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GRADUATION THESIS

**UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF GIFTED STUDENTS IN
ENGLISH-SPECIALIZED 11TH GRADE
CLASSROOM, NGUYEN TRAI HIGH-SCHOOL,
HAI DUONG PROVINCE: A CASE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Gifted underachievement has always been an immense intact field in Vietnam’s educational system, which is awaiting educators and teacher-researchers to cultivate in and bring fruitful changes to the wellbeing of their own students.

With her deep concerns about this situation, the researcher carried out a study titled “*Underachievement of Gifted Students in an English-specialized 11th Grade Classroom, Nguyen Trai High-school, Hai Duong Province: A Case Study*”. The aim of this research was to look at the typical characteristics of underachieving English gifted students; the causes of, and solutions for the phenomenon, from the perception of the insiders. The method adopted was multiple-case study, and diary report was chosen as the fundamental data collection instrument. Besides, questionnaire, observation, documentation and interview were employed to triangulate the information from various aspects and hence ensure the validity as well as reliability of the research.

The study yielded significant findings in response to the proposed questions. The participants were found to demonstrate giftedness in many aspects, and linguistics was the most significant. However, they possessed a low confidence, low self-efficacy, fear of failure, and maladaptive strategies during the process of studying English. They expected a change in materials and more practice in communicative skills besides grammar and vocabulary. They also hoped to have positive interactions with teachers and peers, in a less stressful or competitive environment.

Based on these findings, implications were made for teachers and classroom teaching. Among many, three remedy strategies, namely Supportive, Intrinsic and Remedial were presented in order to help underachievers magnify their potentials and perform better academically as well as personally.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the problem and rationale for the study

In today's prevailing trend toward Knowledge Economy, the intellectual resources of a country determine a relatively large part of its status on an international scale. The better the grey matter is nourished, the stronger the country's stance is ensured.

On considering that indispensable role of knowledge to a country's wellbeing, underachievement of gifted students, i.e. "a situation in which students have subsequent ability but continually achieve unsatisfying academic results" (Reis & McCoach 2000), has been considered one of the most frustrating problems in the education system (Hill 2005). While studying these high-potential students, researchers came to realize that a number of gifted students failed to be successful in schools, instead of excelling in almost any educational environment as presumed previously (Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre 1963).

As long as the causes for this phenomenon have not been detected and effectively treated, gifted students will still be limited in unlocking their full potential and intensifying their teachers' efforts. Studying underachievement, therefore, would provide educators and teachers with a clearer picture of this special group of learners, hence give richer insight into the situation and found a primary background for later work under the same topic. Only when the existed problems are acutely diagnosed can the prescription be given and applied to improve the students' progress.

As an active developing country, Vietnam has been fully aware of the need to preserve and enrich its intellectual resource. As stated in the Draft Platform for country development during the transition period to Socialism (Developing human resource, Fostering Talent 2011), "[t]he mission of education and training is to improve people's knowledge, develop human resources and foster talents". For this purpose, Vietnam has for a long time given remarkable attention to discovering and training gifted students, despite tremendous hardships that it has experienced as a

developing nation. Schools for gifted students of all grades have been built up all over the country.

However, there remains a big gap in understanding these students' learning and living conditions. This even becomes more complex in the absence of resources and qualified teachers that provincial students undergo, in comparison with their counterparts in big cities. As a result, gifted students, especially at such a critical point as high school time, are reflected to "experience top-down knowledge-feeding lessons, study under intense pressure and lack a variety of life skills" (Doanh Doanh 2007).

Despite such negative impacts on the country's intellectual resource, the body of research over this issue remains relatively modest. There has been little, if any, official research in the country that views underachievement at a deeper level. As a consequence, educators from all over the country have not paid proper attention to the circumstances that their students are undergoing throughout the study process. This notable absence of studies in Vietnam's context is an added disadvantage for students in general and gifted high-school students in particular.

With her deep concerns about this situation and the desire to fill the gap in the theoretical field, the researcher attempts to cast a closer look at gifted students to partly discover factors that cause their underachievement and ways to minimize such factors in the study process. These goals are hoped to be achieved through this research project, **"Underachievement of Gifted Students in an English-specialized 11th Grade Classroom, Nguyen Trai High-school, Hai Duong Province: A Case Study"**.

1.2. Aims and research questions of the study

The research aims at students who have subsequent ability but continually achieve unsatisfying results in monthly tests issued by the school. As participants of this research, students stand the chance to reflect on their experience of studying English in an intense environment for gifted students. The researcher is most interested in looking at their characteristics; their self-perceived difficulties and what they think can make them study better.

The above aims are expected to be fulfilled by answering these three main research questions:

Question 1: What are the characteristics of Vietnamese students who have high abilities but fail to demonstrate them in their school settings?

Question 2: What factors, from the students' perspective, are viewed as influencing their educational experiences?

Question 3: What institutional interventions, from the students' perspective, might reverse that situation?

1.3. Scope of the study

Participants were the 11th grade English Specialized students, who were admitted into Nguyen Trai High School for Gifted Student in school year 2010 – 2011 after passing the school's entrance exam. The subjects were identified as underachieving in English according to the researcher's criteria with reference to teacher observations and students' self-reports.

It should also be mentioned that the primary concerns of this research are the subjects' feelings and attitudes; their interactions with peers and teachers and the intervention that they want to have during the English-studying process in the school setting. Hence, primary domestic concerns as well as the question of evaluating teachers in terms of teaching methodology or teaching approach are irrelevant to the stated purposes.

1.4. Expected outcome and significance of the study

With this study, the researcher expects to gain insights into the process of learning and factors that affect underachieving gifted students. At the same time, students' expectations and teachers' interventions in reality will also be observed to determine the extent to which these expectations are met.

Once completed, the research would serve as reference for those who wish to have a more precise look at gifted students and help them fulfill their true potentials. Moreover, the findings are primary resource for later researchers in designing programs or courses of treatment to improve the situation on a larger and more practical scale.

1.5. Organization of the study

The rest of the paper includes the following chapters:

Chapter 2 – Literature review – provides the background of the study

Chapter 3 – Methodology – describes the participants and instruments of the study, as well as the procedure employed to carry out the research.

Chapter 4 – Data analysis and discussion – presents, analyzes and discusses the findings that the researcher found out from the data collected according to the three research questions.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion – summarizes the main issues discussed in the paper, the limitations of the research, several pedagogical recommendations concerning the research topic as well as some suggestions for further studies. Following this chapter are the References and Appendices.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Giftedness

2.1.1. Definition of gifted students

Throughout the vast body of research in education, the concept of giftedness has remarkably undergone a lot of transformations and researchers have not arrived at a complete agreement.

Early in the literature review, giftedness was described as “a person scoring in the top 1 – 1.5 percentile on a test of intellectual ability” (Hollingworth & Terman cited in Clemons 2008). This limited description, however, was gradually transformed under many “multifaceted, multicultural, and multidimensional perspectives”, instead of such a “static performance” (Clemons 2008).

The researcher is particularly in favor of two definitions by Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and Columbus Group (cited in Elijah 2009). The former provided a well-rounded and thoroughly constructed theory about gifted students. In their view, “[s]tudents, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities” are considered gifted (NAGC 2008). Meanwhile, the latter called more attention to the need for specialized counseling. They claimed that “[g]ifted is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm”, and emphasized that the uniqueness of the gifted “renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally” (Columbus Group cited in Elijah 2009).

These definitions are reviewed because they include major issues related to the study of underachievement. In short, such characteristics as “**high achievement capability**”, “**advanced cognitive abilities**”, “**vulnerable**” and requiring “**modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling**” are the lens through which this research studies underachieving gifted students.

2.1.2. Language gifted students

Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre (1963) observed from “common experience” and assumed that “there may be a special ability or ‘talent’ for foreign language study, since people of equal intelligence and diligence often progress at very different rates in learning a language” (Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre 1963, p. 41).

In her report, Wheat (cited in Diket & Trudy 1994) pointed out several remarkable characteristics of linguistically gifted students. First, these students were claimed to be “well-read”, and hence, “seeing different styles of writing and correct grammar usage put into practice encourages them to become better writers and communicators”. Second, they “usually obtain a broader and more interesting way of expressing themselves”. Third, as the report remarked, “[l]inguistically gifted students usually grow even more attentive and sensitive to *phonology*”. Last but not least, they also “acquire good syntax”, which is “the order and arrangement of the words on the paper” (Diket & Trudy 1994, p.25).

2.1.3. Learning conditions for language gifted students

In her research, Elijah (2009) reviewed a broad body of literature covering a variety of areas and conditions when special assistance is needed for a full development of gifted students. Noticeably, she highlighted the marked difference concerning “social and emotional needs” as well as “intellectual abilities” between gifted students and average students (Elijah 2009, p.8). In general, they need a stable home life without personality conflicts, behavioral issues or motivational deficits. At the same time, if left “academically unchallenged”, these students can “become bored and exhibit disruptive behaviors” (Siegle & McCoach cited in Elijah 2009). Similarly, their “multipotentiality” may deter them from deciding on a certain career or result in extended post-secondary education or completely dropping out of college without proper orientation (Elijah 2009, p.9).

Besides the above-mentioned conditions, successful acquisition of a foreign language also requires other attentions. Spolsky (1989) introduced 74 conditions for second language learning, which cover such fundamental aspects as **Attitude, Motivation, Personality, Capabilities, Previous Knowledge, and Learning Opportunities**, with **Social Context** as the overarching factor. Some of these

issues will be discussed further in the next sessions, while the complete model of these conditions can be found in *Appendix A*.

In short, language gifted students can best manifest their potentials, i.e. “giftedness”, within a healthy social context, with a stable family life; a motivational and properly challenging school environment; guidance from professional staff, as well as a keen attentiveness to their linguistic .

2.2. Underachievement

2.2.1. Definition of underachievement

Some educators believe that giftedness is domain specific; therefore “children may be mistakenly classified as underachievers because they are talented in domains that are not encouraged or developed in the school system” (Clemons 2008). For this reason, they are afraid that “labeling a child as an underachiever might prevent some of the availability of necessary variables such as parent and teacher support, and therefore, hinder the development of giftedness or creativity in that child” (Clemons 2008).

However, the researcher believes that detecting the various reasons for the underdevelopment of giftedness is working towards the betterment of students themselves. Therefore, this should not necessarily be considered the act of “labeling”. Moreover, it is groundless to assume that students receive less parent and teacher support once they are considered “underachievers” – instead, this may call more attention from all stakeholders towards students’ lowered performance in order to seek the best remedy for their situation.

From various descriptions of underachievers in literature, the researcher decided to rely on one summary presented by Reis & McCoach (2000) thanks to its unambiguity and comprehensiveness. Instead of one-sidedly studying students’ performance on standardized or IQ tests, this definition stresses the development of potentials by proposing three main concepts:

Achievement among gifted students – developing **four aspects of giftedness**: Ability, Creativity, Productivity Performance, Motivation-Emotions-Values.

Underachievement among gifted students – **underachievement in any of the four areas** necessary for the manifestations of giftedness.

If students are **not working to their ability** in school, they are underachieving.

(Richert & Rimm cited in Reis & McCoach 2000, p.154)

2.2.2. Characteristics of gifted underachievers

Several authors (Heacox; Mandel & Marcus; Rimm cited in Reis & McCoach 2000) attempted to categorize the variety of characteristics that

underachieving gifted students possess. Even with this same goal, however, they wildly differed in the rationale for and interpretation of certain categories. Thus, until a breakthrough in analyzing this issue is reached, in the current research, the researcher is trying not to limitedly adhere to certain existing categories offered by one particular researcher. Instead, the approach is to adapt Reis & McCoach’s table, which reviews the characteristics of highest frequency in literature, belonging to five main categories, namely **Personality Characteristics**, **Internal Mediators**, **Differential Thinking Styles** and **Positive Attributes**.

Table 1: Characteristics of Gifted Underachievers

Personality characteristics	Low self-esteem, low self-concept, low self-efficacy
	Alienated or withdrawn; distrustful, or pessimistic
	Anxious, impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive, or distractible; may exhibit ADD or ADHD symptoms
	Aggressive, hostile, resentful, or touchy
	Depressed
	Passive-aggressive trait disturbance
	More socially than academically oriented. May be extroverted. May be easygoing, considerate, and/or unassuming
	Dependent, less resilient than high achievers
	Socially immature
Internal Mediators	Fear of failure; gifted underachievers may avoid competition or challenging situations to protect their self-image or their ability
	Fear of success
	Attribute success or failures to outside forces; exhibit an external locus of control, attribute successes to luck and failures to lack of ability; externalize conflict and problems
	Negative attitude toward school
	Antisocial or rebellious
	Self-critical or perfectionistic; feeling guilty about not living up to the expectations of others
	Perform less well on tasks that require detail-oriented or convergent thinking skills than their achieving counterparts
	Score lower on sequential tasks such as repeating digits, repeating sentences, coding, computation, and spelling

Attributes	Differential Thinking Skills/ Styles	Lack insight and critical ability
	Maladaptive Strategies	Lack goal-oriented behavior; fail to set realistic goals for themselves Poor coping skills; developing coping mechanisms that successfully reduce short-term stress, but inhibit long-term success Possess poor self-regulation strategies; low tolerance for frustration; lack perseverance; lack self-control Use defense mechanism
Positive		Intense outside interests, commitment to self-selected work
		Creative
		Demonstrate honesty and integrity in rejecting unchallenging coursework

Adapted from Reis & McCoach (2000, p.159)

2.3. Factors that cause underachievement in a foreign language classroom

2.3.1. Causes of gifted underachievement

There have been many studies designed to seek the answer for causes of underachievement among gifted students. The findings are tremendous; they could range from inappropriate early curricular experiences, absence of opportunities to develop appropriate school work habits, absence of challenge in high school, to negative interactions with teachers, and questionable counseling experience. Nevertheless, the researcher is interested in the model presented by Clemons (2008), which comprehensively describes the possible reasons for underachievement and the interaction of these factors in the academic environment:

