

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MUSIC TO GIFTED STUDENTS

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**Abstract.** Music is believed to heal soul. It has been widely practiced to intervene emotional and psychological issues, and further improve students' achievements. However, music is rarely practiced as intervention for gifted students who suffer from the asynchronous development effects such as burnout, depression and suicide. This study thus aims to explore the prominence of music to gifted students. Data collection were conducted through in-depth interview with 15 gifted students who were studying in GENIUS@Pintar National Gifted Centre, Malaysia. A survey with 64 gifted respondents was administered as a supplementary to support the interview data. Results revealed that music offers assistance to gifted students in four domain areas which are emotion, motivation, self-reflection, and awareness. This study has proven that music has contributed beyond emotional and psychological issues. Music sharpens the traits of giftedness and moulds those gifted students as successors that may contribute to the nation.

**Keywords:** *music, gifted students, emotional issues, asynchronous development, education*

## Introduction

Previous studies revealed that music can heal emotional and psychological issues (Nugent, 2019; Levitin, 2019). Music has widely used as emotional and achievement intervention to normal persons and those with special needs (down syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism, ADHD) but not in gifted areas. As gifted students are experiencing asynchronous development, they are having emotional problem which is related with their chronological growth (Md Jais et al., 2020). It is also found that there are gifted students who are categorised as underachievers (Mofield and Parker Peters, 2019). This is due to lower self regulation, emotional issues and twice-exceptional traits. To feed this problem, I believe music may set an effective intervention as music is proven by many experts to cure emotional problem and increase students' achievements (Sandu, 2019; Gabrielson, 2005). In this research context, music is expected to be a mechanism to help gifted students in coping with their emotion proficiently. It also aids to sharpen cognitive and brighten their giftedness traits. Consequently, the objective of this study is to explore the significance of music from the gifted students' perspectives.

## *Understanding the nature of gifted students*

Most of gifted students possess high potential in mental growth and life development compared to their peers. Giftedness is often employed to imply as high intellectual individual who has more than 130 intellect Quotient (IQ) level test. Howard Gardner defines giftedness as a way of information and thinking process. Giftedness is influenced by combination of surrounding and genetic which actively interact each

other. Gifted students are individuals who are recognized for achievement that is advance to that of their peers (Md Jais et al., 2020). Although giftedness is always connected with schooling, gifted individuals present across academic and non-academic domains (Worrell et al., 2019). McWilliams (2018) stated gifted individuals are those who exhibit amazing levels of aptitude (defined as an excellent ability) or competence (performance or achievement) in one or more fields. Fields include any structured part of activity with its own unique system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and set of sensorimotor skills.

Although gifted students are always observed to own high ability in academic and non-academic talents, research shows that they are facing emotional issues regarding of their asynchronous development. Some researchers argue gifted individuals do hold unique characteristics that makes them particularly vulnerable to the risk of social and emotional problems, such as facing problems in identity development, career decision-making, and friendship formation (Rinn, 2018). Without appropriate intervention, psychological problem among gifted students may become critical. A case of a psychological autopsy of a gifted 18-year-old male who suffered from depression decided to commit suicide is a melancholiest story explored by Cross et al. (2020). Neihart and Yeo (2018) also found that gifted students are more at risk for psychological problems rather than normal students. They are more sensitive to personal conflicts and experience superior degrees of isolation and stress.

Perfectionism is more frequently observed among gifted than non-gifted students (Rice and Ray, 2018). It could be argued that in the absence of stimulating school work, chasing complete perfection is a means for high ability students to create their own challenge (Lavrijsen et al., 2018). Research also reveals that there is relationship between perfectionism and school burnout. Perfectionism has been found to enhance engagement, foster positive psychological health and resilience of the gifted. However, perfectionism may also bring harm to emotion as well as stress-related adjustment difficulties (Rice and Ray, 2018).

### ***The effectiveness of music***

There are several fields of music, namely music education, music therapy, music psychology, ethnomusicology, music technology, music performance and musicology. In school, students are taught to learn music through various activities such as listening, singing, instruments playing and dancing. According to Petress (2005), music is an evident device to support students' success in four major areas which are success in society, success in school, success in developing intelligence, and success in life. It is suggested that music to be included into several topics in all school curricular. The National Association For Music Education (NAMC) as stated in Petress (2005) claimed *"...scientific evidence proves that an education in the arts makes better math and science students, enhances spatial intelligence, and are a compelling solution to teen violence"*.

