



Early Identification and Intervention of Underachievement among Gifted Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the underlying factors contributing to underachievement in gifted students and to formulate early intervention strategies that schools can implement. A qualitative case study approach focused on a high school student with strong academic potential who experienced a significant decline in academic performance, placing them at risk of not being promoted to the next grade. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the main factors contributing to underachievement include a lack of interest in certain subjects, an unsupportive social environment, and unstable family dynamics caused by the absence of a father figure. The study concludes that early identification and collaborative interventions involving subject teachers, school counselors, and parents play a crucial role in helping gifted students regain their academic performance in line with their potential. The implications of this study serve as a reference for teachers in implementing early screening and targeted intervention programs for gifted students experiencing underachievement.

KATA KUNCI

Identifikasi Dini;
Intervensi;
Underachievement;
Siswa Berbakat

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang mendasari terjadinya underachievement pada siswa berbakat serta merumuskan strategi intervensi dini yang dapat diterapkan oleh pihak sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, dengan fokus pada seorang siswa sekolah menengah atas yang memiliki potensi akademik tinggi namun mengalami penurunan prestasi belajar secara signifikan hingga terancam tidak naik kelas. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan analisis dokumen. Temuan penelitian mengungkap bahwa faktor utama penyebab underachievement meliputi ketidaktertarikan terhadap mata pelajaran tertentu, lingkungan sosial yang tidak mendukung, serta dinamika keluarga yang tidak stabil akibat ketiadaan figur ayah. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa identifikasi dini dan intervensi kolaboratif yang melibatkan guru mata pelajaran, guru bimbingan dan konseling, serta orang tua memiliki peran penting dalam membantu siswa berbakat mengembalikan prestasi akademik mereka sesuai dengan potensi yang dimiliki. Implikasi penelitian ini sebagai referensi bagi para guru dalam pelaksanaan skrining dini dan program intervensi terarah bagi siswa berbakat yang mengalami underachievement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Underachievement is a common issue among students, largely due to the difficulty of identifying it accurately. According to a study by Mazrekaj and colleagues (2022), approximately 23.5% of 2,228 students in Belgium were identified as underachieving. Similarly, Veas and his team (2016) found that 28.14% of 648 tenth-grade Spanish secondary school students were also underachievers. Students experiencing underachievement are often misun-

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derstood as low achievers or are even assumed to have no particular issues, like most of their peers. In fact, unlike low achievers, who can be easily recognized through their poor academic performance, underachieving students are harder to identify because their potential is not immediately visible. This becomes even more complex when the underachiever is a gifted student, as they often still show average or slightly above-average performance, which does not reflect their true abilities (Mazrekaj et al., 2022).

The underachievement phenomenon requires specific attention because it can trigger a harmful downward spiral. This condition is often associated with boredom, a loss of motivation, a continued decline in academic performance, and an increased risk of school dropout. These consequences can significantly affect the student's well-being (Veas et al., 2016; Mazrekaj et al., 2022). In education, underachievement is a frequent yet often overlooked issue. Underachievement is when a student with high academic ability fails to demonstrate learning outcomes that align with their intellectual potential. This problem typically manifests in reluctance to study, low motivation, and disappointing academic performance despite being intellectually capable.

This condition is commonly found among high school students. For example, some students with above-average intelligence receive poor grades and even face the risk of being held back a year. This situation challenges schools, parents, and teachers, including school counselors. These students are often called into counseling sessions, and their parents feel exhausted by the lack of improvement, especially after losing a father figure who used to support the child's learning process. Homeroom teachers and school counselors also experience emotional fatigue due to the ineffectiveness of various strategies they have tried. The student's lack of motivation may be influenced by factors such as disinterest in specific subjects and peer groups that do not encourage studying. In addition, a lack of emotional support from the family worsens the situation. Despite these challenges, the school has chosen to retain the students, recognizing the significant potential that could be developed with the right approach. Therefore, schools need to conduct early detection and apply effective interventions when signs of underachievement appear in high-potential students.

