

## **Gifted Adults Career as a Reflection of Gifted Education: A Systematic Review of the Literature**

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**Abstract:** *Despite that studies have often focused on gifted children there is a limited amount of research that has examined the gifted adult. Hence, the study examined the relationship of the education that gifted adults received in their childhood with their success in their career, and to know the satisfaction experienced by a gifted adult in his or her career. Through a systematic review of the literature, we categorized the included articles into two thematic areas: first, the effects of early gifted educational experiences and, second, satisfaction with the chosen career and general well-being. Four main themes were examined: (a) gifted adults; (b) gifted children becoming gifted adults; (c) the childhood experiences of gifted adults in gifted education; and (d) gifted adults' career and life satisfaction. The researcher found that gifted adults remain a relatively untested group in the research literature.*

**Keywords:** *gifted education, gifted adults' career*

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### **I. Introduction**

Research studies have often focused on gifted children, just as teachers, specialists and decision-makers have concentrated on planning the educational, cognitive and social needs of gifted children. But how do we know that gifted education has achieved the goals of all these efforts? This question is especially pointed given that all this attention stops abruptly when the gifted children become adults. We know very little about what happens when a gifted person graduates from high school (Rinn & Plucker, 2004). However, regardless of the shortcomings of existing research, there are many reasons why the study of gifted adults is important in analysing gifted education. One of the reasons is to give us a perception of the success or failure of the provision of education for the gifted child, and this insight will guide current and future practice (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). One of the ways to see if gifted education has done its job is to look at the career of the gifted adults and satisfied with their life. Despite the existence of the myth referred to in the literature of gifted education where it is commonly believed that gifted individuals require little guidance or no planning for educational and vocational planning (Muratori & Smith 2015). Studies have shown that gifted people face unique situations such as societal expectations where gifted people choose specific occupations and often find that important others around them do not understand their chosen career sufficiently. The problem of social expectations often leads to the choice of a profession that satisfies the desires of others rather than the personality of these individuals (Delisle & Squires, 1989). However, in this study, we are seeking to know about an important part of the gifted adult's life which is the career that they have chosen. The current study synthesizes and analyses the research literature on gifted adults in order to learn about the relationship between the gifted education they received in childhood and their progress in their career as adults, as well as their satisfaction with the career they chose.

### **II. Statement of the Problem**

As specialists in gifted education, we focus our attention on educational and enrichment programs and diagnostic and survey tools for identifying gifted children. Then, when this child turns eighteen, they are lost on our radar. And the question remains: Did what we offered them in childhood help them to be successful as gifted adults? Moreover, when the gifted adolescents become adults and begin to choose their career, they face some challenges. For example, the path to a desired career may be more complex when the gifted person is multivariate, meaning that they may be able to succeed across many areas because of their many strengths and interests (Muratori & Smith, 2015). Thus, this raises the question of the satisfaction of the gifted person for their chosen career. Therefore, in this paper, we seek to discover the relationship of the gifted education they received in childhood with their success in their career and how satisfied the gifted adult is about his or her career.

### **Justification for the study**

The study aims to look at the relationship of the education that gifted people received in childhood with their success in their career, and their satisfaction with their chosen profession. The reason behind this research is that giftedness is not just part of childhood but rather a lifelong experience (Keating, 2009). In addition, the results and experiences of gifted adults give insights into the success or failure of educational programs for gifted children and thus the findings will guide the current and future practice (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). Therefore, studying this aspect of a gifted adult's life will enrich research based on gifted education.

### **Research Questions**

The problem is represented by the following two questions:

- What is the relationship of the education that gifted adults received in their childhood with their success in their career?
- How satisfied are the gifted adults in their chosen career?

### **Purpose of the Study**

It is known that gifted children are capable to understand advanced problems and complicated ideas with a minimal practice comparing with regular peers, and they receive some intensive programs at their early education enhancing this trend. When they became an adult and practicing their career at natural life, do they influenced by their previous education. In particular, the purpose of this research are twofold: the first is to explain the relationship of the education that gifted adults received in their childhood with their success in their career. The second is to know the satisfaction experienced by a gifted adult in his or her career.