Research by North et al., (2000) indicated music is vital because it allows adults to describe 'image' to the outside world and fulfil their emotional needs. Gabriellson (2002) explained that music appears to help individual manage emotions which categorised into two parts of emotions; perceived emotion and felt emotion. There are four parts of relationships between these two types of emotions in response to music: positive relationship, negative relationship, no systematic relationship, and no relationship. A study by Schubert (2013) explored these four relationships then

suggested that both of the emotions are often coincident in many cases. For example, sad music is generally assumed to cause listeners feel sorrow, which may clarify a positive relationship between perceived and felt emotions.

Study of young Finish people revealed that musical activities aided to normalize the valence, force, and clarity of their emotions (Suvi and Jaakko, 2007). In relation to valence, music instils positive feelings and helps the young people to eliminate negative feelings as well as regulated the intensity of emotional management. Furthermore, music is found to have congruent to cater mood such as anger and sadness. Music affected the clarity of the experience by giving form to different feelings. At sometimes, music succours to elucidate thoughts and to make sense of feelings. A study revealed significant improvement in stress controlling for participants in the music therapy with relaxation group, whereas the reserved control group displayed no significant change in their score over the same period (Ogba et al., 2019).

Maslow noted that music provides the experience of enhanced self-actualization. Music is alleged as one of the nearest alternatives to reach self-actualization by an individual through musical experiences (Lowis, 2002). The process of human progress towards self-actualization demonstrates that children needs to grow are different from one another. In relation to gifted students, self-actualization would be heightened by intellectual stimulation (Pufal-Struzik, 1999). As gifted students prefer specific musical activities in their lesson particularly in playing musical instruments, performance, music theory and singing, research has proven that the activities are essential for them to express creativity (Md Jais et al., 2018). While singing, instruments playing and rhythmic movements do enhance students' music coordination skill (Md Jais et al., 2020; Md Jais, 2018). It means that children including gifted students have the opportunity to sharpen their psychomotor skills (coordination, movement, strength, speed, and gross motor) while learning music. Nogaj (2020) found that students who were exposed to music training have high level of emotional intelligence compared to non-music exposed students. They are more alert of the emotions that they feel, express their emotions more easily, and can effectively practise their knowledge about the emotions they experience. Moreover, in stressful circumstances, students with music experiences exhibit task-oriented coping strategies significantly more often and are significantly less likely to engage in substitute actions than other students.

In addition, many studies reveal that music has significant effect in sharpening students cognitive level. As intellectual process is the vital point for gifted students, music become as a platform for them to jump as high as they can to achieve their life goal. Sandu (2019) discovered that students who were taking part in musical activities enhanced their learning capacity and sharpen concentration. They also improved their behaviour, increased self-discipline and spiritual. A research by Md Jais et al. (2020) revealed that a well catered gifted students preferred music activities to heighten his giftedness. This is aligned with Georgieva (2017) stated that music can sharpen children mental abilities as well as relieving tension by releasing endorphin hormone during musical activities.

## Materials and Methods

This research implements qualitative method with purposive sampling technique. A quantitative data is used as supplementary to support the qualitative evidences as

applied by Seers et al. (2009). Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interview and survey in GENIUS@Pintar National Gifted College, Malaysia. The in-depth interview was conducted with 15 gifted students (six male and nine female), adopting Jacob and Furgerson (2012) interview protocol. A survey to support interview data was administered through google form to 64 respondents randomly chosen among 13-16 years old gifted students. They were studying in GENIUS@Pintar National Gifted College. Data analysis includes verbatim and coding techniques for in-depth interview while descriptive statistic for survey.

