



УДК 37.04
DOI 10.52575/2712-7451-2025-44-2-302-316
EDN MIILJO

Identifying Indicators of Student Giftedness in English as a Foreign Language: a Multiple Case Study

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Abstract. Giftedness is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, presenting challenges in identification for educators, parents, and researchers alike. Given that the identification of giftedness is a crucial prerequisite for effectively nurturing individual potential, this study aims to use the previous research data of the authors and to further explore in depth indicators of potential giftedness in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) through a multiple case study. Drawing on established theories of giftedness, the research involved several months of observation, direct interaction, and detailed note-taking in a mixed-age class of 20 students. These students were attending additional English lessons after school in the form of tutoring. Two students were selected for longitudinal research based on their linguistic abilities, their willingness to participate, and—most importantly—their distinctive differences. Although both exhibited high abilities and creative traits, their school performance and motivation varied. One student showed a strong intrinsic drive to excel, while the other displayed a degree of indifference toward achievement. Key indicators identified included a nonconformist attitude, risk-taking, cognitive flexibility, humor, and originality—elements commonly associated with creative potential. The study underscores the importance of recognizing giftedness beyond traditional academic measures and highlights the role of teacher awareness in fostering students' potential. This study makes a significant contribution to science and pedagogical practice by broadening the understanding of giftedness within EFL contexts, exploring various indicators of linguistic talent, motivation and creativity. A notable limitation in our study is the absence of project-based activities, which could have further illuminated the students' creative-productive giftedness. Future research should explore how such indicators manifest in different EFL learning contexts.

Keywords: Giftedness, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Student Motivation, Creativity Indicators, Case Study

Funding: The research was funded by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia, grant number 451-03-137/2025-03/200140.

For citation: Jovanović M., Ćirković-Miladinović I. 2025. Identifying Indicators of Student Giftedness in English as a Foreign Language: a Multiple Case Study. *Issues in Journalism, Education, Linguistics*, 42(2): 302–316 (in Russian). DOI: 10.52575/2712-7451-2025-44-2-302-316 EDN: MIILJO

Выявление показателей одарённости учащихся в изучении английского языка как иностранного на примере нескольких ситуативных исследований

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Аннотация. Одарённость – это сложное и многогранное явление, выявление которого представляет трудность для педагогов, родителей и исследователей. Поскольку идентификация одарённости является важным предварительным условием для эффективного раскрытия индивидуального

потенциала, данное исследование ставит целью детально изучить показатели потенциальной одарённости в контексте преподавания английского языка как иностранного (EFL) с помощью метода “кейс стади” / кейсовой методики. Авторы опирались на ранее полученные эмпирические данные и существующие теории одаренности. Исследование включало несколько месяцев наблюдения, прямого взаимодействия и детального ведения записей в разновозрастной группе из 20 учеников. Эти ученики посещали дополнительные занятия по английскому языку после школы в форме репетиторства. Для продольного исследования были отобраны два ученика на основании их языковых способностей, готовности к участию, а также, что особенно важно, их ярко выраженных различий. Несмотря на то, что оба проявляли высокие способности и креативность, их успеваемость в школе и мотивация существенно различались. Один из учеников демонстрировал сильную внутреннюю мотивацию к достижению высоких результатов, тогда как другой проявлял определённую степень безразличия к достижениям. Среди ключевых выявленных показателей были отмечены нонконформизм, склонность к риску, когнитивная гибкость, чувство юмора и оригинальность. Эти элементы традиционно ассоциируются с творческим потенциалом. Исследование подчёркивает важность распознавания одарённости за пределами традиционных академических мер и акцентирует внимание на роли осознанности учителя в развитии потенциала учащихся. Данная работа вносит значительный вклад в теорию и практику преподавания, расширяя представления об одарённости в контексте изучения английского языка как иностранного, исследуя различные показатели языкового таланта, мотивации и креативности. Существенным ограничением исследования является отсутствие проектной деятельности, которая могла бы ещё более полно раскрыть творчески-продуктивную одарённость учащихся. Работа открывает перспективу дальнейших исследований, которые позволят выявить, как подобные показатели проявляются в различных контекстах обучения английскому языку как иностранному.

Ключевые слова: одарённость, английский язык как иностранный (EFL), мотивация учащихся, показатели креативности, метод кейс-стади

Финансирование: Исследование профинансировано Министерством науки, технологического развития и инноваций Республики Сербия, грант № 451-03-137/2025-03/200140.

Для цитирования: Jovanović M., Ćirković-Miladinović I. 2025. Identifying Indicators of Student Giftedness in English as a Foreign Language: a Multiple Case Study. *Issues in Journalism, Education, Linguistics*, 42(2): 302–316 (in Russian). DOI: 10.52575/2712-7451-2025-44-2-302-316 EDN: MIILJO

Introduction

The importance of identifying and developing giftedness is reflected in society's strive towards the advancement and enrichment of knowledge, which are, in effect, the contributions and accomplishments of exceptional and gifted individuals. Given that giftedness is a subject of general interest, the heightened regard of this topic in the field of educational psychology is not surprising. The paradigm of giftedness comprises two major dilemmas: one is concerned with the issue of identifying giftedness, whereas the other one addresses ways of developing giftedness. Addressing these questions is further problematized by the fact that the concept of giftedness resists a precise and universal definition. Although it may seem paradoxical that recognizing individuals, who are unanimously characterized as exceptional and outstanding by expert theorists and practitioners, represents a strenuous, challenging task, a universally-accepted definition of giftedness has yet to be established.