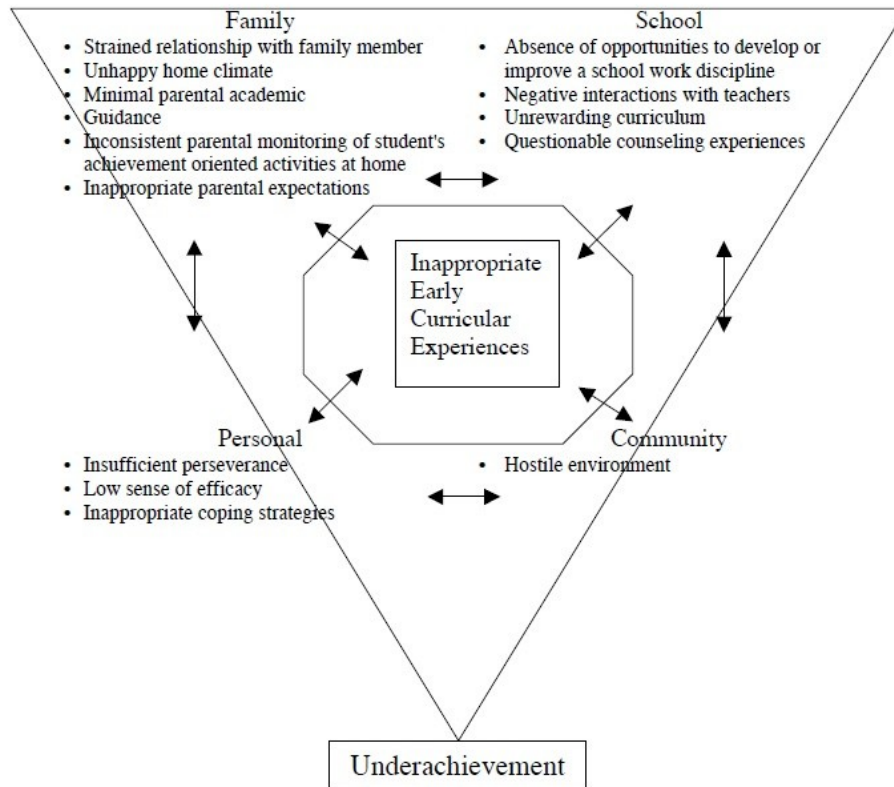


Diagram 1: Model of Academic Underachievement (Clemons 2008)

2.3.2. Causes of gifted underachievement in a foreign language classroom

Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre (1963) attempted to explain the underachievement of their students in different language classrooms by giving a closer look at the **curriculum**, the **demotivating aspects** of the classroom, and the **learners themselves**.

To begin with, **the lack of a unified program**, agreed to and carried out by all teachers in all schools, was considered one of the chief causes of underachievement in foreign language learning. Compared with other major subjects, “foreign languages are clearly more dependent on sequencing than any other”, they remarked. Therefore, teachers and students commented so consistently on the lack of coordination among various levels of foreign language instruction, or “the commitment to a foreign language program, a set of fundamental agreements about the objectives to be attained in each foreign language course, the step-by-step means of achieving them, and the delegation of authority to ensure that the program is carried through as agreed” (Pimsleur, Sundland, & McIntyre 1963, p.35).

Moreover, **demotivating aspects** of the foreign language classroom are also the hindrance to students' acquisition of the foreign language. This is typically demonstrated in the following remark: "No one but a student knows how it feels to be 15 years old, to be sitting in a French class, doing certain kinds of drills, making certain foreign noises, relating to teacher and to fellow students" (Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre 1963, p.23). Importantly, demotivating aspects may come from the teacher and the students alike.

As far as **teachers** are concerned, some students were suspicious about their teacher's command of the foreign language. "While they could not judge how well the teacher spoke it, they noticed that the language sounded differently as spoken by different teachers, and that some teachers used the foreign language more often and more fluently than others" (Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre 1963, p.33). In the same study, there appeared another recurrent theme, which is the teacher's classroom manner. The students wanted teachers to be "patient, kind, and understanding". At the same time, they also expected that teachers "push them along", instead of being "the 'nice guy' who lets them do as they please" (Pimsleur, Sundland, & McIntyre 1963, p.34). Other criticisms were expressed of teachers "who are inconsistent in their discipline, who assign homework and do not follow up on it, or who use sarcasm and tear students down" (Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre 1963, p.34).

Students themselves are equally responsible for other demotivating aspects. Apart from the common characteristics of gifted underachievers in general, underachievers of a foreign language class represent distinguishable problems related to **motivation, attitude and learning strategies**.

Firstly, **motivation** is "one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/ foreign language learning" (Dörnyei 1998, p.117). According to him, "even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement" (Dörnyei 1998, p.117). Secondly, Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre (1963, p.44) suggested that "a negative **attitude** toward some or all foreigners might also affect achievement in language learning". As concluded

in their study, an underachiever might be “especially low in anxiety, reflecting a ‘who cares’ attitude of indifference and uninvolvedness” or he might be “so high in anxiety that he develops a ‘block’, becoming too tense to perform well in the foreign language” (Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre 1963, p.52). In either case, underachievement is inevitable. Last but not least, **learning strategies**, or “special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of the information” (O’Malley & Chamot 1990), also receive great attention in research about the acquisition of a foreign language. To put it simply, Cohen (1999) noted that “good” language learners appeared to use a larger number and range of strategies than “poor” language learners.

Due to their importance to the achievement of language gifted students, these factors acted as the baseline on which the researcher constructed the questionnaire for use in the participant collection.

2.4. Factors in Reversing Patterns of Underachievement

The complex set of factors causing poor student performance call for a comprehensive and systemic set of interventions involving changes in the curriculum and applications of different remedy strategies.

2.4.1. The curriculum

Yell (1971) claimed that an important curriculum frontier in the education of gifted students is to be found in helping them search for and develop their uniqueness. They need opportunity to develop their special enthusiasm or hobbies. Furthermore, Nunan (1988) developed a concept of the “negotiated model” in which “the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners”. This close collaboration is even more meaningful in the context of a second language classroom, and he highlighted the role of learners in “the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught” (Nunan 1988, p.2).

2.4.2. Remedy strategies

At the same time, Whitmore (cited in Delisle & Berger 2000) suggested three types of strategies that functioned to enrich students’ counseling experience and effectively reduced underachievement among them.

Supportive Strategies

According to the authors, there should be classroom techniques and designs that allow students to feel they are part of a “family”, versus a “factory”.

Supportive strategies include methods such as holding class meetings to discuss student concerns; designing curriculum activities based on the needs and interests of the children; and allowing students to bypass assignments on subjects in which they have previously shown competency.

Intrinsic Strategies

These strategies incorporate the idea that “students’ self-concepts as learners are tied closely to their desire to achieve academically” (Purkey & Novak cited in Delisle & Berger 2000). Thus, a classroom that invites positive attitudes is likely to encourage achievement. In classrooms of this type, “teachers encourage attempts, not just successes; they value student input in creating classroom rules and responsibilities; and they allow students to evaluate their own work before receiving a grade from the teacher” (Delisle & Berger 2000).

Remedial Strategies

As theorized, “teachers who are effective in reversing underachieving behaviors recognize that students are not perfect” - that “each child has specific strengths and weaknesses as well as social, emotional and intellectual needs” (Whitmore cited in Delisle & Berger 2000). With remedial strategies, students can excel in their areas of strength and interest while opportunities are provided in specific areas of learning deficiencies. This remediation is done in a safe environment in which mistakes are considered a part of learning for everyone, including the teacher.

As can be seen, the situation can only be improved when school and family work together for the benefits of students. Of equal importance, however, is the effort of students themselves in understanding what they need and trying to accomplish it under teachers’ instruction. Therefore, the researcher advocates the three strategies offered by Whitmore; at the same time, she finds a need to consider the curriculum factor in working for any desirable result.

2.5. Overview of the related studies in Vietnam and the research gaps

As mentioned earlier, there has been a handful of official information about the current situation facing Vietnam’s gifted high-school students. Most notable is a report concerning the IQ (Intelligence Quotient) and EQ (Emotional Quotient) of Vietnam’s gifted students, based on the findings from a research by Nguyen Kim Dung (cited in Anh Thu n.d.).

However, the inaccessibility of the primary resource deterred the researcher from testing the reliability and validity of the findings. Apart from this only study, findings about the characteristics and concerns of gifted students, not to mention underachieving gifted students in Vietnam, are few and far between. This strongly motivated the researcher into carrying out her own study to fill the gap and play a part in improving the situation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design: Multiple-case study method

As stated earlier, the research questions of this study are as follows:

Question 1: What are the characteristics of Vietnamese students who have high abilities but fail to demonstrate them in their school settings?

Question 2: What factors, from the students' perspective, are viewed as influencing gifted underachievers' educational experiences?

Question 3: What interventions, from the students' perspective, might reverse that situation?

These questions aim at investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Such information cannot be found through quantitative method, which gains access to a wide population and yields generalized results about a group of participants. Thus, the main method applied in this research is case study, which “attempts, on one hand, to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the event under study but at the same time to develop more general theoretical statements about regularities in the observed phenomena” (Fidel 1984, p.274).

In this study, the researcher applies the multiple-case study method, which allows exploring the phenomena under study through the use of a replication strategy. According to this model, if all or most of the cases provide similar results, there can be substantial support for the development of a preliminary theory that describes the phenomena (Eisenhardt 1989). From then on, readers can make generalizations based on their own situation and propose possible applications or transference. Another important factor is that multiple-case study would cast light on the perspective of the insiders, also known as the “emic perspective” (Mackey & Gass 2005), one of the researcher's primary concerns.

3.2. Setting of the study

Hai Duong is a small provincial city, located 60 km away from the capital city. Rated as a “Type 3 city” and ranking 35 out of 63 on the Provincial Competition Index (Van Nhat Thanh 2011), it has an average socioeconomic environment. Regarding tertiary education, *Nguyen Trai High School for Gifted Students* has long established itself nation-wide with a reputation for training

students well-roundedly and having students awarded for their performance at international merit competitions in sciences and at national competitions in all subjects (Le Van Canh 2010).

Students from all over the province take part in a highly competitive entrance exam in order to start their study at this school. The entrance tests include Math, Literature and one subject that they choose to specialize in. According to the High School Statute issued by Ministry of Education, no more than 0.10% of the province's population is entitled to attending High School for Gifted Students (Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, 2008).

As can be seen, Nguyen Trai High's students contribute to a vital intellectual resource for the whole province. Due to the particular context of Vietnam, where standardized test is still being used as the main form of evaluation, concerns about the validity of the admission procedure are out of focus in the current research. For the convenience of expression and analysis, the researcher decides to consider her participants as "**gifted students**" throughout the research.

3.3. Sampling

There needs to be a rationale for sampling intensively within a narrower band versus sampling widely across variables or attributes. Generally, sampling widely is done in an exploratory study so as not to prematurely rule out particular variables or factors (Duff 2008, p.119).

The sampling process in this study adapts the **Critical-case sampling**, i.e. choosing people who display the issue or set of characteristics in their entirety or in a way that is highly significant for their behavior (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2005, p.160).

3.4. Participant selection

Throughout the process of data analysis and finding discussion, all the selected participants were mentioned neither in real names or pseudonyms. Instead, each of them will be coded with numbers and letters in order to preserve their rights of privacy.

3.4.1. Student participant selection

The population of the research was 11th grade English – specialized students. Unlike the 10th graders, they had become familiarized with the educational environment of a school for gifted students; moreover, they had not reached the

critical turning point of preparing for the University Entrance Exam like their counterparts in the 12th grade. Thus, choosing 11th graders as the population was to minimize the undesired effects of variables on the research’s validity. There were 29 students in this class. The participant selection process can be viewed in the following diagram:

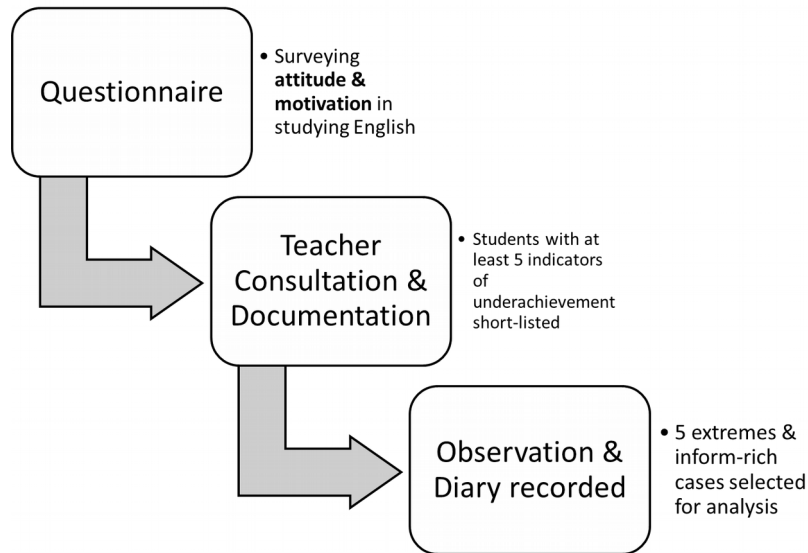


Diagram 2: Student Participant Selection Process

At the final stage, five participants were selected for interviews and closer observation. They were all students of the 11th grade English – specialized class. Most of them had studied English since secondary school, while S1 started a bit earlier with 11 years of learning this language.

Unlike others, S4 was living away from her family. As mentioned earlier, Nguyen Trai was the place for talented students from all over the province to gather and pursue study; therefore, S4 had to leave her hometown in Chi Linh district, which was 30 km far from the center of the province, to stay in a hostel near Nguyen Trai high school and continue her study.

Table 2: Participants’ demographic information

Participant	Age	Gender	Place of residence	Years of studying English	Average score of 3 monthly tests	Average score of semester I
S1	17	Female	Hai Duong	11	5.0	8.4
S2	17	Female	Hai Duong	6	6.1	9.3
S3	17	Female	Hai Duong	6	5.1	8.8
S4	17	Female	Chi Linh	6	5.5	8.7
S5	17	Male	Hai Duong	6	5.6	8.7

The only boy in this study, S5, used to have a problem in his digestive system and had to delay his study for four months during the previous academic year. Though he had come back to class, he had not fully recovered from the illness and was still under medication at the presence.