### **Method - List of Databases**

We collected the articles by searching multiple online databases, namely, ERIC and Google Scholar. To identify pertinent articles, we searched using the keywords "gifted," "high-achieving," "high-ability," "IQ," and "gifted education," "career", "career satisfaction," each in combination with the word "adult." Theses, news articles and press articles were excluded from the current study. We have reviewed the references section of each article and included any related article that was relevant to our research. Searches were performed for items between 2006 and 2017. For the purposes of this study, the "gifted adult career" included gifted adults or adults who were identified as gifted during their youth and young people between the ages of 18 and 40, and their satisfaction with their chosen career. In this systematic review of the literature, we categorized the included articles into two thematic areas: first, the effects of early gifted educational experiences and, second, satisfaction with the chosen career and general well-being.

## **III. Discussion**

The current study sought to explore the relationship between the education that gifted adults received in their childhood and its impact on their career success; it also investigated the overall life satisfaction experienced by those adults in later life. Reviewing the relevant literature had emerged the following themes: emerged: (a) gifted adults; (b) gifted children becoming gifted adults; (c) the childhood experiences of gifted adults with education; and (d) gifted adults' career and life satisfaction.

### **Gifted Adults**

In gifted education, it is important to recognize that the purpose extends beyond the daily activities, projects and homework assignments that come along with a gifted program. We must also accept that gifted children grow up and become members of society like other people. Many studies have explored giftedness without considering adulthood. However, Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011) proposed a new definition of giftedness as "(a) reflecting the values of society; (b) typically manifesting in actual outcomes, especially in adulthood; (c) being specific to domains of endeavor; (d) resulting from the coalescing of biological, pedagogical, psychological, and psychosocial factors; and (e) being relative not just to the ordinary (e.g., a child with exceptional art ability compared to peers) but to the extraordinary (e.g., an artist who revolutionizes the field of art)"(p. 3). This definition of giftedness specifically includes adults, yet strong and rich studies on gifted adults remain rare. Meanwhile, the research available often faces flaws in terms of methodological shortcomings, including imprecise and unclear definitions of giftedness, small sample sizes, and a lack of adequate comparison groups (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). Some research on high-potential adults exists outside the field of gifted education; for example, the field of individual differences has produced a large amount of research into IQ differences among individuals of different ages. However, similar to the case of individual differences in research, induction clarity becomes a problem. Researchers often do not use the term 'gifted,' and studies based on high IQ are based on few books (e.g., Ashton, 2013; Cooper, 2010). However, in the field of gifted education, 'gifted' tends to mean more than a person's intelligence (Rinn & Bishop, 2015),

including other areas, such as special academic ability, music, creativity and leadership. Inconsistencies across fields of study when defining 'gifted' complicates our ability to adequately understand the characteristics, experiences and needs of gifted adults. Adding to this discussion, the following sections discusses how gifted children become gifted adults before moving into an analysis of gifted adults' childhood experiences in gifted education.

### **Gifted Children Become Gifted Adults**

Studies have shown that if children are identified as gifted during childhood on the basis of their intelligence, their IQs remain fairly stable from childhood to adulthood (Deary, Whiteman, Starr, Whalley, & Fox, 2004; Mackintosh & Mackintosh, 2011). In such cases, the "gifted" label is assumed to persist throughout adulthood. If gifted individuals are identified in the world of creativity, leadership, or academic capacity during childhood, they tend to maintain that particular area of talent as they age. Whether formally recognized or not, childhood intelligence usually leads to adult intelligence, but it is not a guarantee (Simonton & Song, 2009). A historical study by Simonton (2008) appeared to identify factors that contribute to adult intelligence, in his analysis, he used a sample of 291 prominent African Americans and a variety of control variables, such as sex and year of birth. The prominent findings of Simonton study were that early giftedness, in particular, is predictive of creative achievement in adolescence and adulthood, in this sense, all gifted adults were once gifted children.