The purpose of this study is to investigate indicators of potential giftedness in English as a foreign language (EFL), with the broader aim of informing teaching practices that accommodate diverse learners through inclusive and responsive approaches. By identifying alternative markers of giftedness, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of student potential and support pedagogies that recognize and nurture varied learner profiles. Recognizing giftedness in schoolchildren is essential within educational settings, as it enables the implementation of differentiated instruction and support strategies that nurture students' cognitive, creative, and socio-emotional potential, thereby contributing to their optimal development.



In this paper, we will focus on identifying indicators that point to student giftedness in English as a foreign language, drawing on the framework of giftedness theory and its proponents, psychologists Joseph Renzulli, François Gagné, and Robert Sternberg.

Theoretical background

The identification of giftedness is the first and one of the most important steps in the education of gifted individuals. It is crucial to understand that the authors, whose theories we will be referencing throughout the paper, ascribe different meanings to the concept of *giftedness*. Gagné F. [Gagné, 1995a] construes an individual's *gift* as their potential, or, more precisely, a set of innate abilities which enable the individual to further develop *talent*, which, according to this model, represents the most complex level of giftedness. Throughout Renzulli and Sternberg's respective works, giftedness is represented as a result of different inherent characteristics' interaction with contextually acquired abilities.

Although contemporary theory of giftedness has distanced itself from the idea that giftedness is exclusively the result of high intelligence, Sternberg R.J., Kaufman S.B. [Sternberg, Kaufman, 2018, p. 37] emphasize that in the United States, intelligence testing remains the most prevalent parameter for identifying giftedness. Prominent educational psychologists and representatives of contemporary giftedness theory do not dispute the fact that high intelligence (or a high level of ability) is a significant factor in giftedness but rather emphasize that it is not the only one. By narrowing the number of abilities tested in giftedness identification, the 'most precious talents' are overlooked [Sternberg, Clinkerbeard, 1995, p. 255]. When addressing giftedness, Sternberg (Sternberg et al., 2011; Sternberg, 2000) introduces the concept of 'successful intelligence,' which encompasses not only a high IQ, but also "skills and attitudes needed to succeed in life, given one's own conception of success, within one's sociocultural environment" [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 43]. In other words, a gifted individual cannot only be intelligent in some abstract sense that has no connection to the world outside the IQ test [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 5]. Therefore, this model of giftedness integrates three different types of intelligence: analytical (which is the only one measurable by standardized tests), creative, and practical intelligence [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 75–76]. Cognitive processes such as *learning, comparison, analysis, evaluation, and reasoning*, which are the focus of the analytical aspect of intelligence, are precisely the abilities typically measured in the identification, education, and assessment of giftedness [Sternberg, Clinkerbeard, 1995]. The creative aspect of intelligence consists of an individual's creative capacities, or abilities that contribute to: generating new and high-quality ideas in any field, interpreting ordinary situations in new ways, and adapting to new situations that the individual encounters in life [Sternberg, Clinkerbeard, 1995]. Sternberg and associates [Sternberg et al., 2011] link the practical aspect of intelligence with an individual's external world, highlighting three types of actions that characterize intelligent behavior in everyday life: adaptation to the environment (the individual changes themselves to adapt to the environment), shaping the environment (the individual changes the environment to suit themselves), and selecting an environment (the individual seeks a new environment).

Gagné views high intelligence or above-average abilities as inherent gifts that represent the starting point of the developmental process [Gagné, 1995a, p. 105]. According to the author, *gifts* refer to significant individual differences that arise spontaneously during the earlier years of childhood development, independent of systematic learning, practice, or preparation. Gagné F. [Gagné, 1995a] argues that these abilities cannot be denied a partially genetic origin, but this does not mean that they are entirely immutable or immune to environmental influence. These *gifts* facilitate the contextual development of *talent*, which, according to this theory, represents the most complex stage in the process of developing giftedness. This means that while high intelligence enables an individual to develop *talent*, it does not, in and of itself, make someone talented. According to this theory, *talent* is understood as the result of sustained learning and practice, whereas giftedness is seen as raw potential that is gradually shaped, developed, and honed through the learning process [Gagné, 1995b, p. 359].

Renzulli's J.S. [Renzulli, 2011] model also encompasses *high levels of intellectual ability* as one of the components of giftedness. However, this model, much like Gagné's, indicates that the development of giftedness solely through high levels of general or specific abilities is not feasible. Instead, according to Renzulli, gifted behavior is distinguished by the fact that individuals exhibiting it possess not only *above-average abilities* in a specific domain, but also a strong sense of *task-commitment* and *creativity* that drive their actions and performances. *Task-commitment*, in this context, refers to motivation and energy that an individual invests into solving a particular problem [Renzulli, Reis, 2014]. The authors explain that the key factor to success for individuals who have made significant contributions in their areas of ability is their perseverance and their commitment to a problem, notwithstanding the obstacles that others are discouraged by [Renzulli, Reis, 2014, p. 31]. *Creativity*, in the context of Renzulli's concept of giftedness, comprises *fluency*, *flexibility*, and *originality* of thought [Renzulli, Reis, 2014, p. 30].

