

# EXPLORING LEARNING NEEDS OF GIFTED EFL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN VIETNAM: TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

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**Abstract:** Gifted students are often characterized as those who demonstrate distinctive characteristics, both intellectually and emotionally. Thus, they may have learning needs that are distinctive from non-gifted ones. Failure to meet the needs of these learners may lead to their low motivation, low attention, and consequently low achievement in their learning processes. Although gifted education in Vietnam has got a relatively long history, gifted English as a Foreign Language (EFL) remained somewhat under-researched and poorly understood. Studies that focus on learning needs of gifted EFL students in Vietnam are almost undetectable. This study thus aimed at discovering learners' and teachers' perceptions of gifted EFL students' learning needs. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with 137 gifted EFL students and five English teachers working with these students. Findings from the study suggest that: (1) among 7 key components of English language, oral skills including speaking, listening and pronunciation were perceived as most important, meanwhile output skills namely speaking and writing appeared to be most challenging; (2) teaching activities that focus on oral skills and self-directed learning (i.e., presentation, debate, discussion, self-study, projects, etc.) are considered most effective and engaging to this group of students; (3) students' commitment to study was generally high but motivation for advanced English lessons and National Talent Competitions, was not as high as expected. These findings contributed to the limited literature on gifted students, particularly gifted EFL students in Vietnamese context, highlighted the need to reconsider the *goals and missions of gifted education in Vietnam*, and had important implications for *curriculum and instructional design* for this unique group of learners.

*Keywords:* gifted EFL students, gifted education, students' needs

## 1. Introduction

The notion of giftedness has evolved continually, reflecting changes in societal needs and priorities (Catholic Education Melbourne, 2013). In its early days, giftedness was mostly linked to general intellectual ability (as measured by intelligence tests; Terman, 1926). In the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of giftedness was extended to include creativity (Renzulli, 2011). However, greater emphasis was still put on academic rather than non-academic domains (Pirto, 2005). Towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, as societal attitudes changed, a broader conception of giftedness encompassing outstanding achievements across academic, physical and cultural domains has become integral to the discourse on giftedness (Catholic Education Melbourne,

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2013). Pfeiffer (2012), for example, defined a gifted student as one who “demonstrates a greater likelihood, when compared to other students of the same age, experience, and opportunity, to achieve extraordinary accomplishments in one or more culturally valued domains” (p. 14). Similarly, according to Vialle and Rogers (2012), giftedness is the ability to demonstrate either extraordinary potential or extraordinary performance in one or more of the intellectual, academic, creative, leadership or visual and performing arts domains.

With their special characteristics, it can be inferred that gifted students may have learning needs that might be distinctive from their non-gifted peers. Failure to meet the needs of these learners may lead to their low motivation, low attention, and consequently low achievement in their learning process (Clinkenbeard, 2012; Schunk, 2012). Paradoxically, though a lot of efforts have been put in defining and identifying gifted learners, not so much has been done to ensure appropriate instructional programming for these individuals (Cao et al., 2017). The number of studies that examine the complex needs of academically gifted students is also very limited (Murdock-Smith, 2013).

## **2. Background to the Study**

In Vietnamese context, gifted education has had a relatively long history. The first high schools for gifted students (also known as specialized schools) were established in the 1960s with the special purpose of identifying and nurturing talents in specific academic subjects (MOET, 2012). Presently, gifted education remains one important scheme in Vietnamese education system (i.e., policies for gifted schools have been well-established, a lot of investment has been put into gifted education, MOET 2012). Students need to go through a rigorous process in order to be accepted into gifted schools; and the level of competitiveness is generally very high. According to the Regulation of Organization and Operation of Gifted High Schools (MOET, 2012), students are recruited into gifted EFL classes based on test results of three subject areas: English, Vietnamese literature and Mathematics. As for English, students are required to sit for two tests (one general English test and one advanced English test). Scores of the advanced English test are doubled before being added to the scores of the other three tests to calculate the sum scores, which would then be used as a basis in the selection process (MOET, 2012). Normally, only the top 5-10% of the students in the exam could be admitted to the program. The selected students are then offered special educational programs which aim to help them successfully achieve their academic excellence in their majored subjects. In other words, although good English language skill is an obvious advantage for students in the selection process, students also need to do well in the other subjects (i.e., Mathematics and Vietnamese literature) in order to be accepted into the program for gifted EFL students.

The quality of educational programs at specialized schools, to some extent, is evaluated by several important testing events. At the first level, schools in the whole province or city select their top talented students to sit in a municipal exam, which aims to shortlist students into the national contests for talented students organized by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training. Students who achieve high results in the national contest might be selected to join the international competitions. Basically, the results of these exams are one of the crucial criteria to measure the effectiveness of educational programs at specialized schools and to promote or reward teachers. Many statistics show that specialized schools, in recent years, get high achievements in these competitions, and Vietnam is also recognized as one of the nations that obtain the highest results in international academic contests (Huu, 2018).

In short, although a clear definition of the term giftedness has not yet been articulated in Vietnam, the way of identifying and nurturing gifted students in Vietnam suggests that Vietnamese conception of giftedness is somewhat close to the definition of academically gifted learners, who are noticed due to their outstanding accomplishments in academic tasks (Pfeiffer, 2012). These students - as suggested by Pfeiffer (2012) - often demonstrate cognitive and/or affective characteristics that are distinctive from non-gifted ones, such as above-average academic performance, love for learning and persistence through difficult and challenging tasks. Educational program(s) for gifted EFL students in Vietnam also remained somewhat foreign and under-researched to not only Vietnamese scholars but also international counterparts. Studies that focus on learning needs of gifted EFL students in Vietnam is scarce (with Vu and Vu (2012) being the only exception). Vu and Vu (2012) investigated gifted EFL students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of one English learning program at a specialized high school in Hanoi - particularly in terms of students' language skills development, and the program's contribution to students' future jobs. Findings from the study revealed that students were generally satisfied with the quality of the program and perceived it as useful for their further studies and career development. However, students' specific needs and wants as well as reasons for their satisfactions were not identified.

Together with the scarcity of documents and studies about learning needs of gifted EFL students, there exist conspicuous problems with gifted education in Vietnam. Firstly, although gifted education in Vietnam has had a long history, received worthwhile investment from the government and obtained impressive achievements in national and international academic competitions, *the goal for gifted education has not yet been clearly defined* (Mai, 2007). Secondly, there is not yet a detailed guideline or a unified program for gifted students across the country (MOET, 2012). *Curriculums and learning materials for gifted learners are mostly independently designed by individual teachers working with these students*. Additionally, none of current teacher education programs in Vietnam at the moment offer training for those working with gifted students. The lack of clear educational goals for all gifted students together with the lack of standardized educational curriculums for students and the absence of training programs for teachers of the gifted raised the concerns about whether or not learning needs of Vietnamese gifted students have been clearly identified and sufficiently satisfied.

Overall, the present study was grounded on the assumption that gifted EFL students in Vietnam might demonstrate distinctive intellectual and/or affective characteristics. While these characteristics are essential for instructional design, they have not yet been adequately identified and addressed. This study was thus carried out with the aim of providing more insights into the learning needs of gifted EFL students in Vietnamese context. The big question that guided the research was: **What are learning needs of gifted EFL students in Vietnam?** It is expected that with better awareness of the learners' needs, better educational services for gifted EFL students could be provided.

