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# **Gifted English Language Learners: The Cultural and Practical Experiences of Chinese Students Learning English in Scotland and in China**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## **Abstract**

This research investigates the potential influences of cultural aspects and contextual practical experiences in relation to the achievement of Chinese gifted English language learners (GELL) studying in China and Scotland. The proportion of English language learners (ELL) in state schools in China has experienced a rapid increase. In sharp contrast to this context, Chinese ELLs are often overlooked for their potential gifted ability in English language learning and are underrepresented within the field of gifted and talented education. However, it is plausible that a Chinese ELL could achieve excellence in English language learning, depending on the effectiveness of the learning, training and support provided. From a review of the literature, it is evident that the identification of, and support for, gifted learners has been subject to extensive investigation. However, there is a dearth of studies looking specifically at GELLs and taking into account the practical and cultural aspects which may influence their identification, learning experiences and achievement.

Chinese ELL students studying abroad in English-speaking countries are likely to encounter a diversity of educational methods, cultures and learning environments. In this regard, the comparison of two groups of English-speaking Chinese students – one in Scotland and one in China – offers insights into the distinctions between teaching and learning methodologies experienced by gifted English-speaking Chinese students across these different contexts. This qualitative research used semi-structured in-depth interviews with twelve English language teachers, thirteen Chinese GELLs and nine parents in total in Scotland and China. A snowball-sampling method was implemented to recruit participants. The interviews were digitally-recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts analysed in accordance with thematic analysis under the technique of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

There is no agreed definition within the literature as to what constitutes a GELL. Current literature from the field of gifted education, alongside EEL literature relating to proficiency in English Language learning was used to examine the participants' understandings of the characteristics of a GELL. Common characteristics were identified and ELL practices within the language learning classroom were explored to better understand how GELL interact with learning opportunities. The study highlights the complex interactions that take place between the selected method of teaching for ELL, the psychological aspects to language learning, such as motivation, attitude, self-concept (cognitive and affective) and cognition along with

the sociocultural aspects of learning. The students' demonstrated self-regulated learning strategies which in turn impacted on how the learning strategies within the class were used. How the teacher organises learning to allow these processes to interact is crucial. Findings from the study suggest that a communicative approach can offer optimal learning experiences for GELL. An important finding from this study is that while teachers in both China and Scotland could describe the characteristics of a GELL, and on the basis of this were willing to nominate GELL to participate in the study, they were not always sure how to best support them in the classroom, even when a communicative approach to language learning had been adopted.

The primary implication of the findings of this study for professional practice is that English language instruction using the communicative approach can greatly enhance the learning experience for GELLs, but teachers need to actively think about GELL when planning learning opportunities. Where language learning instruction focuses on those who require support, GELLs risk being overlooked and their skills and abilities will remain unchallenged and undeveloped. Teachers' understanding of GELL and how ELL practices can be harnessed to provide for, and identify, GELL is key to supporting this often over-looked group of learners.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: \_\_Ruihua Chen\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abbreviations**

AMG: Actiotope Model of Giftedness

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference

CECR: College English Curriculum Requirement

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching methods

DISCOVER: Discovering Strengths and Capabilities while Observing Varied Ethnic Responses

DMGT: Differentiated Model of Gifted and Talent

EAP: English for academic purpose

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELL: English Language Learner

g: General Intelligence

GELL: Gifted English Language Learner

GTM: Grammar Translation Method

LAD: Language Acquisition Device

MIT: Multiple Intelligence Theory

MLAT: Modern Language Aptitude Test

RTI: Response to Intervention

SCGM: Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model

SCGY: Special Class for the Gifted Young

SRR: Stimulus, Response, and Reinforcement

TTI: Triarchic Theory of Intelligence

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction and Background

English, as a language, has global status and a special role that has been recognised by many countries in academic, scientific and economic domains (Crystal, 2003). There are approximately 1.75 billion people using English worldwide (The British Council, 2013). In 2013 the British Council predicted that by 2020, two billion people would learn and use English, meaning that English is seen as one of the essential languages in promoting global development in many countries. Kachru (1992 cited in Bolton, 2009) describes three types of English language learners globally: Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles. The Inner Circle refers to societies who treat the English language as their primary and first language; the Outer Circle refers to societies who apply English language as an official, legal, or educational language, and therefore learn English as a second language; and the Expanding Circle refers to societies who perceive English as an international language and learn English as a foreign language. Although Chinese people speak Mandarin as their mother language, China is a huge economic force and English is considered a vital language for Chinese people to promote the globalisation processes (Pan & Block, 2011). In China, English is learned as a foreign language and treated as a *lingua franca* for international communication purposes (Kachru, 1992).

With the implementation of an open-door policy in China in 1978, the official educational departments started to promote foreign language education and specifically, English language education (Hu, 2001). According to Wei & Su (2012), compared with other foreign language such as Russian and Japanese, English is the most popular foreign language studied by Chinese students. The purpose of English language education in China has shifted from political and ideological functions to emphasising the application of English language in economic development and internationalisation (Hu, 2002). China has the largest number of English language learners in the world accounting for about 20% of the total number who are learning English worldwide (Pan & Block, 2011; Wei & Su, 2012). According to Wei & Su (2012), it was estimated that there are over 400 million English language learners and users in China, which in 2012 equated to nearly a quarter of the population. In order to prepare Chinese English language learners for global participation and engagement, English has been taught as a compulsory subject from primary schools to universities since 2001 (Wang, 2015; Hu, 2005). English proficiency has been regarded as vital for contributing to

internationalisation in China. With globalisation English as a *lingua franca* has become more and more popular in Chinese daily life, thus a “learning English boom” exists in China (Eaves, 2011). However, as a foreign language English is not the official language and is not frequently used for daily communication among the Chinese population (Gao, 2012). Accordingly, communicative language teaching and task-based instructions have been a curriculum requirement for all educational levels in China (Wen & Gao, 2007; Hu, 2002; 2005). In consideration of the popularity and importance of English language learning for and by the Chinese population, it is important to investigate the learning experiences of Chinese English language learners.

There is a vast amount of research discussing the methods, attitudes and influences in relation to teaching English to the Chinese student population (see for example Wen & Clement, 2003; Yu, 2006; Hu, 2001), but little attention has been given to Chinese English language learners who show particular ability in this field. Showing particular abilities in domain is sometimes referred to as being “gifted” (Ziegler, 2005). Having outstanding abilities can occur across domains, including logistic and linguistic abilities (Gardner, 1993). Thus, it can be argued that there are individuals who demonstrate abilities in English language learning. For the purposes of this study, they will be referred to as Gifted English Language Learners (GELLs).

We will discuss what we mean by giftedness and the many contested definitions, theories and models later in this chapter/thesis, but many researchers (see for example Gardner, 1993; Sternberg, 1985, 2005; Ziegler, 2005) have argued that giftedness and the provision for gifted individuals must be considered in relation to the individuals’ cultural backgrounds. Taking account of different cultural backgrounds might result in the conceptualisation, identification and provision for gifted individuals being expressed differently in different countries and continents. Of particular importance in considering Chinese gifted individuals, is that the Confucian perspective on education and development has strongly infiltrated into Chinese culture (Nguyen, *et al.*, 2006) and may still influence the perceptions of Chinese people in relation to giftedness and gifted education. For example, we can see that previously Chinese researchers believed that gifted abilities were genetic, and that children were born with these abilities (Chan, 2007; Zha, 1998). However, the influence of Confucian perspectives resulted in the education of gifted individuals in China emphasising the need to support learners in pursuing excellence (Nguyen, *et al.*, 2006; Confucius, *et al.*, 1998). This change of focus from innate abilities to support chimes with parallel arguments within the

field of gifted education where it is proposed that it is also important to support gifted individuals, not least because they are needed to make a contribution to their countries in various domains (Siegel, 2008). Ziegler (2014) argues that as individuals have their gifts or talent abilities in different areas, the development of excellence depends on deliberate training and opportunity. He argues that the kind of learning experiences people engage in, influence the development of their abilities. Ziegler (2014) posits that in this way culture impacts on gifted learners and points towards the idea of culture linked to environment. More specifically, individuals are situated within the interface between culture and environment and so these interconnecting ideas are important if optimum learning experiences are to be offered to all. The identification and provision for gifted individuals has been evident throughout Chinese history (Nguyen, *et al.*, 2006; Confucius, *et al.*, 1998). However contemporary research on giftedness and gifted education in China pays little attention to giftedness across subjects other than for STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) domains (Philipson, *et al.*, 2009; Zhang & Shi, 2006). From 1978 the Chinese government started to identify and educate people with high abilities, and special classes were set up for academically gifted young adolescents at the University of Science and Technology of China, but as noted before, this mainly focuses on high abilities in STEM subjects (Zhang, 2017; Philipson, *et al.*, 2009). As stated previously, China has the largest group of English language learners in the world and is keen to be part of the globalisation process. It would therefore seem important to investigate how GELLs are supported within Chinese speaking populations. Harnessing and developing this ability alongside expertise in STEM could allow for the dissemination and sharing of scientific findings and increased participation in globalisation.

There has been a rise in the number of Chinese students wanting to learn English and also in those wishing to study abroad in English-speaking countries (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2016). As a *lingua franca* for users to communicate across the world, English language has become important for Chinese students studying abroad. According to a government report published by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2016), there were approximately 523,700 Chinese students studying abroad in 2015. Compared with 2014, this had increased by 13.9%. Chinese students represented the highest number of all international students in UK higher education in 2016-2017. China also was the only country indicating a growth in student numbers in UK higher education with 14% increase since 2012-2013 (HESA, 2018). Particularly, Chinese students were the largest group of international students in Scotland, with a 2% increase since 2016

(HESA, 2018). This dramatically growing population strengthens the argument that it is both necessary and possible investigate Chinese speaking populations studying away from their own culture and environment. As the largest group of international students studying in Scotland, it is also important to investigate their learning experiences in order to support them effectively.

A recent study by Blackburn, *et al.* (2016: 339) describes gifted English language learners who learn English as a second language as those who have some “similar baseline characteristics as mainstream English Language Learners (ELL).” The authors further point out that there may also be individuals who have the potential to be gifted but whose potential might be “hidden behind the language barrier”. While there are early studies discussing the characteristics of gifted or able language learners, (See for example Rubin, 1975; Evans & Goodhew, 1997; Aguirre & Hernandez, 1999; Norton & Toohey 2001; Dean, 2001; Winebrenner & Brulles, 2008) it should be noted that there is no consensus achieved regarding the characteristics of GELLs and this (the identification of gifted English language learners) will be discussed in chapter two in detail. In addition, although a number of researchers have described the identification of gifted individuals or gifted language learners, only recently has research on gifted language learners been highlighted in academia and this is particularly the case for gifted EFL learners (Bernal, 2002; Blackburn, *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, as gifted English language learners have some of the same characteristics as ELLs in general, it tends to be difficult for identifying and supporting gifted EFL learners in schools (Blackburn, *et al.*, 2016). Much of this research also focuses on school education and so considering the experiences of GELL post school will contribute to the existing complex picture.

Since education is important for gifted individuals to pursue their abilities and to achieve excellence in specific domains (Ziegler, 2014), teachers can be considered as participators in gifted individuals’ learning processes. For example, teachers are able to monitor the progress of gifted learners (Harris, *et al.*, 2009), observe their behaviours (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005; Lassig, 2009), and provide support for them (Vreys, *et al.*, 2017). The knowledge and stereotypes that teachers hold about giftedness and gifted education can influence teachers’ perceptions of the identification and provision for gifted learners. However, the information from teachers about gifted learners in their classes is crucial for understanding gifted individuals (Harris, *et al.*, 2009; Dean, 2001).



