest (35.44), followed by authoritarian (29.60), and the lowest mean score is permissive style (24.43). Rudasill et al. (2013) conducted a study of 332 students enrolled in a gifted summer program at the University of Virginia. They found that mean scores of authoritative mothers is the highest compared to authoritative fathers, authoritarian fathers, authoritarian mothers, permissive fathers, and permissive mothers.

In local context, Habibah and Tan (2009) conducted a research that involved 244 form four students from two schools in Kuala Terengganu. Majority of students perceived their mothers and fathers adopting authoritative parenting style, followed by the authoritarian and the least was permissive. Che Hasniza (2011) also conducted a study on 300 mothers, 277 fathers and 435 form four students in Terengganu. Majority of respondents adopt authoritative parenting style in educating their children. The highest mean for parenting style is authoritative, followed by authoritarian, and permissive. Nik Hairi et al. (2012) also used PAQ to 55 form six students of SMK Rantau Panjang, Kelantan. The findings also showed the highest mean score achieved was for authoritative parenting style, followed by authoritarian style, and the lowest average score was permissive parenting style. This finding is also consistent with earlier research by Othman and Normalina (2010) and Kazmi et al. (2011). The study concluded that authoritative parenting style is the most popular parenting styles applied by parents. Lin and Lian (2010) conducted a study of 140 high school students. They found that there was no difference between authoritarian parents. However, their findings showed that there were significant differences of authoritative parents. Mothers are more authoritative compare to fathers. Although research on parenting styles among academically talented students is still scarce, it can be concluded that the parents tend to employ authoritative parenting style more than authoritarian parenting styles compare to parents who have average academic children. However, there is a gap that indicates uncertainty about parenting style experienced by children since they were small.

Although the authoritarian parenting style is often criticized, it is still widely practiced among parents in Asia. There are still many families in Asia who believe that parent-child relationship is close, although they practice authoritarian parenting style (Tam et al. 2012). Asian mothers emphasis on traditional values such as discipline, sensitive to the needs of children, and engage themselves in their children's activities. These features are parallel to authoritarian and authoritative parenting style. This explains why mothers are seen to have higher level of authoritarian styles compared to fathers (Lin and Lian, 2010). Even though Asian mothers seen firmer, they are more responsive to children's needs. They were friendly, and supportive to their children's activities. Meanwhile, McKinney and Renk (2008) and Shek (2002) stated that fathers employ authoritarian parenting style. However, study Xu et al. (2005) found that Chinese parents cannot distinguish between authoritarian and authoritative parenting style.

Many researchers on parenting styles, treats parenting styles of mothers and fathers as one (Ang, 2006; Habibah & Tan, 2009; Lin & Lian 2010). This should be avoided as mother and father are two different entities (Kordi & Baharudin, 2010; Tam et al. 2012). A gap exists when comparing the parenting style of mothers and fathers of academically talented students. Does parenting style practiced by the mother and the father are the same or different. The identification of parenting styles adopted by parents to their academically talented students is a must and should be done separately among fathers and mothers so that the gap can be minimised.

### **Objectives of study**

1. To identify parenting styles as perceived by academically talented students.
2. To identify levels of parenting styles as perceived by academically talented students based on gender?
3. To identify if there is a significant difference in the mean of parenting styles scores as perceived by academically talented males and females students?

### **Research questions**

1. What are parenting styles as perceived by academically talented students?
2. What are levels of parenting styles as perceived by academically talented students based on gender?
3. Is there a significant difference in the mean of parenting styles scores as perceived by academically talented males and females students?

### **Methodology**

#### *Research Design*

Research design is survey-based that used quantitative approach using questionnaire.

#### *Participant*

Participants were 375 academically talented students consist of 241 males and 259 females. They were form 4 students, aged 16 years old who got straight As in their 2011 PMR (Penilaian Menengah Rendah – Lower Certificate Assessment). They came from two high performance schools and two clusters schools.

### *Instrument*

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ: Buri, 1991) which was used to collect the data was each for maternal and paternal. The 30-item instrument was designed to measure parental authority, or disciplinary practices, from the point of view of the child (of any age). There were 10 items for each subscale: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. The forms for mother and father are identical except for references to gender. PAQ is scored easily by summing the individual items to comprise the subscale scores. Scores on each subscale range from 10 to 50. The 5-point scale is from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Level of parenting styles will be divided to two: low and high. Level low will be given for total scoring which is less than or equal to 30. Level high will be given for total scoring which is more than or equal to 31. The PAQ has good internal consistency with alphas ranging from .804 to .849. Lastly, the PAQ also has good construct validity.