Similar to Simonton (2008), Freeman and Walberg (1999) conducted a historical study of 256 African American women who lived in the 20th century, finding evidence of early intellectual capacity, as well as individual perseverance and a strong mentality among these women. For their part, Park, Lubinski, and Benbow (2008) examined the top 1% of early athletes who participated in the first three groups of SMPY, finding that differences in athletic ability at age 13 predicted an advanced degree in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM). On the other hand, researchers found that "most gifted children, even most child prodigies, do not go on to become adult creators" (Winner, 2000, p. 165). Most gifted children are identified as such on the basis of their traditional intellectual capacity (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2000; Subotnik, 2009). At the same time, Howard (2008) had noted that "There is a clear link between being a miracle and becoming prominent...and some recognized geniuses, such as Albert Einstein, have shown no early signs of a great talent" (pp. 119-120). However, in studies considering children who grow up to become prominent, and those who do not, we have to consider more than just IQ in childhood. For instance, we have to consider the childhood experiences of gifted adults in gifted education.

### **The Childhood Experiences of Gifted Adults in Gifted Education**

Wai (2014) has pointed out that cognitive ability predicts successful educational and professional lives in the future. Using a sample of 286 male and 94 female participants (mean age 33.6 years), one study considered the professional and life achievements of gifted children as adults; the study showed that 51.7% of the males and 54.3% of the females earned doctoral-level degrees (Lubinski et al., 2006). Similarly, Kaufmann and Matthews (2012) considered a sample of 145 graduates from the Presidential Scholars program, finding that 70% earned doctoral level degrees, 20% earned master's degrees, 21% pursued careers in education, 19% had careers in health care and health sciences, and 14% had careers in legal fields. Research also demonstrates the benefits of early educational experiences, such as acceleration, advanced coursework and enrichment. Park et al. (2013) suggested that using grade-based acceleration with mathematically precocious adolescents can have lasting effects on the productivity of those pursuing careers in the STEM fields. Moreover, Park et al. (2013) examined three related hypotheses about the effects of grade skipping on future educational and occupational outcomes in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Using a combined sample of 3,467 mathematically precocious students (top 1%), the study found that participants who skipped grades were more likely to pursue advanced degrees in STEM and author peer-reviewed publications in STEM. They also earned their degrees and authored their first publications earlier, accruing more total citations and highly cited publications by the age of 50 (Park et al., 2013).

Research also has considered gifted adults' perspectives of their early childhood education. In a study with 88 adult participants (33 men and 55 women), (Perrone, Wright, et al., 2010) sought to learn about gifted adults' experiences with advanced classes and their attitudes about advanced classes or gifted programs for their own children. 85% indicated that their academic experiences in these classes were positive, and 59% stated that their interpersonal experiences were positive. 75% percent of participants with children described signs of giftedness in their children, and 88% indicated that they would support advanced placement for their children if recommended by the school (Perrone, Wright, et al., 2010). Meanwhile, Watve (2008) examined the effects of enriched educational programs during childhood on academic, practical and social accomplishments during adulthood with 53 adult males. The study showed that men who participated in enriched educational programs during childhood were more likely to have academic and social accomplishments when compared to those who

had not. This discussion of the childhood experiences of gifted adults leads us to the ultimate question: do these childhood educational experiences lead to career and life satisfaction? The follow section addresses this question by considering the career paths of gifted adults as well as their life satisfaction (or lack thereof).