Equally parents are considered as important in providing information about their gifted children to support teachers' observation in class (Sabatella, 2003; Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006; McBee, 2006; 2010). Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius (2006) highlight parents as having the most knowledge about their children's learning progress. However, the perceptions of parents on identifying and supporting gifted learners can be strongly influenced by their cultural backgrounds. For instance, Asian American parents have been found to assert that high academic achievement should be regarded as a standard to measure gifted learners in specific domains (Wu, 2008; Yang, 2007). The educational level and socioeconomic status of parents also can influence their perceptions of giftedness and what they perceive as the appropriate provision for gifted learners (Steinmayr, *et al.*, 2010). As a result, the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding giftedness and gifted education are important in understanding gifted individuals. In order to understand the real needs of gifted individuals in their learning processes, it is also important to know the perceptions of gifted individuals in relation to their own gifted abilities and learning experience. With regards to understanding GELLs, therefore, it is important to get information from them and their surroundings, including from the people surrounding them, such as their teachers and parents. Again, much of the work in this area has been in relation to school age young people and so this thesis extends this to post school experiences and will offer an opportunity for transitional understanding between school and post school learning.

Within this study, Ziegler's model, which will be discussed more fully in section 1.3, has been adopted as a framework for understanding the connections between the learner, teacher, parents and environment. Section 1.4 provides a detailed analysis of the influence of Chinese culture on the Chinese perceptions (such as teachers) of giftedness and gifted education. A number of studies (see for example Sternberg, 1985, 2005; Carroll, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Ziegler, 2005, 2014) have all highlighted the significant role environmental factors have on the identification of giftedness and the provision for gifted individuals to achieve excellence in specific domains. Through investigating the learning experience of Chinese GELL in Scotland and China, the influence of educational and cultural contexts in identifying and supporting GELL may be better understood. The next section will provide an overview of the conceptualisation of language learning, define and conceptualise giftedness, outline the aim of the study and the structure of the thesis.

## 1.2 Conceptualising Language Learning

Gifted English language learners share some characteristics with that of mainstream English language learners (Blackburn, *et al.*, 2016). Although they share common characteristics it is important to consider the ways in which their learning might differ. An examination of theories of language learning and language teaching becomes important as it can then be used to aid essential understanding of the GELLs' language learning experience and, crucially, what that might mean for the teaching of GELL. This section will discuss different theoretical frameworks that have been proposed for language learning including the perspectives of behaviourism, rationalism, and cognitivism. In doing so, this chapter will discuss views on the innate nature of language learning, practice and other factors which may influence language learning.

### 1.2.1 Language Learning Theory

Behaviourists, empiricists, and rationalists have long argued over the existence and function of special language abilities in the second or foreign language learning process. Behaviourist theory holds that human behaviour can be studied through the process of Stimulus, Response, and Reinforcement (SRR), while the behaviour itself could be presented spontaneously as a habit and so argue that language is learnt (Skinner, 2014). The empiricist's view supports the argument that language learning is mainly developed by the learner's experience and that experience is more important than innate ability for language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). Both the empiricists and behaviourists emphasise that there is no specific language learning ability, all learning can be associated in its nature as a series of learning and developing processes. However, from a rationalist view, linguist Noam Chomsky (1965) argued against a behaviourist approach instead arguing that learners have an innate ability for acquiring and learning language. He argued that it was this that distinguished us as being human. This pre-disposition to learning language suggested that the language faculty aspect is largely genetic. The theory of Universal Grammar developed by Chomsky points to a series of principles to describe language learners' innate ability for acquiring language in a certain way. Cohen (2014) argues that second language learning undoubtedly depends on the learners' innate ability, for example, a brain allows the learner to be able to grasp language and to retain this later. However, it is the interplay between the environment, opportunity, teaching practices and innate ability that become the important and are interesting factors as language learners pursue their second language learning.

Alongside the view that there is an innate language ability for language learning, the importance of training and practice has been recognised by many researchers (see for example Skinner, 1941; Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Chomsky, 1965; McLaughlin, 1978; Gardner 1985; Ellis, 1985). The language learner needs to practice in order to develop his/her language competence (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). Theories developed by Chomsky (1965), Krashen (1982), Ellis (1985), and McLaughlin (1978) have argued that practice and learning experience are indispensable for language acquisition. Building on the work of Chomsky (1965), Krashen (1982) developed the Monitor model and argues that learning motivation can be regarded as a crucial aspect influencing second and foreign language acquisition and practice. As cognitive theories state that language learning relates to the internal mental activities, the mental aspects such as motivation, anxiety, or self-image could also influence language learning practice. According to Ellis (1990) from a cognitive perspective, learning is the development of the internal and mental behaviours, not merely depending on the improvement of outside activities. McLaughlin (1990) also supports the argument that learners can plan, act and construct their own learning progress, and that these activities cannot be simply obtained from stimuli in the outside environment. Cohen (2014) argues that second language learning should consider the learning context. Indeed, an increasing number of scholars have stressed that social and linguistic environmental factors can be considered as important and necessary aspects of second language learning (Gass, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986). Both Gass (2003) and Vygotsky (1986) suggest that language learning should emphasise the role of the social, cultural and linguistic environment, in particular they emphasise the way learners implement the target language in conversational interactions in order to enhance their knowledge of this language. Thus, environmental factors can also be regarded as elements influencing learners' language learning processes.

In seeking a theoretical framework for this thesis, a largely cognitive theoretical framework was adopted as it embraces aspects of innate ability but acknowledges the importance of practice and environment, all of which contribute to second language learning (Ellis, 1985; McLaughlin, 1978; Cohen, 2014). Language is a tool for communication and interaction and so the cultural, social and linguistic environmental perspectives should be considered as necessary and important sources of second or foreign language learning.

### ***1.2.2 Language Teaching Approach and Methods***

General language teaching approaches and methods can be useful to understand language learning and second or foreign language acquisition. This section will discuss four popular modes of language teaching and explain how these methods sit within the different theoretical models discussed above: Grammar-translation method (GTM), Direct Method, Audiolingual Approach and Communicative Approach – and their relevance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A summary of the purposes, principles, and analysis of GTM, the Direct Method, Audiolingual Approach, and the Communicative Approach is shown in Appendix I. The dates given for all four modes indicate the era of their popularity in formal education, notwithstanding their practice in some classrooms or informal settings outside of this time period.

#### *Grammar-Translation Method (1840s-1940s)*

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a primary goal of second language learning in Western countries was to read the literature of the target language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) has its roots in Latin learning and originated in the 1500s. This method of applying rules of grammar was further developed by Meidenger in 1783 and Plotz in the 1800s. By the twentieth century the GTM was the most dominant approach to English language teaching in Europe (Stern, 1991; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The GTM teaching method is a way of studying language that relies on detailed analysis of the grammar rules and implementing knowledge in translating texts or sentences into and out of the target language (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). Learners are required to memorise and present the vocabulary, grammatical structures and the contexts from their mother tongue to the target language reciprocally. Due to the detailed analysis of grammar rules, GTM may be considered deductive learning, as the teacher using this method typically presents grammatical rules first and then asks learners to implement those rules in various texts (Thornbury, 2006). In addition, the GTM also requires a strong foundation in the learner's first language abilities, because the first language system is treated as a reference for the desired translation skills and the acquisition of the foreign language (Stern, 1991).

Supporters of the implementation of the GTM in second or foreign language learning argue that foreign language learners should notice the function of the mother tongue in target language acquisition. According to Chang (2011), the GTM can provide a clear differentiation between the first language and the target language, as well as avoiding the

influence of first language on the other language by clearly recognising its interference. Translation from one language to another is significant for learners in language learning. According to Stern (1991), a GTM pedagogy can translate grammatical rules of target languages into meaning in the first language, and the differences and similarities of the target language and first language can be exposed as well. However, as a result of mainly focusing on memorisation of grammatical rules and syntax, there is typically little attention to, or practice of, oral communication. The GTM may therefore overlooks the function of language as a tool for oral communication.

### *Direct Method (1860s)*

Although developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Direct Method was promoted and teachers were encouraged to only use the target language in the classroom process (Thornbury, 2006). The Direct Method emphasises learning and practicing the target language without translation to the first language in the classroom, therefore, the elements from first language and translation would be discouraged or prohibited (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Instead of focusing entirely on translation, the teacher can be encouraged to use real objects, pictures, or demonstrations to indicate the instruction of the target language, and the teacher is required to maintain communication with learners as well (Stern, 1991; Thornbury, 2006). One core principle of the Direct Method is inductive learning and so learners are given an example of grammatical items, and then they are requested to present the rule of grammar after practicing the example (Thornbury, 2006). Due to the utilisation of the target language in classroom processes, the role of the learner's first language is internalised, with the aim of radically excluding the influence of first language in target language learning (Thornbury, 2006; Stern, 1991). Since the Direct Method emphasises the utilisation of the target language in real communication, and "language is primarily spoken, not written." (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 29), students study common, real and actual communication in the target language. They can study the history and the geography of the country where the target language is spoken, or the daily expression of the speakers of the target language. Therefore, the Direct Method works from the premise that cultural aspects of the target language can be taught through communicative contexts found in daily life. Using the target language and making use of it in natural contexts can help learners to understand the target language context. These aspects are also important in second language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

### *Audiolingual Approach (1950s)*

The audiolingual approach was widespread in the 1950s and 1960s to drill students in the use of grammatical sentence patterns in the United States (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Thornbury, 2006). Like the Direct Method, the audiolingual approach is oral-based, but it is different from the Direct Method in that the audiolingual approach is more focused on drilling the grammatical sentence patterns in use within situations (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The steps in an audiolingual class start with the repetition and memorisation of material, then move on to drilling in this material with pattern practice (Thornbury, 2006). The essential purpose of the audiolingual approach is to help students build their own language laboratory and language habits through repetition, memorisation and drill practice (Thornbury, 2006). Then, it is expected that students can speak the target language spontaneously by using their target language laboratory (Thornbury, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The audiolingual approach to language learning is based on the theory of behaviourism as it involves organising a repertoire of behaviours, in terms of stimulus, response, and reinforcement (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Thornbury, 2006). In the process of a typical audiolingual approach, the role of the teacher is treated as the leader to guide and control the students' language behaviours (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In addition, within this approach teachers need to be a good role model for students to imitate, and therefore, the role of students is as an imitator who follows their teachers' instructions and directions accurately (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

In contrast to the behaviourist view (Larsen-Freeman, 1991, 2000; Skinner, 2014) which considers the first language as a reference point in second or foreign language acquisition, the role of the mother tongue in the Direct Method and the Audiolingual Approach are internalised and avoided. However, due to the radical approach of learning the target language without reference to the first language, there may be a misunderstanding of the meaning of language, grammatical items, or demonstration, particularly for learners at an early stage (Stern, 1991). Although it may seem useful to focus only on the target language in this manner, in other modes of language teaching, the mother tongue can allow learners to describe what they really want to show, and teachers can understand and recognise what learners really acquired and what they misunderstood (Atkinson, 1987). Since the Audiolingual Approach emphasises sentence patterns, drilling, modelling and imitation practice, it misses making relationships between language and meaning, and it does not provide a real social context for students to use language (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Bygate,

2001). Chomsky (1965) argued that language cannot be learned only by imitation and repetition. This is because focusing only on massive modelling and imitation practice leads the class to be teacher-centred (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Although in chain drills under the Audiolingual Approach, students can interact with their peers by taking different roles in dialogues (Larsen-Freeman, 2000), and this is suggested as a possibility for learners who are at the early stage of language learning (Stern, 1991).