Another factor frequently associated with giftedness throughout literature is the *academic success* of students. Gagné refers to *academic achievement* as a particular kind of *talent*, Sternberg views it as a special type of *intelligence*, whereas Renzulli categorizes it as one of the two forms of *giftedness*. Gagné's conceptualization of talent encompasses a transformation of gifts, or above-average, inherent characteristics of an individual into systematically developed abilities. This model differentiates between various kinds of talent, such as that in the fields of *arts, technology, social action, business, athletics and sports, strategy*, and the aforementioned *academic talent* [Gagné, 1995b]. The author emphasizes that this type of talent is susceptible to change; an individual may belong to the group of academically talented individuals; however, if there is a decline or stagnation in their progress, they may lose the title of "academically talented." [Gagné, 2004, p. 124]. According to this principle, a student who is an academic underachiever, yet has an IQ that is above 130, is intellectually *gifted*, but not *academically talented* [Gagné, 1995a, p. 106]. Sternberg and associates [Sternberg et al., 2011] regard *academic*, or *analytical intelligence* as a component of *giftedness*, along with *creativity, practical intelligence* and *wisdom* (WICS – Wisdom Intelligence Creativity Synthesized). In this context, *academic intelligence* refers to the abilities which constitute intelligence in the conventional sense – such as *memory, recognition, analysis, evaluation, judgement* [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 43]. Although Sternberg and associates [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 44] integrate this type of intelligence into their model of giftedness, they stress that practical intelligence is the key component of giftedness. Renzulli J.S., Reis S.M. [Renzulli, Reis, 2004, 2014] refer to academic success as a distinct form of giftedness exhibited by students who successfully complete their school duties and tasks. This form of giftedness is "the kind most easily measured by standardized ability tests and performance in traditional curricular pursuits, and therefore the type most conveniently used for selecting students for special programs" [Renzulli, Reis, 2004, p. 25]. The other form of giftedness which Renzulli recognizes is *creative-productive giftedness*, which we have previously elaborated on, and which is realized through the integration of three clusters of traits: *above-average ability, task-commitment*, and *creativity*. Although Renzulli J.S., Reis S.M. [Renzulli, Reis, 2004] acknowledge *academic giftedness* as a unique form of giftedness, he emphasizes that more attention should be given to *creative-productive giftedness*, as it is rarer, more difficult to recognize, and more valuable to society.

Numerous studies in the field of psychology address the issue of self-concept in gifted individuals [Zeidner, Schleyer, 1999; Litster, Roberts, 2011; Vogl, Preckel, 2013; Košir et al., 2015;]. The leading premise of this issue is the constation that "gifted children and adolescents often feel different from their peers" [Zeidner, Schleyer, 1999]. Often, emotional vulnerability, social integration difficulties, anxiety, and excessive perfectionism are ascribed to gifted individuals, as consequences of their differences [Pfeiffer, Stocking, 2000; Pfeiffer, 2002; Cross, Cross, 2015]. However, many studies offer a somewhat different characterization of the social-emotional state and self-concept of the gifted. In their study *Exploring the Link Between Giftedness and Self-Concept*, Hoge and Renzulli [Hoge, Renzulli, 1993] specifically examine the *evaluative*



component of self-concept. This component, which the authors equate with self-esteem, refers to how children assess and evaluate certain aspects of their personality, achievements, and social status. Their findings suggest that, both generally and specifically in the context of academic self-concept, gifted children exhibit slightly higher levels of positive self-concept than non-gifted children [Hoge, Renzulli, 1993, p. 458]. Furthermore, Košir K., Horvat M., Aram U., Jurinec N. [Košir et al., 2015] corroborate this premise in a recent study, finding that the levels of general and academic self-concept among gifted individuals are significantly higher compared to those of non-gifted children. In their manual, Renzulli J.S., Smith L.H., White A.J., Callahan C.M., Hartman R.K., Westberg K.L., Gavin M.K., Reis S.M., Siegle D., Reed R.E. [Renzulli et al., 2021] highlight traits such as *self-confidence*, *a strong ego*, *belief in one's own abilities*, and *freedom from feelings of inferiority* as characteristics commonly associated with gifted individuals.

Research methodology

The aim of this study is to identify the characteristics which may point to giftedness in English as a foreign language. The significance of this aim lies in its potential to expand current understandings of giftedness, offering insights into how potential manifests in the context of English as a foreign language, and thereby informing pedagogical practices that are specifically attuned to the needs and challenges of EFL learners. The qualitative research approach we adopted is a multiple case study, with observation as the data collection method. Throughout the duration of the study, we kept substantive and analytical notes on our observations, which allowed us to determine the presence or absence of indicators suggesting potential giftedness among students in English language classes. The process of interpreting the obtained data involved the use of deductive thematic analysis. By integrating relevant theoretical frameworks, we focused the research questions toward analyzing five distinct aspects of potential giftedness: *above-average ability*, *academic performance*, *task commitment*, *creativity*, and *self-concept*. Based on the aim of the study, we formulated the following research questions:

1. What behaviors suggest that students possess *above-average ability* in the area of English language learning?
2. To what extent does *academic performance* indicate potential giftedness among students in English language instruction?
3. How do we observe *task commitment* in students during English language classes, which may suggest potential giftedness?
4. In what ways do we perceive characteristics of *creative expression (originality, fluency, flexibility)*, as indicators of potential giftedness, in students during English language classes?
5. What do students' behaviors reveal about their *self-concept* in the context of English language instruction?