### 3. The Theoretical Framework

The significance of needs analysis in language teaching and learning has led to the development of several influential approaches including *sociolinguistic model* (Munby, 1978), *systemic approach* (Richerich & Chancerel, 1977), *learning-centered approach* (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), *learner-centered approach* (Berwick, 1989; Brindley, 1989) and *task-based approach* (Long 2005). Among these, learner-centered approach (Berwick, 1989; Brindley, 1989) appeared to be most comprehensive and advantageous as it offers three different ways to

look at learner needs namely: *perceived* versus *felt* needs; *product* versus *process*-oriented interpretations; and *objective* versus *subjective* needs. “Perceived needs” are assumptions made by experts or teachers about learners while “felt needs” are those articulated by learners themselves (Berwick, 1989). Product-oriented needs are concerned about variables required in the target situations which might affect the learning process while process-oriented needs focus on affective and cognitive characteristics of learners which might influence the learning process (Brindley, 1989). “Objective needs”, as its name suggests, refers to factual information about learners (i.e., their real-life language use situations, their current language proficiency and difficulties) whereas “subjective needs” encompasses affective and cognitive factors (i.e., learners’ confidence, attitudes, learning wants, learning expectations and learning strategies, etc.). In other words, *learner-centered* approach to needs analysis gives importance to both cognitive and affective variables, which are often neglected in other approaches like the sociolinguistics model or the systematic approach. The classification of *perceived* versus *felt* needs might help ensure that interpretations are made based on data from multiple perspectives (of both learners and teachers), which is important to ensure reliability of the analysis (West, 1994).

Moreover, *learner-centered* approach also addresses issues of interest to the *sociolinguistic* approach and the *learning-centered* approach. For example, needs in the *product-oriented interpretation* of learner-centered approach are similar to the concepts of *communication needs* (Munby, 1978) and *target needs* (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Needs in the *process-oriented interpretation* of learner-centered approach also correspond to *learning needs* as defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). All in all, it can be inferred that learner-centered approach to learner needs analysis has proved comprehensiveness, extensive coverage and usefulness to instructional design and implementation.

With the above-mentioned advantages, *learner-centered* approach (Berwick, 1989; Brindley, 1989) was adopted to identify learning needs of gifted EFL learners in this study. With the assumption that gifted EFL students in Vietnam might have distinctive cognitive and affective needs, a closer attention was paid to *learners’ subjective needs*, which are very important and worth investigating before and during the implementation of a curriculum (Richards, 2001), and more importantly, encompasses cognitive and affective factors (i.e. learning confidence, learning priorities, learning difficulties, learning styles, learning attitude and motivation (Brindley, 1989). Thus, the following research questions were put forward:

1. How **confident** are students about their English vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, reading, listening, writing and speaking skills?
2. What is the **level of importance** that EFL gifted students attach to the different language skills/ components?
3. What are the **difficulties** that gifted EFL students encounter when learning English?
4. What are gifted EFL students’ **learning styles**? What are their preferred **learning activities**?
5. What is gifted EFL students’ **level of engagement** with learning English at school?

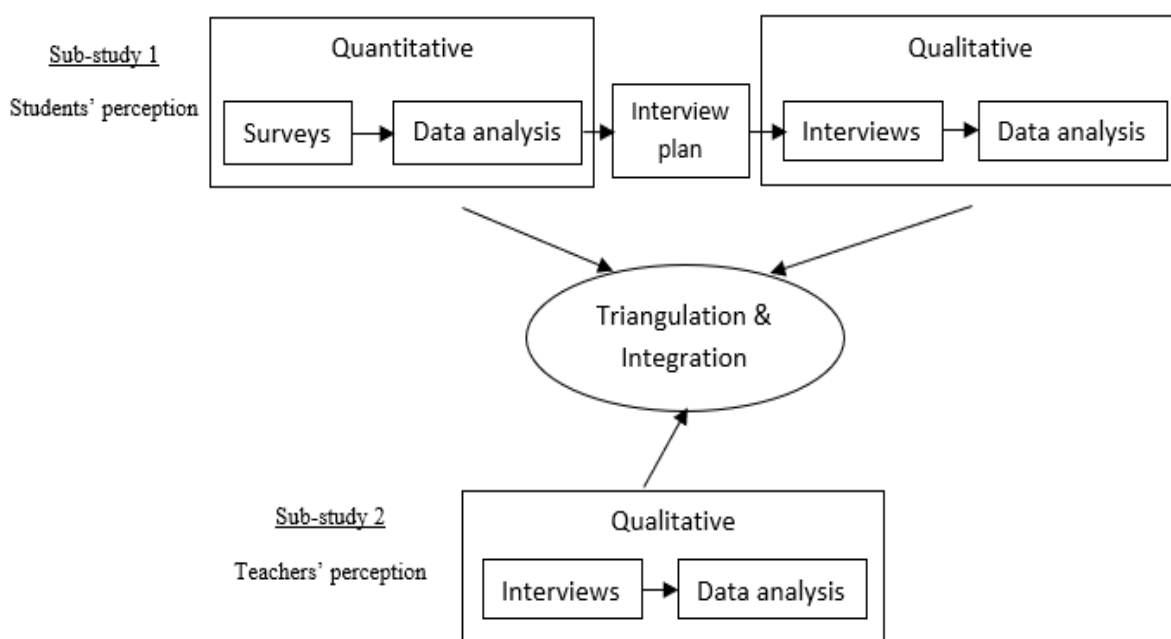
These needs are also investigated from both teachers and students' perspectives as a way of reflection in order to see whether exists any discrepancy between *felt needs* and *perceived needs*.

#### 4. Research Design

This study utilized mixed method design, which involves gathering, analyzing, and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This approach was chosen to capitalize on the strengths of both methods, triangulate the findings, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand (Greene et al., 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Klassen et al., 2012). The study was divided into two sub-studies; one aimed to investigate students' perceptions of their learning needs, and the other focused on teachers' perceptions of their students' learning needs. The results from the two sub-studies were then combined, compared, and contrasted to provide a more complete picture. The study design is illustrated below:

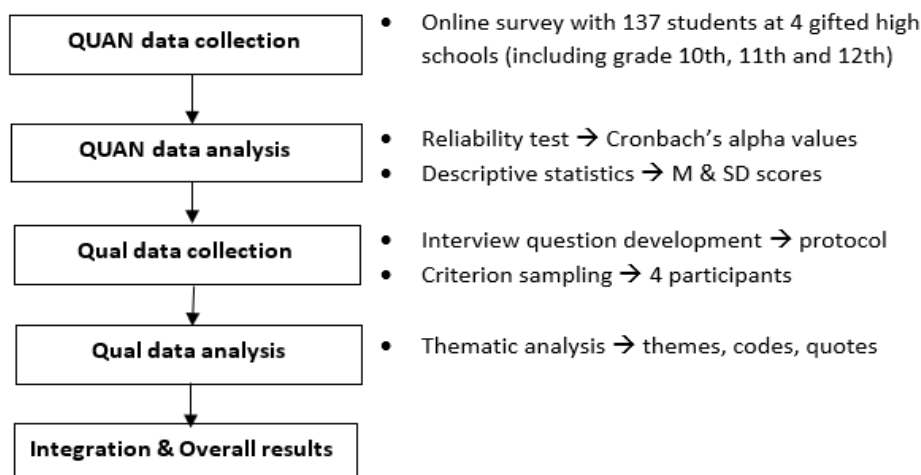
**Figure 1**

*The Overall Research Design*



##### 4.1. Sub-Study 1: Gifted EFL Students' Perception of Their Own Learning Needs

In sub-study 1, *Explanatory sequential mixed method design* was selected with initial use of quantitative questionnaire survey among a large number of students, followed by in-depth interviews with selected students (see Figure 2). The quantitative questionnaire aimed to identify the general trends in students' perceptions about different aspects of their needs, whereas follow-up interviews were to delve deeper into outstanding results. This design is commonly used when researchers need qualitative data to explain the quantitative results, or when researchers want to form groups based on quantitative results and follow up with groups through subsequent qualitative research (Klassen et al., 2012).