S2 and S1 both lived in Hai Duong city and belonged to a middle class family. As shared by these participants, their families were not wealthy and their parents all expected them to “*study hard*” in order to “*bring fame and pride*” to the family, which was “*the only way to overcome financial troubles*” (S2.I5.87).

The five participants differed widely in their scores on **Attitude and Motivation in learning English**. While the other four scored an average point, S4’s result was among the top highest.

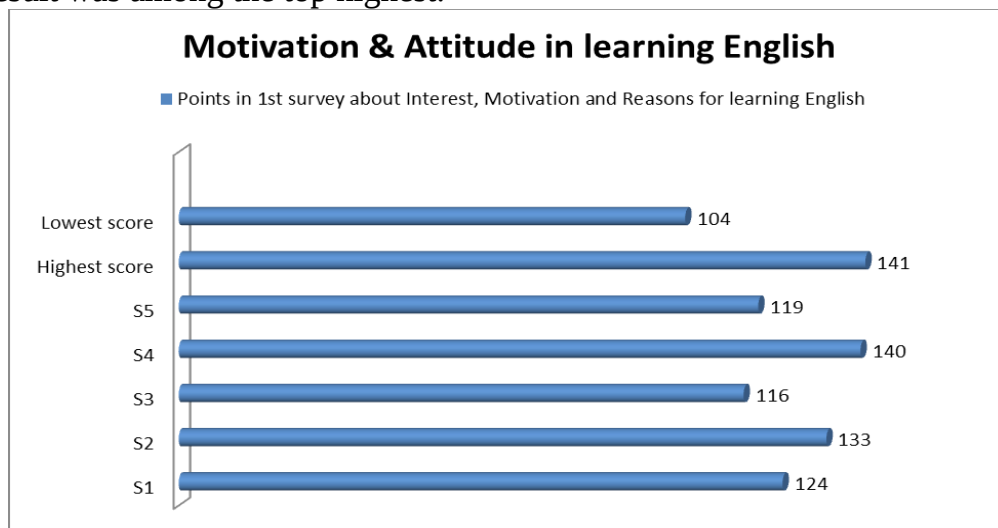


Diagram 3: Scores for Motivation & Attitude in Learning English

Interestingly, when the researcher collated this result with the average scores of the participants in the 03 monthly tests held by the school, the original rank was shifted, and more highly motivated students did not necessarily perform very well.

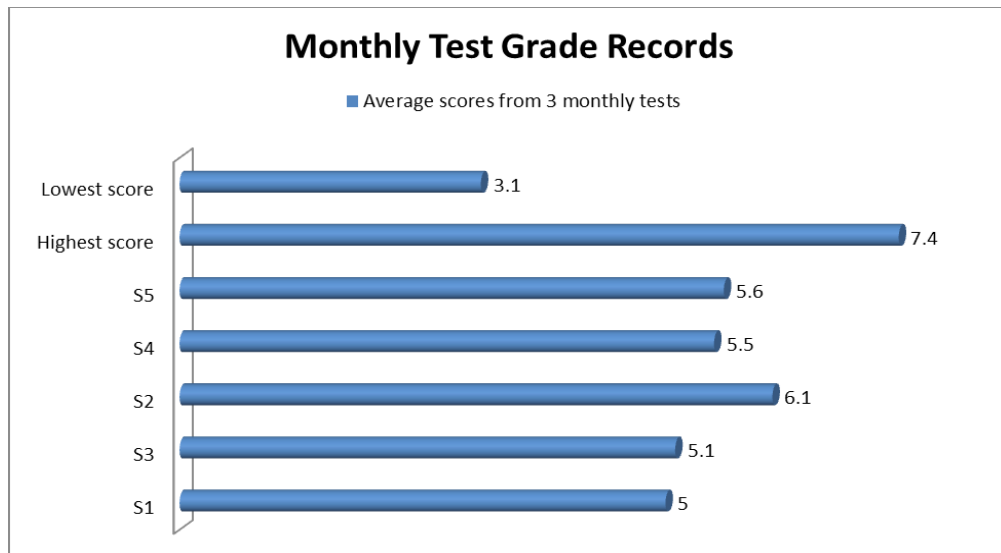


Diagram 4: Monthly Test Grade Records

Moreover, as the researcher showed the two English teachers of this class a list of indicators (*Appendix B*) for underachieving gifted students and asked them to list out 10 students that were most representative, she found all those five participants in the list of both teachers.

Generally, five participants were selected after the sampling because they manifested significant features for the successful analysis of the study. First of all, they showed distinctively different aspects of an underachieving gifted student. Secondly, they reported the process of studying English regularly, adhering to the researcher's instruction. Last but not least, they expressed a noticeable concern about their own study; they were aware that they were underachieving and showed constant evaluation and judgment about the actions of the teachers as well as themselves.

3.4.2. Teacher participants

There were two English teachers in charge of teaching the class, namely T1 and T2. The former was the Head of English Department, while the latter also worked as the form teacher of the class. T1 taught Writing, Speaking and Listening as the three main subjects, while T2 taught Reading and Grammar; moreover, both teachers provided the students with extra vocabulary and structures in their afternoon classes, outside the official morning class time. Having worked with the students for more than one year, they had an insightful grasp of the students' competence and characteristics.

Given the condition of Hai Duong as a small provincial city with few English centers or English clubs, these teachers were the only main source of English knowledge that the students could gain access to. They set a high priority on preparing students with knowledge for the entrance exam to university. At the same time, however, as one of the missions of a high school for gifted students, training students to take part in the National English Contest was a different aspect of their job. As a result, they had to balance between these two needs and invest lots of thoughts into the generic curriculum.

3.5. Data collection instruments

Using multiple sources of data allows researchers to “corroborate and augment evidence from other source” (Yin 2003, p.87). The researcher also adhered to the mnemonic of three E’s in (ethnographic) qualitative data collection: *experiencing* (participant observation), *enquiring* (interviewing), and *examining* (studying documents) from Wolcott (1994, p.156).

3.5.1. Questionnaire

Unlike a test, which “measures how well someone can do something”, questionnaire items “elicit information about the respondents in a non-evaluative manner, without gauging their performance against a set of criteria” (Dörnyei 2007, p.101). Thus, questionnaire was utilized to help the researcher gain general understanding about the participants.

It is noteworthy that the core part of the questionnaire about **Attitude towards English** and **Motivation for learning English** in this study (*Appendix C*) was adapted from that of Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre (1963) because the researcher shared the same concerns with these authors.

3.5.2. Diary

Diary methods were initialized in the field of psychology to study emotions and moods across situations in daily experience (Dörnyei 2007).

As Bolger et al. (cited in Dörnyei 2007, p.134) pointed out; “asking research participants to keep regular records of certain aspects of their daily lives allows the researcher to capture the particulars of experience in a way that is not possible using other methods”. Therefore, diary was selected as the main instrument to collect data for this research. By keeping timely records of what

happened in the class, participants would be able to express their feelings about their learning process; hence, their characteristics would be revealed naturally. Similarly, participants would realize what caused their problems (if any), and what may work better for them. As can be seen, **all the three research questions** can be disclosed via one single instrument.

After selecting participants into a shortlist of five students, the researcher contacted them and provided them with recording tools, i.e. pens and notebooks. Then they were instructed to take note of their feelings, emotions and opinions directly after each English lesson. A framework of guiding questions (*Appendix D*) was employed to better support participants. They were required to write on a regular basis and to reflect on the main issues being triggered by the researcher.

3.5.3. Observation

According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000, p.304), “[o]bservational data are attractive as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather ‘live’ data from ‘live’ situations”. For that reason, the researcher will be able to “become open-ended and inductive”, “discover things that participants might not freely talk about”, and lastly, “move beyond perception-based data” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, p.305). With keen awareness of these benefits, the researcher employed observation in order to triangulate the different sources of data and come up with the richest, most reliable and most comprehensive picture of the situation.

In accordance with having students record their thoughts into diaries, the researcher further observed the lessons in which these participants involve in the English learning activity in order to answer **Research Question 1** and **Research Question 2**.

The observation days were allocated on a weekly basis between lessons of two teachers, each of whom taking charge of certain skills and contents. It is worth mentioning that the whole process of observation did not interfere with their ordinary procedures of studying. The appearance of the researcher in the classroom was made natural and unobtrusive thanks to the fact that she previously spent some time talking the matter over with the students and made regular visits to the class before officially starting the process of data collection.

3.5.4. Interviews

At the end of the data collecting process, *in-depth interviews* with the five students and two teachers were carried out. Students had chances to reflect on their general impression about their learning process and clarify critical points that they mentioned in the diaries. At the same time, teachers were asked to reflect on their teaching process, their support for the students and their opinions about their students' expectations. Therefore, the interview instrument was employed to ensure that **all the three research questions** were answered thoroughly and reliably.

The research employed techniques of asking questions in the interviews as suggested by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2005) , including introducing question, follow-up question, probing question, specifying question, direct question, indirect question, structuring question, interpreting question and silence (pp.268-270). The **Interview guidelines** can be found in *Appendix F* and *Appendix G*.

3.5.5. Documents

Records of students' performance in three standardized Monthly tests as well as the end-term tests were collected and used as reference to single out students who demonstrated a discrepancy between the motivation to learn and the actual achievement.

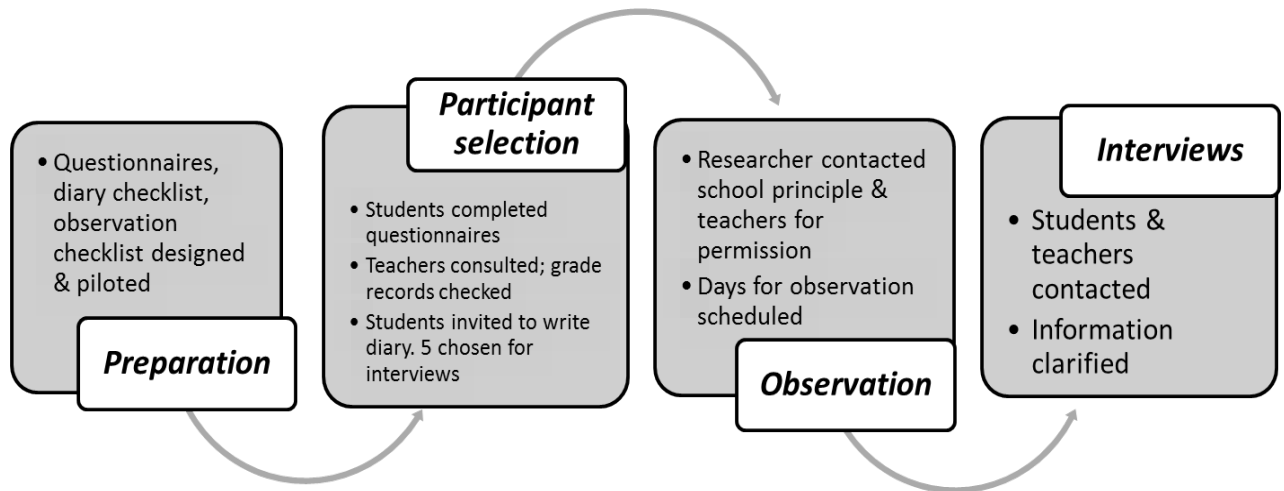
To sum up, all the data collection methods including Questionnaire, Diary, Observation, Interviews and Documents used in the current study, with specific functions and at specific periods of time can in the following table.

Table 3: Data Collection Method

Method	Data collection period (October 2011 – February 2012)	Data
Weekly diary by students	On-going 1-3 times per week, per student	- E-mail messages - Telephone conversations - Written journals - 111 reports total, about 25 different lessons
Interviews with [5] students	Interview 1: after the period of writing self-report Interview 2: end of the study	- Audiotaped and transcribed interviews - 10 interviews total - Average 01 hours each
Classroom observation	On-going	- Field notes on 5 lessons; 4 official and 1 additional (300 minutes of observation)
Interviews with [2] teachers	On-going informal interviews: after observation Formal, in-depth interviews: end of the study	- Audiotaped and transcribed formal interviews 2 formal interviews total, average 1 hour
Documents	On-going	- Course outlines - Grade reports (03 monthly test; 1 end-term test)

3.6. Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure consists of *four main steps*, each of which is taken according to a designed timeline. The steps



are illustrated as follows:

Diagram 5: Data Collection Procedure

3.7. Data analysis method

Qualitative procedures were used to address the study’s research questions. The first step in data analysis begins with a tentative list of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1984) to guide the process.

Coding is the process of refining the information obtained to make it manageable. According to Le Van Canh (2011), in qualitative research, codes are “not numerical but verbal, amounting to short textual labels” and they are “left open and flexible” (p. 129).

Thus, narratives from each self-report in participants’ diaries were coded for themes based on the characteristics of underachieving gifted students reviewed in the literature. Similarly, interviews with each participant were coded based upon the essential questions of the study and related to specific questions posed during the interviews.

As the main sources of data are from weekly diaries and interviews, the coding system for names of participants in this study follows the format **participant – source of data – number of entry** for reports from diary; and **participant – source of data – line of reference** for interviews. For example,

S1.D3 means Student 1, diary, entry 3; S2.I3.37 means Student 2, interview 3, speaker turn 37; T1.I6.12 means Teacher 1, interview 6, speaker turn 12. The numbering of each participant is based on the initial letter in their first name, with number 1 being the first alphabetically ordered name and so on. All the interviews and diary entries were produced in Vietnamese and the extracts (*Appendix H; Appendix I*) presented in the study were translated by the researcher.

The indicators of underachievement fall into five categories, namely **personality characteristics**, **internal mediators**, **differential thinking skills/ styles**, **maladaptive strategies** and **positive attributes**. The causes of underachievement consisted of comments about **Personal**, the **School**, the **Family**, and the **Community**. The desired interventions consisted of **altering one's attitude**, **learning adequate study skills**, and **better cooperation with teachers and peers**.

Below is the illustration of how the data were categorized in this study.

