

# Academic Problems Facing High Achieving Students at Universities

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## ABSTRACT

The study aimed to identify the academic problems facing high achieving students in Jordanian universities. The study sample consisted of (353) randomly selected high achieving male and female students from graduate and Bachelor's degrees at Amman Arab University and Balqa Applied University, who obtained a cumulative GPA of 3.7/4 or higher. The researchers followed the descriptive approach, and developed a scale that mainly focused on the following areas (studying problems, emotional problems, problems related to future professional choices, social problems, and family problems). The results indicated that academic problems are the most common problems among high achieving students, which affect them moderately, whereas family problems affect them the least. The results also indicated that there were no statistically significant differences at the level of ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) due to gender and college variables, and a statistically significant difference at the level of ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) due to the degree variable in favor of bachelors. Also, differences appeared in emotional problems in favor of females and in studying problems in favor of high achieving students in scientific colleges.

Keywords: Academic, high achieving students, problems, students, university.

## INTRODUCTION

High achieving students have abilities that make them different from other students and may face several problems, including what was found associated between high mental ability and mental superiority and the ability to adapt to problems, where high abilities contribute to ease and speed of adaptation in different situations. Thus, the high achieving students have a better understanding of themselves, and others around them, due to their high mental capacity, which makes them abler to cope with problems and deal with them in healthy ways compared to other students.

There are also problems associated with academic excellence, as high achieving students are more anxious, tend to perfectionism, have high sensitivity, and have a sense of loneliness and social isolation compared to ordinary students (Peterson, 2006; Hebert, 2000). Despite the high mental abilities, these students suffer from problems that may be endogenous, including an imbalance in mental and physical development, imbalance in mental and emotional development, high sensitivity, a multiplicity of interests, and the tendency to form systems and laws at an early age, a seek for perfection and excessive idealism, or external problems, related to their relationships with colleagues and companions, or with their relationship with parents, or teachers (Webb, 1984; Al-srou, 2007)

University is one of the most important stages that students go through. High achieving students might face academic problems related to their characteristics, regarding high self-concept and high self-esteem (Wouters et al., 2011;

Nadiahan & Cabauatan, 2021 ). Academic and social issues that high achieving students face in college affect their ability to emotionally adapt to university life where the university environment may offer an opportunity to compare themselves to other students, as well as to test their abilities (Neumeister, 2004). Academic issues include study-related demands and how they are reflected in their academic effort, engagement, and achievement. In contrast, Social issues indicate how students can integrate themselves into universities' social life. Whereas Personal-emotional issues affect the degree of stress and anxiety, student commitment, and satisfaction (Baker et al., 1985).

High achieving students adapt well to the academic requirements when they are provided with opportunities for intellectual growth and academic challenge (Hébert et al., 2007;

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Mirici & Sari, 2021). They can acquire new information quickly, show an advanced academic achievement compared to other students (Diezmann, 2001). Parents, peers, and teachers are considered essential elements to high achieving students since they influence their learning environments and play a crucial role in whether facilitating or impeding their self-determination, adjustment, and achievement (Almukhambetova et al., 2020).

High achieving students generally experience particular challenges of an evolutionary nature. Some of these might emerge and exacerbate at a certain age, and some other challenges might be related to male or female. The higher the degree of academic achievement, the greater the possibility of exacerbating problems (Jarwan, 2007; Russo, 2004). Neihart (1999) believes that academic distinction depends on three factors: the type and degree of academic distinction, the degree of adequacy of services provided to them, and the student's characteristics.

High achieving students face two types of emotional and social problems; first, they are prejudged by their teachers and counselors, they are considered capable of managing their own affairs, and they have a high degree of mental health, self-direction, and high self-esteem. The second, is that these students do not seek help and do not express their suffering, as this contradicts the images they have formed of themselves (perfection), which makes them tend to solve their problems, which may affect the effectiveness of the results when dealing with academic, life and development issues (Peterson, 2006).

Contradictory views emerged about the actuality of problems among high-achieving students. Some found a link between high mental ability and the ability to adapt to stressors and problems, as it turns out that high intelligence helps in faster adaptation in different situations. High achieving students have a better understanding of themselves and others around them, and this is due to high mental capacity, which makes them more able to cope with stress and deal with it healthily compared to other students (Al-Hawamdeh, 2012; Peters, et al., 2020).