## Results

Interview data were analysed by coding the transcription into four domains; emotion, motivation reflection and awareness. Based on interview findings, I found music has aided gifted students specifically in coping emotion issues. According to the students, music makes them calm and functions as stress release. If they felt stressed and worried during exam weeks, doing assignments and homeworks, listening to music would unchain the stress. It was said that listening to music would reduce their stress and they would feel more relaxing. Surprisingly music also helps gifted students to sleep. One of the respondents stated:

*“Music helps me to sleep at night as I usually hard time trying to sleep. The music I listened to at night were usually slow-pop songs. It calms me down, helping me to sleep. Music sweeps away my boredom and motivates me a lot”.*

The most emotion problems faced by gifted students were stress and depression. In this case, music helps those students in accompanying them completing assignments and overcome anxious feelings. Students preferred to listen to music when they were alone. Hence, music become a mechanism to overcome uncertainty mood. A student claimed:

*“Music helps me to relax when I’m feeling stressed out. Music also help me to release my anger rationally rather than scolding everyone around me. Everytime I feel upset, music helps me to overcome my sadness rather than being depressed. If I don’t listen to music there’s a high chance I will fall into depression. Songs that helps me a lot are Eyes, Nose, Lips by Taeyang, Loser by Bigbang, Castle by Halsey, Gasoline, and Angry Too”.*

Besides, gifted students love to listen classical music. They found it was very relaxing and soothing unlike rock music. According to them, rock music is very loud and noisy. Sometimes, they listened to classical music until they felt asleep, which made them feel better and comfortable.

Into the bargain, music is entertaining and it brightens the students’ mood. Whenever they feel bored, they listen to music. Trending or pop music would be in their preference as, according to them, it is fun and relaxing that would embellish their days. As music has different genres, it does influence their mood. This is because the rhythm and tone that they hear when listening to music contributes to their current mood. For them, a major key of music pieces implies cheerfulness while minor key is sadder. This has also affected on their brain to stimulate emotion based on what kind of music they

are listening to. When listening to joyful or happy music, it produces a jovial atmosphere for them. They may also hum or sing along. This sets them in a very positive mood. Classic, pop and meditative sounds seem to be uplifting and these kinds of music are to their fancy. When they feel sad or sorrow, they are triggered to listen to sad songs. This is because the song's lyrics and rhythm would always describe their present situation and touch their heart. They feel better listening to songs that are connected to their context as the sense of someone understands their emotions and thoughts is present. When they are really angry, those gifted students would play some loud music like heavy metal to help them diminish the anger. Respondents agreed by stating:

*"Music helps me to express my feelings. When I'm down, I will listen to Pulang song by Imsoniack and The One That Got Away by Katy Perry. When I feel hype or excited, I listen to songs like No More Dreams by BTS and Cypher:Triphth. Through music I have been better at handling my bad feeling When I feel dramatic, my choice is In My Blood by Shawn Mendes and Ddaeng by BTS. I knew BTS through music. BTS releases songs that cater depression, peer pressure and many teenage problems. Music is my little get away from this world for some time. Music is medicine".*

Music is believed to be a motivation booster for gifted students. It has sharpened focus for gifted students by assisting them to complete task. Students enjoy completing a task while listening to music as it helps injecting force to complete the whole task. They prefer to listen to music while completing task. Some might hold an idea that listening to music while completing task is an adverse habit, but for the gifted students it is their niche, especially in completing homework or assignments. A respondent said:

*"I used to listen music as it helped me to focus on spesific things. I listen to gaming soundtrack because it assists me to focus on my assignments. I also like to listen hip-hop music since it has a harmony, melody and deep tone. High tone of music is my favourite".*