### *Communicative Approach (1960s-2000s)*

The Communicative Approach emerged from an interest in the communicative uses of language and this in turn influenced language teaching and curriculum development (Wilkins, 1976). Developing learner's communicative competence is distinct from the aim of the GTM which focuses on the development of language competence. According to Nunan (1991), the main principles of the Communicative Approach are:

- a) learning elements should relate to learner's experiences;
- b) learning language should be based on the interaction between the target language with real-life contexts;
- c) there should be focus on the language learning process as well; and
- d) there should be correlations between the classroom and outside of the classroom activities.

The purpose of the Communicative Approach is to encourage learners to communicate and interact with others in the target language and attempt to use communicative activities to integrate language instruction as well (Stern, 1991). Essentially, the Communicative Approach shifts the emphasis from the traditional teaching system of focusing on vocabulary and grammar rules, to using language in real life situations (Thornbury, 2006). However, this kind of focus on real-life communication within teaching methods may not be applicable in a cultural context such as China where the role of the teacher is considered as one of being knowledgeable and where language accuracy is treated as one of the most important components alongside fluency (Chang, 2011). In addition, it demands a high level of competence from the teacher and as such there are implications for teacher professional development.

This section has provided a brief overview of four language teaching models: the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audiolingual Approach and the Communicative Approach. Over time the focus of language teaching has shifted from language competence to communicative competence. Each model has its relative merits, but each has drawbacks.

The Grammar Translation Method was conducted using typical teacher-centred instruction and focused on developing students' reading, writing skills and knowledge of grammar using mother tongue translation teaching. This resulted in the students having little opportunity to participate in their learning process actively, because students were mainly controlled to complete grammar and vocabulary exercises by memorising and translating (Matamoros-Gonzalez, *et al.*, 2017). Under the traditional Grammar Translation Method, it is perhaps difficult for learners to apply language learning in meaningful ways in terms of social interaction because there were limited activities for students to do language application in real communications. Even though Grammar Translation Method seems to be replaced by other approaches, some of exercises and practices are still used in some language teaching classrooms. For example, developing students' translation skills in classroom has been highlighted in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2009) for language learning. Particularly, CEFR (2009) suggested activities such as simultaneous interpretation, consecutive interpretation can be used in language teaching classroom. However, it seems to require the students to have certain language proficiency to learn specific translation courses in higher education (Kodura, 2019). This means translation skills, seen as a quite high language skill, can be provided for advanced language learners or learners with high level of language proficiency. Although the Direct Method and the Audio-lingual Approach develop students' oral skills, these two methods require students to learn the target language mainly by memorising oral and listening structural patterns or immediately recall without thinking how the target language should be learnt and how they use the language in appropriate situations. Under the Direct Method, it may be difficult for them to acquire this learning in a way that relates to their own linguistic culture because students would be controlled in a target-language learning environment and banned to involve their own cultural references and mother tongue in second language learning. Under the Audiolingual Approach, it may result in teacher-centred instruction and less real communication for the students because of the controlled drilling practice of the repetition of oral and listening structural patterns. More importantly, the application of mother tongue was banned in the Direct Method and the Audio-lingual Approach environment, which may cause the students to misunderstand the knowledge and use of the target language.

The Communicative Approach does not emphasise habit formation by listening and repeating drill practices, but provides a way for teachers to give opportunities for their learners to think and learn how they can use the target language to interact and communicate in real situations. Under the Communicative Approach, students can promote their own



functional communication, social interaction, and develop their speaking skills. The role of mother tongue in this setting is seen as a support for students to learn target language (Swan, 1985). This method encourages teachers to conduct learner-centred instruction and encourage students to think about their role in their own language learning process. However, the Communicative Approach also needs to consider the different contexts in which teachers apply this mode of language teaching. The learning environment, practice, and learner's ability can influence the second language learning process. It is necessary to know how language learning occurs in different environments. This also means teachers should be more skilled, and considering the learning environment and context, to modify their teaching strategies and classroom management for their English language learners. Considering GELs, the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual approach are mainly conducted in teacher-centred classroom, which could consider less the needs of GELs in their English language learning process. It is worth to note that although the translation practice as deriving from the traditional Grammar Translation Method, this specific practice and mediating activities can be provided for high level students (such as students in higher education) for developing students' higher interpreting and exploring skills in use. However, the importance of translation and grammar has not been entirely eradicated from the Communicative Approach (Kelly & Bruen, 2016; Kupske, 2015). The Communicative Approach environment seems to provide much more space for GELs thinking about their own language development, and more opportunities for them to practice, interact, and communicate by using English language. However, conducting the Communicative Approach needs to consider the cultural and educational context (Chang, 2011), the application of the Communicative Approach in different contexts should be explored for specific learners. The learning environment, practice, and learner's ability can influence the second language learning process. It is necessary to know how language learning occurs in different environments.

### **1.3 Defining and Conceptualising Intelligence and Giftedness**

When considering the language learning of GELs it is important not only to consider the essential understanding about language learning but in addition to think about giftedness as a concept. There is still no agreement on who should be considered a gifted individual and what the behaviours or other evidence are that can identify giftedness. This section will discuss three general views of intelligence which contribute to two current models of giftedness. Understanding the concept of intelligence can be useful for understanding the

concept of giftedness in this field of research (Davidson, 2009), but even within the research on intelligence there is a lack of agreement on what intelligence is and how it might be measured (Stoeger, 2009). It has been argued that theories of intelligence influence the attitudes of educators towards gifted individuals as well as their practice (Galton, 1892). English experimental psychologist Charles Spearman (1904) first argued that intelligence is general, and that the individual who is excellent in one domain is also excellent in other domains. His two-factor model also incorporated more specific associated abilities which he labelled 's' and so it was the amount of general ability that flowed into a person's activities that might lead them to be deemed to be intelligent. Later, Horn & Cattell (1966) proposed the Theory of Fluid and Crystallised Intelligence. Fluid intelligence refers to intrinsic abilities in relation to genetics; and crystallised intelligence refers to the problem-solving abilities. Since then, this work has been extended to acknowledge the cultural influence on intelligence (Stoeger, 2009). This cultural aspect is important for second language learning and since the Multiple Intelligence theory (Gardner, 1993) describes intelligence with consideration of cultural diversity, and the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence (Sternberg, 1985) considers the influence of environment on identifying intelligence, both of which are relevant to this research, they will be discussed more fully in the next paragraph.

The Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) of Gardner (1993) states that intelligence should be correlated with cultural diversity, and that intelligence includes: "verbal/ linguistic intelligence, mathematical/ logical intelligence, visual spatial intelligence, bodily kinaesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, naturalist intelligence" (Gardner, 1993: 163). Later adding existential intelligence MIT can be classified into nine specific domains, and it is argued that each can be developed with a specific course of training. According to MIT, an individual can develop their intelligences and this will be influenced by genetic inheritance, practice, environment and the socialisation of cultural values (Davidson, 2009). MIT evaluates specific intelligence with cultural differences and takes the influence of cultural contexts into account in the development of intelligence.

Intelligence, according to this theory, can be assessed through evaluating individual's behaviours and so MIT emphasises the importance of education in the development of intelligence and considers intelligence as a biopsychological potential that can be developed in different environmental settings (Gardner, 1999). Even though MIT argues that different intelligences can be developed through specific training to achieve success, it states that

those specific intelligences can be inherited genetically as well (Gardner, 1993), which means that MIT acknowledges the contribution of an individual's innate abilities. MIT emphasises the correlations and cooperation among multiple intelligences, it does not indicate the independence each of them (Gottfredson, 2003). Although MIT was welcomed by educators it did not fully illustrate the independence of the multiple intelligences and the lack of robust empirical data was of concern (Fasko, 2001). Gardner's multiple intelligence theory tried to shift thinking away from determinate abilities towards potential competences, which has expanded the range of intelligence domains (Davidson, 2009). However, it was not universally accepted (Visser, *et al.*, 2006) and so the theory has been called into question.

Intelligence cannot be merely described as a unitary ability and researchers (see for example Gardner, 1993; Maker, *et al.*, 1994; Davidson, 2009) acknowledged intelligent ability can be demonstrated in one or more specific domains instead of across general domains. The Triarchic Theory of Intelligence (TTI) (Sternberg, 1985) considered this and also focused on the mental processes in the conception of intelligence. The Triarchic Theory of Intelligence describes intelligence as focusing on mental processes among three aspects: Analytical Intelligence, Creative Intelligence, and Practical Intelligence (Sternberg, 1985). Generally, successful intelligence can be achieved when strengths are fully capitalised, whilst weaknesses are properly compensated for or improved (Sternberg, 1985). Utilising the interaction of analytical intelligence, creative intelligence, and practical intelligence, individuals can adapt to, shape, and also select different environmental situations (Sternberg, 2005). The three aspects of TTI are relatively independent, but they have common correlated mental processes: from meta-components to performance components, and finally to knowledge-acquisition components (Davidson, 2009).

Unlike MIT, TTI pays more attention to the mental processes underlying intelligence, rather than to specific abilities. According to TTI, individuals can plan and supervise their performance, then implement prior performance instructions, solve novel problems and learn new skills spontaneously (Davidson, 2009). Although mental processes are treated as the main feature in TTI, the influence of education is evident throughout this theory. Sternberg (2005) strongly asserts that intelligence can be created and improved through practice and training. Moreover, the Triarchic theory demonstrates that an individual could have abilities in one domain but not in all, which is counter to Spearman's theory in terms of people having general intelligence and that therefore highly intelligent people would have ability in general

areas. Although TTI emphasises the individual's mental processes when describing intelligence, MIT and TTI theories both note the role of the environment on intelligence.

The above theories emphasise gifted individuals with different intelligences in different domains and the influence of training, culture and environment on intelligence. These ideas link to the language learning approaches discussed earlier. However, some contemporary models of giftedness extend to acknowledge that exceptional behaviours depend on a degree of genetic endowment (Carroll, 1993, Tannenbaum, 2003, Gagné, 2005). Particularly, Tannenbaum (2003) claims that general intelligence (*g*) is highly inherited. Gagné (2005) who developed the Differentiated Model of Gifted and Talent (DMGT) also supports that view that natural ability is considered as an innate gift and appears in only the top 10% of groups. According to Gagné (2005) natural abilities can predict a certain degree of future excellent performance in specific domains but they are not sufficient to guarantee further successful achievement. The genetic progress of giftedness can contribute to achieving excellence in specific domains (Simonton, 2005), and this excellent performance should work together progressively with other non-intellectual aspects to realise superior performance. Scholars (Gardner, 1993; Sternberg, 1985, 2005) have also looked at the impact of non-intellective influences on giftedness. MIT (Gardner, 1993) and the Triarchic theory (Sternberg, 1985) both emphasise the contribution of training, practice and education on gifted achievement in specific domains.

Although some scholars (Carroll, 1993, Tannenbaum, 2003) believe that natural ability is a determinant for intelligence, there is no persuasive evidence to demonstrate the necessity of genetic endowment contributing to future success (Gagné, 2005, Davidson, 2009, Simonton, 2013). It is also argued that all individuals can be educated and trained to achieve "better" performance and even excellence in specific domains (Ziegler, 2014). Moreover, external components such as environmental contexts can influence the exceptional performance of individuals who have potential ability in specific domains.

To some extent, the above theories of intelligence influence the identification and education of gifted individuals (Davidson, 2009), although current models of giftedness generally involve several behaviours and attributes, not only intelligence. An example is the Three Ring Conception of Giftedness developed by Renzulli (1998). In this model, an individual's giftedness can be separated into 'schoolhouse' and 'creative-productive' giftedness. Schoolhouse giftedness can be measured by any aptitude test (such as IQ tests) that

giftedness can be appraised through the measurement of school scores (Robinson, 2005). The Three-Ring conception of giftedness is designed to account for creative-productive giftedness which is influenced by the environment and involves creativity in products or ideas. According to this model, giftedness is proposed to be the result of an interaction among three aspects: general ability, creativity, and task-commitment (Renzulli, 2005). An above-average ability in relation to general ability or specific ability consists of the ability to execute high performance in specific domains. Another important aspect is task commitment which relates to the motivation to perform tasks. People with high motivation present with self-confidence and a high level of enthusiasm to plan their study. Problem solving is also seen as necessary along with a resolve to work hard (Renzulli, 2014). Renzulli (2014) argues that necessary elements should be present for creativity to be identified. These include fluency, flexibility and originality of thought, openness to new challenges, willingness to take risks, as well as sensitivity and curiousness.