**Figure 2***Design of Sub-Study 1***Quantitative Survey Study*****Participants***

The survey participants were 137 students studying at 4 gifted high schools in Hanoi and nearby provinces. Their ages ranged from 15 to 18 (grade 10 to 12). Majority of the participants were female students (78.8%). An initial analysis of the data did not find significant differences among students from different schools or of different grades. Therefore, the student population as a whole could be considered homogenous.

***Data Collection Instrument***

The survey questionnaire was divided into two main parts: the first part required participants to provide information about their background (gender, grade, school); the second part, which comprised six sections (A to G), aimed to assess the six constructs of interest namely: *learning confidence*, *learning priorities*, *learning difficulties*, *learning styles*, *learning attitudes and engagement*. These constructs are developed based on the factors concerned in the learner-centered approach (Brindley, 1989), which was adopted as a guide for this study.

In section A and B, the researchers chose Kaharuddin et al.'s (2017) scale since it helps to measure students' confidence and priorities in different key components of the English learning content at high schools in Vietnam, which are vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and four language skills.

**A. Learning confidence sub-scale:** The learning confidence scale was adopted from Kaharuddin et al.'s (2017 "language ability" questionnaire. The sub-scale consisted of 8 items that required students to rate their level of confidence in terms of *vocabulary*, *grammar*, *pronunciation*, four skills (*reading*, *listening*, *writing*, *speaking*) and their *overall English competence*.

**B. Learning priorities sub-scale:** The scale was taken from Kaharuddin et al.'s (2017) "learning priorities" questionnaire. It consisted of 7 items, which requested participants to rate the level of importance of those English components and skills to themselves.

**C. Learning difficulties sub-scale:** The researcher employed the scale developed by Kaharuddin et al. (2017) in order to measure the *level of frequency* at which student participants encountered some potential obstacles while using English, some of which are psychological

problems, lexical resources, mother tongue interference, and topical knowledge. For example, the psychological problems included items such as “*Feel shy of speaking English*”, “*Fear of making mistakes*”, the lexical resources included “*Vocabulary limitation*”, “*Pronunciation mistakes*” and “*Grammar mistakes*”.

**D. Learning styles sub-scale:** This sub-scale aimed to identify learners’ preferred learning activities. Participants were asked to rate the level of usefulness of common classroom activities according to them. Activities listed in the questionnaire corresponded to four types of learning styles: Visual, Auditory, Reading/ Writing, and Kinesthetic (The VARK model; Fleming & Mills, 1992). The model was chosen since it was most likely to reflect the experiences of teachers and students.

**E. Learning attitudes and engagement sub-scale:** The sub-scale was adapted from the PISA survey (OECD, 2004), which aimed to measure students’ attitudes and engagement with learning in Mathematics. This scale was widely used in more than 40 countries and proved to be a valid and reliable measure of learning attitudes and engagement (OECD, 2004). Students’ learning attitudes and motivation were measured via five subscales, which are “*Interest*”, “*General self-concept*”, “*Instrumental motivation*”, “*Attitudes towards schools*” and “*Sense of belonging at school*”, with 26 items in total. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement to these 26 items on a 4-point likert scale.

For sections A to E, a four-point Likert-type scale was utilized (refer to Appendix 1). For more details about specific items in the questionnaire, please refer to Appendix 2.

### **Data Analysis**

In the current study, IBM SPSS software (Version 20.0) was employed to handle quantitative data. Specifically, descriptive statistics (M, SD) were generated to identify key features of the data set. Besides, Cronbach’s alpha value was calculated to ensure reliability/consistency of multi-item scales (i.e., section D and E). According to George and Mallery (2003), scale reliability is considered acceptable if the alpha value is higher than 0.60 and unacceptable if the alpha value falls under 0.50. The reasonable goal is noted to be alpha of 0.80. In section D and E, the Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of all scales are above 0.60 (see Table 1). Therefore, the conclusion was reached that each scale had a fair to good reliability.

**Table 1**

*Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  Reliabilities of Sub-Scales*

Section	Sub-scales	Items	Cronbach’s $\alpha$
<b>D. Learning style</b>	Visual	D1, D2	0.61
	Auditory	D3, D4, D5, D6	0.64
	Reading/Writing	D7, D8	0.61
	Kinesthetic	D9, D10	0.66
<b>E. Learning attitudes and engagement</b>	Interest	E1, E16, E20, E22	0.77
	General self-concept	E2, E4, E6, E9, E10	0.77
	Instrumental motivation	E12, E15, E19, E21	0.69
	Attitude towards school	E3, E5, E7, E8, E11, E18	0.77
	Sense of belonging at school	E13, E14, E18	0.84

## Qualitative Interviews

### *The Interview Protocol Development*

After analyzing data from the questionnaire, the researchers found the need to further understand (a) why EFL gifted students were least confident with speaking and writing skill, (b) why pronunciation, listening and speaking were considered most important, (c) how students experienced vocabulary limitations and the speaking anxiety, (d) whether in-class activities are interesting/ motivating to student. To better understand these issues, an interview protocol including four open-ended questions was developed to elicit students' explanation for those problems (please refer to Appendix 3).

### *Participants*

Criterion sampling method was used to purposefully select prospective students from the survey respondents. Four students were selected for the interviews (coded as S1-4). These students were approached because their answers in the questionnaire implied that they (1) had low confidence in *speaking* and *writing*, (2) attached high importance to pronunciation, listening and speaking, and (3) frequently encountered vocabulary limitation and speaking anxiety.

### *Data Analysis*

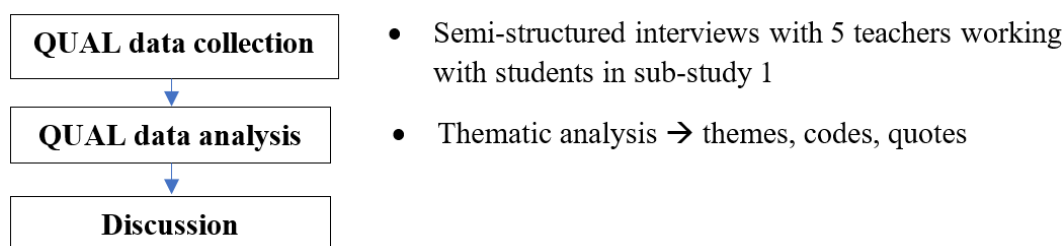
Transcriptions of the interviews, after being checked by student participants, were manually coded using thematic analysis method, which is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In other words, this method is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about, and of making sense of those commonalities (Joffe & Yardley, 2004), and especially appropriate when researchers wanted to generate new insights from the raw data as existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Each interview transcript was read and re-read several times, then annotated to generate a list of initial codes. These codes were collated across participants to find similar patterns in their answers, and if a pattern appeared among more than 50% of the participants, it would be considered a theme. Those themes together with participants' exemplifying quotations were also reviewed for further explanation of the problems from quantitative surveys.