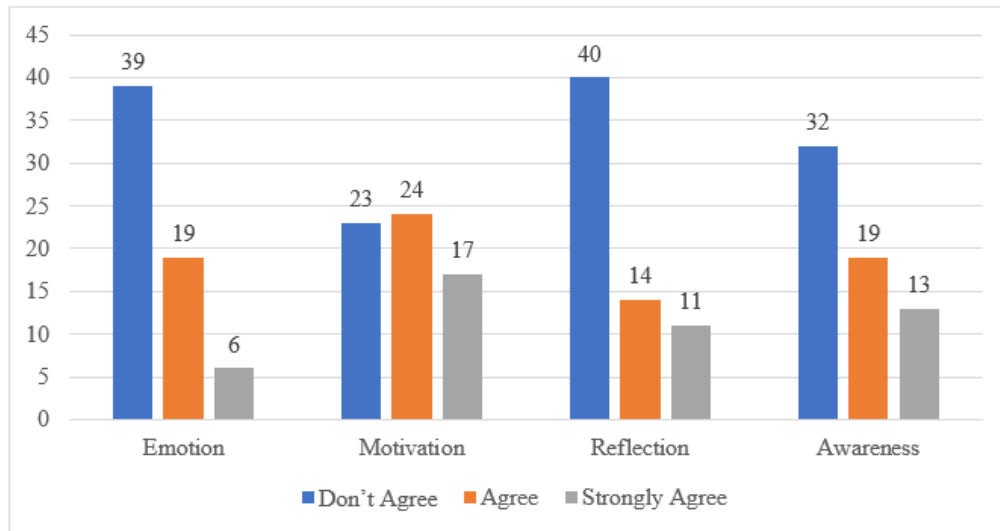
Through music lesson in the class, gifted students have learnt how to play a lot of musical instruments and it makes them feel satisfied. Some musical activities learnt in class were playing piano, violin recorder and ukulele. They also played those musical instruments for their friends and family which would definitely makes their family and friends proud. Additionally, this could also improve the students' music skills as feedback would be received from their audience. Students also were given opportunity to play some music during the arrival of guests which could definitely develop their confidence. The guests would have a good impression on the school and contribute to excellent remarks which would augment their commitment to perform again. During musical instruments performance, students play music which reflects their thoughts and motivation. This portrays that the students did not only focus on the music pieces while performing but felt the music as well. The gifted students found music creates learning to be more pleasant. It is also an extremely unique method to develop the capability of memorising. Music in poems are being taught to them and it makes the learning further interesting, easy to learn and retain the contents in mind.

Furthermore, music assists gifted students as a reflection mechanism. While listening to music, students read the song lyrics. The lyrics would somehow remind the students about their memory in the past. For example, students remembered that they had spent time with family while singing '*Rasa Sayang*' song during picnic. This will make students to be more appreciative to their family members and friends. Through this, students would try to improve their self and become a better person. As the lyrics comprise meaningful words and phrases, it offers the students to have a deep thought and reflection on their life as well as their own selves.

In addition, music foster awareness among gifted students. When involved in music activities, students communicated and observed their friends. They were aware to every action shown by them and their friends. For instance, students were asked to play musical instruments. They would observe their friends first, and aware of feedback from friends and teachers. They would try their very best to present their efforts but still, sensitive to critiques. If too many critiques or condemn on their work, those gifted students would face embarrassment which may cause suicidal action. This also inculcates trustworthy values among students where they learnt it through the process of learning. For example, if their friend won't back up or support them during their turn on presentation, it may cause them to loss trust towards their friends.

While music can move the gifted students in an acute emotional moment, it's also notable that it can be used to elicit underlying emotions and it tells them about unconscious elements of their emotional structure. This really helps in self exploration and understanding of their growth. For them, music comprises melody which triggers positive thoughts and good memories in the past, favourite places, persons or events. Music plays a great role in making gifted students contented during difficult times and gives lots of relief to mind. It also aids in improving mind vigorously by making it more artistic and ingenious. Music has the potential to improve listening skills and understanding abilities. Students feel the lyrics and try to decipher what the singer wishes to convey through songs.

Interview data are supported with survey findings with 64 gifted students' feedback. I relate the findings from the interview data which includes the four domains (emotion, motivation, reflection, and awareness) in conducting the survey. Based on the graph as *Figure 1*, I found majority students agreed that music has brought positive effects to them. In emotion part, there are 61% students feel music makes them happy, calm and release their stress. This also affects them towards positive mood. In motivation part, 36% students feel music can motivate them to be successful and help in developing themselves. In reflection part, 63% found music aids them in reflecting life to be better person. In awareness part there are 50% students believe that music makes them aware of their surroundings. Therefore, the results reveal that music is proven to help gifted students in reflecting their life to be better person in catering their emotion.



**Figure 1.** *The importance of music for gifted students.*

## Discussion

From the findings, it shows that music contributes significantly to gifted students' lives. Music helps students to cater their negative feelings as well as emotional issues. It moulds the gifted students to be a well-being person that may become role models and contribute not only to the nation but globally. This has been proven upon the students' majority agreement that music helps them in catering lives within these four domains which are emotion, motivation, reflection, and awareness. As Alcaraz (2019) mentioned that music brings a lot of positive impacts and advantages to students, this study has strengthened the evidence that music has empowered positive aura to human, in this case, the gifted students. The shift towards positive feelings or moods is the main focus in implying music as emotional cure. From anger to calm and sad to happy, music helps students control their emotions and further alters their behaviour. This is in line with Constantin and Drăgulin's (2019) notion that music functions are to lead mood modification and emotional regulation, sharpen attention and concentration. This hence has the relation on increasing intrinsic motivation of gifted students. Music helps them to focus on task completion as well as change their perspective upon facing difficult tasks. It is proven by research that listening to music may enhance concentration because there is a temporal change in children's mental process (Mori et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2016).