According to the Three-Ring conception of giftedness, above-average ability (“g”) is treated as the foundational component for identifying giftedness (Renzulli, 2005). The measurement of giftedness relies on the IQ test or other aptitude tests. Then, based on the measured result, more able individuals (identified by the test score) could be trained and developed through deliberate productive-oriented tasks to achieve excellence in different domains. Renzulli (2005) recognises that general ability “g” influences giftedness to some extent. However, gifted or potentially gifted individuals cannot be measured only by IQ tests (Gunderson & Siegel, 2001; Urbina, 2011). The three-ring conception of giftedness which depends on a test score to identify gifted individuals in advance does not allow gifted underachieving individuals to be identified. Thus, underachieving gifted students might not be identified through the use of the three-ring conception of giftedness. Although Renzulli’s (2005) three-ring model does not directly involve environmental elements in identifying giftedness (Mönks & Katzko, 2005), it provides a basic model for identifying giftedness that does not only consider intelligence.

Ziegler (2005) points out that giftedness is not a personal attribute, instead, it can be improved through the result of various interactions between the environment and the individual. Ziegler states that: “Being talented or being gifted simply means that someone has a chance to attain excellence in a domain, if the person learns effectively enough” (Ziegler, 2014: 99). So gifted behaviour means that a person can recognise that he or she has the ability to do well and also that the person has the willingness to improve his/ her ability

by taking the environmental influences into consideration. The Actiotope Model of Giftedness (AMG) developed by Ziegler (2005) asserts that giftedness can be described through analysing results of interactions between action repertoire, goals, environment, and subjective action space. In the conception of the AMG (Ziegler, 2005), it is important to set goals referring to learning or professional goals, and social aims for potential individuals to develop their excellence, as well as forming an excellent action repertoire. The action repertoire is composed of all possible actions that an individual executes; the environment can be regarded as having several components, such as settings, objects, persons, and the social environment, and the environment can be affected by an alteration of the talent domain. The subjective action space is regarded as that in which a person executes and develops a plan of action (Ziegler & Stoeger, 2008). So, the subjective action space is viewed as person's cognitive space in which he or she can make a decision regarding personal behaviour possibilities. Meanwhile, due to the cognitive process, the subjective action space also generates the other three components in the AMG.

Ziegler's work on giftedness has shifted the debate from asking who can be identified as a gifted individual capable of executing intellectual performance, towards asking what conditions could help to develop and permit excellent performance (Grigorenko, 2012). This shift emphasises the importance of education in promoting gifted individuals to be excellent (Dai, 2012; Grigorenko, 2012). In accordance with the AMG, giftedness not only refers to personal aptitude, but it is something can be improved and developed by an extensive action repertoire in a specific domain (Davidson, 2009). Ziegler's work on giftedness not only focuses on the top strata of individuals; it is of benefit for everyone but in different domains through long-term systematic development (Ziegler, 2014). Although the AMG (Ziegler, 2005) considers how environmental settings can stimulate and support the promotion of gifted behaviours, it was still argued by some that there is not enough evidence to support the conception of giftedness in the AMG (Cohen, 2012). Ziegler (2012: 141) responds to criticism of the AMG stressing that the "AMG offers an improvement to our understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon known as exceptionality." The AMG emphasises the interaction between an individual and the environment (Davidson, 2009). Indeed, Ziegler & Stoeger (2017) have claimed through systemic thinking following the AMG, it has a stimulating effect on gifted education, and emphasises the importance of identification of giftedness with the interaction between the individual and the context. It is argued that besides the environmental factors, the AMG specially notes the importance of cultural influence on gifted education and on an individual's execution of excellent performance

(Ziegler, *et al.*, 2013). In Ziegler's view (Ziegler, 2005), an individual's cultural background and learning environment should be noted when identifying giftedness. Importantly, for this study he suggests that from previous studies (see for example, Chan, 2007) societies rooted in Confucianist principles place great importance on "the strong relationship between culture and the development of learning" (Ziegler, 2012: 134).

## 1.4 Gifted Education in China

Since this research will investigate Chinese GELLs, the information about the influence of Chinese culture on the identification of giftedness and gifted education will be helpful for this research. The Confucian perspective is still strongly infiltrated in Chinese culture (Nguyen, *et al.*, 2006). Confucianism emphasises the importance of education on the individual pursuing excellence, as well as psychological and moral development. Within traditional Chinese language, intelligence is represented using the characters *Zhi Hui* (智慧), meaning smart, and wisdom (Chan, 2007: 55). The ancient Chinese sages believed that giftedness was gained from heaven (*Tian*, 天) or God (*Shen*, 神), so a gifted person is born with high ability. Hence, they also take the character *Tian* (天) that symbolised heaven into account to describe giftedness, for instance *Tian Cai* (天才), or *Shen Tong* (神童) (Chan, 2007; Zha, 1998). Indeed, one of most common phases for classifying the quality of learners' performance is: *Sheng Er Zhi Zhi Zhe, Shang Ye; Xue Er Zhi Zhi Zhe, Ci Ye; Kun Er Xue Zhi, You Qi Ci Ye; Kun Er Bu Xue, Min Si Wei Xia Yi* (生而知之者, 上也; 学而知之者, 次也; 困而学之, 又其次也; 困而不学, 民斯为下矣). This phrase means that people who are born to know are paramount; people who know from learning voluntarily are the second; people who learn because of difficulties and passively are third; and people do not to know and do not learn are inferior (Chan, 2007). Although the gifted individuals are described as heavenly children in Confucianism with the meaning of gaining supernatural power from heaven, Confucius claimed even for himself the need to learn how to know, and stated that he never met anyone who was born to know (Confucius, Brooks, and Brooks, 1998). This view from Confucianism is contained in the phrase: *Xue Er Zhi Zhi Fei Sheng Er Zhi Zhi* (学而知之非生而知之), regarding the meaning of learning to know and not born to know (Chan, 2007). Confucianism also emphasises the importance of learning and education for developing gifted abilities (Confucius, *et al.*, 1998). Thus, the perception of Confucianism is to believe that education can improve an individual's abilities; even able individuals also need to be

educated to achieve excellence. Therefore, although the traditional thinking of Chinese culture was that giftedness is gained from heaven or God, the ancient Chinese Confucian scholars mention the importance of education for improving and developing gifted abilities.

There is an ancient Chinese tale, “Shang Zhongyong”, told by Wang Anshi, a Song Dynasty Confucian scholar, that can be best used to describe the influence of traditional Chinese culture on identifying and developing gifted individuals, and also the importance of education in improving gifted ability. The story has been adapted for middle school students in China (Course Materials Institute, 2008). The following is the summary of the translation from the Chinese text:

There was a five-year child called Zhongyong with high ability in language and literacy, and he could make a gorgeous poem immediately when given any topic in any context. When villagers knew that Zhongyong had this high ability, they believed Zhongyong was a god-like child who was exceptionally gifted in imperial China. The villagers respected Zhongyong’s father and so his father also gained benefits from Zhongyong’s work. His father did not allow his child to be educated gradually and so developed his high ability with poetry, instead, he told Zhongyong to write poems and to show off this ability immediately in order to make profit. After ten years, this child Zhongyong could not make a gorgeous poem, and he lost his high ability in literacy. (Course Materials Institute, 2008: 37)

This tale can be an appropriate explanation for the influence of Confucianism on giftedness in China. The responsibility of family is important in Chinese culture. It also corresponds to the Confucian tenets of benevolence, propriety, filial piety, and loyalty to one’s ruler. According to Chan (2007: 53), “every member of the family has a position, and all defer to the head of the family.” In addition, this obedience is infiltrated into Chinese culture, children would be required to be obedient to parents, and teachers (Chan, 2007). As a consequence, parents determined their children’s decisions and future, and children could not dispute their ideas. However, due to this kind of obedience, children may not show their “true” ability, instead they may become the model that their parents or teachers want them to be. Gifted behaviour may not be easy to see, it may even be buried. Moreover, traditionally Chinese people pay more attention to the idea of “face” or honour. Chinese people treat academic achievement as important evidence that can bring “face” to parents and family



(Phillipson & Cheung, 2007). In Zhongyong's prose, his father believed the talented child could bring "face" to him, while the parent was very proud of their talented child (Chan, 2007). Influenced by "face" Zhongyong's father determined Zhongyong's education and did not develop his child's high potential ability. The long-historical influence by Chinese Confucianism has resulted in the influence of parents and family on gifted individuals and this was viewed crucial, but it could lead to gifted children becoming over-dependent on other's suggestions.

Considering the talented ability in a specific area, the ancient Chinese scholars also believe that a man of great talents will surely be given an important accomplishment (*Tian Sheng Wo Cai Bi You Yong*, 天生我才必有用). Hence, they realise that every gifted person has special ability in one area, which they call it as *Zhuan Chang* (专长) (Chan, 2007). In addition, another traditional Chinese instruction: *Ren Jin Qi Cai* (人尽其才), means that people need to develop their special talents and abilities for achieving excellence (Chan, 2003). This emphasises the educational implications of special gifted and talented domains. Thus, in Chinese culture, gifted individuals can be identified as having high abilities in specific areas, and these gifted abilities require education and support of they are to achieving excellence.

Although there are a number of different models used to identify giftedness (see for example Gardner, 1993; Renzulli & Reis, 2000), many give little explicit consideration to the different cultural influences on giftedness. According to Stoeger (2009), cultural differences are a significant factor that should be considered when defining conceptions of giftedness. Ziegler (2005; 2014) also emphasises that giftedness is a character or behaviour that can change over time along with environmental components. So, the cultural influence is important for the understanding of giftedness. Although the Actiotope Model of Giftedness developed by Ziegler (2005) may not point specifically to the cultural factors influencing giftedness, the *environmental components* in Ziegler's model are considered as highlighting that giftedness is entwined with cultural influence.

Three phases of giftedness research are differentiated by Ziegler & Raul (2000): the theological phase; the metaphysical phase; and the scientific, empirical phase. The distinction between those three is that in the theological phase, giftedness is considered as supernatural power; in the metaphysical phase, giftedness is investigated in relation to individual aptitudes; in the scientific and empirical phase, giftedness is described by providing empirical and scientific reasons (Stoeger, 2009). In addition, in the third phase,

giftedness research is conducted in relation to psychological theoretical frameworks (Stoeger, 2009). In China, for example, Shi & Zha (2000) investigate giftedness through the view of psychology on children in gifted and talented education in China. However, due to the long-historical influence of ancient Chinese perspectives and Confucianism, some thinking of the theological and metaphysical phases may also coexist in the conception of giftedness in the general public. Since Chinese people believe in the importance of education in developing gifted individuals, some gifted education programmes have been established in China. In 1978, the first Special Class for the Gifted Young (SCGY) was established as a college entrance programme at the University of Science and Technology of China (Dai, *et al.*, 2015). The purpose of this programme is to provide support for talented students to develop the national interest in the science field (Dai, *et al.*, 2015). Chinese researchers have also investigated giftedness, and although this initial focus was on science, creative abilities are being considered (Shi, 1995; 2004). The place of English language within provision is interesting. A special class for young adolescents aged 11-16 years old has been studied at the University of Science and Technology of China. However, this special class pays more attention to mathematics or science rather than humanities (Phillipson, *et al.*, 2009) and there is no focus on English language learning. In addition, the identification of gifted individuals for this special class is conducted mainly by examination, only focusing on mathematics, physics, and non-verbal intelligence tests. The study by Zhang & Shi (2006) illustrates that further gifted research needs to address the issues relating to other specific types of giftedness, such as arts and athletics. English language learning cuts across science and humanities and so research into giftedness in these areas could include research into GELLs.