After several months of observation, direct interaction, and detailed note-taking in a class of 20 students, the researchers identified four with strong linguistic abilities and creative traits in English, but with varying levels of academic achievement and motivation. Two of these students agreed to participate in the study. Both attend weekly extracurricular English lessons—one, an 11-year-old fifth-grader, at a tutoring center in a small Serbian town; the other, a 14-year-old eighth-grader, through individual online sessions via Google Meet. Although both are male, gender was not a factor in their selection. The decision to focus on these two students was based on their contrasting attitudes toward learning: one demonstrated a strong intrinsic motivation to excel, while the other showed relative indifference to achievement. Observed indicators included nonconformity, risk-taking, cognitive flexibility, humor, and originality—traits commonly linked to creative potential.

Given that the effectiveness of research is enhanced by selecting subjects who possess relevant characteristics [Ševkušić, 2011, p. 109], the participants in this study were specifically chosen because they exhibit behaviors that, in theory, are associated with potential giftedness. It is, however, important to emphasize that the subjects of this study were not formally identified

as gifted, nor do we claim that they are; the participants were selected because they stand out from their peers in the field of English as a foreign language, which does not automatically imply that they are gifted in this area. We have selected this particular sample due to the students' exhibition of relevant characteristics, particularly their above-average linguistic abilities, which distinguish them from their peers and point to potential giftedness in the field of EFL. Although the sample consists of two subjects, case studies typically *are* focused on a limited number of subjects for the purpose of analysing them more thoroughly and comprehensively. Whereas experimental researchers seek to establish causal relationships by controlling and manipulating variables, survey researchers gather broad data through uniform questions posed to large populations, case study researchers focus on detailed observation of a single entity: an individual learner, a social group, a classroom, or a school [Cohen et al., 2007, p. 258]. In the same way, our research focuses on a sample of two students who were categorically selected due to certain characteristics they possess which can be associated with giftedness. Also, their consent to participate was another reason to further research these two students. Since the research did not specifically focus on the socio-emotional development of the participants, but rather on identifying indicators of potential giftedness in EFL, the three-year age difference between the students did not present an issue. Rather, it presented an advantage in the context of a case study, as it allowed for the exploration of how indicators of giftedness and language learning motivation may manifest across different stages of cognitive and academic development. The aim of this case study was to compare individual cases in order to identify recurring patterns, relationships, or similarities. In multiple case study research, cases may be either similar or diverse in nature; however, the objective remains to uncover cross-case patterns or relationships [Yin, 2018]. This methodological approach is particularly suitable when the phenomenon under investigation is rare or difficult to observe – as is the case with the identification and assessment of giftedness, which presents notable challenges in both research and measurement.

Rather than limiting comparability, the variation provided a broader perspective on the diverse ways linguistic aptitude can manifest in learners within the EFL context. Unlike methodologies that prioritize uniformity, controlled variables and homogeneous samples, case studies allow for the exploration of individual learning experiences in their natural contexts and with their inherent differences (*ibid.*). The case study approach is particularly useful to employ when a single group (for example a specific group of people within a bounded system), a case study is the best choice [Bloomberg, Volpe, 2022].

Based on the considerations outlined above, the authors selected the following procedure for the purposes of this study. The research covered a period of one semester, starting in September 2023 and continuing until the end of December 2023. Prior to the commencement of the study, we presented the conceptual framework to the students' parents, after which we asked if they would agree to their children's participation. Since the students were minors, their involvement largely depended on parental consent. Once the parents of both students agreed to their children's participation in the study, we also spoke with the students themselves, explaining the purpose of the research and why they were specifically chosen for the sample. We made it clear that, even if they agreed to participate, they could withdraw at any time, for any reason. After obtaining parental consent, it was equally important for us to ensure that the students themselves agreed to take part in the research. With the consent of both the students and their parents, we ensured adherence to the ethical principle of informed consent [Ševkušić, 2011, p. 96]. To protect the anonymity of the research subjects, the students were referred to, in this paper, as Student A and Student B.