Table 4: Coding of Characteristics of underachieving gifted students

Responses	Coding categories
<i>Why is English so difficult?? Help me, I want to die!</i>	Personality characteristics (PC)
<i>Why am I so useless? My mum would be very upset about this result.</i>	Internal mediators (IM)
<i>How can they write down the words repeatedly to study? I want something logical, like a rule, to study it, rather than memorizing.</i>	Differential thinking skills/ styles (DTS)
<i>I wonder why I'm so easily distracted; I just can't look at those words for half an hour!</i>	Maladaptive strategies (MS)
<i>I love drawing. I just draw all the time if possible.</i>	Positive attributes (PA)

Table 5: Coding of Reasons for underachievement

Responses	Coding categories
<i>There is no counseling office in the school, though sometimes I really don't know what to do to overcome all this.</i>	School (S)
<i>My mum always compares me with the relatives; it's so stressful.</i>	Family (F)
<i>They are just too competitive, as if they would lose if they just answer me one question.</i>	Community (C)

<i>People always say that I'm lazy. That's right, and I don't even know how to be less lazy, I don't know how to study.</i>	Personal (P)
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This chapter has presented and discussed the research design, rationale for choice of methods, data collection strategies and procedures which are employed in the current study. For a purpose of gaining insights into the context, it is strongly argued in this chapter that the choice of a case study method is appropriate. Such a research strategy helps to investigate the experiences that individual students are going through, the dynamics of study in their environment, and their own judgments about a better way for their study process. Last but not least, approaches to coding and analysis have been described to make the study trustworthy and transparent.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research question 1: What are the characteristics of Vietnamese students who have high abilities but fail to demonstrate them in their school settings?

The multifaceted answer to this question was gathered through the instruments of questionnaire, diary, observation and interview with the participants throughout an on-going process. The findings will be presented based on both Reis & McCoach's table **Characteristics of Gifted Underachievers** and the remarkable **characteristics of language gifted students** found in the literature review.

4.1.1. The giftedness

As the linguistic giftedness had been reflected through the admission procedure that the participants underwent in order to enter the English-gifted class, the current study will pay further attention to other kinds of intelligence. Among many, **creativity** was the first trait to be widely shared by the participants. For example, S4 and S2 showed a keen interest in drawing when they illustrated their diaries with many images as well as graphics (*Appendix I*). S4 further expressed in the follow-up interview that she could draw “almost everywhere” and liked to “express my feelings and thoughts through those images”. Sometimes these

participants drew to illustrate the new words or vocabulary encountered while studying English and that helped them memorize better.

Besides, S1 seemed to be very **emotional** and keen on **written communication**. She addressed the notebook as “*Smart Diary*” (*Appendix I*), and wrote reports regularly in form of long letters to this imaginary friend. After the data collection period, she thanked the researcher and revealed that “*I actually love this kind of writing, because it’s like I have someone to share my feelings about problems that I can’t seek for help from people around*”. “*By looking back at what I’ve written*”, she added, “*I can also point out what my problem is, and think seriously about how to make progress*”. This outcome was unexpected, and it is a valuable clue for the implications that follow later in this study.

S3 and S5 manifested a high **logical and critical thinking skill** in daily activities. S3 frequently looked at an issue from both sides to give reasonable explanation or make impartial judgments about it. Meanwhile, T1 remarked that S5 was “*actually quite smart*”, in that he could “*understand and answer many questions that others fail to*”.

4.1.2. Personality characteristics

It first should be noticed that several personality characteristics listed in Reis & McCoach’s table did not appear among the participants of the current study. In reality, no participant showed any visible symptom of being “alienated or withdrawn; distrustful, or pessimistic”. Nor were they “aggressive, hostile, resentful, or touchy”. The “passive-aggressive trait disturbance” was not demonstrated, either.

However, “**low self-esteem, low self-concept, low self-efficacy**” was a very common characteristic, which was vividly and repeatedly expressed through the diary reports of the participants. Apart from S5, the participants expressed their self-esteem very lowly. They acknowledged that other classmates were better than them, especially at speaking and listening; while they were always “*brainless*”, “*careless*”, “*forgetful*” and “*lazy*”. These words appeared highly frequently in the participants’ reports, and most of the time, in contexts when they talked about themselves, rather than recited the opinions from others.

All of the participants expressed certain levels of being **anxious, impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive, or distractible**; though it was not to the extent that they exhibit such ADD or ADHD symptoms as gathered from the literature review.

The main reason for S5 to be highly distractible was that he always felt sleepy, especially while sitting still to do the exercises. He claimed that he always went to bed early, i.e. 11 p.m. at the latest, however, it was difficult for him to keep listening to the teacher and not moving around or talking to his peers. In most other lessons, especially those with T2, he could not help “*nodding off*” and tried to find ways to sleep without her noticing.

Unlike S5, S1 and S4 often found themselves low-productive and inattentive even when wide awake. Remarkably, S1 revealed that she lost focus all the time – “*sometimes I chat with the girl next to me, sometimes I daydream about a ‘significant other’, or fiddle with things around – I just don’t know how to keep focus in T2’s lessons*” (S1.D13). Meanwhile, S4 easily wandered her thoughts away from the lesson when she encountered long and difficult exercises: “*Unfortunately, I missed the first part, and I could not correctly arrange the rooms in the diagram. So I stopped listening and thought about architecture.*” (S4.D1)

S2 was easily affected by other people’s reactions towards her, either positive or negative. For instance, she always felt anxious and awkward if the teacher was standing nearby while she was doing the exercises. Similarly, she felt “*embarrassed*” when being teased about the lisp between “l” and “n” by her peers; and the matter would become worse when the teacher approached – she would “*stutter or forget all about what’s on my mind*”.

Indicators of being **depressed and dependent, or less resilient than high achievers** were also vividly depicted among the participants.

The inflexibility was reflected in S1’s way of thinking when she failed to follow teacher’s instructions during class. One time, while the teacher was lecturing new knowledge, S1 hurried herself up to copy down everything on the slide. As a result, S1 reported, “*when she [the teacher] asked me a question, I hadn’t thought of that yet. Lucky me, I was whispered an answer by the girl next table*”. After that, S1 admitted being “*so silly*” in doing things ahead, as the teacher spared enough time for students to copy the knowledge into their notebooks later on.

It appeared that S2 was always concerned about what the teacher expected from her; therefore, she heavily depended on teachers' instructions for fears of "doing wrong" and was not comfortable in experimenting new ideas. For example, in a writing lesson about pie-chart, the teacher showed the class a model essay and asked them to rewrite it. S2 did not want to "copy" the model and decided to "deliberately choose a different way to analyze the pie". Surprisingly enough, she quickly felt "regretful" and "sorry" for not following the model, rigidly reasoning "what if mine doesn't suit her style, and she will give me a low mark?"

Unlike S2, who was upset about reusing the ready-made structures, S3 was dissatisfied about the input provided: "She hadn't taught me how to capture the general ideas; how many parts are there? How to write each part? – Yet, she forced us to write the complete essay, with just some model expressions. It's so difficult!" Noticeably, S3 did not raise any question about her confusions – instead, she bore it in mind and still tried to complete the task. This resulted in her losing heart and feeling negative about her "thinking ability" at the end of the lesson.

4.1.3. Internal Mediators

Throughout the diaries as well as the follow-up interviews, the participants did not show any negative attitude toward school, or being antisocial and rebellious like what was found in the literature review. However, other internal mediators appeared with a high frequency.

Interestingly, though the participants differed in the competence of English, they more or less shared the same **fear of failure, and normally avoided challenging situations to protect their self-image or their ability.**

These participants were weary of being asked for an answer, especially when they had not prepared for that question or they were unsure about the accuracy of their response. It was commonly seen in all the five diaries that the participants counted their turn beforehand and focused on preparing for that particular question until they were called by the teachers. Notably, the turns were predictable because the teachers normally called the students in order. As explained by S3 in the follow-up interview, "I know no one would scold me for a wrong answer, but still, it's embarrassing to answer wrong, and I want to save face". As a matter of fact, they

all felt “*a relief*” and “*thankful*” or “*lucky*” when they could give a correct answer or “*get away without answering that tough question*”.

Likewise, even when the task was within their ability, the participants still preferred to remain silent or hesitant just because they are not “*one hundred percent sure*”. It would be more tangible to look at one single situation, when T2 checked her students’ homework on idiomatic expressions from last lesson, and see how the participants reacted:

I was fairly afraid that I hadn’t learned very thoroughly so I didn’t dare raising hand. But soon afterwards I deeply regretted not trusting myself. Everyone who volunteered to go to the board was given a 10. There’s gone another chance to make up for the bad marks! (S2.D4)

Those guys that volunteered to go to the board must have learned all the phrases by heart; therefore all three of them got mark 10. I’m not sure if I could’ve been able to do that, I can’t memorize those ones that are kind of difficult. (S1.D5)

As can be seen, there was too much caution going on in their mind before they realized that the chance was desirable and they needed to go for it. Then, in turn, they felt sorry and regretful for not being more decisive. This pattern of thinking was repeated exceptionally high throughout S2 and S1’s diaries.

Another trend recorded is that those participants naturally **attributed successes to luck and failures to lack of ability**; moreover, they tended to **externalize conflict and problems**.

S5 recalled the time when he ranked 4th out of 29 after a monthly test of the previous school year. He said that he found it “*extremely inexplicable*” when other peers did not score as high as usual; assuming “*there was something wrong to their mind, otherwise I wouldn’t have outgone them so impressively*” (S5.I2.34).

When it came to failure, the participants tended to seriously blame themselves for “*lacking the ability*” or “*simply can’t be good at English*”. S4 kept wondering whether she had “*a mental disability*”, because she always confused this word with another and fixed a “*right word*” into a “*wrong one*” in the tests. Also, she thought that her memory did not serve her as well as others”; that “*stuffing new words into my head is the most difficult and time-consuming task ever*”.

Apparently, the female participants had a higher trend of externalizing their problems than their male counterpart. The ways of expressing emotions were various, ranging from singing (S4), drawing (S2 & S1) to socializing on the Internet via Facebook or Yahoo Messenger (S1 & S4).

Last but not least, the participants were constantly **self-critical** or **perfectionistic** and **feeling guilty about not meeting the expectations of others**.

S1 complained a lot about her “*being lazy*”. Similarly, S4 assumed that she had been “*infected with the lazy disease*”. They could not find a way to memorize the numerous words and structures after each lesson, and criticized themselves for “*not trying hard enough*”. S1 was emotionally expressive in judging her own study progress. She criticized herself not only for the low performance but also for not taking action to improve the situation. She felt guilty when “*I ask Mom for lots of money buying reference books but I never had time to touch that stuff, and my study is up and down all the time*”. In the case of S4, the need to “*learn well and make Mom proud*” was what made her feel guilty for not achieving higher results.

Meanwhile, S2 was very upset about her performance during the current school year. On receiving results of the third monthly test, she felt ashamed to see “*many classmates scoring 7, several others made it to over 8, while I couldn’t even get near to that mark*”

This time last year, I didn’t even have to think about the scores, as I always ranked 3rd or 4th. But this year, I fell to 14th. Oh, why is it that they keep moving forward while I’m always rolling down? I’m so desperate! Why do they learn so well? That feeling of plummeting from high above is so painful and regretful. (S2.D9)

4.1.4. Differential Thinking Skills/ Styles

“Differential thinking style” was strongly demonstrated through the fact that all of the participants **performed lower on sequential tasks such as repeating separated words and spelling**.

S4 had persistently shared her hopelessness in memorizing words and structures after each lesson. Seeing herself as a “*curious and enquiring learner*”, S4 admitted that she did not like the way “*knowledge is available for students to take in by memorizing*”; instead, she preferred to “*absorb knowledge through understanding, analyzing and applying it*”. She expressed that she wanted to study “*actively*”, suggesting that “*the teacher can let us go online and find exercises suitable for our level and we can ask for support when needed*”. For her, T1 was giving out exercises and assumed that all the students could finish them, while in fact “*I was dragging on as it was over my level*”. Similarly, each time she described

the mundane cycle of work in Tuesday afternoons, S2 was also desperate at the way new knowledge was poured into her head.

S2 also **demonstrated integrity in rejecting unchallenging course work**, which was to “*copy*” the model essay without thinking on one’s own way. She said that T1’s teaching style was “*quite conservative*” because “*she wants us to strictly follow her ideas*”, but that sometimes “*captures my creativity*”.

4.1.5. Maladaptive Strategies

It is surprising to find out how the participants were repeatedly reporting a **lack of goal-oriented behaviors** and for most of the time; they **failed to set realistic goals for themselves**.

When being asked by the researcher, all the five participants said that they never set a long term goal for the study of English in particular and other subjects in general. The most precise extent to which they set goals in their study was listing out the items of homework to complete within one week so as not to miss any. Because they did not have a goal, the absence of goal-oriented behaviors was foreseeable and understandable. This resulted in passive involvement; the participants just received what was presented by the teachers in class without asking about issues that they needed more help on, or self-evaluating to see whether they had met what they first set.

Furthermore, the participants **possessed poor self-regulation strategies; lacked perseverance** and **lacked self-control**.

Reporting a slightly more severe trouble in regulating his time and managing his work, S5 was fully aware that he needed to be “*less lazy*”, but he did not have a clue how to. He did spend time doing homework; nonetheless, he could not tell for sure what he did exactly within one evening of study, and the work completed was usually within the minimum requirements. He had no extra time for doing supplementary practice or learning new vocabulary. Generally, S5 was more carefree than others, to the extent that he lacked some control of himself. He easily found things acceptable in either one way or another; but this attitude was so dominant that it reduced the motivation and determination to improve his performance.

At the other end of the scale, S3 was among the most panicked learners when talking about coping with stress and frustration. She always felt “*stuffed*”, “*stressed*” or “*suffocated*” in T1’s lessons because of the speed at which the work was regulated. It seemed that she could hardly tolerate frustration, and may encounter unpleasant feelings when the workload was increased.

The same case was true for S1, S4 and S2. They repeatedly claimed that they “*will try harder from now on*”, but then the heavy workload and the difficult or unfamiliar topics in Listening, Speaking and Reading lessons soon deterred their efforts. Again, they turned back to the state of blaming themselves, worrying or feeling hopeless. It was obvious that those participants lacked perseverance as well as self-control.