In summary, gifted education in China is often focused on abilities in mathematics and science, and is not focused on other domains or on the learners' development of mental, physical abilities or personality. Although there are gifted programmes for developing gifted individuals, there is little consideration given to the identification and provision for GELLs in spite of the largest number of English language learners in the world being Chinese. As cultural information influences identification and provision for GELLs, and Chinese people are strongly influenced by historical thinking, it may be useful to investigate the cultural influence in supporting the learning experience of GELLs, with Chinese GELLs as a particular example.

Through the understandings of intelligence and the models of giftedness discussed above, giftedness can be demonstrated in different domains, and may be treated as biopsychological

potential which could be increased by distinct development. Environmental influence and an individual's cultural background also should be considered when identifying people who are gifted. Bringing together these aspects alongside the knowledge and understanding from language learning, a lens for examination of GELLs in language learning contexts can be developed.

## **1.5 Aim of Research and Structure of Thesis**

Considering how the learning environment, method of instruction, educational context, and cultural information can influence identifying and supporting GELLs, it is important to investigate GELL's learning experience in different educational and cultural contexts. This will increase understanding of how these factors influence the identification of, and support for, GELLs. China and Scotland have distinct educational and cultural contexts, and their potential influence on GELLs in each of these two places will be investigated. By investigating English language learning in Scotland and China, the thesis will explore how very different cultural and educational contexts address the challenges raised by the education of GELL and will examine the differences between studying English in Scotland and China.

This thesis is structured in the following order:

- Chapter 1: Introduction: the background and rationale of this study.
- Chapter 2: Literature review: identifying GELLs, the characteristics of GELLs, the provision for GELLs, EFL education and gifted education in Scotland and China.
- Chapter 3: Research methodology: research design, data collection methods & approach to data analysis.
- Chapter 4: Data presentation and analysis arising from qualitative interviews with teachers.
- Chapter 5: Data presentation and analysis arising from qualitative interviews with Chinese GELLs.
- Chapter 6: Data presentation and analysis arising from qualitative interviews with parents.
- Chapter 7: Synthesis of the study findings, summary of the main findings, implications, and discussions.
- Chapter 8: Summary of this research and discussion of its limitations. Recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided the overarching context and rationale of this research. This chapter will discuss the literature in these fields, and this will consist of five sections. The first section will provide a review of available literature on the characteristics of GELLs (section 2.2) including, motivation, self-concept, learning approach, and English language proficiency. The second section will review current strategies for identifying GELLs (section 2.3). This will include a critique of using English language aptitude, proficiency (section 2.3.1), IQ tests and nonverbal tests (section 2.3.2) as bases to identify gifted learners. Building on this, the importance of gathering information from teachers and parents as an approach to identify GELLs is highlighted and justified (section 2.3.3). This discussion will then proceed to considering gifted underachievers and potential cultural influences on academic performance (section 2.3.4 and 2.3.5). The subsequent section will review current provision for GELLs by schools, teachers and parents (section 2.4). The next two sections will discuss EAP and EFL within the context of higher education in Scotland and China respectively (section 2.5 and 2.6). This chapter will conclude with a synthesis of key findings, the importance and aims of this research in response to the implications from the literature reviewed (section 2.7 and 2.8).

### **2.2 Characteristics of GELLs**

GELLs as a group of English as foreign language learners should have similar basic characteristics to ELLs, as well as characteristics of giftedness (Blackburn, *et al.*, 2016). However, GELLs as a group of English as foreign language learners display similar basic characteristics to ELLs, but in addition display characteristics of giftedness (Blackburn, *et al.*, 2016). While it should be noted that there is no consensus achieved regarding the characteristics of GELLs, enough similarities have emerged to identify four main characteristics of able language learners: motivation; self-concept; learning approach and language proficiency. This suggests that while giftedness as a concept is slippery and many characteristics overlap those of other ELL, there are some differences between learners that suggest it is possible to say that some learners appear to be GELL. Broadly, the above characteristics can be categorised according to process-oriented and outcome-oriented goals.

Firstly, for example, one of the main aims of Ziegler's AMG is to produce a framework that allows for the identification of giftedness in order to develop support for gifted students so that they can achieve excellence in different domains (Zielger, 2004). In AMG model, the importance of students' motivation and self-concept have been emphasised as part of gifted students' effective learning processes and for further achievements in their learning. This is based on the notion that motivation and self-concept could benefit individuals' self-regulation and formulation of their learning strategies. As this research has used the AMG model developed by Ziegler (2004) as the foundational theoretical framework, the literature regarding characteristics such as motivation, self-concept, learning strategies will be analysed and critiqued.

Ziegler (2004) focused on the training and learning processes for helping individuals achieve excellence in various domains. Using proficiency in language as a criterion to identify giftedness has been noted by scholars investigating language learners. Indeed Rubin (1975) sought to examine whether good language learners were somehow different in their makeup and in their approach to learning from weak language learners. Although their study yielded interesting findings in relation to strategies that proficient language learners used, it concluded that better tests to measure personality should be developed. Overall their research did correlate with previous studies suggesting that "attitude and motivation were in many instances the best overall predictors of success in second language learning" (Rubin, 1975: 66). Successive studies (see for example Strong, 1983; Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1990; Gardner, Day & MacIntyre, 1992) assumed that good language learners did approach learning differently and as such, they largely ignored the "situated learning experience" (Norton and Toohey, 2001: 310) of the language learner. Norton and Toohey's study of good language learners (2001:318) considered the impact of the social interactions and communities in which the language learning happened and concluded that "understanding good language learning requires attention to social practices in the contexts in which individuals learn". A synthesis of both the psychological aspects to language learning, for example, motivation, attitude, cognition with the sociocultural aspects of learning with the learning environment is necessary to better understand the requirements for proficiency in language learning, particularly for GELLs.

## ***Motivation***

Of particular relevance to gifted students is the role motivation has been given as an important element in gifted students' achievement by a wide range of models and definitions of giftedness. For instance, task commitment in the Three Ring Conception of giftedness (Renzulli, 1986) was regarded as an essential component for gifted students' achievement. Mönks & Mason (2000) point out that Renzulli's model involves broad personality and environmental aspects, and task commitment in this model can be seen as a part of motivation. Importantly, the role of motivation is often considered as the additional but significant factor in gifted students' high levels of performance (Howe, 1995; Sternberg, 2000; Kornhaber, *et al.*, 2004). In a similar vein, Schneider (2000) explains that non-cognitive factors, including motivation, are a precondition for excellent levels of achievement. According to Ziegler's AMG model, an individual needs enormous resources including motivation, attention, financial and social support, etc. to maintain consciousness and to pursue the learning goals required for high levels of performance and achievement (Ziegler, *et al.*, 2010). There are, of course, many things that impact on motivation and Ziegler and Philipson (2012: 13) highlight that two core components of the AMG model - interconnectedness and interdependence - that serve as a reminder that "manifestations of behaviour do not occur in a "vacuum"". Clearly there are implications here for gifted students whose circumstances mean that they do not have this support to draw on. Lack of access to support might mean that their abilities remain underdeveloped.

However, access to these enormous resources can benefit an individuals' self-regulation, which is treated as a preconditional factor for high performance, specifically motivation is considered as an indispensable factor in influencing gifted students' achievement (Ziegler, *et al.*, 2010; Sternberg, 2000). If access is denied through social status, for example, the provision of appropriate learning experiences in both school and university become important for the development and support of learners, including gifted learners. Empirically, Csikszentmihalyi, *et al.* (1997) found that compared with the impact of intrinsic motivation on gifted students' achievement, extrinsic motivation displayed nonsignificant correlations with gifted student's achievement. Teenage students who had strong intrinsic motivation would spend more time progressing their talents, and the intrinsic rewards were treated as the main reason for students engaging in developing their talents. When looking at the achievement of gifted students, gifted students have uniquely higher academic motivation, and it has positive correlations to their academic achievement (Gottfried & Gottfried, 2004;

Friedman-Nimz & Skyba, 2009). Translating this into a post school context striving to go to university to study, and in the case of this research, go to study English language, might be seen as an intrinsic goal for the learner that drives them to study and succeed in order to achieve the goal. Thus, the cyclical and interactive effect between goal and motivation leads to renewed focus on the goal and increased motivation to achieve it.

Motivation of higher education students can be impacted by continuing parental influence and teachers' support. The parenting styles students experience in their childhood can influence students' anxiety levels, academic motivation and grades in university. For instance, parents with a less authoritarian parenting style can help the students become independent and develop their own sense of responsibility for their own learning (Silva, *et al.*, 2007). Furthering this line of research, Perry *et al.* (2001) found that university students with increased responsibility for their own learning were more motivated, frequently used self-monitoring strategies and had confidence in their performance in the learning process or final examination.

While this impacts positively on those who have experienced this kind of parenting, it raises questions about others, who may have ability in English language but may lack the parental support required to move them onto the next level. This perhaps highlights once again the role of the English language teacher as experiences offered on courses may go some way to offer support the learners who appear to have potential but not all aspects of the support required for it to develop. Moreover, teachers' support (such as teachers' expectations, teaching strategies), is a form of collective motivation that can also influence college students' outcomes. For instance, Gorham & Millette (2009) have shown that the selection of teaching materials, the course assignments the teacher designed, classroom requirements (such as the time to attend class and to finish homework) can all influence the level of motivation of university students in class. In particular, teachers holding high expectations can help university students to achieve. While the ideal setting in Ziegler's model is have access to all areas of support and resources, it is important to examine practice and experiences. In this way an understanding of how each component might be developed and applied, particularly to those without access to one area, can be explored.

Under self-determination theory, motivation can be described into two ways: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Roth, *et al.*, 2007; Alt, 2015). This theory has been used extensively to investigate students' motivation in higher education (see,

Komarraju, *et al.*, 2009; Silva, *et al.*, 2007; Alt, 2015) and there is general agreement that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation often work together simultaneously when individuals complete a task. However, the role of intrinsic motivation in the development of talent is particularly salient (Lens & Rand, 2000). To clarify, intrinsic motivation broadly refers to people who are working for internal interests or own goals and focusing on the task itself as in the previous example of going to university to study; while extrinsic motivation refers to people who are motivated to work by external factors, such as rewards, grades or prize, etc. (Clinkenbeard, 2012). When either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, ELLs who are proficient strive to be accurate in their knowledge of a new language; they have a strong motivation to communicate and to acquire language from communication. When communicating with others, they prefer to prepare the form of language in advance, practice the new language and to monitor their own and others' speech (Rubin, 1975). The importance of the learning context can be seen here as communication between individuals allowing for the development of proficiency in language learning. Appropriate learning contexts that offer opportunities to practice and engage with others are required if the intrinsic motivation of ELL and GELL is to be addressed and this is dependent on teacher professional awareness and development and language programmes and resources that allow this to happen.