However, other results showed that there are problems associated with high achieving students, compared to other students, as high achieving students are more anxious and have a tendency to perfection and high sensitivity (Hebert, 2000). Despite the high intellectual capabilities those students have, they may suffer from specific problems that include an imbalance in mental-physical and mental-emotional development, high sensitivity, perfection, and excessive idealism (Jie, 2019; Mahasneh, 2001). Moreover, they face interpersonal problems that might affect their relationship with colleagues, parents, family, or teachers (BANAT et al., 2020; Al- Srour, 2007).

*Al-Khatlan* (2015) mentioned that high achieving students face problems, such as maladjustment, seeking for perfection,

a constant sense of frustration, the inability to make a change in the environment and society, much procrastination, love to take responsibility alone, broad imagination, exposure to the ridicule of others for being intelligent and lack of friends who understand their feelings. High achieving students are distinguished from ordinary students by high intelligence, perseverance, high morale, self-confidence, emotional maturity, self-affirmation, self-control, and realism.

High achieving students are usually considered very enthusiastic learners (Wholuba, 2014), it is necessary to separate their motivation from their ability (Patrick et al., 2015). the motivation of high achieving students is reinforced by course content, classroom activities, teaching quality, interest, and the relationship between the student and the teacher (Wu et al., 2018).

The education system that looks after high achieving students focus on the contact between the individual and student's environment and emphasize the development of competencies, resources, and their educational path. Moreover, the education system nurture student's goals until they are achieved (Jie, 2019; Sękowski & Łubianka, 2015).

*Ghaith et al.* (2009) showed that fears and emotions are the primary sources of stress, followed by study achievement. While financial and economic matters and relationships with parents and siblings are minor sources of stress.

Many studies tried to discuss several aspects related to high achieving students, such as, the adjustment of high achieving students to university in higher education settings (Almukhambetova et al., 2020), maladjustment, seeking perfection, and test anxiety. Hence this study offers insights for understanding excellent students in a context where they are often viewed as high intelligent and academically successful. It is also noticeable that this category of students at universities do not receive enough attention to the academic problems they face, although they deserve to receive more attention because of their importance in society development due to their higher thinking skills.

*Gamer* (2016) identified the self-confidence among the gifted and non-gifted students and its relationship with some variables at Dongola University students in Sudan. (166) students (84) males and (82) females applied the Self- confidence scale. The results found that the degree of self-confidence for students is high, and there was a positive relationship between self-confidence and achievement in favor of males, and self-confidence is considered a good predictor of academic achievement.

*Ayasreh et al.* (2016) identified the high achieving students' problems at King Abdullah II Schools for Distinction (KASD). The sample size was 240 male and female students who answered a questionnaire distributed into three fields: Problems related to school, family, and students. The results showed that problems faced high achieving students' are at a medium level.

Problems related to school come first, those related to students are the second, and finally, those related to the family. There were statistically significant differences in the family and school field due to gender in favour of males. However, there was no statistically significant differences in the school field (secondary/basic) stage.

*Leonor et al.* (2015) explored the persistence and perceived difficulties of gifted students in the college through sociodemographic and academic characteristics. (45) gifted and (209) non- gifted participated in the study. There were significant differences for gifted students due to pre-college academic variables. The financial aid variable affected students' enrollment equally. The main difficulties the gifted students faced were time management, poor study habits, and a lack of knowledge of content due to poor high school academic preparation.

*Al-Hawamdeh* (2012) study identified the problems faced by gifted students in Jordanian pioneer centers. The results indicated that emotional problems are the most common problems among gifted students, and family problems are the least. It was also found that the relaxation strategy is the most used strategy by gifted students to deal with problems, and the isolation strategy is the least used.

*Taqash et al.* (2009) conducted a study about the sources of psychological distress experienced by students of pioneers centers for the high achieving and talented students and strategies for dealing with them. The sample included (121) female and male students who were intentionally chosen from three pioneer centers. The study results showed that the feelings, fears and emotions are the most important sources of stress, followed by academic achievement, then the economic and financial matters, lastly the relations with siblings and parents.

The current study benefited from previous studies in presenting and enriching the theoretical literature, developing the study instrument, determining the methodology and discussing the results. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is one of the rare studies of its kind to identify Academic problems facing high achieving university students, as most of the previous studies dealt with the school students or pioneers centers for the high achieving and talented students, while none of them addressed the high achieving university students. And they represent a percentage that deserves to study their problems, so this study came to identify the Academic problems facing high achieving students in two universities in Jordan.