This article explores how a comprehensive identification process can be carried out and what intervention strategies can help students rebuild their motivation and improve their academic performance. Research on student underachievement has gained attention in education because this condition reveals a gap between intellectual potential and actual academic achievement. Previous studies have shown that the causes of underachievement range from intrapersonal factors, such as low motivation and lack of interest in learning (Anam, 2021; Padil & Lessy, 2024), to external factors, such as an unsupportive social environment and dysfunctional family dynamics (Astuti & Nur, 2025; Utomo et al., 2022; Utomo & Pahlevi, 2022). However, there is still a lack of in-depth research on underachievement at the high school level using a comprehensive qualitative approach. This study contributes to the academic discourse by providing a detailed analysis of the causes of underachievement and emphasizing the importance of early intervention through collaboration between schools and families.

Although some studies have examined underachievement among students, most focus on individual factors such as learning motivation or academic anxiety and use quantitative methods that do not explore personal and social dynamics in depth. This gap highlights the need for contextual and comprehensive studies on the experiences of underachieving high school students, especially by considering the interaction of intrapersonal, social, and family factors. This study's novelty lies in using a qualitative case study approach to examine in detail the condition of a high-potential student experiencing a drastic decline in performance, as well as the development of a collaborative intervention model involving subject teachers, school counselors, and parents. Therefore, this study aims to holistically identify the factors contributing to underachievement and design effective and applicable early interventions within the context of high school education.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. This approach was selected to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to underachievement in a high school student and formulate contextual and applicable interventions. The case study method allowed the researcher to explore the phenomenon thoroughly within its real-life context.

2.2 Research Subjects

The participant in this study was a tenth-grade student at a public high school who demonstrated high academic ability based on IQ scores and previous academic records but experienced a significant decline in academic

performance to the point of being at risk of grade retention. The participant was selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria aligned with the underachievement definition used in this study.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using three main techniques: (1) In-depth interviews, conducted with the student, parents, subject teachers, and the school counselor to explore the contributing factors of underachievement; (2) Observations, carried out to monitor the student’s behavior within the school environment, both inside and outside the classroom; (3) Document analysis, which included a review of academic records, attendance reports, and counseling notes related to the student.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s interactive analysis model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This process was conducted continuously throughout and after the data collection to ensure the validity and depth of interpretation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The findings of this study reveal that the student identified as Respondent A experienced symptoms of underachievement caused by a combination of internal and external factors. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observation at school, and academic documentation analysis involving the counseling teacher, homeroom teacher, and parents.

Table 1. Factors Causing Underachievement in Respondent AK

| Factor | Description of Findings | Data Source |
|-----------|--|----------------------------|
| Internal | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low interest in learning• Boredom• Low self-confidence• -voidance of difficult subjects | Interview & Observation |
| Eksternal | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unsupportive social environment• Loss of father figure• Lack of emotional attention | Parent & Teacher Interview |

The research results show that the factors causing the named students to experience underachievement are a combination of internal and external factors. From the internal side, students experience decreased interest in learning certain subjects, feel bored during learning activities, and show low self-confidence. Students tend to avoid subjects that are considered difficult or not in line with their interests, resulting in low motivation and engagement in the learning process.

On the other hand, external factors such as the social environment are also significantly influenced. A friendship environment that lacks enthusiasm for learning makes it easier for students to get carried away in lazy habits. In addition, family dynamics also play an important role. The loss of a father figure as a learning companion and role model causes students to lose emotional support and direction in the educational process. The lack of emotional attention from the family results in decreased enthusiasm and clear learning goals.

Table 2: Early identification indicators

| Indicator | Before Intervention | Source of Information |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Academic grades | Sharp decline | Student report card |
| Attendance | Average 78% | School attendance |
| Class participation | Passive | Teacher observation |
| Psychosocial conditions | Moody, lack of confidence | Counseling results |

The early identification of underachievement was conducted through collaboration between the school counselor, homeroom teacher, and the student's parent. Key indicators of concern included a decline in academic performance, increased absenteeism, and reduced participation in classroom activities. Through interviews and

behavioral observations, a noticeable discrepancy was found between the student's intellectual capacity and academic achievement.