Students who are intrinsically motivated believe that tasks are interesting, helpful and important. As such, they will be willing to participate and will be persistent as they seek to achieve goals (Lee, *et al.*, 2010). Zimmerman & Schunk (2008) and Vansteenkiste, *et al.* (2004) reported that intrinsic motivation can help students maintain their autonomy and willingness to engage in self-regulated learning. Therefore, intrinsic motivation is also regarded as one source of students' autonomous self-regulation in learning process (Reeve, *et al.*, 2008). Alternatively, students who are extrinsically motivated prefer to engage in surface learning and to achieve extrinsic rewards, and they prefer to focus on competition with others rather than the interest of task (Lee, *et al.*, 2010). Although extrinsic motivation played an important role in the development of talent, for instance, competition as an element in extrinsic motivation is an effective motivator for students' task involvement and success, there is a risk of reducing interest in the task if receiving negative encouragement in competition (Udvari & Schneider, 2000; Lee, *et al.*, 2010). As such, extrinsic motivation may have a negative influence on maintaining motivation (Lee, *et al.*, 2010). However, extrinsic motivation can be helpful for enhancing intrinsic motivation. The tangible rewards such as money if offered unexpectedly or depending on the predetermined level of



performance, can stimulate student intrinsic motivation (Cameron & Pierce, 1994). In a language learning context one aspect of the extrinsic motivation is gaining a place at university and of course subsequently graduating with a degree may have an impact on earnings in later life and so it could be argued that these longer-term goals might influence extrinsic motivation of GELL. Equally, it could be argued that the goal of further enhancing their language skills and abilities could act as intrinsic motivation for the learner.

In relation to second language learning, motivation and positive attitude have been noted as playing an important role in learning process (Dörnyei, 2009b). In addition, Dörnyei (2009a) also emphasised the significance of the interaction between language learners' individual characteristics and their learning environment. Particularly, Roth, *et al.* (2007) pointed out teachers' teaching as an extrinsic motivation for students, can influence students' motivation and their learning processes and outcomes. Studies (see for example Pae (2008); Noels, *et al.*, 2000; Wen, 1997) found a beneficial role for intrinsic motivation in maintaining students' interest intensity, and persistence. In contrast, extrinsic motivation, which includes extrinsic rewards or punishment depending upon students' success or failure in the specific task, could have a negative impact in promoting continued language learning (see for example Wang, 2008; Pae, 2008). However, the value of extrinsic motivation cannot be isolated when investigating the role of motivation in language learning (Gonzales, 2011), as there is evidence suggesting the positive role of extrinsic motivation in increasing intrinsic motivation in the process of language learning (Wang, 2008; Noels, *et al.*, 2000). Overall, the existing literature is of the opinion that intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are of a cooperative nature, and students often have a variety of motivations in operation in their learning process (Alt, 2015). Again, this calls into question the place of the English language learning classroom when one of these motivational aspects is denied to the ELL or GELL in other areas of their life. ELL teachers cannot change personal circumstances. Nevertheless, how teachers organise and facilitate learning within the classroom might support GELL rather than compound issues for them because they have not had access to support. Curriculum structures, exam expectations and language learning approaches will all influence the degree to which the ELL teacher can facilitate learning opportunities to maximise the learning for GELL. Some of this may be dependent on the policy landscape in a university or country in which the teacher is working.

Motivation is discussed in relation to the learning goals, and there are correlations between learning goals and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Lee, *et al.*, 2010). Particularly, goal orientation is one of the key components in Ziegler's (2004) AMG model, which forms an excellent action repertoire for an individual to do deliberate learning in different domains. Goal orientation theory, also known as achievement goal theory, has often been used to understand students' achievement motivation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Goal orientation theory aims to understand students' motivation and achievement-related behaviours by considering students' reasons for engaging in academic activities (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). It is stated that there are four types of goal orientations, 1. mastery-approach goal orientation, 2. mastery-avoidance orientation, 3. performance-approach orientation, 4. performance-avoidance orientation (see for example Wolters, 2004). Specifically, mastery goals are viewed as the purpose of learning to acquire knowledge, develop skills, and understand materials. Students who pursue performance goals treat the purpose of learning as being to show their intellectual abilities to others. Mastery-avoidance goals view students who learn in order to avoid failure; while performance-avoidance goals view students who learn in order to avoid demonstrating failure performance in front of others (Wolter, 2004). These different stances that a student can take will impact on how they approach the learning and activity. So, adopting different goal orientations can influence student outcomes. Mastery-oriented goals which focus on the students' personal development are associated with students' greater interest in classroom processes, greater self-regulation, more positive attitudes toward learning, and self-efficacy, while performance-oriented goals will lead students to focus on the evaluation of their performance and competence instead of the learning process itself (Ames, 1992; Wolters, 2004). For example, Dweck (1986) found that students who have confidence in their intelligence (known as self-efficacy) show high self-efficacy in learning processes; while students who have low confidence in their intelligence show low self-efficacy in learning tasks. Based on this result, the author concluded that performance goals were not appropriate for students who have low self-concepts of ability. There is also a positive relation between adopting mastery goals and students' self-regulated learning (Wolter, 2004). For instance, students who have learning-mastery approach show more self-monitoring, and more effective and frequent use of strategies in their learning processes (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Overall, it can be seen that mastery-oriented goals are related to students' intrinsic satisfactions and rewards, while performance-oriented goals are related to students' extrinsic rewards and recognition (Wolter, 2004). In this regard, this information can be useful for this study of gifted English language learners' learning goals which, in turn, will aid understanding of their motivation

towards engaging in the learning process. Class activities can then be developed in ways that support GELL.

The main conclusion drawn from the above literature is that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are important for English language learners, college students and gifted students (see for example, Silva, *et al.*, 2007; Alt, 2015; Lens & Rand, 2000; Gonzales, 2011). For example, studies have made links between the motivation of gifted university students and a range of student outcomes such as academic dishonesty (Rinn & Boazman, 2014), academic achievement and aspirations (Rinn, 2007), underachievement (Balduf, 2009), transition to college (Gomez-Arizaga & Conejeros-Solar, 2013). However, the majority of this research does not account for students' subject speciality. Exploring this within the domain of language learning that is taking place across two cultures and countries will shed light on the role of motivation for GELL. Moreover, as discussed earlier in the section about personal and collective motivation, university students' motivation can be influenced by the parenting styles they received during childhood, and parenting influence is subject to the individuals' cultural background (Dennis, *et al.*, 2005). This points towards the necessity of considering cultural influence when addressing ELL and GELL. Previous studies address the motivation of Chinese English language learners, but they are either conducted on Chinese students in secondary school (Zhang, *et al.*, 2017) or on Chinese international students studying in American universities (Wang & Zuo, 2014). This therefore ignores the context of Chinese university students studying in Chinese universities. Furthermore, studies that have investigated Chinese English language learners' motivation in higher education in China (such as Peng, 2007) but they did not focus on students who may be gifted in English language learning. Given this recognition, the current thesis investigated GELL in higher education and their motivation to study in order to develop better understanding about their self-regulated learning process.

### ***Self-concept***

Self-concept and identity are about an understanding of self (Baumeister, 1999). From a sociological perspective, Lawler (2008) pointed out people can share the same and different identities or characteristics to others. For language learners, self-concept involves two dimensions: cognitive and affective, and these two dimensions are interrelated in second language learners' learning processes (Mercer, 2012). Self-concept of a Foreign language learner is defined as the learners' own perceptions about their competence and evaluative feelings in learning a foreign language (Mercer, 2011). Particularly for gifted individuals, in

Ziegler's AMG model (2004), the component of subjective action space is regarded as individuals' cognitive space in which they can make a decision regarding the various possibilities related to their personal behaviour. This concept refers to an individual's cognitive perceptions about their abilities to do actions resulting in their development. Considering cognitive perceptions, self-concept can be defined as an individual's perceptions of his/her own abilities, and it can be developed through one's experience or through one's interpretations of the surrounding environment (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). According to this definition, self-concept broadly includes two categories, non-academic self-concept and academic self-concept. Non-academic self-concept refers to one's perception of themselves in relation to social, emotional and physical aspects, and the academic self-concept refers to one's academic abilities about different academic areas, such as English, history, math, etc. (Shavelson, *et al.*, 1976). Of particular relevance to the educational settings is the concept of academic self-concept (Williams, *et al.*, 2015). More specifically, academic self-concept is people's perceptions of their own abilities regarding their academic performance (Rinn & Boazman, 2014) in specific subject areas.

Importantly, academic self-concept has been argued to differentiate across subjects (Williams, *et al.*, 2015), and therefore, English language self-concept would be different from mathematics or history self-concept. In this regard, academic self-concept can be categorised in relation to subject areas such as academic which would include English, history, science, mathematics, etc (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Swann Jr, *et al.*, 2007). Academic self-concept is regarded as a main factor influencing students' learning and intrinsic motivation (Spinath & Steinmayr, 2012). Marsh & Craven (2006) argue similarly for academic achievement. An early study by Reynolds (1988) investigated students' confidence in their academic abilities and found a positive relationship between high academic self-concept and college students' grade point average (GPA). This is congruent with the findings from Lent, *et al.* (1997) and Choi (2005) where students' academic self-concept can be used to predict students' academic achievement, such as GPA. In addition, there are studies exploring the antecedents of academic self-concept; for example, students' self-concept can be influenced by interactions with the university learning experience (Komarraju, *et al.*, 2010). In particular, Bjorkland, *et al.* (2002) reported that students who received more feedback about their performance or frequently communicated with staff members had higher levels of awareness about their academic competences, future career aspirations, and problem-solving skills. This may have impact on the development of clear goals and on their motivation to work towards these goals.

A student's academic self-concept is significant for their success, and particularly for students who are highly able (Rinn, *et al.*, 2010). To clarify, since self-concept is subject-related (Swann Jr, *et al.*, 2007), the academic self-concept of gifted students has two comparison processes. These include an internal comparison where the student's self-perception of their own ability in one specific area is compared to his/her ability in other areas; and an external comparison where the student's perceptions of their own ability in one specific area is compared to others' ability in this area (Plucker & Stocking, 2001). Generally, gifted students appear to have higher academic self-concept than non-gifted students (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993; Lister & Roberts, 2011). With regards to its influences on gifted student outcomes, academic self-concept can affect gifted students' achievement (see for example, Rinn, *et al.*, 2010; Plucker & Stocking, 2001). For example, McCoach & Siegle (2003a) argued that both gifted achievers and gifted underachievers have high academic self-concept in specific domains. Their subsequent work (McCoach & Siegle, 2003b) provided further supporting evidence that both groups (gifted achiever and underachiever) can perceive themselves as having certain cognitive abilities for being successful in schools. In particular, gifted underachievers may be confident with their abilities, and have a positive attitude in dealing with their academic failure. The implication being that academic self-concept is considered as a predictor for gifted students' achievement, but not a determinant for gifted students' successful achievement (McCoach & Siegle, 2003a, 2003b; Lee, *et al.*, 2017). These traits and understanding of self can be carried into the post school setting.

The importance of self-concept of the gifted individual also has been highlighted by Ziegler's AMG model. The subjective action space as a crucial component in the AMG model is used to show a person's cognitive perceptions about her or his abilities to complete actions (Ziegler & Stoeger, 2008). Meanwhile, the subjective action space is used for gifted individuals to make optimal decisions from the behavioural possibilities provided by the other three components, which can be treated as a synthesis for gifted individuals to progress action.

Academic self-concept has been investigated in samples of university students (see for example: Lent *et al.*, 1997; Komarraju, *et al.*, 2010), gifted children (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993) and gifted high school students (McCoach & Siegle, 2003a), but little research has been carried out with gifted university students (Rinn & Cunningham, 2008). Swann Jr, *et al.*, (2007) argue that academic self-concept should be investigated among university students and in relation to specific subjects. Although studies have been carried out in certain domains,

for example, academic self-concept in science (Blankenburg, *et al.*, 2015) and in languages, mathematics and history (Marsh & Yeung, 1997), none of these studies specifically consider gifted university students' academic self-concept in specific subjects and none relate to English language learning. As a response, this thesis aims to investigate GELLs' understanding of their academic self-concept in order to understand their learning processes, and how this might affect the provision of further support for this group.