In addition, it is found that music allows students to reflect on their past actions. It reminds them on previous memories which makes them remember on certain events that might touch their hearts. This would cause the gifted students to become more appreciative, grateful and kind-hearted person. This is explained by Baumgartner, (1992) that music associates event from a person's life, relates music with experiences and arises emotions by listening to the piece of music. Results also revealed that music fosters awareness among gifted students. as they are sensitive with their surroundings, music becomes a mechanism to foster giftedness traits of the students and sharpens their concerns. It might appear not a common process for normal person but for gifted individual it is observed as a vital development. This is because sensitivity towards

surroundings especially emotional and behavioural responses are one of the obvious gifted traits (Gere et al., 2009). Additionally, music is also found to help gifted students beyond the four domains. Previous studies included medical and social studies are enriched in this research findings scope by highlighting on how music enhances students' cognitive level, develop creativity and coordination (Pribram, 2013; Coulson and Burke, 2013; Md Jais, 2017).

### ***Implication of findings***

Based on the findings, it is proven that music plays important roles in gifted students' life. It does not only impact their achievement but emotional as well. Music is a mechanism to get the students focus on completing task and perform extraordinary. It also supports the students to release their stress and avoid critical emotional issues such as depression and suicidal. As music is very close to the students and has potential to overcome many emotional issues among gifted students, music should be integrated in gifted teaching and learning activities in the class. Teachers may employ musical activities while teaching in the class such as teaching history by singing or listening to classical music related to the history topic as to gain information from the songs. Teachers may also start their class with music such as playing a song to attract students' attention as orientation phase. While students are doing their task, teachers may also play calm music to the students. Besides, music education class should be introduced in gifted education programme. Students need to be taught and given chance to express their creativity and feelings in the class. It is a platform for the students to enjoy music and forget any bad memories which enables them to develop positive moods throughout the days. Lastly, music also impacts to gifted education programme. As Malaysia is looking forward to expanding gifted program throughout the nation, it is possible to integrate music in curriculum and school events. Music can be integrated in the syllabus or learning approach of all subject and events. Activities such as dancing, playing music instruments and singing are the best options to be integrated in the gifted education programmes as suggested by Md Jais et al. (2018).

### **Conclusion**

A deep exploration pertaining music significance to gifted students can generate new information for the purpose of implementing music programmes in gifted education. For example, what kind of mental process is involved when gifted students are fully engrossed in music aural exercises and how it is practical to their achievements? The findings about the effectiveness of music to overcome emotional issues provide insights of the significance to satisfy human needs and strengthen the current studies on the importance of music. As many studies proved the importance of music to normal students or children, this study has also proven it as effective to gifted students in term of: (a) coping emotional problems, (b) increasing motivation to be successful person, (c) allowing students to reflects on the meaning of life, (d) developing awareness and sensitive to surroundings.

Gifted students, like any other normal children have their forte such as Mathematics, Science, Language and Technology. They need to be motivated intrinsically to fully utilise their metier so that their skills are directed to their pitch. In the process, gifted students are facing many challenges in terms of emotional issues, perfectionism traits, and so forth that might slower their cognitive development and



limits their skills performance. This will eventually place them into underachievers group which may cause them the risk of being alienated by their peers. This would be a great loss for a nation as gifted students are expected to be the asset of a country. Thus, the need of music has become even more conspicuous to gifted students especially in their teenage maturity process which would provide them with positive experience, and interpersonal or intrapersonal circumstances. In relation to this study, gifted students view music positively. They have experienced music and noted that music has assisted them in diverse ways. It is proven that music is significant for gifted students not only in coping with their emotional issues but in sharpening their mind and well-being. Future experimental studies are suggested to explore which music activities suit the gifted students and the effectiveness of music to tailor serious psychological issues of gifted students.

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