Results and discussion

Student A

From the first few lessons, Student A demonstrated a strong ability to imitate the pronunciation of the target language, solved reading comprehension tasks with ease, and employed vocabulary and grammatical structures beyond what is typically expected for his age. Based on



these behaviors, we inferred that Student A has a significant potential for talent development that distinguishes him from his peers, a concept Gagné describes as a *gift*, while Renzuli frames it in terms of *above-average ability*. What is striking about Student A is his ability to utilize various linguistic tools, despite not being familiar with the rules for their use. Possessing practical knowledge of a foreign language is often a result of exposure to that language. Since English has attained the status of a global language, young people have progressively started to acquire this foreign language spontaneously and informally by consuming mass media, which is predominantly anglophone. Student A demonstrates an inability to substantiate his practical language knowledge with explicit or structural reasoning; for instance, when asked to elaborate upon his choice of a particular verb tense, he states that his decision is based on a feeling. We ascribed this to the fact that his knowledge is mainly tacit, which makes it difficult to express it formally or systematically, since it is acquired contextually, through personal experience, intuition, and practice. This type of knowledge is often unconscious, and includes skills, feelings, and insights that are not easily articulated.

At this age, superficial and intuitive understanding of a target language is not uncommon, what is particularly interesting about this case, however, is the student's lack of motivation to advance and build upon his knowledge. The tutoring center the student attends is a non-profit organization that provides supplementary academic support to students whose families cannot afford private lessons. Parents are not given the option to choose which subjects their child will attend, based on the areas where the child is less successful. Instead, enrollment in this school implies that the student participates in all subjects offered. Unaware of this rule, during the first class session, Student A stated that he did not require supplementary lessons in English, as he believed he had already 'mastered the material,' as he put it. While a positive self-concept is generally encouraged, in the case of Student A, it manifests as complacency, which in turn fosters a closed attitude and resistance to deepening his knowledge. While this example is not the only instance in which the student displayed a reluctant attitude towards broadening his understanding of English, it symbolically indicated the mindset he would continue to have, according to which he actively refuses the opportunities to further develop his skills in certain situations.

The self-concept of a student, or their mental image of who they are [Woolfolk, 2016, p. 126], is constructed in relation to the environment and through its mediation. Although we are discussing a specific type of self-concept related to the educational sphere, in the case of Student A, the school grade, as one of the most common forms of intrinsic motivation and a way of evaluating success in school-aged children, does not serve as the cause of the student's self-confidence. The reason we assume that the summative grade of Student A in English during elementary school does not contribute to his high self-confidence is the fact that his grade¹ is not the highest – *excellent* (5) – but rather *very good* (4). While it is widely known that grades are not a reliable indicator of knowledge, children, as subjects of evaluation, tend to equate *school grades* with success. Although the grade *very good* (4) is near the top of the scale, it does not in itself suggest that the student demonstrates exceptional abilities that point to potential giftedness in the field of English. On one occasion, Student A even mentioned that there are "students who are better than him" in his class. Evidently, the school grade is a factor in Student A's self-assessment; however, it does not influence his self-concept in a positive way, and it does not explain his belief that he has already 'mastered the material.' Instead, it imposes the idea that he is less successful, or, as he puts it, 'not as good'.

Student A stands out significantly from the group of his peers at the tutoring center, which, on the one hand, fulfills the rarity criterion according to Sternberg and colleagues' pentagonal model of giftedness [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 3], which states that an individual must possess a

¹ In the context of Serbian education, grades range from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest grade, and 5 being the highest grade. Each grade has a descriptive value ascribed to it: 1 – *not sufficient*, 2 – *sufficient*, 3 – *good*, 4 – *very good*, 5 – *excellent*.

high level of a certain attribute that is rare compared to their peers. However, the rarity criterion is contextually constructed and, as such, is relative – in one context, the student may excel, and their ability will be above average, while in another setting, the same student’s abilities may be considered average. We cannot claim that Student A is truly ‘average’ in the context of his elementary school peers because, primarily, we are not familiar with the criteria employed by his teacher in the assessment of the student’s performance. If the criterion for the highest grade is that students regularly complete their school tasks and responsibilities, then it is clear why Student A does not have the highest grade: it is likely that he does not possess school-house (or academic) giftedness [Renzulli, Reis, 2004], because, among other things, he is not diligent in fulfilling his school obligations. While we observe that the *school grade* does influence his self-concept, Student A does not show that he is motivated by it to improve his performance in the subject.

Observing the student led us to the assumption that he constructs the meaning of ‘success’ based on how his teachers evaluate success. On one hand, he demonstrates that he is aware that he does not meet the success criteria set by his elementary school teachers, but he also shows that he is aware that he meets certain success criteria established by his tutoring center teacher. The reason we believe that his self-concept varies depending on the context is that, in the tutoring center, he demonstrates, in various ways, that he perceives himself as very successful. This is not due to the fact that the group he is studying with at the tutoring center is in any way ‘less successful’ than his peers from elementary school. Moreover, there is a girl in the group who is potentially academically gifted and who is often active during English lessons. Although this student has a higher grade than Student A in elementary school (the students attend different schools), Student A does not show that he perceives her as more successful than himself in the context of the tutoring center. Instead, he frequently takes on the role of a leader and mentor, insisting on helping other students, including the aforementioned student, with their tasks. Through months of observing and working with the group, we have identified certain indicators that suggest Student A may possess a specific innate gift for English as a foreign language, enabling him to achieve, with considerably less effort, what others in the group can only accomplish only with much greater dedication and work.