### ***Language Learning strategies***

Language learning strategies have been investigated and classified by scholars for some time (see for example Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975, Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1998, Macaro, 2001). The focus for language learning strategies is the learner and so this differs from the more mechanistic approach to language learning that had been applied. Initial studies explored the idea of a good language learner. A key scholar in the learning strategies field offered this definition Oxford (1990: 8): “learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” and so the focus shifted somewhat from good language learning to learning strategies. However, language learning strategies were described as “rather inconsistent and elusive” by Dörnyei & Skehan (2003: 608) and as recently as 2014 Griffiths and Oxford described them as “fuzzy” (2014). Overtime scholars (see for example Cohen & Weaver, 2005) argued that language learning was complex. As such it was unlikely that adopting a learning strategy and applying it to other learners would necessarily result in the same outcome. It was claimed that there are a variety of ways to succeed as a language learner and so one strategy was not a panacea. In an attempt for clarity of the concept, Dörnyei (2005) adopted a psychological construct, namely self-regulated learning. Applying a self-regulated learning approach to second language acquisition, it was argued, would offer learners autonomy in relation to both the behavioural and mental approaches chosen and used by learners (Oxford, 1990). One issue with this approach was the place of “self” within the idea of self-directed learning although the idea of autonomy emerges in later definitions. Researchers had recognised a combination of concepts within their research in the field (see for example Gao, 2007; Macaro, 2006; Gao & Zhang, 2011) were important for language learning and in 2011 Oxford introduced the Strategic Self-Regulation Model. This model brought together a variety of the previously used concepts (including self-regulation and autonomy) to understand the contested concept of learning strategies. Dörnyei & Ryan, (2015: 164) argued that it is important to view “the usefulness of specific learning strategies”

going on to say that it “is not absolute but depend(ing) on how they suit the individual agent who employs them: A certain learning technique/procedure can be “strategic” for one learner and “non-strategic” for another”. This called into question how far it could be said that frequency of use of a strategy will result in successful learning. Rather they argued that it is the capacity to self-regulate that might render the strategy successful for some. Nonetheless, studies have investigated the most frequently used language learning strategies and report these to be metacognitive, compensation and cognitive strategies (Dawadi, 2017; Charoento, 2016; Wu, 2008; Chen, 2009). However, Chamot (2004) noted the preferences towards different strategies used by students in different cultural contexts thus supporting the argument that it is perhaps the interaction between the individual within in a context and the strategy that is important and results in success. For example, Chinese students were reported as having a greater preference for social strategies with less preference for affective strategies than European students.

Returning to the development of learning strategies within the field, Oxford’s system (1990) stated that language learning strategies involved two main types - direct strategy and indirect strategy. Direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies; and the indirect strategies involve metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. In direct strategies, memory refers to the storage of the language information; cognitive refers to students’ mental strategies about their sense of language learning. Compensation strategies refer to students using a variety of strategies, such as non-verbal communication or the context, to understand meaning when the exact meaning is unclear. Metacognitive strategies refer to students self-regulating their language learning; affective strategies are related to students’ emotional aspects in the language learning process, such as confidence and anxiety, and social strategies refer to the use of the target language in social interactions. More recently, Oxford (2017) analysed definitions of language learning strategies and as a result suggests that language learning strategies specifically refer to the thoughts and actions taken by the learners in order to regulate their language learning for the purpose of “a) accomplishing language tasks; b) improving language performance or use; and/or c) enhancing long-term proficiency” (Oxford, 2017: 48). Although she developed her strategy categories in a meta-model, she did not elaborate on this developed strategy classification. She acknowledged a master of meta-strategies, within the existing three strategies - cognitive, affective and sociocultural-interactive strategies and she continued to use some of her original classifications for analysis. Therefore, this research will utilise her taxonomy of language learning strategies presented in Oxford (1990) acknowledging the developments in 2017. See Table 2.1 below.

Table 2-1: Taxonomy of Language Learning Strategies

<b>Direct Strategies</b>	<b>Indirect Strategies</b>
<b>Memory Strategies:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating mental linkages</li> <li>Applying images and sounds</li> <li>Reviewing well</li> <li>Employing action</li> </ol>	<b>Metacognitive strategies:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centering your learning</li> <li>Arranging and planning your learning</li> <li>Evaluating your learning</li> </ol>
<b>Cognitive Strategies:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practicing</li> <li>Receiving and sending messages</li> <li>Analysing and reasoning</li> <li>Creating structure for input and out</li> </ol>	<b>Affective strategies:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lowering your anxiety</li> <li>Encouraging yourself</li> <li>Taking your emotional temperature</li> </ol>
<b>Compensation strategies:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guessing intelligently</li> <li>Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</li> </ol>	<b>Social strategies:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asking questions</li> <li>Cooperating with others</li> <li>Empathising with others</li> </ol>

Oxford (1990: 17)

Language learning strategies are flexible and creative (Oxford, 2017) and different learners may have developed their own language strategies for language learning. For instance, McMullen (2009) found that female university EFL students used more language learning strategies than male students. Oxford (2017) argues that language learning strategies are teachable and so this too will influence the learning strategies students adopt. Studies by McMullen (2009) and Lam (2015) investigated the ways in which university English language learners could be trained to be effective writers through the use of learning strategies.

Language learning strategies are closely related to language proficiency (Lai, 2009; Zhang, *et al.*, 2017) with studies appearing to indicate a positive relationship between the use of language learning strategies and language proficiency (Wu, 2008; Rao, 2016; Chen, 2009; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007). Generally, more proficient English language learners used language learning strategies more frequently than less proficient ELLs (Lai, 2009; Shmais, 2003). Particularly, Wu (2008) noted in higher education, more proficient students emphasised the importance of using cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies in their language learning process. Additionally, Magogwe & Oliver (2007) argued that more proficient students were able to modify and choose the most appropriate language learning strategies for themselves in order to achieve different learning goals. Wharton (2000) specifically noted that students who have higher proficiency self-rating engaged in more frequent strategies use. Therefore, advanced or more proficient language learners seem to be



focused more on the implication and importance of learning strategies in their language learning process (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Wong & Nunan, 2011).

Within the field of gifted education, Ziegler's AMG model, as discussed in chapter one, includes training and learning processes for identifying and supporting gifted individuals. It recognises that motivation and self-concept can benefit an individuals' self-regulation and influences their choice of learning strategy during the learning process. That the model comes from the field of psychology is perhaps not surprising since Ziegler is a psychologist. Along with Stoeger, another psychologist, Ziegler has examined the role of self-regulated learning in relation to giftedness. Studies from language learning, while not exploring giftedness per se nonetheless examine the utilisation language learning strategies could make the contribution to learners' language learning success (Macaro, 2006). For example, Rubin (1975) emphasises the self-monitoring ability of able language learners, and particularly, the author focuses on learning strategies and communicative competence. The results suggest that this group of language learners usually monitor their own language skills, improve and develop these skills through the interactions with others in dynamic contexts. Furthermore, Norton & Toohey (2001) particularly focus on describing the learning strategies of able adult language learners, in terms of: 1) being active in dealing with the task of language learning; 2) realising and recognising the nature of language; 3) implementing language in appropriate communications, interactions, and situations; 4) improving their language ability through managing the difficulties in their language learning; and, 5) supervising their performance of language learning.

Bringing together the long history of learning strategies within the field of English language learning and the psychological work on the AMG model offers a framework for analysing and better understanding the commonalities and divergencies between language learning strategies in the learning process and progress and gifted language students' success in language learning.

### ***Language proficiency***

In general, able ELLs explore their language ability in a way that not only focuses on the meaning of the language, but also on the form and the function of language (Rubin, 1975). For example, Dean (2001) describes the language proficiency of more able language learners according to four basic domains of language, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This corresponds to the typology proposed by Ellis & Shintani (2013) in that English language

learning consists of “receptive” aspects and “productive” aspects. More specifically, the “receptive” aspects relate to the activities of listening and reading, and the “productive” aspects relate to the activities of speaking and writing. However, Dean’s (2001) checklist of able language learners does not involve all the processes in English language learning and therefore may not provide a comprehensive and holistic understanding of GELLs. In comparison, Evans & Goodhew (1997 cited in Holderness, 2001) provides a more specific view on gifted English language learners, particularly on considering learners’ English language acquisition. Like that of Ellis & Shintani (2013), the checklist developed by Evans and Goodhew (1997 cited in Holderness, 2001) includes both “receptive” and “productive” aspects of English language learning. More importantly, these authors advance the crucial role of the suitability of English language for use in appropriate situations since English language learning aims to improve learners’ actual use of English language in real social communication (Canale & Swain, 1980; Nunan, 1991; Stern, 1991). This is important in the sense that it emphasises the proficiency-related characteristics of able language learners’ ability in terms of the application of English language. The existing literature tends to examine these characteristics of able English language learners by assessing the level of students’ English language proficiency, such as the use of tests (IELTS), this will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3.1.

## **2.3 Identifying GELLs**

The identification with regards to this special population of learners has been investigated and discussed by other researchers and there are various approaches that have been adopted for this purpose. For example, Bain, *et al.*, (2010) identified English language learners with gifted ability by focusing on their language aptitude. English language proficiency also has been examined by Kitano & Espinosa (1995). As a traditional measurement, the use of IQ tests to identify giftedness has been critiqued by researchers such as Gunderson & Siegel, (2001) and Urbina, (2011). Nonverbal tests have also been used to identify GELLs (Lohman, *et al.*, 2008). These tools all seek to identify gifted learners from a range of perspectives.

This section critically discusses the existing literature regarding the identification of GELLs, including a critique of using language aptitude and proficiency as a measure of GELLs as well as a critique of the effectiveness of IQ tests and nonverbal tests as methods for identification. This is followed by a discussion of the alternative or additional methods for identifying GELLs including the perceptions of teachers, parents and students (Blackburn,

*et al.*, 2016; Gear, 1978; Vreys, *et al.*, 2017; Lassig, 2009; Harris, *et al.*, 2009; Sabatella, 2003; Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006), through which the use of the perceptions of teachers, parents and the learners themselves in identifying GELs as part of the process will be justified. This part of literature review then is directed towards gifted underachievers and potential cultural influences.

### ***2.3.1 English language aptitude and proficiency***

Language aptitude can be treated as one's strengths in second language learning where "cognitive abilities information processing" is utilised "during second language learning and performance in various contexts and at different stages" (Robinson, 2005: 46). Traditionally ideas of giftedness have been linked to intelligence not least because of strong associations with IQ tests (Galton, 1982). However, language aptitude is different from intelligence (Wesche, *et al.*, 1982) in that intelligence is related more to students doing writing and reading tasks and focuses less on oral tasks (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). In comparison, language aptitude is process-oriented and is strongly affected by the surrounding environmental factors which can influence students' language aptitude and outcomes (Cronbach & Snow, 1981; Robinson, 2005). Importantly, language aptitude has been discussed as individual variables in a student's second language acquisition (Cochran, *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, Li (2015) concludes that there is no single instruction for all learners' second language development; a more effective way to foster language aptitude should be to consider students' variations in aptitude and based on this, design and modify instructions for second or foreign language learners' development. This will help EFL learners become more successful in foreign language acquisition (Sparks & Ganschow, 2001).