### **Analysis**

#### *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the overall trends, provide understanding the scores variations, and provide insight into where one scores stands in comparisons with others. Analysis of descriptive statistic describes mean, standard deviations, minimum scores and maximum scores for each subscale.

#### *Inference Statistics*

An independent-samples t-test was used to compare the mean score of perceived parenting styles between males and females academically talented students.

### **Results**

*Research question 1:* What are parenting styles as perceived by academically talented students?

*Table 1 - Means, Standard Deviations,  
Minimums and Maximums of Maternal and Paternal Parenting Styles*

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Mother's Authoritativeness	36.40	5.701	14	50
Father's Authoritativeness	35.82	5.749	20	50
Father's Authoritarianism	32.54	5.994	10	48
Mother's Authoritarianism	31.89	6.019	14	50
Father's Permissiveness	30.75	5.550	14	48
Mother's Permissiveness	29.61	5.596	10	45

Table 1 summarises the descriptive statistics of Parental Authority Questionnaire for father and mother. Based on the findings, score mean of authoritativeness was the highest for mothers and fathers, followed by authoritarianism, and permissiveness scored the lowest.

*Research question 2:* What are levels of parenting styles as perceived by academically talented students based on gender?

*Table 2 - Level of Parenting Styles based on Gender.*

Parenting Styles	Low			High		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Permissive Mother	90	123	213	66	96	162
Authoritarian Mother	57	95	152	99	124	223
Authoritative Mother	25	21	46	131	198	329
Permissive Father	79	111	190	77	108	185
Authoritarian Father	58	82	140	98	137	235
Authoritative Father	36	37	73	120	182	302

*Research question 3:* Is there a significant difference in the mean of parenting styles scores as perceived by academically talented males and females students?

These findings showed that most academically talented males and academically talented females perceived both their fathers and mothers to be authoritative. Among the academically talented females, authoritative mother is followed by authoritative father, authoritarian father, authoritarian mother, permissive father, and permissive mother. As for academically talented males, authoritative mother is followed by authoritative father, authoritarian mother, authoritarian father, permissive father, and permissive mother.

The t-test for independent means showed that there was a significant difference in the scores for males and females regarding their parenting styles.

*Table3 - T-test result for Parenting Styles based on Gender*

Parenting Style	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t-Value	Sig.
Mother's permissiveness	Male	156	29.34	5.473	-.783	.434
	Female	219	29.80	5.686		
Mother's Authoritarianism	Male	156	32.79	5.158	2.565	.011*
	Female	219	31.24	6.498		
Mother's Authoritativeness	Male	156	35.23	5.872	-3.407	.001*
	Female	219	37.24	5.438		
Father's Permissiveness	Male	156	30.53	5.393	-.650	.516
	Female	219	30.90	5.666		
Father's Authoritarianism	Male	156	32.83	5.176	.809	.419
	Female	219	32.34	6.518		
Father's Authoritativeness	Male	156	35.06	5.806	-2.189	.029*
	Female	219	36.37	5.659		

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the maternal and paternal parenting styles for males and females academically talented students. There was significant difference in scores for males (mean=32.79, s.d.=5.158) and females (mean=31.24, s.d.=6.498); (t=2.565, p=.011) in mother's authoritarianism. Significant difference in scores for males (mean=35.23, s.d.=5.872) and females (mean=37.24; s.d.=5.438); (t=-3.407, p=.001) was also found in mother's authoritativeness. Lastly, there was also a significant difference in scores for males (mean=35.06, s.d.=5.806) dan females (mean=36.37, s.d.=5.659); (t=-2.189, p=.029) in father's authoritativeness. These results suggest that females regards their mother's and father's authoritativeness

higher than the males. However, the males perceived their mothers to be more authoritarian than the females.

### **Discussion**

The present study examined parenting styles as perceived by academically talented students. The result revealed that most academically talented students perceived their parents as authoritative. These findings are consistent with what had been observed previously that children from authoritative parenting styles tend to have higher grades in schools (Craddock et al., 2009; Kyle, 2010; Rudasill et al., 2013). Samples for this study were academically talented. They were chosen based on their excellent academic performance. The findings showed that academically talented students regard their mother as more authoritative, followed by authoritative father, authoritarian father, authoritarian mother, permissive father, and permissive mother. Among academically talented female students,

This study showed that among academically talented males they are better off with authoritarian mother. However among academically talented females they were supported by both authoritative mother and authoritative father. This suggest that academically talented male students need a mother who is firm, assertive and has a good control over the child's discipline. Academically talented female however need both parents to be authoritative, with high in warmth and high in control. Most academically talented females perceived lower level of parenting styles in permissive mother. This is also true for academically talented males.