### Study Questions

This study aimed to answer two research questions;

- What are the Academic problems facing high academic achieving university students in Jordan?

- Are there statistically significant differences, at the level of ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in the Academic problems facing high achieving students at Jordan due to (gender, college, and degree) variables?

### Significance of the Study

The study tried to uncover the Academic problems facing high achieving students in Jordan, as well as the importance of paying attention to high achieving students at the university level, who are one of important category in the community.

It can be an appropriate psychometric tool that contributes to strengthening the theoretical framework and providing feedback to higher education institutions and faculty members about Academic problems facing high achieving students.

### Study Objectives

The study aimed to:

- Reveal the problems facing high achieving university students in Jordan.
- Reveal the problems facing high achieving university students in Jordan due to (gender, college, and degree).

### Terminology

*High achieving students:* are "those who give evidence for their ability to perform well in the mental, creative, psychological, leadership, and academic fields" (Jarwan, 2007, 59).

In the current study, the high achieving students are the ones who have an excellent academic performance from the Amman Arab University and the Applied Balqa University with BA and MA degrees.

### Limitations and Delimitations

- This study was limited to academic problems facing high achieving students.
- This study was limited to Bachelor's and master's programs students of Amman Arab University and the Applied Balqa University in Jordan for The first semester of the academic year (2020/2021).
- This study was limited to its variables (academic problems facing high achieving students, gender, college, and degree)
- The results of this study are delimited by the validity & reliability of the study tool.

## METHOD

### Research Model

A descriptive approach was used.

### Study Procedures and Methodology

*Study population:* The study population consisted of (1000) students in Amman Arab University and Al-Balqa Applied

**Table 1:** Frequencies and percentages according to study variables

	Categories	Frequency	Ratio
Gender	Male	69	19.5
	Female	284	80.5
The faculty	Scientific	148	41.9
	Humanity	205	58.1
Degree	Bachelor	216	61.2
	Masters	137	38.8
	Total	353	100.0

University enrolled in master's and bachelor's programs in all faculties for the academic year (2020/2021).

*Study sample:* The study sample consisted of (353) male and female students who had excelled academically of graduate and undergraduate students at Amman Arab University and Al-Balqa Applied University who obtained a cumulative GPA of 3.7/4 or higher. The sample was chosen in the most accessible way possible by distributing an electronic link to university students. Table (1) Shows the sample distribution.

### Procedure

The study tool was applied to the available sample of high achieving students at Amman Arab University, Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan, electronically through the use of Google Forms, especially since the research was applied in light of the Corona pandemic during October of the academic year 2020/2021. Furthermore, provide instructions and directions to them on how to express their opinion on the scale paragraphs by placing an X in the appropriate place and leaving them enough time to answer. The data and information were downloaded to the computer, and the results were extracted using the SPSS program.

### Study Tools

Researchers developed a scale to measure the Academic problems facing high achieving students, referring to the previous literature on the topic and related measures (Hamdi, 1998; Al-Hawamdeh, and Banat 2012). *The scale consists of (31) items distributed into five areas:*

- Study problems represented by paragraphs (1,2,3,4,5,6, 22,23,24)
- Emotional problems, represented by paragraphs (7,8,9,10,12,14)
- Social problems represented by paragraphs (11,13,30,31)
- Family problems represented by paragraphs (15,16,17,18,19,20,21,29)
- Problems with professional decision-making, represented by paragraphs (25,26,27,28)

To ensure the validity, reliability, and correction of the study tool, the test-retest method was verified by applying

**Table 2:** Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient, repetition constancy of fields, and overall score

	Validity	Internal consistency
Study problems	0.88	0.79
Emotional problems	0.90	0.79
Social problems	0.92	0.73
Family problems	0.89	0.86
Problems of career decision	0.90	0.71
The overall score	0.92	0.91

the scale and re-applying it after two weeks to a group from outside the study sample consisting of (30), then the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated.

The validity was calculated using the internal consistency method according to the Cronbach Alpha equation, and table (2) shows the internal consistency coefficient according to the Cronbach Alpha equation, the values were considered appropriate for this study. The scale was corrected by giving the answers: (always, often, sometimes, rarely, never) scores (5, 4, 3, 2, 1)

### Data Analysis

The descriptive-analytical approach was used for its relevance to the study. Means and standard deviations, three-way ANOVA, MANCOVA were used.