The intervention process was implemented gradually. The school counselor provided intensive individual counseling sessions to build emotional rapport and uncover the root causes behind the student's declining motivation. Subject teachers developed more engaging and adaptive instructional strategies, including providing academic challenges aligned with students' interests and abilities. Simultaneously, the school involved the student's mother to actively monitor progress and foster a supportive learning environment at home.

The outcomes of these interventions showed positive developments. Student A began to demonstrate improvements in attendance, participation in class discussions, and academic performance in several subjects. The students also started taking part in school competitions. These changes suggest that comprehensive and sustained intervention efforts can support students in overcoming underachievement and regaining motivation in their educational journey.

These findings reinforce the importance of thoroughly understanding students' personal and social aspects when addressing underachievement. Focusing solely on academic results without addressing the root causes may exacerbate the problem. Therefore, a holistic approach that engages all support systems at school and home collaboratively and continuously is essential.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that underachievement among high-ability students can stem from a combination of intrapersonal and environmental factors. This research highlights that a collaborative intervention approach involving the school counselor, subject teachers, and parents effectively restores students' motivation and academic performance. Academic grades served as the primary indicator in identifying underachievement in Respondent A. A sharp decline in grades revealed a significant gap between the student's intellectual potential and academic outcomes. In this context, the student had a strong academic capacity, which was not reflected in actual performance. This suggests that non-cognitive factors such as motivation, interest, and environmental support play a major role in academic achievement. The decline in academic performance was not solely due to a lack of ability. Still, it resulted from internal factors (such as low interest and self-confidence) and external factors (such as limited emotional support and an unsupportive learning environment).

The student's average attendance rate of only 78 percent became another indicator of reduced engagement in the learning process. Low attendance often reflects issues related to motivation or emotional distress. In this case, poor attendance was closely linked to a lack of internal drive and the absence of a father figure who had previously played a key role in encouraging discipline and responsibility. Inconsistent attendance disrupted the learning process and contributed to a general decline in academic achievement.

Passive behavior in class reflected the student's psychological state and lack of motivation. Student A tended to avoid participation in discussions or group work and often disengaged from subjects perceived as difficult. This behavior not only indicated a lack of interest but also a lack of confidence and fear of failure. Active participation is essential to support the development of critical thinking and social skills. When students do not take the initiative or are willing to engage, it impairs the internalization of learning materials and negatively affects academic outcomes.

Respondent A's psychosocial condition was characterized by a withdrawn attitude, low self-confidence, and difficulty building social relationships at school. The loss of a father figure and lack of emotional support at home had a significant impact on the student's emotional stability. During the formative years of schooling, emotional support from family is essential to foster a positive attitude toward learning. When students feel unsupported, they tend to withdraw and show psychological symptoms that affect academic performance. Unlike the study by Fauziah (2023), which emphasized online interventions based on self-regulation, this study found that face-to-face approaches grounded in interpersonal relationships and emotional support were more effective in situations involving the loss of a parent. This condition became a key focus of counseling services and the primary target of intervention strategies provided by the school counselor.

Underachievement among gifted students presents a serious challenge in education, as these students often fail to reach performance levels that align with their intellectual capacity. Early identification is an important step to prevent further decline in academic performance. Studies have shown that factors such as lack of interest in the subject matter, excessive academic pressure, and limited emotional support from the environment contribute to underachievement (Ritchotte, Rubenstein, & Murry, 2020). In this context, schools need early detection tools to identify changes in students' learning behavior and emotional states as early indicators of academic decline.

Effective intervention for underachieving students must be collaborative and comprehensive, involving subject teachers, school counselors, and parents. Research by Matthews and Peters (2021) emphasizes that relationship-based interventions focused on enhancing intrinsic motivation, fostering positive social relationships, and creating a supportive classroom environment can help rebuild students' confidence and academic engagement. In the case studied, the absence of a father figure and a lack of supportive social interactions underscored the importance of an approach that addresses academic needs and psychosocial recovery to help gifted students realize their potential.