## 4.2. Sub-Study 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Gifted EFL Students' Learning Needs

The purpose of this phase was to examine teachers' perception of their students' needs. To achieve that aim, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers of gifted EFL students. Data from teacher interviews were also analyzed using thematic analysis. Details of the research procedure and expected outcomes are present in Figure 3.

### Figure 3

#### *Design of Sub-Study 2*





### ***Participants***

Five teachers (coded as T1-5), who participated in the study, were all experienced teachers who had from seven to twenty-five years of working with EFL gifted students. With that amount of time, it was expected that these teachers had gained proper understanding of their students' characteristics and needs.

### ***Data Collection***

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore their perceptions of students' learning needs. These interviews also covered themes previously addressed in sub-study 1 (i.e., students' language ability, learning priorities, learning difficulties, learning styles/ preferred activities, learning attitudes and engagement). Details of the interview protocol could be found in Appendix 2.

### ***Data Analysis***

Similar to the qualitative component in sub-study 1, thematic analysis was chosen as the data analysis method in this sub-study with the purpose of identifying teachers' perceptions about different domains (A – E) of students' needs. Codes, together with noteworthy quotations, were identified and synthesized to identify common themes. These findings were then incorporated with findings from sub-study 1 (students' perceptions) to create a more comprehensive picture of learning needs of gifted EFL students.

## **5. Research Findings**

### ***Research Question 1: How Confident are Gifted EFL Students About Their English Language Ability?***

#### **Confidence in Overall English Ability**

Students were surveyed about their confidence levels in different areas of English language proficiency, including Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation, Reading, Listening, Writing, and Speaking. Figure 4 presents the mean ratings for each area. Overall, students demonstrated high levels of confidence in their English competence ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ). This result was supported by interviews with the students' teachers, as four out of five reported that the students' overall English competence was good and that their proficiency in the four language skills had improved compared to previous cohorts.

In the last 5 years, students who entered EFL gifted classes, especially Foreign Language Specialized School, showed much higher abilities in four English skills. (T4)

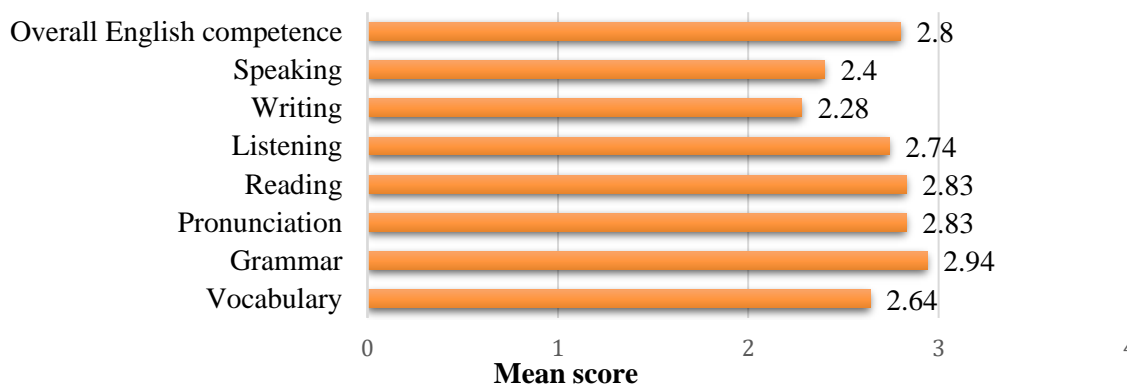
#### **Lower Confidence in Speaking and Writing**

A closer look at students' responses to specific English skills and components, however, suggested that students appeared to be least confident about the two productive skills namely Writing and Speaking ( $M = 2.28$  and  $2.40$  respectively; see Figure 4). This was consistent with the feedback provided by teachers, T3 and T4, who noted that their students struggled the most with writing. T4 also estimated that as many as 60 to 70 percent of her students faced difficulties with writing. When interviewed, three out of four students cited "insufficient practice" as the main reason for their lack of confidence in Writing and Speaking, both in class and at home.

The main reason is that we do not have much practice time. In class, we mostly learn vocabulary and grammar so (our) speaking skills are not very good. Writing skills are not our focus at school, either. (S3)

**Figure 4**

*Level of Confidence in Specific English Areas*



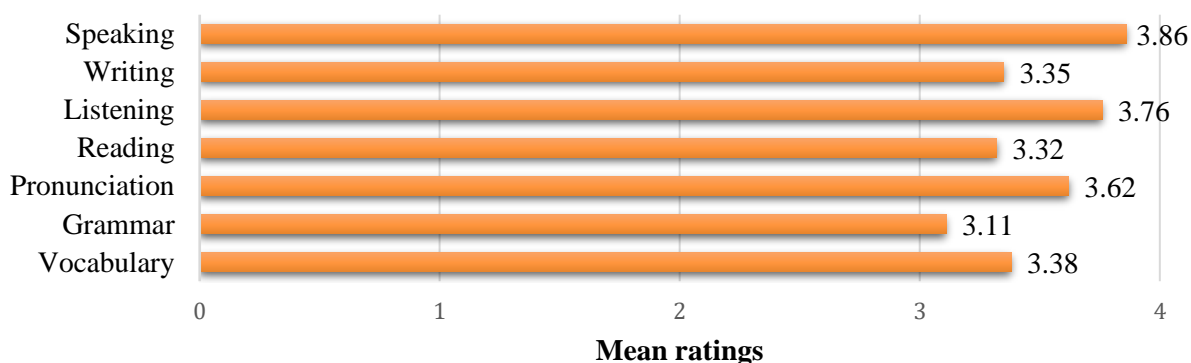
**Research Question 2: What is the Level of Importance That Gifted EFL Students Attach to the Different Language Areas?**

**Higher Level of Importance Attached to Auditory-Oral Skills**

In response to part B of the questionnaire, participants rated all language skills and components as important (mean scores greater than 3.1; see Figure 5). However, speaking, listening, and pronunciation (M = 3.86, 3.76, and 3.62, respectively) were considered the most important. Notably, these skills are all related to oral proficiency.

**Figure 5**

*Level of Importance Attached to Specific English Areas*



In the interviews, three students, who gave high rating scores for pronunciation, listening and speaking, believed that these aspects were more practical in daily communication (as compared to other skills), and thus were regarded as being more important.

For me, the most important thing when learning a language is to be able to use it in daily communication, therefore pronunciation and speaking is most important... And you must also be good at listening to understand what foreigners say [...] I think oral skills are important because I will use these skills more often than writing or reading. (S3)

Listening and speaking are most important because they are widely used in daily communication. (S4)

### Main Focus on Vocabulary, Grammar and Reading

Although the explanations that these students have for their high appreciation of oral skills were understandable, the findings suggested a mismatch between what students considered important and what they spent more time on. Both S2 and S3 - who were in grade 12 - admitted that they did not have enough time practicing and improving their speaking, listening, and/ or pronunciation because they were preparing for the National High School Graduation Exam. Interviews with teachers also revealed similar results. Four out of five teachers (T1, T2, T3 and T5) thought that gifted EFL students, except for a small minority who aimed to study abroad, would need to perform well in this exam to secure themselves a place at university. Since this high-stake exam mainly focused on vocabulary, grammar and reading, they naturally had the urge to put more time and effort on these components.