### **Gifted Adults' Career and Life Satisfaction**

When choosing a profession, gifted individuals are influenced by many factors. For example, gifted students tend to choose careers that align with their personal self-concept and perceptions about the qualities needed to succeed in a career. They also seek quality careers and high wages. Family members also may significantly impact career decision-making (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). Research usually indicates a positive relationship between IQ and self-being. For example, Wulff et al. (2009) investigated a sample of 298 men and 399 women in order to consider the importance of mental ability for school and job satisfaction in Sweden. The study found a positive relationship between level of intelligence and subjective well-being (Wulff et al., 2009). In a similar study of job satisfaction among gifted people and their temperament structure in Poland, researchers included a study group of 180 people (90 gifted adults and 90 average ability adults, with each group including 37 women and 53 men). The research indicated that gifted adults were significantly more satisfied with their jobs than the compared group (Siekańska & Sękowski, 2006). In their research, Perrone, Tschopp, et al. (2010) examined the career expectations and outcomes of individuals identified as academically gifted in high school (87 participants; 32 male and 55 female). Most individuals in this study reported satisfaction with their careers. A study of 287 Mensa members (216 men and 71 women) investigated the career paths of a group of intellectually gifted individuals, finding that most were happy in their careers, particularly when in positions of leadership allowing for considerable autonomy (Persson, 2009). Furthermore, in a study of 4166 male army veterans in the USA, IQ predicted cardiovascular disease mortality as strongly as other risk factors; individuals with high IQs were physically healthier and lived longer lives (Batty et al., 2008). Wirthwein and Rost (2011) examined the subjective well-being of a sample of intellectually gifted adults  $N = 96$  compared to a sample of adults of average intelligence  $N = 91$ . They found that intellectually gifted adults were neither "happy" nor "unhappy" relative to their peers of average intelligence. Another study considered the major life decisions of gifted adults, examining 57 gifted participants (25 men, 32 women) and their life satisfaction. Participants reported making a variety of major life decisions leading to high general satisfaction with life as well as satisfaction with careers and family relationships (Perrone-McGovern et al., 2011). Interestingly, the most common outcomes of individuals' worst decisions were dissatisfaction or termination of a romantic relationship. Many studies support an association between strong romantic relationships and life satisfaction among the gifted. For example, in a study of 99 adults (40 men and 59 women) exploring the relationship between spirituality, work, family roles and life satisfaction among gifted adults, participants' well-being and marital satisfaction contributed significantly to life satisfaction (Perrone et al., 2006).

The research in this section supports the general idea that gifted adults tend to have positive career paths and a great deal of life satisfaction. Most of the gifted adults considered in the research presented here have found satisfaction both in their careers and in their personal lives.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The current study revealed a number of limitations with regards to studying gifted individuals. As discussed earlier in this article, some research on gifted adults remains flawed due to inaccurate or unclear definitions of 'gifted,' as well as small sample sizes. In addition, many words have been used to describe gifted adults, including reputation, creative production and achievement. Because of the multiple definitions of gifted applied to adults and the lack of time to research more broadly, the researcher may have missed important studies when compiling essays for this study. Furthermore, word count restrictions limited the scope of this research. Other areas relevant to this study but not included are how family impacts the development of gifted children, the characteristics of gifted adults, and how gifted adults form families.

Future research should replicate and expand previous studies on gifted adults. In addition, the current research on gifted adults is limited in that it focuses heavily on intellectual and academic giftedness. This research may not be generalizable to gifted adults in other areas, such as the creative and leadership fields or the arts. In the future, the current researcher could conduct a case study on six gifted adults regarding the relationships between the education that gifted adults received in their childhood, their career success, and their overall life satisfaction.

## **IV. Conclusion**

Exploring literature studies on the relationship between the childhood education of gifted adults and their career success, as well as their degree of satisfaction with life that has explored gifted adults in this research. Four main themes were examined: (a) gifted adults; (b) gifted children becoming gifted adults; (c) the childhood experiences of gifted adults in gifted education; and (d) gifted adults' career and life satisfaction. The

researcher found that gifted adults remain a relatively untested group in the research literature. Comprehensive studies therefore are needed to describe the characteristics, experiences and needs of gifted adults, with a particular focus on clearly defining talent during puberty while expanding on previous studies. Research on giftedness and talent during adulthood may help researchers and educators better understand gifted children's experiences. Such research will not only provide insights into the children who may become prominent adults, but also help talented adults understand themselves better in order to reach their own potential.