Although Student A actively participates in lessons and is consistently engaged, there have been several instances where he offers to solve a task in front of the class but loses focus after struggling to find the answer and when the teacher begins to provide an explanation. His willingness to attempt the task, despite not knowing the answer, could be viewed as a potential sign of giftedness. One of the items in Renzulli and associate’s [Renzulli et al., 2021, p. 43] *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students* is related to the students’ *adventurous spirit* and their *willingness to take risks*, which is precisely what Student A demonstrates in the previously mentioned situation. However, the problem arises when Student A fails to reach a solution, leading the entire group to receive instructions from the teacher—at which point the student withdraws and disengages from the discussion. A similar issue arises when the student hastily completes a task, assuming they have already mastered the new material, only to disengage when the teacher attempts to intervene and offer further explanation. A significant indicator of the student’s lack of enthusiasm for developing his potential talent is the fact that he almost never asks questions or shows any signs of curiosity. It is likely that Student A is aware of his distinction from others, however, he does not demonstrate a desire to work on his potential. Given that *dedication, ambition, diligence* and *perseverance* play a crucial role in all the mentioned models of giftedness, this behavior suggests that Student A may not possess creative-productive giftedness. On the other hand, while it is often assumed that the behaviors exhibited by Student A in this situation are not /typical of gifted individuals—who, instead, demonstrate “persistent work on tasks even when setbacks occur” and “tenacity for finding out information on topics of interest”—gifted students also often show that they require very little assistance from the teacher [Renzulli et al., 2021, p. 44]. One possibility is that Student A withdraws and stops listening to the teacher’s instructions because he does not want others to explain things to him, preferring instead



to find solutions independently. Although we are exploring the student's characteristics in terms of motivation, that is *task commitment*, we are also highlighting certain indicators of giftedness that are linked to traits associated with an individual's *creativity*. Some characteristics of creative individuals that Sternberg R.J., Jarvin L., Grigorenko E.L. [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 38]. identify, which we can attribute to Student A, include *a willingness to take risks* and *confidence in problem-solving* which were characteristics we previously discussed in the context of this student's *motivation*. Moreover, Student A frequently offers innovative suggestions related to classroom activities, which suggests that he possesses elements of creative *fluency* and *originality*.

Given that students in this group tend to interrupt lessons in order to share personal anecdotes, a rule was implemented allowing each student to tell one story, provided it is shared in English. Due to their lack of confidence in using the foreign language, the other students interpreted this as a cue to focus on the lesson and refrain from interrupting class with personal stories. Student A, however, was the only one who welcomed the new rule and was motivated to share a story in English. Renzulli and colleagues [Renzulli et al., 2021, p. 43] highlight that *a non-conformist attitude*, in which an individual is unafraid to stand out from others, is an indicator of *creativity*.

Based on the observed behavior, we can conclude that, although a significant number of indicators suggest potential giftedness (ranging from signs of *above-average abilities*, *adept language skills*, to a *confident, nonconformist attitude*), we were unable to identify certain abilities and traits that, according to theoretical frameworks, define giftedness. Notably, the student did not display elements of *academic* or *analytical intelligence*, such as a thorough grasp of linguistic rules and structures, nor did he exhibit certain traits related to *task commitment*, like perseverance in exploring specific topics and problems or persistence in tasks despite encountering obstacles. As *analytical intelligence* is one of the three fundamental components of Sternberg's [Sternberg et al., 2011] model of giftedness, and *task commitment* is one of the three core elements of giftedness according to Renzulli's J.S. [Renzulli, 2011] *triarchic model*, as well as an important catalyst for *talent* development according to Gagné F. [Gagné, 1995b], the absence of these significant traits suggests that the student may not possess *creative-productive giftedness*, or *successful intelligence*. However, the fact that we were unable to identify these traits does not mean that Student A lacks them, nor does it imply that the student is not gifted. The *school grade*, on its own, is not a reliable indicator of this student's potential giftedness and does not suggest that their abilities are exceptional, particularly given that some of their peers in the class have higher grades in the subject. If we were to rely solely on the student's academic grade as a measure of potential giftedness, we would overlook the fact that Student A demonstrates *creative fluency*, *originality*, *practical intelligence*, *boldness*, and *self-confidence* – traits commonly associated with potentially gifted individuals.

Student B

Student B was born and spent most of his life in Serbia, but three years prior to the research, he relocated with his family to Germany, where they have since resided. Student B asserts that, before the move, he did not speak German. He acquired the language by immersing himself in his new environment, listening to those around him, and he now speaks it fluently. A notable indicator of Student B's *practical intelligence* is his *ability to adapt* to the new context: due to his exceptional adaptability, he was able to rapidly learn a new language, form social connections, and continue his education in a foreign country.

Student B attends individual English lessons once a week via the Google Meet platform. Like most children in Serbia, he has been learning English since the first grade of primary school. In the domain of English language proficiency, Student B demonstrates a notably advanced level of ability compared to his peers. During private lessons, he has consistently completed tasks and tests designed for high school students with success. Although, similarly to Student A, exposure to anglophone media has facilitated his language acquisition, his practical knowledge is also supported by his understanding of grammatical rules. These observations suggest that Student B

possesses a gift that enables him to acquire foreign languages at a significantly faster and more efficient rate than his peers.