Gifted EFL students also have to take the National High School Graduation Exam. Therefore, they also need to spend more time on vocabulary, grammar and practice tests, just like non-gifted students. (T3)

Of course, they want to be good at all skills but, er..., grade 12th students, for example, need to prioritize vocabulary, grammar and reading to prepare for the National High School Graduation Exam. (T2)

When I taught those skills (listening, speaking, writing) many students did not really pay attention and (they) only focused on vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills to have high scores on the national high-school graduation exam. (T1)

### Research Question 3: What are Students' Difficulties in Using English?

#### Psychological Obstacles in Speaking

In questionnaire section C, students rated the frequency of encountering difficulties using English (as seen in table 2 below). Mean scores ranged from low to moderate levels (M between 2.25 and 2.60), indicating these students could generally use English without much encounter with the given difficulties. The issue with the highest mean scores was shyness of speaking (C1, M = 2.60), followed by limited vocabulary (C5, M=2.58), limited topic knowledge (C8, M=2.56), fear of making errors (C2, M=2.55), and fear of criticism (C3, M=2.51). Additional responses specified by students were *shyness*, *afraid to be judged by others*, *eye contact*, etc. Interestingly, most of the above issues/ key words (except for C5 and C8) were pointing towards shyness and fear of speaking. However, this problem seemed not to be well recognized by teachers. Only one teacher (T2) mentioned students experiencing embarrassment and anxiety due to pronunciation mistakes, while other four teachers claimed students were confident and did not encounter any psychological hindrance.

**Table 2**

*Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Difficulties in Using English*

Item	M	SD
C1 Feel shy of speaking English	2.60	0.72
C2 Afraid to make errors	2.55	0.71
C3 Afraid to be criticized	2.51	0.78
C4 Can't avoid using Vietnamese	2.36	0.72
C5 Limited vocabulary	2.58	0.61

<b>C6</b>	Bad grammar	2.25	0.53
<b>C7</b>	Bad pronunciation	2.31	0.63
<b>C8</b>	Limited knowledge of the topic	<b>2.56</b>	0.67

**Limited Academic Vocabulary and Background Knowledge**

Besides psychological barriers, student participants in the current study also acknowledged that they had problems with “limited vocabulary” (C5) and “limited knowledge of the topic” (C8; as could be seen in the table above). In addition to the pre-listed categories, students also added difficulties with lexical resources, such as slangs, technical words, paraphrasing ability, etc. In the interviews, students were asked to give more details about their vocabulary resources; and three participants shared that they did not have enough academic words to fully and precisely express their ideas in complicated topics.

In sub-study 2, teachers were also asked to comment on their students’ vocabulary. T2 and T5 stated that their students just encountered difficulties expressing their ideas about academic and highly complicated topics. T4 also specified that the proportion of students encountering this problem were 60% - 70% for writing skills and around 30% for speaking skills. The reasons, as explained by T2, were the insufficient academic vocabulary and background knowledge, which was in line with students’ responses.

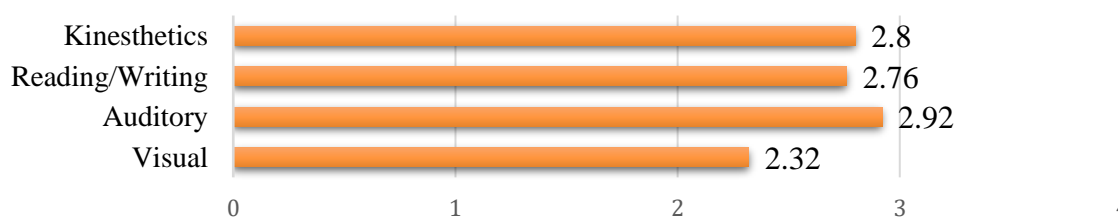
**Research Question 4: What are EFL Gifted Students’ Learning Styles and Preferred Learning Activities?**

**Preference for Auditory-Oral Activities**

Gifted EFL students' learning styles were assessed by evaluating the usefulness of common learning activities in four categories: Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic. Figure 6 displayed the mean ratings of each group, revealing that the Auditory group was the highest rated (M=2.92, SD=0.81), followed by Kinesthetic (M=2.80, SD=0.89) and Reading/Writing (M=2.76, SD=0.83). Students found "watching video" (M=3.23, SD=0.76), "listening to podcast" (M=2.87, SD=0.86), and group discussion (M=2.80, SD=0.85) most useful, probably indicating that they learned best through listening and speaking activities. Furthermore, when asked to specify their own preferred learning methods, eleven out of eighteen responses recorded were also listening and speaking activities (i.e., “self-talking in English”, “debating”, “listening to audio-books”). Those responses strengthened the belief that most of gifted EFL students appeared to be auditory learners.

**Figure 6**

*Level of Usefulness of Four Learning Styles*



Teachers’ opinions were also in line with this finding. Among the wide range of activities in their lessons, all teachers thought that activities focusing on oral skills, such as “group-discussion”, “presentation”, “debates” or “projects” were most effective and engaging

to students. For instance, T5 stated that her gifted EFL students showed strong interest in discussing and sharing opinions or applying what they had learnt in joint projects. However, most of those activities could not be done on a regular basis due to time constraints in class.

Students seem to prefer projects, erm, it seems so... time-consuming they are, but (we) still have to do them because they are included in the textbooks. (T1)

The activities can be getting the students to do a presentation using PowerPoint, to role-play, to have a talent show or a fashion show, all in English. [...] Generally students enjoyed those, but those activities took a lot of time and effort so we couldn't have more than two (activities) in a semester, other than that we also organize, for instance, learning the basis of grammar, practicing tests for gifted students, etc. (T3)

This idea was confirmed by S2 and S4, who asserted that their teachers did carry out presentations, debates and projects during a school year, however, not frequently (once or twice in a semester mainly in grade 11<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>). In class, students mostly had tests and worksheets (S2; S3), which were considered as quite boring to students (S3; S1).

### **Preference for Self-Directed Learning**

Another finding from interviews with teachers was that self-directed learning/ student-centered learning appeared to be highly effective and motivating to gifted EFL students. All teacher participants agreed that activities that allowed students to plan and organize their own learning were highly welcomed. T1 even stated that self-directed learning activities were most effective for students of this level.

The most important thing to bear in mind when teaching gifted students is to instruct them how to self-study and self-research. (T1)

They (students) prefer planning and carrying out learning projects by themselves. Normally, I would just play the role of a facilitator. (T3)

They like to read about the problems at home and when they come to class, they're very excited to present what they've learnt to teachers and other friends. (T5)

### ***Research Question 5: What is EFL Gifted Students' Level of Engagement With Learning English at School?***

#### **Positive Attitudes Towards Learning**

Students' learning attitudes and engagement were measured in five different aspects "interest in English", "general self-concept of English ability", "instrumental motivation", "attitude towards school" and "sense of belonging at school". Table 3 presents the mean and standard deviation of each sub-scales. The results showed that mean scores of all sub-scales were relatively high (ranging from 2.86 to 3.62) and the standard deviations were low (from 0.49 to 0.57), suggesting that students generally have positive attitudes towards learning English at school.