4.2. Research Question 2: What factors, from the students’ perspective, were influencing gifted underachievers’ educational experiences?

From what they have shared in the diaries and follow-up interviews, there existed three most influential factors towards the study progress of the participants. As illustrated through the diagram – the darker the box, the more influential the factor – the **Self** was regarded as the largest influence, then comes demotivating aspects related to **teachers and peers** and lastly, **the curriculum**. Contrary to the hypothesis proposed by the researcher based on the literature review, the **family factor** did not play an outstanding role in the participants’ studying process. Therefore, this factor will be reserved as a reference point to come up with the final conclusion later on.

As the researcher has already provided a composite picture of the underachieving gifted student in **Research Question 1** with various identifying characteristics and noticeably a lack of competence in regulating their own study activities, the **Self** factor will not be further discussed in this section.

With the above-mentioned exclusions, the current section is going to focus on two remaining issues, namely **the curriculum** and **the interrelations between the teachers, the participants, and their peers**, in the dynamics of everyday classroom.

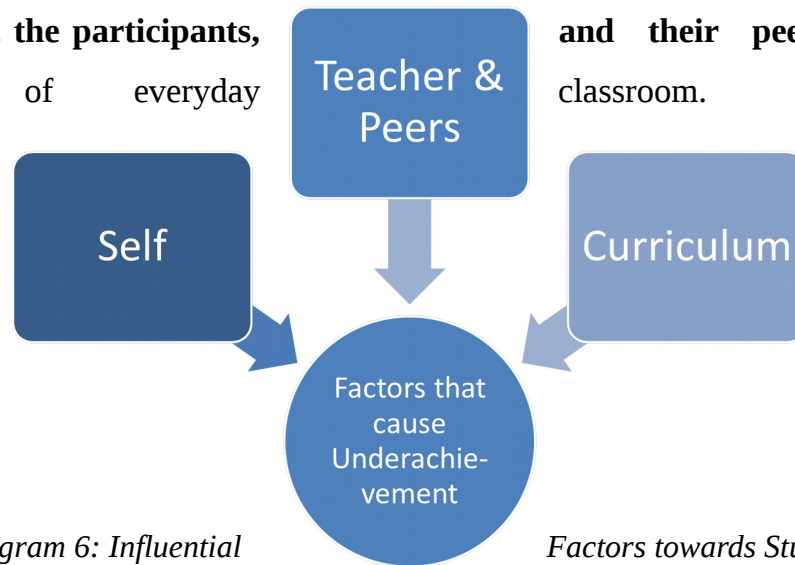


Diagram 6: Influential

Factors towards Study Progress

4.2.1. The curriculum Program objectives

As the Head of the English Department, T1 stated that “*the goals for different groups of students in the same class during three years are not totally the same*” (T1.I7.12). Students who were selected into the National Team would pursue higher goals in terms of English proficiency; while the rest were expected to take the university entrance exam with confidence after three years studying English as their major. However, the common aim of the course was “*training students into well-rounded English learners, with one 45-minute session assigned to each of the four communicative skills, namely Speaking, Listening, Writing and Reading*” (T1.I7.28). Regardless of goals or proficiency levels, students study the same content during the official training time: “*it is not until the first half of Grade 12 will the National Team be chosen and decided on, so from now till then, they will have to work under increasing pressure*” (T2.I6.72).

However, from what was observed in reality and what was shared by the teachers, a large portion of class time was spent on grammar and vocabulary drills. T1 viewed that it was quite easy to communicate in English because “*the knowledge required is very little*”. Meanwhile, their aim is “*to improve academic English*”, which needed much more “*sweats and tears*”.

Even the vendors at Hoan Kiem Lake could speak English fluently, just to sell some postcards. Then Speaking and Listening aren’t the most important skills,

right? Of course it needs to focus on the right subjects. If someone only needs communicative English, then yes. But these students need academic English (T1.I7.70).

Materials

Although the course books used to teach the students varied, there appeared two distinct trends of materials being discussed by the students. The first one, used by T1, was typically very challenging while the second one, used by T2, was normally more down-to-earth.

The common problem of all the participants was that they could not cover everything taught in each unit of T1's materials. Statistically, 89% of all the entries written after T1's lessons mention the workload and level of difficulty that was facing the participants.

The exercises are so difficult! They are all new words to me. I find it a waste of time to look up for those words in the dictionary – there are countless meanings and examples for each single word. [...] Why does it have so many?! It's even impossible to make guesses, because I know none of the four options. (S3.D6)

Meanwhile, T2's lessons were normally spent on reading or doing exercises in the standardized textbook required by Ministry of Education for high schools all over the country. This was what S5 thinks about this material:

This morning while working on the book "Advanced English", I realized some terrible things. First, that book was written by The South, following the American English style and the content is no better than the mainstream textbook (written by The North, British English). It's even easier. I'm so surprised that the word "advanced" is only a label. This doesn't make sense. (S5.D4)

This view was also shared by his other counterparts – they mostly did not understand why they had to spend at least one class period on the textbook that was already too easy, especially in comparison with exercises in the other materials given by their teachers. S4 seemed quite critical in talking about this: "*the book was written long time ago, while the English level at this age of this student generation has been much increased, so should there be a more updated one?*" (S4.D8)

As reasoned by T2, it was compulsory to teach some part of the textbook during class time, though she was aware that the students would get bored. Thus, she only chose some part that would give students a chance to practice speaking. Other than that, "*there is not much else to exploit*", said T2.

By and large, there appear a few issues in the curriculum mentioned by the underachievers. First, there was a discrepancy in the level of difficulty of the materials.

The exercises were both too challenging and too simple, which was sometimes confusing and made it hard for the participants to regulate. Second, the content had a much stronger emphasis on building up vocabulary as well as training writing and reading skills. The other two skills, Speaking and Listening, were not the focus of training outside of the official time, i.e. 45 – minute class periods.

4.2.2. The teachers

Teacher 1 (T1)

T1 was reported to be “*very strict*”, “*inexplicably cold*” and “*distant*” towards her students. Despite claiming that “*the teacher was still devoted into the lesson as usual*”, S3 also added, “*this can’t make me less scared of her because it’s still not easy to access her at all*”. There was one writing lesson, when she could not finish the in-class practice because “*the graphs were confusing already and her face was frowning, I wondered if we did something wrong, and though I didn’t know, I felt a little stressed*.” Later on, when T1 returned the end-term test papers, S3 came to ask herself, “*I don’t know if others felt the same, but I seemed to have a heart attack when she was coming near to return the test paper*”. Unlike what she previously expected of a high average score for the whole class, S3 was thrilled to see “*her face like an assassin*” and to pick up what the teacher said “*disappointed... shock...but we must face up...blah blah...*” At that time, S3 said she had a heavy headache because she “*lacked oxygen for breathing*”.

Although they did not feel so strongly affected, other participants more or less shared the same view about T1’s manner. Another point added by S4 was that the teacher seemed “*overtly happy when talking about the Math class*”. This made S4 feel “*unconfident, as if I was even worse than them at English*”, and she didn’t enjoy being compared with a favorite class of her English teacher.

What is more, the way T1 determined the workload given to her students also made S2 feel “*worried*” and “*confused*”:

I find it kind of strange. This is really a good book, but she goes so fast, which makes knowledge vapor away from my head before I could absorb anything!!!
[...] She didn’t explain and **I was so afraid of asking her.** (S2.D7)

At a more severe level, S1 gradually accepted the fact that she was always falling behind. Except for lessons when she came to class fully prepared, i.e. checking new words in a few units ahead, S1 found herself much slower than other

peers. In a typical lesson, she had to divide her attention between following the teacher in checking her peers' answers and nervously counting till her turn to answer the next questions. As a result, she lost focus of what was going on.

However, no one among the participants denied T1's effort in managing the class with a variety of activities. With hindsight, it was S3 herself that claimed the effects of T1's strictness on her study.

Because she is so strict, we couldn't play around and had to focus wholeheartedly on the lesson. It's stressful, but a lot of knowledge was stuffed into my head that way. I'm satisfied for that (and only for that). (S3.D2)

Even though she admitted being "*scared of getting caught for random essay submission*"; "*afraid of in-class writing*"; "*hesitant in doing home writing*" – S1 herself could not explain why she liked learning Writing with T1. "*Maybe because she instructed us step by step, very strictly and carefully*", she said (S1.D4).

This strictness was seen from a different angle by S5, who attributed his sharp focus of attention during class time to the fact that T1 was "*so serious that I could not joke around, do private stuff or nod off. The only thing I could do is let myself stirred into her lessons*" (S5.I2.44)

Teacher 2 (T2)

At the other end of the spectrum, T2 was generally seen as "*friendly*" but also "*too easy-going*" by the participants. For example, S5 and S1 always fell asleep in her lessons but they got off without any punishment. As reported in S5's diary:

Sometimes I fell asleep but she didn't know. Same as chatting in class. Even if she knew, she would just remind us (and her facial expression looked just like she was joking! ^^) (S5.D3)

Another participant, S4, was not very happy that T2 accepted sleeping students in her class. In a reading lesson about writing summaries, S4 remarked that "*the lesson was quite interesting, but some still collapsed to the table*". Meanwhile, S5, one of the sleeping students, reasoned that "*I can't sit still and move from one reading passage to another. I want some activities so that I could talk and feel awake.*"

Unlike S5, S1 did feel "*guilty*" because she had nodded off in T2's lesson. But she was clueless in coping with this situation: "*I have no idea how to resist the sleepiness whenever reading long text. If only she could change the teaching method, like, using projector to illustrate the lesson and playing games.*" (S1.D17)

Meanwhile, S2 and S3 found the speed of T2's lessons going too slow. Naturally, S3 went on to compare the speeds in two teachers' lessons, one "is extremely slow" while the other "is like the storm of... the highest degree" (S3.D16). At the same time, S2 confessed that she often brought up the exercises of other subjects to work on, while waiting for the teacher to correct or explain the questions.

4.2.3. Peers

The participants had various experiences and thoughts about their peers. Generally speaking, the prevailing atmosphere in the class was highly competitive. However, each participant perceived this fact with a different attitude.

S5 expressed his annoyance at the way "the girls keep screening my test paper to see if the teacher missed any mistake". If his mark was really low, then "they'll leave me alone", but if not, "they will either read my paper very carefully to compare mine with theirs, or pull a long face as if scoring high was my fault" (S5.D20). He did not like competition and accepted the marks the way they were.

In one lesson at the end of the semester, when the class had to check their test scores to see if there was any mistake, S1 was "a bit angry" when her classmates quickly spotted a misprint that made her average score turn higher, and had corrected it by themselves before she reported to the teacher. She felt that her classmates did not respect her. "Of course I can't have higher scores than them, why are they so anxious that the misprint can make me rank any higher in the class??" (S1.D27) For the rest of the lesson, S1 kept wandering her thoughts about the competitiveness of the girls and did not pay attention to the lesson:

As I was angry, I didn't focus much while learning the new topic "History of Chemistry". I fiddled with the computer or sat inattentively despite the teacher lecturing so enthusiastically. I knew you [the other girls] were afraid that I could get a higher grade. Stop it, I don't even dream! Oh Diary, I'm as mad at them as mad at myself! (S1.D27)

Likewise, peer pressure drew S4 to think negatively when someone had a better result. "When she praised X, I felt as if I had been pushed into a hole. Yes! To be exact, it was as if I was submerged into water. I did make efforts, but they seem to go nowhere, they mean nothing to the teacher" (S4.D10). S4 confessed that she felt "tottery" when seeing her peer smile contentedly at the teacher's praises. "I cheerfully congratulated her but felt deeply ashamed inside", said S4, in her diary.

On the other hand, lowly motivated and uninterested peer brought S4 to another type of ailment. She was particularly depressed because of the boy sitting next to her throughout the semester:

I'm so helpless at X, he's driving me crazy! I told him that he was the laziest creature in the class, and then he argued that those guys from Y and Z high schools were even lazier!?!?! Can someone help me? [...] Will this bad luck go with me for all my life???(S4.D18)

Unlike the other four participants, S2 considered herself as “*belonging to the middle – sometimes I want to compete but some other times I want to learn with a partner. Let's say 60 - 40*” (S2.I5.65). Carrying many characteristics of a perfectionist, she was afraid of failure and strongly wanted to enter the National Team for next year's English contest. She always wondered why some other peers were exceptionally good at listening or speaking. However, she also mentioned being teased by her peers for the “*funny pronunciation*”, which gradually deterred her from wanting to speak.

4.3. Research question 3: What interventions, from the students' perspective, might reverse that situation?

4.3.1. The Self

The participants were fully aware that they were the main subjects to bear responsibility for their own study progress. There were three main aspects that they perceived as they needed to work on, namely **Changing Attitude, Improving Study Skills** and **Cooperating with Teachers and Peers**. The last aspect is more external oriented; therefore it will be discussed separately under a different angle.

As expressed in their diaries and in the interviews, the participants were very serious about changing their own attitude in order to improve the situation. All the four female participants expressed strong and constant determination in “*working harder*” and “*never giving up*”. However, they were too sensitive and easily felt demotivated when receiving little support from the environment. A low self-esteem caused them to feel unstable and insecure whenever they made a new attempt. This accumulated to the stress already of existence in the daily workload. For this aspect, thus, the participants remained clueless in seeking a solution for themselves.

Apart from changing attitude, all the five participants expressed the need to build up proper study skills. As one with a very troublesome personal routine, S5 showed his concerns about arranging a logical working timetable, “*so that I could*

better control what to work on and be less lazy” (S5.I2.57). Similarly, the other participants hoped that they had someone share experience in learning vocabulary effectively and utilizing the learned knowledge. Such was the guidance they had never received since entering high school. This partly explained for the heavy dependence on teachers’ instruction and the inflexibility in handling their own work.

It is a paradox that the participants considered themselves as determining factors in improving their underachievement but they were unable to find satisfactory solutions for themselves. In other words, their perception about self-help strategies was poorly developed and weakly held throughout the study.

4.3.2. The Curriculum

All of the participants expressed a hope for some changes in the current curriculum, especially the materials, in terms of both quantity and quality.