Authoritative parenting provide safe and unthreatened environment for the children. Children feel being loved and accepted by their parents. This is because warmth and love is manifested by parents, and is felt by the children, and this promotes therapeutic environment at home. This kind of home environment provides cushioning effect for children in their academic struggles. Nevertheless this kind of parenting style strongly emphasizes on parental control and strict adherence to disciplinary rules. Authoritative parenting style promotes reasoning skill and democracy among their children. They are responsive to their children's emotional needs but know how and when to set limits for the children. This kind of parents set high standards, nurturing, supporting, and responsive to the children's needs and demands, and show respect towards their children. They regard their children as independent rational being, expecting maturity and cooperation, and offer a lot of emotional support for their children. To sum up authoritative parenting style is responsive towards all their children's needs, they are nurturing and involved. However they are not letting children get away with bad behaviour. They have firm stand and let children be responsible for their behaviour. Kamins and Dweck (1999) suggested that avoiding reprimanding children for academic mistakes, for example, saying "I am disappointed in you" may develop more resilient problem solvers and better learners.

Educators not only need to nurture academic development for their students, they also need to think and plan on how to prevent bad behaviours among gifted students, such as ending up becoming bullies or sometimes delinquents. Children from authoritarian parenting style tend to be less socially competent, more aggressive, and less socially accepted by their peers (Steinberg et al 1992). Bullies were seen to have authoritarian parents (Baldry & Farrington, 2000). Baldry and Farrington (2000) suggested bullying could lead to delinquent at a later age, thus effort should be done to

educate and train parents to adhere to appropriate parental style to prevent bullying in schools. Peterson and Ray (2006) have found that 16% of 432 gifted eight graders were bullies, and 29% of them had violent thoughts.

Children from authoritarian family were said to be more likely to be suffered from emotional problem. They were prone to anxiety, low self esteem and depression (Rothrauff et al. 2009). This could be due to frustration from within them. Their authoritarian parents tend to not explain reasons behind rules and regulations. Children are expected to follow the rules without questioning. Disobedient will lead to shaming, withdrawal of love, and other punishment, and verbal give-and take are not encouraged. This kind of parenting is said to be high in control but low in warmth, nurturance, and support. Although children from authoritarian parenting are well behaved, but they tend to be less resourceful, poorer social skills, and lower self esteem. Thus, this psychosocial environment surrounding authoritarian parenting style will not be much of a help in realizing academically talented or gifted students' potential.

Educators in schools and at higher institutions need to emulate authoritative parenting style when dealing with students. This is to ensure that all students are educated in nurturing environment. Although educators and teachers are responsible for their students' learning and academic performance, they are also to educate and nurture their students to develop every one of them to be a responsible learner and a contributing citizen. Parents and teachers play complementing roles in educating students. This is to ensure gifted students and all students will develop their potential fully to their optimal level. All efforts need to be done to make sure gifted students and all students develop to their fullest and not to underachieve. This is what education is all about, to nurture positive and holistic development in all students. The aim of education is to build and develop mankind and to nurture civilization.

It is very important to educate parents and equip them with appropriate understanding and skills to nurture their children accordingly. It has to start from understanding the nature of giftedness, their characteristics and their learning needs. They have needs in cognitive and social emotional domains of development. Authoritative parenting skills include guiding and supporting techniques for children, assertive control, developing children's self-monitoring technique, anger management, and skills in handling socio emotional issues. A self taught module would be helpful in assisting parents and teachers to develop nurturing skills within themselves to align with authoritative parenting style.

### **Conclusion**

It has been emphasize in this writing the importance of parenting styles in nurturing children's development, especially in nurturing gifted children. Parents and teachers are responsible to provide environment that is conducive for the positive development. Home environment is influenced by parenting skills. Authoritative parenting style was seen to be the most parenting style observed among academically talented students. Permissive parenting skills were the least observed among academically talented students. Therefore it is suggested that educators will have to emulate authoritative parental skills so as to create therapeutic, nurturing, supporting and enabling environment for students' optimal development.

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