**Table 3**

*Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) on Learning Attitudes and Engagement*

<b>Sub-scales</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Interest	2.86	0.57
General self-concept	2.90	0.53

Instrumental motivation	3.62	0.49
Attitude towards school	2.93	0.53
Sense of belonging at school	3.06	0.53

The results obtained from interviews with teachers also supported this assumption. All interviewed teachers complimented their students' learning attitudes. Most of the positive comments included "serious commitment to studying", "high interest in English", and "positive attitude towards school".

### **Low Motivation for the Advanced Curriculum**

Beside the positive comments, teachers also identified some students' lack of motivation for advanced English lessons, which aimed to nurture gifted EFL students' language ability and select candidates for national/municipal level contests for gifted students. These classes normally followed a more demanding curriculum, which might sometimes make students feel discouraged and overwhelmed:

When (we) have to give difficult tasks to prepare for the national advanced English exam for gifted students, some students were demotivated... (T1)

Attending the national contest is somewhat strenuous. They have to put much time and effort on it... So the number of students attending this competition has been decreasing significantly in recent years. Their parents tell them that they don't need to study that much but still pass the university entrance exam so why (they) need to join in the contest. That's also a difficulty for teachers when selecting candidates for the national contest. (T2)

We sometimes have to find ways to, erm, persuade or even force them to attend (the contest). (T5)

### **Low Motivation for Non-Challenging Tasks**

"Too basic lessons" was found to be another source of demotivation for gifted EFL students. This could probably be linked to students' high self-concept about their English ability. T1, T4 and T5 reported that some students, due to their overconfidence, usually became careless and underestimated the importance of "basic lessons" - those that follow the mainstream curriculum. Teachers, as a result, needed to frequently remind them to be careful and focused while studying. T5 also commented that gifted students easily got bored with simple and tedious tasks so teachers always need to find ways to keep them engaged in the lessons.

## **6. Discussion and Implications**

Findings from this research provided better insights into gifted EFL students' characteristics and problems, in terms of both academic and affective aspects.

When it comes to the key elements of English learning curriculum, the greater role that student participants placed on *speaking, listening and pronunciation*, which aim to develop oral communication skills, was understandable and in line with current trends in English language teaching and learning as well as the context of globalization and internationalization, where the need to use English for communication is emphasized. In fact, the new English textbooks for high school students in Vietnam have also put more focus on oral skills and overall

communicative competence (Quyen, 2019). However, the way the textbooks are implemented may need further investigation to measure their effectiveness in enhancing students' communicative competence.

While the greater importance was attached to oral communication skills (speaking, listening, pronunciation), what students actually prioritized in learning seemed different (vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension). Such inconsistency was somewhat unexpected but could probably be explained by the washback effect of the National High School Graduation Exam in Vietnam, in which listening and speaking are not included. In fact, the impacts of exams on students' learning and teachers' teaching have been well-documented. Exams can affect both students' learning and teachers' teaching, potentially leading to a focus on test preparation rather than instructional goals (McKinley & Thompson, 2018). In order to develop students' communicative competence, especially their oral skills, the assessment content and methods should be adjusted accordingly.

While oral English skills should receive more attention since they were considered as essential components, students' concerns over *speaking and writing* implied that these output skills should be more focused on as well. Difficulties in performing speaking and writing tasks are apprehensible and in compliance with recent literature, which have chorally regarded these skills as most difficult for EFL learners (Al Hosni, 2014; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Richards & Renandya, 2002) as they require control over numerous academic, psychological and cognitive aspects (Olshtain & Celce-Murcia, 2016).

When it comes to these output skills, student participants seemed to be well-aware of the specific hindrances such as *shyness, inadequate background knowledge, lack of academic vocabulary*, etc. However, teachers did not seem to have full understanding of their students' difficulties, particularly speaking shyness. Therefore, improving teachers' awareness and understanding of gifted EFL students' psychological problems should be targeted. Besides, teachers might also benefit from trainings on strategies and techniques to support students with anxiety in the language classroom, such as: establishing a learning community and a supportive learning environment, providing indirect rather than direct correction, accepting the need for self-worth protection, offering teacher immediacy/ reducing distance between teacher and student, and providing praise appropriately (Neumeister et al., 2007; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009).

Besides, findings from the study also provide better understandings about gifted EFL students' learning process, or in other words, the most effective ways for them to learn English. To be more specific, the potential of *self-directed learning* to gifted EFL students was clearly highlighted by the teacher participants. This result has also been supported by both research and practice in the field of gifted education (i.e., Riley, 2004; Kronborg & Cornejo-Araya, 2018; Gross et al., 2001). It is thus highly recommended that to better meet the needs of gifted students and at the same time motivate them to learn, the curriculum for gifted EFL students should be carefully planned, in a way that allows students to take initiative in choosing and conducting learning activities. To this end, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been considered an ideal option for the gifted classrooms as it allows gifted students to structure their own learning, establish their own deadlines, and work to their full capabilities (Stanley, 2012; Diffily, 2002). It also encourages active student learning, cooperation, creativity, critical thinking, and effectively prepares students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bell, 2010; Takeda, 2016).

Another finding about students' learning styles also suggested that gifted EFL students learn best through auditory-oral activities. It is consistent with previous findings on learning

styles of gifted language students (Rubin, 1975). Therefore, it is recommended that teachers incorporate more activities like presentations, debates, group discussions, and projects into their lessons. Nonetheless, such activities are mostly time-consuming and require careful preparation, thus could not be done on the regular basis. Instead, to save time and effort, teachers could consider assigning daily listening reflective journals and speaking portfolios as homework to encourage students to strengthen their English habits.

Last but not least, affective problems about students' engagement should be taken into consideration to improve their overall learning outcomes. Specifically, there are demotivating factors that affect gifted EFL learners, including a lack of interest in national advanced English contests. To many, the academic competitions at different levels (i.e., provincial, national, international) appeared to be the most important goals for gifted students (including gifted EFL students) and their teachers, since students' performance in these contests are often used to evaluate teaching and learning quality (Huu, 2018). Although the desire to compare oneself to others is innate, and competition has irrefutable benefits to an individual's development (Verhoeff, 1997), solely focusing on competition as a goal is irrational and counterproductive for gifted education, including gifted foreign language programs. Therefore, the researchers are of the belief that both the goals set for gifted education in Vietnam and the curriculum for gifted EFL students need substantial revision to make learning more motivating and relevant for students, and better prepare them for the modern workforce. This is crucial to ensure the success of gifted foreign language programs in Vietnam.

## **7. Conclusion**

Findings from the present research provided insights in different aspects, from students' academic concerns to affective problems, with the aim of answering the central question "What are the learning needs of gifted EFL students?" These findings suggested that gifted EFL students in Vietnam demonstrated several unique needs in both academic and affective domains. Regarding the former, these students attached relatively high importance as well as engagement to auditory-oral skills, which might suggest that learning and assessment content and method should be adapted with more focus on these areas. Besides, a closer attention should be paid to speaking and writing as well, since these skills remained daunting among gifted EFL students, even though their English competence was generally good. Some of the common problems that might need more attention included speaking anxiety and insufficient academic vocabulary. Moreover, teaching activities that focus on oral skills and self-directed learning (i.e., presentation, debate, discussion, self-study, projects, etc.) are considered effective to this group of students, and therefore, should be utilized to keep them engaged in the learning process. With reference to affective needs, gifted EFL students showed relatively high commitment to study but motivation for advanced English lessons seemed to be rather low. This implied that gifted education in Vietnam in general and the curriculum for gifted EFL students in particular may need substantial reforms. It is believed that goals and missions of gifted education, once clearly defined, would guide the whole process of curriculum development, assessment, teacher development, and lesson planning for gifted EFL students.