First, they all hoped that the workload particularly in T1’s lessons could be reduced, so that the materials could be better exploited. S4 pointed out that “*there should be different exercises for those who are good already and who need more practice, otherwise I will forever fall behind*” (S4.I3.87).

Second, the five participants showed the need to practice more speaking and listening, although they did not claim they were confident about these skills. In other words, it was because they were most concerned about making people understand what they said and understanding what people said in English that these participants wanted to improve their speaking and listening skills. S4 wrote that she wanted to learn “*something practical*”, rather than “*cramming new words and structures all the time*”, reasoning “*I will have to communicate in English a lot when I enter university or even when I work with foreigners*” (S4.D10&I3.64). This was also presented in S3 and S2’s diaries as well as follow-up interview.

Concerning these two main issues, the participants hoped for a better designation of materials, with changes in the content of standard textbook and a clear differentiation for learners at different levels of proficiency. Besides, they wanted to practice the communicative skills in more proportion of class time.

4.3.3. Teachers and Peers

Teachers

From the view of the participants, there were two distinct trends of intervention expected from T1 and T2.

On concerning T1’s approach, S2 wished that the teacher would analyze the questions for her instead of “*imposing the keys*” on her. She felt “*overloaded*” partly

because of the amount of new knowledge and partly because she was “*merely trying to remember rather than understand those keys*”. As revealed in the follow-up interview, S2 said, “*I’d rather go slower but understand further than swipe so quickly through the exercises and come back to memorize their keys at home.*” (S2.I5.25) From what S1 revealed through both her diary and the follow-up interview, “*only when T1 goes slower a bit can I get any better and focus more on the lesson. But I know this won’t happen, so honestly sometimes I just let things drift*” (S1.D8).

When mentioning the approach of T2, S4 wondered “*maybe she should be stricter?*” so that the class atmosphere could be more effective and students focus better on their study without feeling uninvolved or lowly motivated. Also, the slow pace of the lessons during T2’s lessons was said to contribute to the loose focus of students in the class. S3 gave a suggestion about the exercising correcting process: “*Actually she doesn’t need to go over every single question because there are some that we already know, and her explanations are sometimes so detailed that we forgot what the main point is.*” (S3.I1.62)

Peers

The changes related to peers mentioned by the participants included a less competitive atmosphere between class members and a better seat arrangement that enables students to exchange knowledge and learn from each other.

Sharing the same view point against competition in the class, S4, S3 and S1 were constantly wishing they could have a real study partner “*who is better than me, so that he or she could pull me up from the next-to-the-last position*” (S1.I4.78); or who “*wouldn’t turn me down or ignore me but share with me what she knows*” (S3.I1.80). Meanwhile in reality, they did not have much chance to cooperate, instead, were continually bothered by trivial issues related to the test scores or peer performance.

S5 rarely studied with someone else outside class hour, but when asked about his favorite study partner, S5 mentioned another boy in the class, who “*really has a knack of English – he does know what to learn and what not to; also, he speaks English quite well*”. Interestingly, S5 was hesitant about choosing a female study partner; because he was once caught staying after class and studying new vocabulary with a girl, then his friends kept teasing him about that. In his opinion, overall, people should only be “*mean*” about grades and ranks when they had the

intention of joining the National Team. For others who just chose to take the entrance exam to university, *“it is preferable that we study together and don’t take the grades too seriously”*.

Both in the diary and the follow-up interview, S4 expressed a desire to have a partner who *“is serious about learning; hardworking and understands what I think or what I need in order to help me with that”*. It was not important to her that the partner was excellent at English but he or she should *“get on well with me in many aspects, not only in learning English.”* (S4.I3.74). In fact, she had been asking for a seat change several times, thinking *“it’s so unfair that the smart students always sit next to each other”*. She wanted to exchange her knowledge in Math, a subject that she was performing well, with someone who was good at English, so that both of them could progress together. This intention was also stated in the follow-up interview with S3.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of findings

The study has led to fruitful findings about underachieving language gifted high-school students, with a particular impression about the grammar-competence objective that has long existed in Vietnam's tertiary education.

Research question 1: What are the characteristics of Vietnamese students who have high abilities but fail to demonstrate them in their school settings?

Among many characteristics of language gifted students from the literature review, the most representative findings found in the participants of the current study was that they were creative, emotional and logical. They also had a very positive attitude and high motivation for learning English.

At the same time, the participants possessed certain **personality characteristics** of a gifted underachiever. However, ADHD symptoms or such anti-social traits listed in Reis & McCoach's table as Aggressive, Hostile, Resentful, Touchy were not observable among the five participants. The most frequently demonstrated characteristics include a low self-confidence, anxiety and lower resilience than achieving peers.

In terms of **Internal Mediators**, the participants showed full awareness of success and failure; moreover, they were quite self-critical and some had indicators of a perfectionist. However, they did not have any negative attitude toward school or express rebellion against the community like what has been found about underachievers in the literature. Furthermore, they showed **differential thinking style** in not well following detail-oriented; convergent thinking or sequential activities.

Remarkably, the participants had all the indicators of **maladaptive strategies** listed in Reis & McCoach's table. This may be due to a lack of training and counseling experience for study skills and life skills that the institution failed to provide them from the moment they started high-school. As a consequence, they did not have a habit of planning or setting goals for learning. Neither could they well adapt to stress and build up perseverance; instead, they lacked self-control and easily felt demotivated in the appearance of troubles or difficulties.

Research question 2: What factors, from the students' perspective, are viewed as influencing gifted underachievers' educational experiences?

Research question 3: What interventions, from the students' perspective, might reverse that situation?

The participants perceived **themselves** with a lack of confidence and proper study skills; the **curriculum** with a heavy vocabulary-based emphasis, the **teachers'** approach and **peers'** competition as the main factors that influenced their underachievement. They were well aware that they needed to improve their study skills in order to follow a better discipline and concentrate better on their work. Besides, they expected to benefit from changes in the materials that would reduce the workload and improve such communicative skills as speaking and listening. Last but not least, they proposed some changes in teachers' manners in a way that both effectively assisted their study and motivated them simultaneously. Moreover, the participants showed a negative feeling for competition among class members and expected a cooperative learning environment, in which they could exchange their expertise and learn from each other.

5.2. Implications for curriculum development and remedy strategies

5.2.1. Curriculum

Firstly, the current curriculum seems to not have helped students develop their uniqueness and become active learners. What is normally neglected proves importance: *students should be introduced the goals and objectives of the course*, so that they clearly understand why they have to do what they are doing.

Secondly, the total lack of discussion or negotiation about the materials caused both teachers and students to fall short of each other's expectations. As can be seen, the students would benefit from Nunan's *negotiated model* (1988), which values students' contribution to the curriculum. *There should be continuous feedback before, during and after each semester* to measure students' individual needs and competence in order for any timely adjustment to be made.

Last but not least, *there should be a portion in the curriculum spared for training students' study skills and English learning strategies*, so that they could gain more autonomy and be better equipped to solve their own problems before asking for help. Despite the limited time budget of the course, these skills are

equally indispensable in comparison to the academic knowledge; therefore they deserve due investment and attention from related stakeholders.

5.2.2. Remedy strategies

The marked special characteristics of the gifted underachievers provided persuasive evidence that they needed a motivational and properly challenging school environment as well as guidance from professional staff, in order to best manifest their potentials, i.e. “giftedness”. Based on the specific needs and conditions of each group of students, teachers could apply different remedy strategies in order to help underachieving students magnify their potentials.

Supportive Strategies are classroom techniques and designs that allow students to feel they are part of a ‘family’, versus a ‘factory’. From what the five participants repeatedly emphasized, they were longing for occasions when they could *freely discuss their concerns*, and more importantly, *seek help from competent, responsible and reliable adults*. Furthermore, judging from the five participants’ dislike towards competition, teachers can advocate an environment when *individual students could learn from and support each other in pursuing knowledge, rather than competing against their own partners* even in such “riskless” situations as that of everyday classroom.

Intrinsic Strategies are techniques and designs that invite positive attitudes to encourage achievement. By and large, the participants had a relatively low confidence about themselves. Therefore, such students as S1 or S3 should be *encouraged for attempts, not just successes*, so that they do not feel too weary about giving wrong answers. For S2, who strongly expressed a wish to follow her own way of thinking without being imposed a ready-made answer, would achieve more if she could *evaluate her own work before receiving a grade* from the teacher. Besides, the *creation of classroom rules and responsibilities should involve students*, so that students like S4 could feel the sense of “fairness” being carried out and students like S5 could be pushed to work more actively and single-mindedly.

Remedial Strategies encourage teachers to think that students are not perfect and each individual has specific strengths and weaknesses as well as social, emotional and intellectual needs. Correspondingly, *such different interests as S1’s*

literary talent or S2 and S4's artistic hobbies should be encouraged and exploited in the classroom in order to create colorful, inspiring and less stressful lessons. By *taking into consideration the learning deficiencies* that S1, S3 and S4 had as a result of a lower starting point compared to their peers', teachers would **assign them with work that is more compatible to their level** and make them believe that they could totally excel in their areas of strength and interest. This, in turn, would open up a "**safe environment**" like what was mentioned in their diaries, where mistakes are considered a part of learning for everyone, including the teacher.

For a large part, these implications can be examined and explored by teachers themselves, in their own classroom. With little but often consideration and attention, teachers would play a crucially constructive role that goes beyond the mere mission of transferring knowledge and turns learning into more a self-discovering process and less a self-torment procedure.

5.3. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

The researcher is fully aware of the limitations in her study. The most noticeable one is a thin description of the perceptions and feelings of other stakeholders, i.e. *teachers, achieving or competitive peers* and *family members*, in relation to the underachievers themselves. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that future research extends the scope of research to such subjects in order to have more objective and multifaceted insight into the issue. Furthermore, action research that implements the suggested strategies into the real environment is valuable and thus highly encouraged.

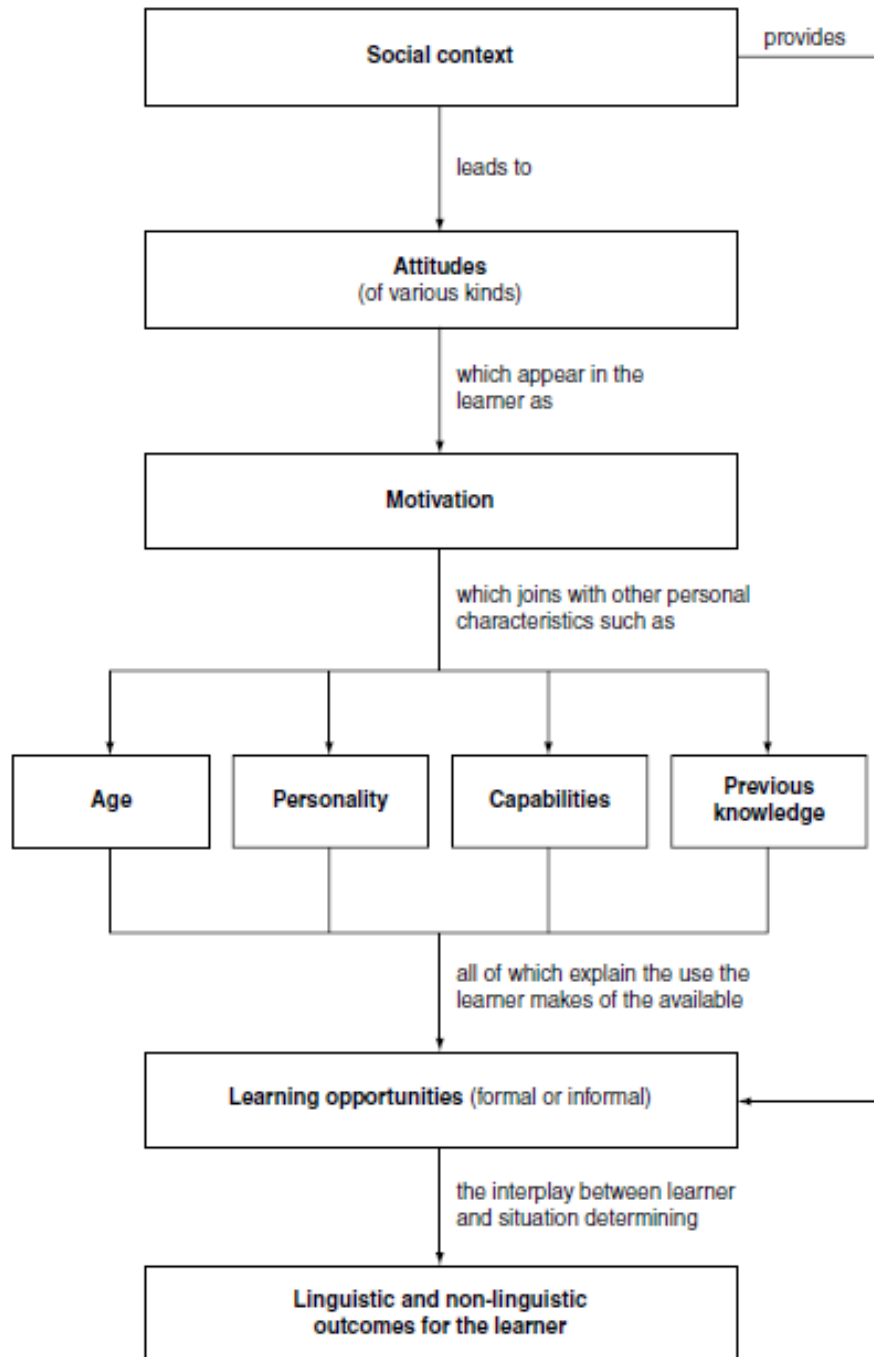
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APPENDIX A
Conditions for foreign language learning (Spolsky, 1989)



APPENDIX B
List of indicators for underachieving Gifted Students (Reis & McCoach, 2000)