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**Table 1: Characteristics of included studies**

Study Authors	Participants	Interest (Study Focus)	Context Setting	Outcomes	Study Type
Batty , Shipley, Gale, Mortensen, &Deary (2008)	Cohort study of 4166 male former army	Does IQ predict total and cardiovascular disease mortality as strongly as other risk factors?	United States	Individuals with a high IQ have been shown to be physically healthier, and to live longer lives	Quantitative study
Lubinski, Benbow, Webb, & Bleske-Rechek (2006)	Sample of 286 male and 94 female participants (mean age 33.6 years)	Know the professional and life achievements for gifted children when they become adults	United States	51.7% of the males and 54.3% of the females earned doctoral-level degrees	Quantitative study
Kaufmann & Matthews (2012)	Sample of 145 participants	The success of Presidential Scholars in their future	United States	70% of them earned doctoral level degrees, 20% earned master’s degrees, 21% had careers in education, 19% had careers in health care and health sciences, and 14% had careers in legal fields	Quantitative study
Siekańska, &Sękowski (2006)	Study group included 180 people. One half of them, i.e. 90 gifted adults. The other half i.e. were 90 average ability adults. Each group included 37 women and 53 men.	Job satisfaction among gifted people and their temperament structure	Poland	gifted adults were significantly more satisfied with their jobs than the comparison group.	Qualitative study
Perrone , Tschopp, Snyder, Boo, & Hyatt (2010)	87 participants (32 male, 55 female)	Examine career expectations and outcomes for individuals who were identified as academically gifted high school students.	United States	Most were satisfied with their careers	Qualitative study
Persson (2009)	287 Mensa members (216 men and 71 women)	The study set out to investigate which career path a group of intellectually gifted individuals chose	Sweden	Most were happy in their careers when they in positions of leadership that allowed for considerable autonomy	quantitative and qualitative
Wirthwein and Rost (2011)	A sample of intellectually gifted adults N = 96 compared to a sample of adults of average intelligence N = 91	Examined the subjective well-being of both groups	Germany	They found that intellectually gifted adults were neither “happy” nor “unhappy” relative to their peers of average intelligence.	Qualitative study
Perrone - McGovern, Ksiazak, Wright, Vannatter, Hyatt, Shepler, & Perrone (2011)	Participants 57 gifted adults (25 men, 32 women)	Major life decisions of gifted adults were examined in relation to life satisfaction	United States	Participants reported making a variety of major life decisions that have led to high general satisfaction with life as well as satisfaction with careers and family relationships.	Qualitative study
Perrone , Webb, Wright, Jackson, &Ksiazak (2006)	Participants 99 adults (40 men and 59 women)	Explore the relationship of spirituality to work and family roles and life satisfaction among gifted adults.	United States	Participants well-being and marital satisfaction contributed significantly to life satisfaction.	Both quantitative and qualitative
Park , Lubinski, and Benbow (2013)	Combined sample of 3,467 mathematically precocious students (top 1%)	Authors examined 3 related hypotheses about the effects of grade skipping on future educational and occupational outcomes in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)	United States	Participants more likely to pursue advanced degrees in STEM and author peer-reviewed publications in STEM, earned their degrees and authored their 1st publication earlier, and accrued more total citations and highly cited publications by age 50 years.	Quantitative study
Perrone , Wright, Ksiazak, Crane,	Participants 88 adults (33 men and 55 women)	learn about gifted adults’ experiences in advanced classes and attitudes	United States	85% indicated that their academic experiences in these classes were positive	Qualitative study

&Vannatter (2010)		about advanced classes or gifted programs for their children		and 59% that their interpersonal experiences in these classes were positive, 75% with children described signs of giftedness in their children, and 88% of participants indicated that they would support advanced placement for their children if it were recommended by the school.	
Watve(2008)	Participants 53 men adults	Examined the effects of enriched educational programs during childhood on academic, practical and social accomplishments during adulthood.	India	Men who participated in enriched educational programs during childhood were more likely than those who had not to have academic and social accomplishments, specifically	Both quantitative and qualitative
Wulff, Bergman, and Sverke (2009)	Sample of 298 men and 399 women	Investigated the importance of mental ability for school and job satisfaction	Sweden	Positive relationship between level of intelligence and subjective well-being	Quantitative study
Wai (2014)	Sample study 1 N = 1975 and Sample study 2 N = 1536	To see whether cognitive ability matter in the development of expertise in educational and occupational domains	United States	Cognitive ability predictive of later educational and occupational success.	Quantitative study