The implications of this research point to the need for a multidisciplinary approach in addressing underachievement. Schools should develop ongoing support systems that respond to students' emotional and academic needs. Cross-functional collaboration among teachers, counselors, and families has proven effective in creating personalized and context-sensitive intervention strategies (Subotnik et al., 2020). Additionally, school policies should be more flexible in providing gifted students opportunities to explore their interests and preferred learning styles to prevent stagnation and performance decline (Neumeister & Burney, 2019).

These findings are significant because they highlight the urgency of a holistic approach to education. Focusing solely on academic aspects without addressing psychosocial dimensions may worsen the student's condition. The recovery of motivation and performance in underachieving students cannot be achieved through study techniques alone. It must include emotional support, adaptive learning strategies, and active family involvement.

4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study on the early identification and intervention of underachievement in high-achieving students provide several important implications for guidance and counseling.

a) Theoretical Implications

The results reinforce existing theories on underachievement, which emphasize that the failure of high-potential students to reach their academic potential is influenced not only by cognitive factors but also by psychosocial and environmental elements (Clark, 2013; Veas et al., 2016). The inclusion of the loss of a father figure as an emotional factor broadens the perspective on holistic approaches to addressing this issue. The findings also underscore the significance of family involvement especially active participation as an essential component of effective intervention models.

b) Practical Implications

For school-based guidance and counseling professionals, this study offers practical guidance for developing more adaptive and individualized service programs. Strategies such as intensive one-on-one counseling, collaboration between teachers and parents, and adjustment of instructional methods have improved students' motivation and academic performance. Interventions grounded in emotional connection and social support can serve as a strong foundation for counseling practices aimed at high-ability students who face performance barriers.

c) Managerial Implications

In educational management, the findings highlight the importance of establishing an early detection system based on collaboration among school counselors, homeroom teachers, school principals, and parents. Schools are encouraged to form cross-functional intervention teams to address complex cases of underachievement. Internal policies should also strengthen the role of counseling services and promote greater family engagement in the educational process.

d) Methodological Implications

From a methodological perspective, using a case study approach in this research allowed for an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of underachievement. This approach can be a reference for future studies examining complex psycho-pedagogical issues. Subsequent researchers are encouraged to explore this topic using different research methods or approaches to enrich the body of knowledge and deepen the understanding of underachievement.

5. CONCLUSION

Underachievement among students with high academic potential is characterized by a mismatch between their intellectual capabilities and academic performance. This phenomenon arises from a combination of internal factors, such as low learning interest and lack of self-confidence, as well as external influences, including social environment and family dynamics. These factors interact in complex ways to hinder students from reaching their full academic potential despite their abilities. Early identification efforts, conducted through collaboration among teachers, counselors, and parents, are a crucial initial step in recognizing and addressing underachievement before it deepens.

Effective intervention requires a comprehensive approach integrating counseling services, tailored instructional strategies, and active family support. Counseling helps address emotional and motivational barriers, while adjustments in teaching methods can better engage students by aligning with their interests and strengths. Simultaneously, involving families creates a supportive home environment reinforcing positive academic behaviors. Such a holistic and continuous approach not only restores students' motivation but also significantly improves their academic achievements. Therefore, optimally managing underachievement demands sustained, multifaceted efforts that address personal and contextual factors influencing student performance.

Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of the study by involving a larger and more diverse sample, including variations in social backgrounds and educational levels, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the underachievement phenomenon among gifted students. Additionally, further research could explore the effectiveness of various intervention models, including technology-based approaches or personal development programs, to compare their impact on student motivation and academic performance. Quantitative or mixed methods approaches can also be employed to strengthen the validity of the findings and systematically measure the factors influencing underachievement, enabling the results to offer more practical and broad recommendations for educational practices and counseling services.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have contributed equally and substantially to this work. Their contributions include the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, as well as the drafting, critical revision, and final approval of the manuscript.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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