## **8. Limitations of the Study and Recommendation for Further Research**

Despite researchers' efforts in designing and conducting the research, this study still has unavoidable limitations. Firstly, due to the difficulties in recruiting participants during the Covid-19 pandemic in Vietnam, the survey in phase one of the study was conducted entirely



online using convenience sampling. Since the sample just consisted of students from four gifted high schools in the North of Vietnam, the results might not be representative of all Vietnamese gifted EFL high school students. Moreover, the number of students from different schools and grades were unproportioned, which probably skewed the results to a certain extent; therefore, care should be taken when interpreting results from the current study. Secondly, due to the scarcity of research related to gifted EFL students in Vietnam, findings reported in the current study could not be directly related to any previous studies, and thus remain solely valid for the sample studied within its scope. Thirdly, due to time and resource limitation, some domains of students' needs have not been investigated thoroughly. For example, findings about students' ability, difficulties and learning activities were still general and might have benefited from additional methods such as classroom observation or curriculum evaluation. Future studies, given more time and resources might either expand the scope of the current study or delve deeper into specific areas of needs. It might be also be worthwhile to compare and contrast learning needs of gifted EFL students with other gifted groups and/ or non-gifted population.

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## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire

#### DISCOVERING LEARNING NEEDS OF GIFTED EFL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

##### Background information:

Age:

Gender:

Grade:

School:

##### SECTION A: Learning abilities

Please rate your confidence in terms of the following English areas?

1 = Not confident at all  
3 = Confident

2 = Not very confident  
4 = Very confident

	1	2	3	4
B1. Vocabulary				
B2. Grammar				
B3. Pronunciation				
B4. Reading				
B5. Listening				
B6. Writing				
B7. Speaking				
B8. Overall language proficiency				

**SECTION B: Learning priorities**

How important is each of the following language components/ skills to you?

1 = Not important    2 = Less important    3 = Important    4 = Very important

	1	2	3	4
C1. Vocabulary				
C2. Grammar				
C3. Pronunciation				
C4. Reading				
C5. Listening				
C6. Writing				
C7. Speaking				

**SECTION C: Learning difficulties**

How often do you experience the following difficulties in your English classes?

1 = Never                      2 = Seldom                      3 = Often                      4 = Always

	1	2	3	4
D1. Feel shy of speaking English				
D2. Afraid to make errors				
D3. Afraid to be criticized				
D4. Can't avoid using Vietnamese				
D5. Limited vocabulary				
D6. Grammar mistakes				
D7. Pronunciation mistakes				

D8. Limited knowledge of the topic				
Other reasons: (please specify)				
.....				
.....				

**SECTION D: Learning styles**

How helpful are these activities to you in your English language learning? Rate them according to their level of helpfulness by ticking the appropriate column.

1 = Not helpful at all    2 = Somewhat helpful    3 = Helpful    4 = Very helpful

	1	2	3	4
D1. Pictures				
D2. Mindmaps				
D3. Watching videos				
D4. Discussions				
D5. Lectures				
D6. Podcasts				
D7. Wordlists				
D8. Textbooks				
D9. Role-plays				
D10. Projects				
F11. Others (please specify):				
.....				
.....				

**SECTION E: Learning attitudes and engagement**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Please tick the appropriate column.

1 = Strongly disagree    2 = Disagree    3 = Agree    4 = Strongly agree

Statements	1	2	3	4
E1   I enjoy learning English.				
E2   I have always believed that English is one of my best subjects.				
E3   I feel like I belong to this school.				
E4   I get good marks in my major subject.				
E5   I feel lonely at school.				
E6   In my English class, I understand even the most difficult work.				
E7   Other students seem to like me.				

E8	I feel awkward and out of place.				
E9	I learn English quickly.				
E10	I am just not good at learning English as a major.				
E11	I feel like an outsider at school.				
E12	School has taught me things that could be useful in my future study/work.				
E13	English is an important subject for me because I need it for further study (i.e., going abroad).				
E14	I will learn many things in English that will help me get a job.				
E15	My school helped give me confidence to make decisions (i.e., decision about my future education/ career).				
E16	I look forward to my English lessons.				
E17	I make friends easily at school.				
E18	Making an effort in learning English is worth it because it will help me in the work that I want to do later.				
E19	Studying (English) at school has been a waste of time.				
E20	I am self-motivated when studying English as a major.				
E21	My school has done little to prepare me for life after I leave school (i.e., university, work life).				
E22	I learn English because I enjoy it.				
E23	I am interested in the things I learn in English.				

### Appendix 2

#### Overall Construct of the Questionnaire

Section/ Domain	Factor	Item #	
<b>A. Learning ability</b>		A1	Vocabulary
		A2	Grammar
		A3	Pronunciation
		A4	Reading
		A5	Listening
		A6	Writing
		A7	Speaking
		A8	General English ability
<b>B. Students' priorities</b>		B1	Vocabulary
		B2	Grammar
		B3	Pronunciation
		B4	Reading

		B5	Listening
		B6	Writing
		B7	Speaking
<b>C. Learning problems</b>		C1	Feel shy of speaking English
		C2	Afraid to make errors
		C3	Afraid to be criticized
		C4	Can't avoid using Vietnamese
		C5	Limited vocabulary
		C6	Bad grammar
		C7	Bad pronunciation
		C8	Limited knowledge of the topic
<b>D. Learning styles</b>	Visual	D1	Using pictures
		D2	Using mindmap
	Auditory	D3	Watching videos
		D4	Group-discussion
		D5	Listening to lecture
		D6	Listening to podcasts
	Reading/ Writing	D7	Using wordlists
		D8	Reading books
	Kinesthetic	D9	Role-play
		D10	Doing projects
<b>E. Learning attitudes and engagement</b>	Interest	E1	I enjoy learning English.
		E16	I look forward to my English lessons.
		E20	I am self-motivated when studying English as a major.
		E22	I learn English because I enjoy it.
		E23	I am interested in the things I learn in English.
	Instrumental motivation	E13	English is an important subject for me because I need it for further study (i.e., going abroad).
		E14	I will learn many things in English that will help me get a job.
		E18	Making an effort in learning English is worth it because it will help me in the work that I want to do later.
	Attitude towards school	E12	Specialized school has taught me things that could be useful in my future study/ work.
		E15	Specialized school helped give me confidence to make decisions (i.e., decision about my future education/ career).
		E19	Specialized school has been a waste of time.
		E21	My school has done little to prepare me for life after I leave school (i.e., university, work life).
	Sense of belonging at school	E3	I feel like I belong.
		E5	I feel lonely.

	E7	Other students seem to like me.
	E8	I feel awkward and out of place.
	E11	I feel like an outsider (or left of thing).
	E18	I make friends easily.
General self-concept	E2	I have always believed that English is one of my best subjects.
	E4	I get good marks in my major subject.
	E6	In my English class, I understand even the most difficult work
	E9	I learn English quickly.
	E10	I am just not good at learning English as a major.