### RESULTS

*The Results of answering the first study question: What are the Academic problems facing high achieving students in Jordanian universities?*

Means and standard deviations of the problems facing high achieving students in Jordanian universities, and Table 3 below illustrates this.

Table (3) shows that the means ranged between (1.62-2.40) were problems of the study came in the level with a moderate mean (2.40). Second, the emotional problems with a mean (2.23), then professional decision problems and mean was (2.03), and the social problems ranked fourth with a mean (1.80), while the problems of family in the last place and with a mean (1.62), and the mean of the scale as a whole was (2.04)

*The Results of answering the second study question: Are there statistically significant differences, at the level of ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in the Academic problems facing high achieving students at Jordan due to (gender, college, and degree) variables?*

Means and standard deviations for the problems faced by students by variables of gender, and college, degree, and table (4) illustrates this.

The table shows (4) apparently in contrast to the means and standard deviations for the problems faced by

the students because of the different categories of variables of gender, and the college, and the degree.

To demonstrate the significance of the statistical differences between the means, three-way ANOVA on the domains was used, and MANCOVA for the tool as a whole, table (5) and table (6) were used.

It can be seen from Table (5) the following:

- Lack of presence of statistically significant differences ( $\alpha 0.05 =$ ) attributed to the effect of gender in all domains except for emotional problems, and the differences were in favor of females.

- Lack of presence of differences ( $\alpha 0.05 =$ ) attributed to the effect of the faculty in all fields except for academic problems, and the differences came in favor of scientific colleges.
- The existence of differences ( $\alpha 0.05 =$ ) attributed to the effect of the degree in all fields and the differences came in favor of the Bachelor's degree.

It can be seen from Table (6) the following:

- The absence of statistically significant differences ( $\alpha 0.05 =$ ) attributed to the effect of gender, where  $P=0.228$  In statistical terms, it was 0.269.

**Table 3:** Means and standard deviations for the problems facing high achieving students in Jordanian universities in descending order

Rank	The number	The problems	SMA	Standard deviation	Level
1	1	Problems of study	2.40	707	Moderate
2	2	Problems of the emotional	2.23	.874	Low
3	5	Professional decision problems	2.03	.803	Low
4	3	Problems of social	1.80	.821	Low
5	4	Problems of family	1.62	.714	Low
Total marks			2.04	.583	Low

**Table 4:** Means and standard deviations for the Academic problems faced by students by variables of gender, and the college, the degree

			Studying	Emotionality	Social	Family	Professional decision	Total marks
Gender	Male	s	2.31	1.91	1.70	1.68	1.92	1.94
		P	.742	.742	.743	761	.838	598
	Female	s	2.42	2.31	1.82	1.60	2.06	2.06
		P	698	888	.839	703	794	.578
The college	Scientific	s	2.48	2.19	1.84	1.62	2.11	2.07
		P	784	.850	.813	.805	886	619
	Humane	s	2.34	2.26	1.77	1.62	1.97	2.02
		P	641	893	.828	642	.735	.556
The degree	Bachelor	s	2.56	2.44	2.01	1.70	2.20	2.20
		P	.717	933	.915	.705	796	.591
	Postgraduate	s	2.14	1.90	1.46	1.48	1.76	1.79
		P	608	.655	.488	709	.743	.472

S = mean, p = standard deviation

**Table 5:** Three-way ANOVA of the impact of gender, and the college, and the program on the areas of problems facing high achieving students

Gender	Problems of the study	564	1	564	1.242	266
Hoteling =049	Problems of the emotional	5.236	1	5.236	7.627	006
H =.005	Problems of social	238	1	238	392	.532
	Problems of family	809	1	809	1.618	204
	Professional decision problems	.803	1	.803	1.343	.247
The college	Problems of the study	2.128	1	2.128	4.686	031
Hoteling =041	Problems of the emotional	002	1	002	003	957
H =017	Problems of social	593	1	593	977	324
	Problems of family	088	1	088	.177	675
	Professional decision problems	2.122	1	2.122	3.547	060