Personality characteristics	Low self-esteem, low self-concept, low self-efficacy
	Alienated or withdrawn; distrustful, or pessimistic
	Anxious, impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive; ADD/ ADHD symptoms
	Aggressive, hostile, resentful, or touchy
	Depressed
	Passive-aggressive trait disturbance
	More socially than academically oriented. May be extroverted. May be easygoing, considerate, and/or unassuming
	Dependent, less resilient than high achievers
	Socially immature
Internal Mediators	Fear of failure; gifted underachievers may avoid competition or challenging situations to protect their self-image or their ability
	Fear of success
	Attribute success or failures to outside forces; attribute successes to luck and failures to lack of ability; externalize conflict and problems
	Negative attitude toward school
	Antisocial or rebellious
	Self-critical or perfectionistic; feeling guilty about not living up to the expectations of others
Differential Thinking Skills/	Perform less well on tasks that require detail-oriented or convergent thinking skills than their achieving counterparts
	Score lower on sequential tasks such as repeating digits, repeating sentences, coding, computation, and spelling
	Lack insight and critical ability
Maladaptive Strategies	Lack goal-oriented behavior; fail to set realistic goals for themselves
	Poor coping skills; developing coping mechanisms that successfully reduce short-term stress, but inhibit long-term success
	Possess poor self-regulation strategies; low tolerance for frustration; lack perseverance; lack self-control
	Use defense mechanism
	Intense outside interests, commitment to self-selected work

AttributesPositive	Creative
	Demonstrate honesty and integrity in rejecting unchallenging coursework

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANT SELECTION

CÂU HỎI KHẢO SÁT VỀ TÌNH TRẠNG HỌC SINH CÓ NĂNG KHIẾU NHƯNG CHƯA PHÁT HUY HẾT THỰC LỰC TRONG LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH

Tôi là Vũ Bảo Châu, hiện đang học tập và công tác tại trường ĐH Ngoại Ngữ - ĐH Quốc Gia Hà Nội. Tôi cần tham khảo ý kiến của bạn về hiện tượng **Học Sinh Có Năng Khiếu Nhưng Chưa Phát Hủy Hết Thực Lực Trong Lớp Học Tiếng Anh ở Trường Phổ Thông**. Mong bạn trả lời câu hỏi một cách xác thực vì nó sẽ ảnh hưởng đến chất lượng bài nghiên cứu của tôi. Tất cả thông tin do bạn cung cấp sẽ được **giữ bí mật** và bạn **không bị tính điểm dưới bất kì hình thức nào** cho việc trả lời bản khảo sát này. Xin trân trọng cảm ơn sự hợp tác của bạn!

1. Thông tin cơ bản

a. Tên: _____ Học lớp: 10/11/12 Năm sinh: _____ Giới tính: Nam/ Nữ

b. Tiếng Anh có phải ngoại ngữ chính của bạn không? Có/ Không Nếu đúng, bạn đã học tiếng Anh được bao lâu rồi? _____ năm

2. Sự quan tâm dành cho Tiếng Anh

Hãy đánh dấu (☑) vào dưới chữ cái thể hiện chính xác nhất mức độ quan tâm của bạn dành cho việc học Tiếng Anh.

Ý kiến		A	B	C	D	E
		Hoàn toàn đồng ý	Đồng ý	Không chắc	Không đồng ý	Hoàn toàn không đồng ý
1.	Tôi muốn được dùng Tiếng Anh trong các hoạt động hàng ngày (giao tiếp xã hội, hoạt động trí óc, học thuật)					
2.	Việc học một ngoại ngữ giúp tôi diễn đạt ý tưởng của mình bằng tiếng mẹ đẻ rõ ràng hơn					
3.	Tôi sẽ vẫn học Tiếng Anh dù nếu đó là điều không bắt buộc					
4.	Tôi thích ý tưởng được dùng nhiều ngôn ngữ khác nhau để diễn đạt cùng một ý					
5.	Tôi thích xem film Tiếng Anh mà không cần phụ đề hay lồng tiếng					
6.	Tôi muốn đọc sách báo bằng Tiếng Anh từ bản gốc					
7.	Tôi cảm thấy mình đặc biệt có tiềm năng để học tốt Tiếng Anh					

8.	Tôi muốn thường xuyên được nói Tiếng Anh lúc ở nhà					
9.	Nếu tôi kết hôn với một người nói Tiếng Anh, tôi sẽ học sử dụng Tiếng Anh thật tốt cho dù người đó biết Tiếng Việt					
10.	Tôi thích tìm ra điểm giống và điểm khác giữa Tiếng Anh và Tiếng Việt trong cách diễn đạt cùng một khái niệm					

3. Động lực học Tiếng Anh

Hãy khoanh tròn chữ cái thể hiện chính xác nhất động lực học Tiếng Anh của bạn

1. So với những học sinh khác trong lớp Tiếng Anh, tôi:
 - a. Học Tiếng Anh nhiều hơn phần lớn bọn họ
 - b. Học Tiếng Anh ít hơn phần lớn bọn họ
 - c. Học Tiếng Anh tương đương với bọn họ
2. So với những môn học khác, tôi:
 - a. Dành nhiều thời gian hơn cho môn Tiếng Anh
 - b. Dành ít thời gian hơn cho môn Tiếng Anh
 - c. Dành thời gian tương đương cho môn Tiếng Anh
3. Các thầy/cô dạy Tiếng Anh hiện nay của tôi:
 - a. Đã cố gắng hết sức để tôi học tốt môn này
 - b. Không chú ý đến việc học của tôi
 - c. Chưa quan tâm nhiều đến việc học của tôi
 - d. Ý kiến khác? Xin nêu rõ _____
4. Trong lúc học Tiếng Anh, các bạn cùng lớp:
 - a. Giúp tôi hiểu rõ những gì chưa hiểu
 - b. Tô ra thiếu kiên nhẫn khi giải thích lại cho tôi
 - c. Cạnh tranh gay gắt với tôi
 - d. Ý kiến khác? Xin nêu rõ _____
5. Nếu trường này không dạy Tiếng Anh nữa, tôi sẽ:
 - a. Ngừng học Tiếng Anh
 - b. Cố tìm và theo học một lớp dạy Tiếng Anh ở chỗ khác
6. Xét một cách công bằng về việc học Tiếng Anh của tôi, có thể nói rằng:
 - a. Tôi học vừa đủ để theo kịp cả lớp
 - b. Tôi tin vào trí thông minh và may mắn, vì tôi thường học rất ít
 - c. Tôi thực sự rất cố gắng học Tiếng Anh nhưng vẫn chưa có kết quả tốt
 - d. Ý kiến khác? Xin nêu rõ _____
7. Nếu học lên Đại Học ở Việt Nam, tôi sẽ
 - a. Chọn một chuyên ngành cần sử dụng Tiếng Anh thường xuyên
 - b. Học vừa đủ để qua môn Tiếng Anh đại trà
 - c. Không định tiếp tục học Tiếng Anh
 - d. Ý kiến khác? Xin nêu rõ _____

4. Khao khát học Tiếng Anh

Trước mỗi ý kiến được nêu sau đây, hãy viết 1 con số (từ 1 đến 5) thể hiện chính xác nhất quan điểm/ cách phản ứng của bạn đối với việc đầu tư cho môn Tiếng Anh.

Không giống tôi	Hiếm khi giống tôi	Đôi khi giống tôi	Khá giống tôi	Rất giống tôi
1	2	3	4	5

1. Khi tôi có bài tập Tiếng Anh phải làm, tôi:

- a. _____ Làm nó ngay lập tức khi vừa bắt đầu thời gian tự học
- b. _____ Cố tìm cách tránh để không phải làm
- c. _____ Trì hoãn cho đến khi bài các môn khác đã được hoàn thành
- d. _____ Chờ bạn cùng lớp làm để tham khảo

2. Trong các giờ học Tiếng Anh trên lớp học chính, tôi

- a. _____ Có xu hướng mơ màng nghĩ về những việc khác
- b. _____ Cảm thấy nhàm chán
- c. _____ Phải tự buộc mình tập trung lắng nghe thầy/cô giáo
- d. _____ Hoàn toàn bị cuốn vào bài học một cách tự nhiên

3. Nếu tôi có cơ hội thay đổi cách thức dạy môn Tiếng Anh ở trường mình, tôi sẽ:

- a. _____ Tăng cường độ rèn luyện được yêu cầu cho mỗi học sinh
- b. _____ Giữ nguyên cường độ rèn luyện như hiện tại
- c. _____ Giảm cường độ rèn luyện dành cho mỗi học sinh

4. Tôi thấy môn Tiếng Anh

- a. _____ Là môn học lý thú nhất
- b. _____ Không lý thú hơn những môn học khác
- c. _____ Không hề lý thú

5. Lí do học Tiếng Anh

Dưới đây là những lí do học sinh thường đưa về việc họ theo học Tiếng Anh. Hãy đọc và đánh dấu (☐) vào dưới chữ cái thể hiện chính xác nhất trường hợp của bạn.

Việc học Tiếng Anh là quan trọng với tôi bởi vì...		A	B	C	D	E
		Chính là trường hợp của tôi	Rất giống trường hợp của tôi	Khá giống trường hợp của tôi	Không giống trường hợp của tôi lắm	Chắc chắn không phải trường hợp của tôi
1.	Gia đình tôi muốn tôi theo học Tiếng Anh					
2.	Có nhiều học bổng du học dành cho học sinh giỏi Tiếng Anh					
3.	Nếu giỏi Tiếng Anh, sau này tôi sẽ tìm được công việc tốt					
4.	Tôi muốn hiểu thêm về những người nói Tiếng Anh và văn hóa của họ					
5.	Một người phải giỏi ít nhất một ngoại ngữ để được xã hội tôn trọng					
6.	Tôi phải học Tiếng Anh để hoàn thành chương trình của trường phổ thông					
7.	Học Tiếng Anh giúp tôi giao tiếp được với nhiều người trong nhiều hoàn cảnh					
8.	Tôi phải học Tiếng Anh để thi vào Đại Học					

9. Lí do của riêng bạn: Xin nêu rõ _____

Nếu được mời tham gia tiếp vào nghiên cứu này với cam kết là bạn sẽ nhận được trợ giúp từ chúng tôi trong việc cải thiện môn Tiếng Anh sau khi nghiên cứu

kết thúc, bạn có tham gia không? Nếu có, xin vui lòng để lại số điện thoại hoặc địa chỉ email của bạn: _____

Một lần nữa, cảm ơn bạn đã giúp chúng tôi hoàn thành bản khảo sát! Chúc bạn một ngày tốt lành!

APPENDIX D: INVITATION LETTER FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION

THƯ MỜI THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU

Thân chào em...,

Chị là Bảo Châu, tuần vừa qua đã về làm việc với lớp mình. Sau quá trình tìm hiểu kết quả từ phiếu điều tra, chị viết thư này để nhờ riêng em một việc. Chị muốn được tìm hiểu cụ thể hơn tiến trình học tiếng Anh của em ở trên lớp, vì em có nhiều biểu hiện của một học sinh có năng khiếu nhưng chưa khai thác được hết thế mạnh của mình đối với môn học này.

Đồng ý tham gia cũng có nghĩa là em sẽ giúp chị làm những việc này:

- Ghi lại cảm nghĩ, nhận định... của em sau mỗi buổi học tiếng Anh trên lớp, dựa theo câu hỏi gợi ý mà chị cung cấp. Không có giới hạn gì cho việc ghi “nhật kí” này, điều duy nhất cần đảm bảo là độ trung thực của thông tin. Việc này kéo dài khoảng 1 tháng.
- Để chị quan sát hoạt động của em trên lớp và phỏng vấn em khi cần thiết (sẽ hẹn trước) về những vấn đề liên quan đến kiến thức được truyền đạt và sự tương tác giữa em với thầy cô, bạn bè.

Em sẽ được đảm bảo những quyền lợi sau đây:

- Được cung cấp sổ/ bút ghi nhật kí, đồng thời những gì em viết sẽ không bị tiết lộ ra ngoài, chỉ sử dụng làm dữ liệu nghiên cứu dưới tên giả do nhà nghiên cứu tự đặt
- Được hướng dẫn trong việc nhìn nhận quá trình học của mình một cách khoa học, từ đó tìm ra cách cải thiện và nâng cao kết quả học
- Sau khi nghiên cứu kết thúc em sẽ được hỗ trợ và định hướng trong việc học tiếng Anh, đồng thời nhận được phiếu giảm giá cho các khóa học Tiếng Anh tại trung tâm nơi chị đang làm việc

Chị rất mong nhận được sự hợp tác của em, đồng thời phần nào giúp em tìm ra phong cách học phù hợp nhất với tư chất của mình, từ đó có hướng tiếp cận sâu sắc hơn với Tiếng Anh. Phiền em trả lời thư của chị và cho biết có thể tham gia vào nghiên cứu này được không. Cảm ơn em!

APPENDIX E: GUIDELINE FOR DIARY WRITING

HƯỚNG DẪN GHI LẠI CẢM NHẬN VỀ GIỜ HỌC TIẾNG ANH TRÊN LỚP

Chào em,

Một lần nữa, cảm ơn em đã tham gia nghiên cứu nhằm tìm hiểu và nâng cao chất lượng học tập đối với môn Tiếng Anh. Để thu thập thông tin chân thực và cụ thể, em sẽ được hướng dẫn ghi lại vắn tắt cảm nhận của mình về mỗi buổi học thông qua những khía cạnh khác nhau. Thông tin của em sẽ được bảo mật và mã hóa, tên của em sẽ được thay đổi để đảm bảo tính khách quan cho nghiên cứu. Em có quyền tìm đọc nghiên cứu này khi nó được hoàn thành.

Trong quá trình viết, mời em lưu ý những điều sau:

- Nên viết sớm, sau khi mỗi buổi học Tiếng Anh kết thúc để tránh bỏ sót thông tin, đồng thời cũng để tránh việc ghi chép này làm ảnh hưởng đến các hoạt động khác của em. Nếu 1 cô giáo có 2 tiết học, em có thể ghi gộp vào 1 bài. **Việc ghi chép áp dụng đối với cả giờ học trên lớp buổi sáng và giờ học nâng cao buổi chiều.**

- Viết đều đặn hàng tuần, **không “viết dồn”** (sau vài ngày viết một thể). Việc ghi chép này mất khoảng 5 – 7 phút, sẽ kéo dài trong 1.5 tháng.