**Table 2: Details of Study findings**

Author	Finding / Concept #1	Finding / Concept #2	Finding / Concept #3	Finding / Concept #4
Batty , Shipley, Gale, Mortensen, &Deary (2008)	High IQ leads to success in education, high social status and well rewarded recruitment	High IQ leads to more favorable behaviors for health, such as non-smoking, higher levels of physical activity	People with high intelligence have a lower risk of later psychiatric illness and subsequent deaths	High IQ results improve the management of a serious illness such as heart disease
Lubinski, Benbow, Webb, & Bleske-Rechek (2006)	Many participants in the General Service category (69.3%) were teachers, engineers and post-secondary scientists	Doctoral degrees (PhD, MA or JD) were obtained by 51.7% and 54.3% of male and female participants respectively, 79.7% and 77.1% of male and female participants in the General Service	_____	_____
Kaufmann & Matthews (2012)	The scholars of the presidency came from relatively educated families: 94 (65%) of their fathers and 76 (53%) of their mothers had at least a bachelor's degree and many had advanced degrees.	A large proportion of respondents (87, 60%) reported traumatic events or life conditions by age 18	86 (59%) of the respondents reported academically and socially or personal problems related to their level of abilities or achievement in adulthood	_____
Siekańska, & Sękowski (2006)	People who have been in the past with high abilities at present are more satisfied with their jobs than those from the control group (who do not claim outstanding academic achievement)	Research shows that the relationship between mood and job satisfaction should not be analyzed at the global level, but at the professional level	_____	_____
Perrone , Tschopp, Snyder, Boo, & Hyatt (2010)	Participants pointed out that they were looking for jobs that would provide mental opportunities for challenge and motivation, indicating the attractiveness of such professions.	One third of respondents reported changing career areas.	Most participants were able to accurately predict professional outcomes.	_____
Persson (2009)	They chose participants to pursue careers in technology, science, social work, practical and aesthetic work.	The participants appear rather indifferent to their current job.	_____	_____

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Wirthwein and Rost (2011)	Excessive appropriations are not appropriate to identify intellectually gifted or highly achievable individuals.	_____	_____	_____
Perrone - McGovern, Ksiazak, Wright, Vannatter, Hyatt, Shepler, & Perrone (2011)	Participants reported making major decisions in life that led to meeting the needs of understanding or knowledge, company and expression.	Increase the satisfaction of life by increasing happiness, pride and satisfaction about relationships and financial situation.	Increase the level of commitment in the romantic relationship as a key decision of life.	Participants demonstrated many self-activation characteristics.
Perrone, Webb, Wright, Jackson, & Ksiazak (2006)	Existence and marital satisfaction have positively contributed to the satisfaction of life.	Participants pointed out that their spiritual beliefs contributed positively to the satisfaction of life	Participants pointed out that their spiritual beliefs had little or no effect on their career development	_____
Park, Lubinski, and Benbow (2013)	Early mathematicians who skipped the grade were more likely to follow advanced grades and secure the achievements of STEM	_____	_____	_____
Perrone, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane, & Vannatter (2010)	Gifted individuals indicated that they had positive academic and personal experiences from being in advanced classes.	That students who received advanced training courses were more likely to evaluate these courses than the level of preparation for the college compared to general education courses	Advanced secondary school courses have helped students develop the skills needed for college success.	Advanced preparation courses are useful in preparation for universities.
Wulff et al. (2009)	Poor positive relationships between mental ability and satisfaction at age 13 and middle age.	Satisfaction with school or work is related to school achievement and completion of work.	There are stronger relationships between mental ability and job satisfaction in middle age compared with youth.	_____
Wai (2014)	The differences in ability at a younger age have made a difference in obtaining a higher proportion of educational grades, in particular the PhD.	_____	_____	_____

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