In terms of *task commitment*, what distinguishes Student B from Student A is his ability to persist in solving a problem, even when faced with obstacles [Renzulli et al., 2021]. Unlike Student A, Student B does not withdraw when the teacher explains how to approach a specific type of task—instead, he becomes even more focused, which demonstrates his curiosity and desire to acquire information on a topic that interests him [Renzulli et al., 2021]. Furthermore, Student B frequently asks questions during class, which is not the case with Student A. Student B is willing to redo tasks multiple times until he reaches the correct solution: this indicates his *perseverance* and *motivation*, as well as his creative *flexibility*, or ability to approach a problem in various ways [Callahan, Renzulli, 1977]. In addition to signs of *analytical* and *practical intelligence*, we also observe elements of *creative intelligence* in this student. Depending on his mood and the type of task being worked on in class, Student B's responses can be very direct and concise, or at times, unusual, unexpected, and humorous. A *sense of humor* and *originality* are traits that Renzulli and colleagues [Renzulli et al., 2021, p. 43] identify as indicative of an individual's *creativity*. In the case of Student B, his *nonconformist attitude*, as an aspect of *creativity*, does not manifest in the same way as with Student A, who is unafraid to stand out from his peers – primarily because the format of instruction that Student B follows is more limited in this regard, as it is individualized. However, Student B most often expresses this trait during conversation exercises by offering unusual, bold, and often controversial opinions. By deviating from the conventional and expected, he expresses his individuality. On the other hand, it is important to consider that the student is an adolescent, and the expression of a nonconformist attitude is, among other things, characteristic of this age group.

As the student's abilities in the subject are more advanced, his attention is conditioned by more challenging, interactive tasks. Student B loves quizzes and puzzles, but he has repeatedly mentioned that he finds tasks that involve reading comprehension tiresome, as he does not find the texts themselves interesting and considers them unnecessarily lengthy. In more casual conversations, he often emphasizes that social media is a central component of his daily life, which allows us to infer that one of the catalysts for his demotivation when asked to read longer texts is likely the fact that recreational content, to which young people are most often exposed today, typically comes in a shorter format.

The summative grade of Student B in English at his school in Germany is 2, which is equivalent to the grade *very good* (4) in the Serbian educational context. Interestingly, the highest grade in Student B's class is also 2, and no student has received a grade of 1, which would correspond to the grade *excellent* (5) in Serbia. This suggests that, unlike in Serbia, where grading is typically done within the context of the class (with the most successful students receiving the highest grade – 5, and the least successful receiving the lowest grade – 1), in Germany, grading is based on a broader, more general criterion – thus, the most successful students in the class do not necessarily receive the highest grades. In terms of motivation, Renzulli and associates [Renzulli et al., 2021, p. 44] state that with gifted individuals, there is “little need for external motivation to follow through in work that is initially exciting.” Student B does not appear to be influenced by his English grade in terms of motivation or self-perception, neither positively nor negatively. However, we have observed that the student frequently highlights instances where he is the only one in the class who knows the answer to a question and receives praise from the teacher for it. Due to the frequent emphasis on such events, we infer that these instances act as a form of motivation for the student to improve his abilities. The catalysts that stimulate Student B's motivation appear to be far more spontaneous and informal than the summative grades awarded at school. A pleasant atmosphere and the encouragement of affective factors in teaching may also serve as one of the catalysts that boost motivation, thereby fostering more active student participation in solving language tasks [Ćirković-Miladinović, 2024].



The observed behaviors suggest that Student B demonstrates elements of practical, analytical, and creative intelligence, which implies that the student may be potentially gifted in the area of English language. A potential negative factor influencing the student's motivation that we identified is exposure to "fast culture," which, we hypothesize, may hinder the student's ability to concentrate on completing longer tasks. Aside from this specific influence, we noted high levels of *motivation* and *perseverance* in the student, despite obstacles, as well as creative *flexibility* and *originality*, indicating the student's *commitment* and *creativity*. These traits, in conjunction with elements of *analytical intelligence*, suggest potential *giftedness* [Renzulli, 2011]. On the one hand, Student B's school grade reflects potential giftedness, as he achieved the highest grade in the class, fulfilling Sternberg's [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 2]. *excellence criterion*, which posits that an individual excels in a particular domain compared to most of their peers. On the other hand, Student B is one of a few peers who received the same grade, which conflicts with Sternberg's [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 3] *rarity criterion* in his *pentagonal model*. Consequently, it cannot be stated that the grade itself is indicative of the student's potential giftedness, if it suggests that the student's "gift" is not rare.

When comparing Student B with Student A, several notable similarities and differences emerge, offering a more nuanced understanding of how giftedness can manifest in diverse ways. Like Student B, Student A also demonstrated a high degree of creativity and originality, particularly through their engagement in open-ended tasks and willingness to take intellectual risks. However, while Student B's strengths were more evenly distributed across practical, analytical, and creative domains, Student A appeared to show a stronger inclination toward creative-productive giftedness, especially in linguistic expression and imaginative language use.