- Hãy ghi lại thật thẳng thắn, tự nhiên và chính xác về bản thân mình và những người có liên quan

- Tập trung phản ánh những yếu tố sau:

- ✓ **When:** ngày, tháng, năm... - thời gian em học bài này?
- ✓ **Who:** ai là người dạy bài đó?
- ✓ **What:** Bài học về nội dung gì? Em đặc biệt nhớ nội dung gì (độ khó, độ dễ, sự hấp dẫn/ nhàm chán)? Có chuyện gì xảy ra với em không? Cô giáo và các bạn có hỗ trợ/ tương tác gì với em không? Trong giờ, em có nghĩ đến gì khác ngoài nội dung bài học không, tại sao?...
- ✓ **How:** Em cảm thấy thế nào về những điều đã xảy ra và phản ứng của cô giáo hoặc các bạn? Có điều gì em cảm thấy lẽ ra cô giáo/ các bạn có thể làm khác đi để em hài lòng hơn không?
- ✓ **Whole:** Nhìn chung, em thấy thích hay không thích giờ học này? Tại sao? (Xin nêu rõ thêm bất cứ mối quan ngại/ cảm xúc gì chưa được nhắc ở trên).

Để tiện hình dung, mời em tham khảo một đoạn ghi chép của người tham gia trong một nghiên cứu khác:

[Trích đoạn 4]

23/10/2010

Cô Tâm – Listening & Speaking

Hôm nay cả Nghe và Nói đều học Giving & Asking directions. Tài liệu trong quyển Inside Out. Mình thích cái này, vì có lần gặp một ông Tây hỏi đường mà chả biết chỉ kiểu gì cả. Đoạn băng mẫu cô cho nghe hơi rề, nhưng được cái có transcript nên không đến nỗi. Nhưng nếu cô để yên cho

mình tự nghe rồi về sau hăng đưa transcript thì tốt hơn. Cái bài điền từ thì hay, nhưng cô không cho mình bàn kết quả với bạn bên cạnh mà đã gọi ngay rồi, đâm ra bị sai 2 chỗ.

Giờ Spk thì được nói chuyện thoải mái với Hằng. Nhìn vào bản đồ để chỉ đường trong 1 khu phố, rồi phải đoán xem chỗ người kia chỉ là chỗ nào. Nó nói siêu hơn mình, nên mình cứ nghe nó nói thôi. Đã thế mình cứ nói là nó lại chữa lỗi phát âm, động 1 tí là chữa. Sốt ruột quá, nói đi nói lại mà chưa hết giờ. Sao mình ngại nói thế. Kể ra nếu nó đợi mình nói xong rồi hăng nhắc lỗi thì còn đỡ ngại. Ai chả biết nó được học tiếng Anh từ bé!

Giá kể cô Tâm không đi lại liên tục thì mình cũng mang Toán ra ôn, tiết sau kiểm tra. Lần trước đã bị nợ điểm rồi.

Nói chung giờ hôm nay chỉ có mấy cái cấu trúc là hay. À, cả đoạn cuối, bắt chỉ đường đi đến trường mình cũng được. Sướng nhất là cô không cho bài về nhà.

Cảm ơn sự cộng tác của em! Nếu cần liên hệ thêm, xin gửi email cho chị tới địa chỉ vubaochauvbc@gmail.com hoặc nhắn tin tới số 0169 7575 088 - nói tên và mục đích gọi điện, chị sẽ gọi lại cho em.

Have a nice day! ☺

APPENDIX F: GUIDELINE FOR STUDENT INTERVIEW

1. What is your general feeling about last semester? Are you satisfied? Do you think you could have done better? Why?
2. Which aspect among Listening, Writing, Speaking, Reading, Vocabulary and Grammar are you most confident about? Which one are you “afraid” of? What do you think about the extent to which that aspect is covered in class?
3. Do you have any strategies in learning English? What are they?
4. Do you often make goals/ plans for your English performance?
5. What’s your typical week day like? Do you have enough time for the English homework? Do you have enough time for studying something new that you are interested in?
6. What do you think about the workload from your current English lessons? (regardless of which teacher)
7. Why are you always counting turns for giving an answer? What if you did it wrong?
8. Do the different teaching styles of the teachers affect you in any way? Which style suits you better?
9. What do you think about T1?
10. What do you think about T2?
11. Do you have a partner to study English with? What are the criteria for your ideal study partner(s)?
12. What do you think about your classmates? What influence do they have on you in English lessons?
13. What do you think are the most influential factors that cause you to not perform up to your potential?
14. In what way can that situation be improved?
15. Do you have any recommendations about the studying and teaching of the English subject?

APPENDIX G: GUIDELINE FOR TEACHER INTERVIEW

1. Can you briefly tell the goals and objectives of the course for the current 11 grade English gifted class?
2. Do you pay some special attention to any aspect, among Listening, Writing, Speaking, Reading, Vocabulary and Grammar?
3. What are the criteria for you to choose the materials for this course? Do you think the current materials work well for them?
4. Could you provide some key information and your own remarks about the five students S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5? These should include, but not be limited to: their personal background; competence; giftedness, motivation and attitude toward English; study skills; their problems; any possible reasons and solutions for such problems.
5. Do you intend to build up a teaching style? What are the advantages and disadvantages of that style, from your own perception?
6. What do you think are most important for those gifted underachievers to improve their situation? Especially, what do you think teacher can do?

APPENDIX H: TEACHER INTERVIEW EXTRACT

Teacher: T1

Date: 26 March, 2012

(I: Interviewer; T1: Teacher 1; #31: speaker turn)

- 31 I: Well, now let's move to the next student. S1. Do you have any remarks about her?
- 32 T1: S1... It's hard to tell [laugh]. Everything about her is so precious; I have a very good feeling about this girl. She's very loving, enthusiastic, mischievous and pure. Also, she's very hard-working. However, she's not studying effectively.
- 33 I: Yes, her performance is constantly leveled out.
- 34 T1: Yes, leveled out, constantly poor.
- 35 I: She also told me that except for a guy who's always standing at the bottom, she's better than none. She seems desperate about this situation.
- 36 T1: Once she wrote me an email, showing worries and disappointment about this. I also replied, giving advice about what to do and how to do it. For example, she said that she always forgot the structures, then I said, "there's only one way, which is revising and doing more exercises in order to remember". But then again, she came up with many silly mistakes.
- 37 I: From what she shared, she always thinks of something else, like a music band, a story told by the teacher from the previous period, or things to get ready for the next period.
- 38 T1: Yes, that may be another point. She can't focus well on anything.
- 39 I: Now can you please tell me something about S4?
- 40 T1: S4. Actually she's quite ok. She's good at Math, which means her logical thinking is not bad.
- 41 I: But still, her performance in English is not up to the desirable level.
- 42 T1: I've noticed that she's made progress recently. Maybe her background was not very wide. She's from the nearby district, so her conditions wouldn't be as good as the city counterparts. But she's good at Math, and she's doing better at English, too. Actually I wouldn't list Thu as belonging to the lower-achieving group of that class.
- 43 I: My point is that her achievement in English is not compatible to her level of intelligence and giftedness, do you agree?
- 44 T1: Yes, that's right. But I think she'll be doing just fine in the university entrance exam, though it's hard to say she'll be on the top.
- 45 I: S4 told me that learning English is way too different from learning Math, which has a lot of logical and clear paths of thinking. For English, she finds it difficult because there are so many words and structures to memorize.
- 46 T1: It's just because they don't practice often. If so, how do they expect to remember and understand how the words are used? For example, I used to give them a whole set of PET books to self-study, but they didn't touch them at all. The other day, I even collected and gave them a long list of useful websites to practice the skills.
- 47 I: Ok, than you. Now can you tell me something about S5?

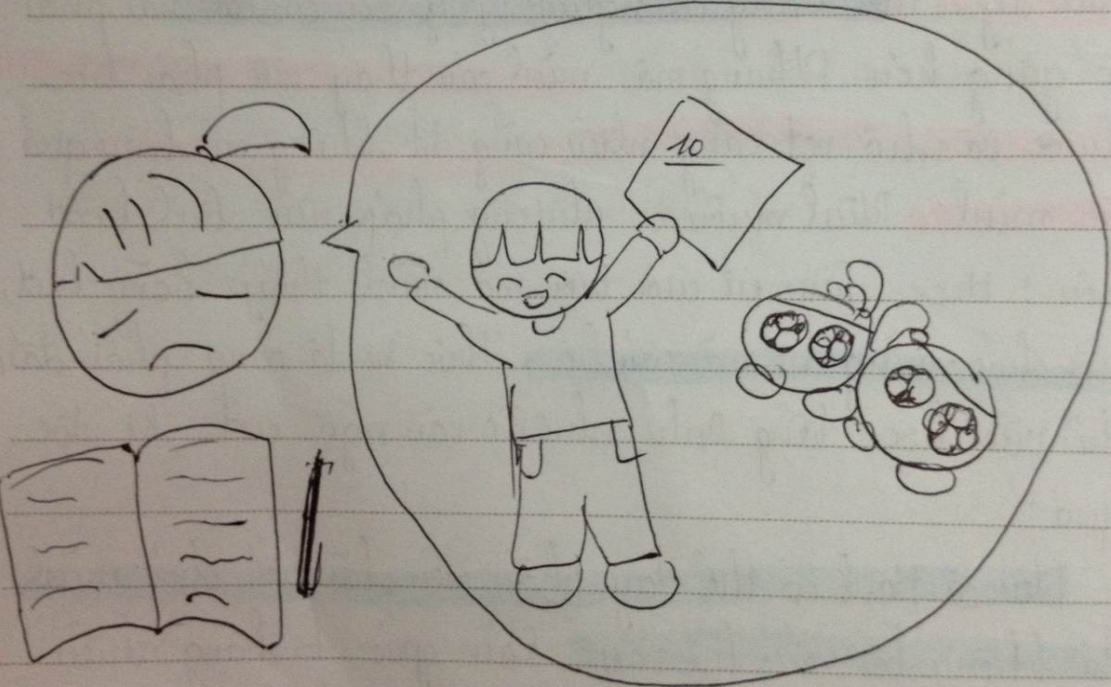
- 48 **T1:** S5. He has some health problems, and had to delay his study because of them. I think he's quite smart, and quick in getting the idea. However, he had too many days off from class during the 10th grade year because of the sickness; in addition, he doesn't truly make the efforts. Therefore, his performance is still not up to the desirable level. Still, there are points at which the whole class, except him, makes mistakes. Again, he makes mistake when everyone else does it right.
- 49 **I:** He told me that his performance last year was much better than this year. Also, he's always falling asleep. If possible, what do you think is his problem?
- 50 **T1:** I think it's just because of his routine – it may not be very healthy. But I don't normally see him sleeping in my class.
- 51 **I:** Thank you, now let's move to S2.
- 52 **T1:** This girl has something very... strange. If I'm not mistaken, I've never met her family. As far as I know, there's nothing problematic about S2's family issues. However, her performance is very inconsistent. There are times when she does remarkably well, but at the same time, there are regrettable and disappointing moments. I can't explain this, I don't understand. Actually she's in the "resource group", a group of students being intensively trained for the National English Contest. Sometimes she makes inexplicable mistakes, and she herself couldn't understand why.
- 53 **I:** I think this girl is both perfectionist and unconfident at the same time. She always blames herself seriously for being "stupid" and "forgetful". She told me that she has fallen from top 6 last year to top 15 this year. Is this true?
- 54 **T1:** I'm not sure about the ranking. But S5 is always in the state of fluctuation – I can't ever predict whether she will be "up" or "down" in the next test.
- 55 **I:** Do you find her having any gift or talent?
- 56 **T1:** I don't find anything special.
- 57 **I:** Do you think she will be able to take part in the National team for next year?
- 58 **T1:** It's hardly likely, if she keeps on with this kind of fluctuating performance.

APPENDIX I: DIARY EXTRACT

S4.D10 (17 December 2011)

và điểm số." Lại còn các bác, các cô có con học giỏi.
Sao cứ phải "Cháu nó ngày xưa... " rồi " Phải cố
gắng lên ". Ai cũng biết như vậy nhưng BĂNG CÁCH
NAO !!!

Haiz. Tích lũy dần dần vậy ! Nhưng mình không
thích học bị động thế này ! Hè về sẽ học chủ gái mình,
chủ ấy sẽ nói chuyện với mình bằng T.A. Active !
HỒN LOAN VÀ BÊ TẮC TOÀN TẬP !!!



Never had a dream come true.....

S1.D4 (30 November 2011) & S1.D5 (2 December 2011)

Có chỗ tớ muốn giới tay lắm nhưng nghĩ là sai rồi nên thôi.
Rồi lúc là cũng tớ lơ mơ, nằm gác trên bàn. Sau đây
chép bài chữa thôi.

Tiết 2, ui, từ giờ ra chơi, sao đau bụng quá. Thế
là đánh nằm ra bàn thật ui. Ban đầu còn nghe tiếng +
người chữa bài, sau thì ngủ lơ lơ (cô giáo bảo về
nhưng tớ bảo thôi). May, hôm nay tiết này học trong
quyển TA nâng cao (tớ không mang) - Ồm cũng có
cái hay đấy, đau bụng quá.

Tớ ước có dạy hay hơn, tao không biết hơn
Nếu thế, tớ đã chẳng dài mà tớ lơ mơ. Máy đưa học
giờ cơ như bị thờ quên ấy, hực !!! @@ A, tớ còn
nghĩ đến mấy cái tình tình khác - học hành chán quá.

* Thứ 6, 2/12/011. Chiều

(5)

Cổ Thu - Reading - Vocabulary - Listening.

Nhật kí Thông Minh à,

Đầu giờ, cô kiểm tra học bài cũ (idiom ấy mà). Ban
lối tớ cũng học thuộc rồi nên lên bảng cả 3 đưa đều được
điểm 10. Tớ cũng không chắc có đưa như bạn ấy không,
không nhớ đưa cái khó khó. Sau đó, bọn tớ lại làm
vocabulary về idioms tiếp. May, tớ cũng không sai nhười