### Appendix 3

#### Câu hỏi phỏng vấn học sinh

1. Tại sao em lại không tự tin vào kỹ năng Nói/ Viết ?
2. Tại sao em lại cho rằng Phát âm/ Nghe/ Nói là quan trọng nhất?
3. Em hãy mô tả cụ thể hơn về những khó khăn
4. Thiếu tự tin khi nói tiếng Anh: (tại sao em thiếu tự tin, thiếu tự tin trong hoàn cảnh nào, về vấn đề gì?)
5. Vấn đề hạn chế (tại sao vấn đề của em hạn chế, em thiếu vốn từ trong những hoàn cảnh nào?)
6. Trên lớp, thầy/ cô thường tổ chức những hoạt động gì? Những hoạt động này có gây hứng thú cho em và các bạn trong lớp không?

### Appendix 4

#### Câu hỏi phỏng vấn giáo viên

##### I. Năng lực và ưu tiên trong học tập của học sinh

1. Thầy/cô đánh giá thế nào về **năng lực tiếng Anh** của học sinh các lớp chuyên Anh trường mình (trong những năm gần đây)?
  - Năng lực tiếng của các học sinh trong cùng lớp có đồng đều nhau không?
  - Năng lực của học sinh các khóa trong những năm gần đây có đồng đều nhau không?
2. Thầy/cô đánh giá như thế nào về **năng lực** và **mức độ chú trọng** của học sinh trong từng nội dung học tập như: *từ vựng, ngữ pháp, ngữ âm*, và 4 kỹ năng *nghe, nói, đọc, viết*?
  - Phần nào học sinh học tốt và phần nào học không tốt? Tại sao?
  - Học sinh có xu hướng chú trọng vào nội dung nào hơn? Tại sao?

##### II. Phương pháp giảng dạy

1. Khi dạy học sinh chuyên Anh thì thầy/cô thường tổ chức những **hoạt động giảng dạy** gì? Mức độ hứng thú của học sinh và tính hiệu quả của từng hoạt động này ra sao?
  - Theo thầy/cô, những hoạt động nào sau đây sẽ gây hứng thú và đem lại hiệu quả cho việc học tập của học sinh: *sử dụng tranh ảnh, sơ đồ tư duy, thảo luận nhóm, xem video*,



*tự đọc tài liệu, diễn kịch, tham gia những dự án thực tế có sử dụng tiếng Anh*

### III. Các khó khăn trong việc dạy và học

1. Trong quá trình giảng dạy, thầy/ cô nhận thấy học sinh của mình thường gặp các khó khăn gì? Thầy/ cô đã có những giải pháp gì giúp học sinh vượt qua được những khó khăn đó?
2. Bản thân thầy/cô đã gặp những khó khăn gì trong quá trình giảng dạy học sinh chuyên Anh và thầy cô có giải pháp gì để giải quyết những khó khăn đó?

### IV. Đánh giá của giáo viên về thái độ và động lực học tập của học sinh

1. Từ quan sát của mình, thầy/cô có nhận xét gì về **thái độ học tập và mức độ hứng thú** của học sinh đối với môn tiếng Anh?
2. Theo thầy/cô thì **động lực và mục tiêu** của học sinh khi chọn theo học chuyên Anh là gì? Với phần lớn học sinh chuyên Anh thì mục tiêu nào là quan trọng nhất?
  - Có phải là vì những mục tiêu như *thi học sinh giỏi quốc gia/ đi du học/ thi vào các trường đại học lớn/ tìm một công việc tốt trong tương lai?*)
3. **Các hoạt động hướng nghiệp/ định hướng ngành học tương lai** cho học sinh chuyên Anh đã được trường mình tổ chức như thế nào và đem lại hiệu quả ra sao?
4. Theo thầy/cô thì học sinh cảm thấy như thế nào về **môi trường học tập** tại trường chuyên nói chung và tại các lớp chuyên Anh nói riêng? (ví dụ: *sự thoải mái, sự thân thiện, sự gắn bó* với trường lớp/ thầy cô/ bạn bè của các em)

### VI. Những góp ý nhằm nâng cao chất lượng giảng dạy:

Từ những kinh nghiệm trên, thầy/ cô có đề xuất gì nhằm nâng cao chất lượng giảng dạy tiếng Anh cho học sinh chuyên không? (về nội dung chương trình, phương pháp giảng dạy, xây dựng môi trường học tập, v.v)

## NHU CẦU HỌC TẬP MÔN TIẾNG ANH CỦA HỌC SINH CHUYÊN ANH BẬC THPT TẠI VIỆT NAM: GÓC NHÌN CỦA GIÁO VIÊN VÀ HỌC SINH

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**Tóm tắt:** Học sinh chuyên/ học sinh giỏi thường có những đặc điểm nổi trội hơn về mặt trí tuệ và cảm xúc so với học sinh bình thường. Do vậy, trong học tập, những em này có xu hướng thể hiện những nhu cầu riêng, đòi hỏi giáo viên phải nắm bắt được, nếu không thì hiệu quả giảng dạy cho những học sinh này sẽ không cao. Tại Việt Nam, mặc dù hệ thống trường chuyên đã tồn tại từ lâu, song hầu như chưa có một nghiên cứu chính thức nào về hệ thống giáo dục cho học sinh chuyên nói chung và cho học sinh chuyên Anh nói riêng. Vì vậy, trong nghiên cứu này, các tác giả muốn tìm hiểu quan điểm của một số giáo viên và học sinh chuyên Anh về các nhu cầu trong việc học tập môn chuyên của những học sinh này. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ phiếu điều tra và câu hỏi phỏng vấn với 137 học sinh chuyên Anh và 5 giáo viên trực tiếp giảng dạy các em. Kết quả từ nghiên cứu cho thấy: (1) Trong 7 nội dung của chương

trình học tiếng Anh phổ thông (từ vựng, ngữ pháp, phát âm, nghe, nói, đọc, viết), các kỹ năng giao tiếp bằng lời thoại (nghe, nói, phát âm) được cho là quan trọng nhất, trong khi đó, nói và viết được cho là hai kỹ năng khó nhất; (2) Trong quá trình học, các hoạt động tạo được sự hứng thú và hiệu quả học tập cao là các hoạt động chú trọng vào kỹ năng nghe-nói như thảo luận nhóm, tranh luận, thuyết trình, và các hoạt động lấy người học làm trung tâm như tự học, tự nghiên cứu, làm dự án, v.v.; (3) Học sinh chuyên, nhìn chung, có thái độ hăng say và nghiêm túc trong học tập, tuy nhiên, niềm đam mê và động lực với những giờ học bồi dưỡng tiếng Anh để phục vụ cho kỳ thi học sinh giỏi quốc gia, là không cao. Những kết quả trên chỉ ra sự cần thiết nên chăng phải thay đổi lại mục tiêu và sứ mệnh đào tạo của hệ thống trường chuyên ở Việt Nam, cũng như sự điều chỉnh nội dung, chương trình học và cách thức kiểm tra đánh giá đối với nhóm đối tượng người học đặc biệt này.

*Từ khóa:* học sinh chuyên, hệ thống trường chuyên, nhu cầu của học sinh