Both students exhibited perseverance and motivation in different forms [Ćirković-Miladinović, Jovanović, 2024]. Student B showed determination in structured academic settings despite external distractions, whereas Student A's motivation seemed more internally driven and was particularly evident during unstructured, exploratory tasks. The mentioned research found that this distinction may highlight the role of task type in eliciting gifted behaviors, as well as the potential influence of environmental and cultural factors on how giftedness is expressed (*ibid.*)

In terms of academic recognition, Student A's achievements were less formally acknowledged than Student B's, whose high grade met the excellence criterion of giftedness [Sternberg et al., 2011]. However, Student A's originality and depth of insight may point to giftedness that remains under-identified due to a misalignment with conventional assessment measures.

Overall, these observations suggest that both students exhibit characteristics aligned with potential giftedness, though in different configurations. Student B's profile is more aligned with traditional academic indicators and a balanced intellectual triad, whereas Student A exemplifies a more creative and less formally recognized expression of giftedness. This contrast underscores the importance of using multifaceted criteria when identifying gifted students, particularly in the EFL context, where language proficiency, creativity, and motivation intersect in complex ways.

Conclusion

Giftedness is a complex and elusive concept, and its recognition poses a significant challenge not only to parents and teachers but also to experts in the field of educational psychology. Relying on relevant theories of giftedness, the present study focused on identifying indicators that point to potential giftedness in two students in English language classes. In addition to several months of observation and direct interaction with the subjects, the research procedure involved keeping detailed notes. Although we pointed out several indicators of giftedness in both students during the interpretation, it is important to emphasize that we discussed giftedness strictly as a potential of these students.

The scientific significance of this study lies in its focus on a relatively underexplored area: the manifestation of gifted potential in the context of English as a foreign language. While much

of the existing research on giftedness tends to focus on general academic achievement, few studies have examined how giftedness can manifest in language learning, particularly in non-native contexts. By applying established theoretical frameworks to the observation of language learners, this study offers new insights into how general indicators of giftedness – such as above-average ability, creativity, and motivation – can be identified in EFL settings.

In the study, we have described the ways in which both students exhibited *high intellectual abilities* which formed the basis for identifying potential giftedness in the domain of learning English as a foreign language. Neither of the students had the highest grade in the subject at school, although for the second student, the grade he received was also the highest in the class. For the first student, the perception of his own success varied depending on the context. Although he did not perceive himself as standing out in elementary school English classes, this did not prevent him from believing that his abilities were exceptional in a tutoring center setting. We did not observe that the second student placed great importance on grades; we hypothesized that for him, the greatest reward came from the accomplishments that set him apart from other students in the class, and which were noticed and praised by the English teacher. Both students generally displayed high levels of focus and engagement during lessons, but each had a specific trigger that disrupted their attention. The first student would withdraw when the English teacher attempted to assist him with a task, whereas the second student's attention would wane when he was required to complete longer tasks involving reading comprehension.

Despite the fact that both students potentially possess certain gifts that enable them to achieve more with less effort than their peers in the field of English language, Student A does not appear to be motivated to improve their abilities. Instead, we observed a certain level of resignation and indifference in Student A towards their achievements, as well as toward what they could potentially accomplish. On the other hand, Student B, through frequent questioning and unwavering persistence, demonstrated *motivation* to further enhance his knowledge and skills. Some of the elements of creativity that we were able to identify in the students include a *nonconformist attitude, willingness to take risks, fluency, flexibility, a sense of humor, and originality*.

The conclusion of this study is that the general parameters of giftedness, such as above-average ability, motivation, and creativity are reflected within the context of English as a foreign language (EFL). While giftedness is typically understood in broad academic or intellectual terms, this study demonstrates that these general characteristics can manifest distinctly in the context of language learning. In particular, both students in the study exhibited linguistic potential, yet their motivation and engagement with language learning differed. This highlights how giftedness is not only defined by cognitive ability but also by a student's intrinsic drive and investment in learning. For example, Student A's lack of motivation contrasted with Student B's persistence, which in turn influenced their learning outcomes, showing that motivation plays a crucial role in the development of language-related giftedness.

Another conclusion is that traditional assessment methods, such as grades or standardized testing, may not fully capture the nuances of giftedness in language learners. For instance, neither of our subjects achieved top grades in their school settings, yet both showed indicators of giftedness when assessed through more qualitative methods, such as observation. This finding calls for a more holistic and flexible approach to identifying giftedness in EFL, one which does not strictly rely upon traditional assessment measures.

This study reinforces the idea that giftedness is a multidimensional concept that can take various forms depending on the domain. We believe that the findings of this study can be valuable for English language teachers in recognizing potential indicators of giftedness in their students, allowing them to direct their instruction towards fostering such potential. One limitation of this study is that the two students did not have the opportunity to engage in project-based work during their English language lessons. Student projects would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the creative-productive aspect of potential giftedness [Sternberg et al., 2011, p. 43], which could serve as a basis for further exploration of how such indicators manifest in the context of learning English as a foreign language.



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Конфликт интересов: о потенциальном конфликте интересов не сообщалось.
Conflict of interest: no potential conflict of interest related to this article was reported.

Поступила в редакцию 27.03.2025
Поступила после рецензирования 13.05.2025
Принята к публикации 10.06.2025

Received March 27, 2025
Revised May 13, 2025
Accepted June 10, 2025

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