<i>The source of the contrast</i>	<i>Domains</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>Degrees of freedom</i>	<i>Average of squares</i>	<i>Ph. value</i>	<i>Statistical significance</i>
The degree	Problems of the study	14.131	1	14.131	31.124	.000
Hoteling =156	Problems of the emotional	20.831	1	20.831	30.343	.000
H =.000	Problems of social	24.107	1	24.107	39.748	.000
	Problems of family	4.497	1	4.497	8.993	.003
	Professional decision problems	14.780	1	14.780	24.707	.000
The error	Problems of the study	158.451	349	.454		
	Problems of the emotional	239.590	349	.687		
	Problems of social	211.664	349	.606		
	Problems of family	174.537	349	.500		
	Professional decision problems	208.774	349	.598		
Macro	Problems of the study	175.868	352			
	Problems of the emotional	269.178	352			
	Problems of social	237.494	352			
	Problems of as family	179.443	352			
	Professional decision problems	227.147	352			

**Table 6:** MANCOVA of gender, and the college, and the program on the problems faced by students

<i>The source of the contrast</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>Degrees of freedom</i>	<i>Average of squares</i>	<i>Ph. value</i>	<i>Statistical significance</i>
Gender	.369	1	.369	1.228	.269
the college	391	1	391	1.302	.255
the degree	13.334	1	13.334	44.383	.000
The error	104.852	349	.300		
Macro	119.598	352			

The absence of differences ( $\alpha 0.05 =$ ) attributed to the total effect, where the value of P.1.302 In statistical terms was 0.255.

- And the presence of differences ( $\alpha 0.05 =$ ) attributed to the effect of the degree, where the value of P.44.383 In statistical terms amounted to 0.000, and the differences came in favor of the Bachelor's degree.

## DISCUSSION

According to the problems that Facing High Academic Achieving Students: the problems of the study came in the first level, then the emotional problems, after that professional decision problems, then the social problems, finally the problems of family in the last place. This may be attributed to the fact that high achieving students in universities are subjected to high academic pressure, especially as they are going through different conditions resulting from the Corona pandemic, which has created difficulties due to distance learning, which causes the high achieving students to fear their academic average. Note that one of the characteristics of High Achieving Students is the desire for perfection, which was emphasized by Al-Khatlan (2015). Also, the passing of the

study sample under special circumstances resulting from the Corona pandemic requires them to carry out additional tasks, academic burdens that have caused great needs for a long time, and a great effort to accomplish. The results of the current study differed from the study of Al-Hawamdeh (2012), which indicated emotional problems are the most common problems facing high achieving students, and Mahasna study (2001), which indicated the existence of emotional problems among high achieving students.

Moreover, (Ghaith et al., 2009) study, which indicated that the field of feelings, fears, and emotions represents the greatest areas of stress for high achieving students. Concerning the fact that family problems came in the last place, this can be explained as, high achieving students' families have become more aware of their needs and have skills in dealing with them, in addition, the Jordanian family greatly appreciates and supports academic excellence, so they receive a great degree of care and attention from parents and brothers. The results of the current study are consistent with the study of Ghaith et al. (2009), which indicated that the field of relations with parents and siblings was the least stressful area.

The results indicated that there are no differences in problems for high achieving students in universities at the total

degree due to gender, while differences related to emotional problems appeared in favor of females.

As for the emergence of differences in emotional problems in favor of females, this can be explained by the fact that females are more emotional than males because of here characteristics of the developmental stage in which they pass, namely late adolescence and early adulthood, in which emotional problems may appear. This was confirmed by Rice (2000). This may also be due to the nature of the family's upbringing that enhances compassion and empathy with females. The results of this study differ from the study of Al-Hawamdeh (2012), indicated that there are differences in family problems in favor of high achieving male students.

The study also showed that there were no differences attributable to the faculty variable (scientific, human) on the total score of the scale, and differences appeared in the studying problems only in favor of the scientific colleges. This can be explained by the fact that students of scientific colleges face greater studying difficulties, and it is their responsibility to accomplish more challenging tasks and duties in addition to studying courses. It requires practice in scientific laboratories, which represents pressure on them, which may cause them to face greater studying problems.

Also, differences appeared in the problems of high achieving students in universities due to the program, in favor of the undergraduate student, maybe because Bachelor's students have less experience and knowledge than master's students. This represents a great challenge on undergraduate students as they are in a lower age stage, need more time to earn their degree, in which they must complete a study plan that has many courses, requirements, and specialization level, and they will be exposed to different types of teachers and many teaching techniques.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on several types of problems that high achieving students face, which are: studying problems, emotional problems, Professional decision problems, social problems, and family problems. Where the studying problems were the most and the family problems were the least.

Based on the results, the researchers recommend conducting more researches on other variables related to high achieving students and enrolling them in tailored training to enhance their ability to handle the problems more efficiently and ultimately enhance their quality of life.

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