In assessing students' aptitude, the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) by Carroll & Sapon (1959) has been widely used to test foreign language learners' aptitude (Saito, 2018). According to the Carroll (1962: 128), foreign language aptitude in MLAT is understood as aptitude in "phonetic coding, grammatical sensitivity, rote memory for foreign language materials, inductive language learning ability". However, it is important to note that the components of foreign language aptitude in this test are focused on rote learning and grammatical aspects, which may be more applicable in audio-lingual teaching classroom, rather than communicative classrooms (Skehan, 1998) and thus using this test alone may result in the identification of those who have been taught in a particular way. The notion of language aptitude in the test was referred to as an "unspecified mixture of cognitive variables" (Dörnyei, 2010: 250), which may not allow the students' holistic and communicative

language abilities to be identified. In particular, Robinson (2005) argues that the specific language tasks in real-life situations which emphasise the learning processing and influence of environmental settings on foreign language aptitude should be taken into consideration identifying EFL's language aptitude. This means that the role of interactions within the environmental setting in predicting foreign language performance is deemed to go beyond the aptitude test score. Moreover, for university students, their perception of foreign language aptitude did not necessarily make a positive contribution to their foreign language learning process. For example, Horwitz (1988) interestingly found that university students' beliefs about the concept of foreign language aptitude can in effect have a negative influence on their foreign language learning. The author explained that university students may have their own perspectives about who were unable or less able to learn a second or foreign language, and when they believed themselves as the members of this group, it would lead to negative perceptions and recognitions on their own capabilities (Horwitz, 1988). In addition, it is noted that gifted students' foreign language abilities should be measured with reference to other aspects, such as attributions and achievement (Bain, *et al.*, 2010), and it is recognised within the literature that a standardised intelligence test (Matthews & Kirsch, 2011), although problematic, may also shed light on some aspects of giftedness. Using foreign language aptitude as an identification tool for GELLs may be problematic. It can be influenced by surrounding environmental settings and students' perceptions and as these are not stable and subject to variation, the foreign language aptitude scale is not considered as an appropriate measure to identify GELLs for this study.

To identify GELLs, it is important to consider their abilities in English language. English language proficiency is often used to show students' successful ability to understand and express English language in both oral and written modes and in concepts and ideas (Cummins, 2008). There are some international tests to measure students' English language proficiency, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). This international system seeks to assess the English language ability of international students who want to work or study in a country where English is the language of communication (Hamp & Lyons, 2001). However, there are studies criticising the use of IELTS results as a predictive score for a student's academic achievement in English language learning. They argue it is not a holistic method in demonstrating the proficiency of the student. For example, Dooley & Oliver (2002) found that there was no significant correlation between the IELTS score and the students' subsequent academic achievement. Indeed, as an English language proficiency test, IELTS does not consider any aspects of gifted abilities of English language

learners. A more recent critique by Pearson (2019: 197) argues that the test has developed in ways that resulted in a simplification of the original “direct communicative language test” with an abandonment of the English for specific purposes aspect in the original test. These changes were made in response to an increasing market for English language testing and a need for a “second language evidence and selection process” (Pearson, 2019: 197) In this regard, while it does test some aspects of English language, it would be misleading to use IELTS as an appropriate tool to measure the proficiency of GELLs. Moreover, it is noteworthy that a high level of English proficiency is not necessarily a characteristic of GELLs. As suggested by Kitano & Espinosa (1995), the identification process of GELLs should consider traits other than language proficiency, such as motivation, interest, memory. The above evidence suggests that using English language proficiency to measure university students’ abilities in English language learning is not sufficient. To measure English language ability of gifted students, one should consider other information about the students using alternative procedures, to make sure all GELLs are identified (Kitano & Espinosa, 1995).

### ***2.3.2 IQ tests and Nonverbal tests***

IQ tests are still widely used for identifying gifted individuals. However, from the perspectives of some psychologists, not all characteristics of intelligence (such as motivation, leadership ability, or creativity) can be measured by tests (Urbina, 2011). They argue these additional characteristics are important in the identification process. In identifying GELLs, IQ tests can only indicate what an individual has already learned, not the individual’s capability for doing tasks (Gunderson & Siegel, 2001). However, it should be noted that there is an inherent limitation of using IQ tests in depicting the acquisition in the learning process (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004), as the traditional assumption underlying the IQ tests is that intelligence is an individual’s inherent attribute and it cannot be changed or developed over time (Okan & Ispinar, 2009). Moreover, some IQ tests ignore the influence of culture. Cultural background is considered important in relation to how learners learn, and it is particularly important when considering for foreign language learners (Gunderson & Siegel, 2001; Siegel, 1989). For example, Gunderson & Siegel, (2001) argue that most English language learners are not able to fully understand the complex target language and the cultural information involved when undertaking the test. As such, the language of the test differs from the language of the learner and this can lead to the failure of the individual doing IQ tests (Gunderson & Siegel, 2001). Language also belongs to a culture and so the result of an IQ test can be influenced by the learners’ cultural background and the first language

(Siegel, 1989). Therefore, using IQ tests to identify ELL or GELL is unlikely to be sufficient or reliable in the identification process as those with potential may be overlooked and disadvantaged because of the cultural limitations of the test.

Although some nonverbal tests have been established for measuring intelligence, the reliability and validity of these nonverbal tests for identifying GELL learners have not been confirmed by existing research (Harris, *et al.*, 2007). Three examples of nonverbal tests that have been established for identifying gifted language learners are the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT), the Raven Standard Progressive Matrices (Raven) and Form 6 of the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). However, there is no agreement among existing research regarding the effectiveness of such tests in identifying GELL. For example, Lohman, *et al.*, (2008) investigated the effectiveness of using nonverbal tests to identify academically gifted English language learners. The results indicate that none of the nonverbal tests could predict the individual's English language ability well. Keith (1999) claims that nonverbal tests might be good for measuring general high abilities but may not be effective for measuring the specific verbal or quantitative abilities of the learner. Lohman, *et al.*, (2008) have since elaborated on this and examined the role of the ethnicity on language ability testing; their results show that Asian American and White students gained higher scores than Native American, Hispanic, or Black children in the three nonverbal tests outlined above, arguing that the ethnic differences of the learners is influential on language ability in nonverbal tests. However, they conclude by saying that whilst the tests should not be the only measure, they do provide "helpful information" (Lohman, *et al.*, 2008: 275). The participants in this current research study are of Chinese origin and so the ethnicity is important when considering how identification might take place and those seeking to identify need to consider any non-verbal test scores alongside additional information that can be gathered about the student.

### ***2.3.3 The importance of the view of teachers and parents***

Other methods of identification, such as observing students' behaviours, have been employed to identify GELLs as either an alternative to (or sometimes in complement with) intelligence and achievement test scores. For instance, the ENTER model created by Ziegler and Stoeger (2004) provides five steps for identifying giftedness: *Explore, Narrow, Test, Evaluate, and Review*. The ENTER model emphasises the exploration of the general behaviours and performance levels at home, in school, and even with peer groups. The Sports Approach by Freeman (1998) particularly helps researchers to define able language learners through their regularly and consistently executing opportunities or actions. Both of these two

methods of identification seek to firstly provide opportunities for all, then observing the learners' learning process for this identification. Both of these approaches emphasise that the perspective of teachers, parents, or peers in observing the general behaviours and performance of potential able learners and this is important for understanding and supporting gifted individuals. While these studies are referring to the school age population, the principles they espouse offer an insight into how identification might be undertaken post school.

According to Ziegler (2014), educators are able to observe as well as participate in gifted learners' learning procedures, and consequently they also play an important role in gifted learner identification. For example, teachers are able to conduct their teaching in ways which consider the needs of gifted learners and other learners, and also monitor the performance of gifted learners in doing tasks. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to recognize gifted learners in their classes (Harris, *et al.*, 2009; Dean, 2001). However, Gear (1978) argues that teachers are influenced by their attitude or training programmes and therefore they might not always provide a useful or reliable judgment on their students' potential abilities. In contrast, a later study by Guskin, *et al.* (1992) claimed that the trained teacher can be sensitive to their learners' range of abilities and can provide valuable and useful information on students' potential abilities. The study by Vreys, *et al.*, (2017) perhaps could offer a way of uniting these two opposing views by arguing that the essential condition for the effectiveness of teachers' identification of gifted learners is that teachers are sufficiently trained for providing best practice for gifted students (Vreys, *et al.*, 2017). In line with this notion, studies have suggested that the lack of knowledge and understanding about giftedness can limit teachers' understanding and lead to misconceptions when they identify gifted students (Lassig, 2009; Harris, *et al.*, 2009). Likewise, the study by VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005) argues that teachers may have to learn specific knowledge and challenge their own beliefs in order to be successful in their observations of gifted individuals. They may need to acquire or update their knowledge about giftedness, in terms of the different behaviours and interests which able learners may display. These ideas with their roots in school education have implications for educators in post school institutions.

Teachers may also have to change the perception of their role in teaching gifted learners. For instance, some teachers tend to see themselves as knowledge mediators for gifted learners, believing that gifted learners must follow their instructions in class so that then they can pass the required assessment. This belief can result in teachers being seen as the exclusive

authority in the classroom, which may restrict the occurrence of behaviours of gifted individuals. Indeed, given the stereotypes about gifted learners, some teachers may not believe in the existence of giftedness or gifted individuals in low socioeconomic communities (Blackburn, *et al.*, 2016). These kinds of beliefs and stereotypes may lead educators to fail to recognise the behaviours and needs of gifted individuals in their classes. Blackburn, *et al.* (2016) claims that some English language teachers identify some students as GELLs when in they are simply students who can achieve high or excellent academic performance in class or tests. Although GELLs have some characteristics of ELLs, teachers identifying GELLs merely focused on test scores may overlook those who can use language in more sophisticated ways.

The role of parents is also treated as a significant influence in identifying GELLs. According to Sabatella (2003), parents can provide a good source of information on their children's abilities, motivations, and strengths as they observe the behaviour of their children in various situations. Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius (2006) take a similar position in that parents are the most knowledgeable source of information about their children's strengths and weaknesses. They can provide different opinions and information about giftedness in comparison to teachers. Some literature also supports the view that parents as sources additional information about their children's gifted abilities and that they can supplement what the teacher may not observe in classes (McBee, 2006; 2010). It should be noted that the knowledge of parents about giftedness can influence their perceptions and understanding about their gifted children. For instance, research by Louis & Lewis (1992) stated that some parents believed that only good creativity, memory and abstract thinking could be labels to help them identify giftedness. Some studies that investigated specific groups, such as that of Wu (2008) and Yang (2007), claimed that Asian American parents, particularly Chinese American parents, believed high academic achievement was the evidence for identifying their gifted children, and that the characteristics of hard work, high level of interest, and effort were necessary conditions for gifted learners to achieve academic success. In particular, fathers of White and Asian parents generally emphasised high grades or entry to a successful university as a definition for gifted students' academic success (Ablard & Parker, 1997). These studies mainly investigated Asian families and there has been little research on this topic within gifted cohorts. All of the above research which investigated Asian families indicated similar results in parental understanding and beliefs about giftedness, but these results merely indicated the phenomena for Asian families, not for all ethnicities. Therefore,



it may be useful to investigate the influence of another culture on the perceptions, understanding and knowledge of parents regarding giftedness.

Parents' education levels and socioeconomic status in relation to their cultural background can influence their perceptions of giftedness which, in turn, then affect their nomination of their children as gifted. Steinmayr, *et al.* (2010) point out that parents with higher education degrees present highly similar characteristics of gifted learners to those used by state schools for identification; however, this is not the case for parents with a lower education level. In addition, McBee (2006; 2010) points out ethnicity and socioeconomic status can influence parents' identification of giftedness, as parental nomination rates of gifted children for gifted programmes are higher among Asian, White, and Native American parents, and among middle and high socioeconomic status families than in other ethnic groups such as Hispanic parents. Furthermore, the emotional response of parents (such as either pride or fear) towards their children's gifted language abilities can influence their nomination of their gifted children as gifted (Bernal, 2002; Dean, 2001).

#### ***2.3.4 Gifted underachiever***

Some gifted students may not demonstrate their abilities and may be gifted underachievers, in which case, it can be hard for teachers, parents or other educators to identify their gifted abilities. However, there is no agreement among studies about the definition of gifted underachievers (Reis & McCoach, 2000), and very little research has investigated underachievement in relation to GELLs (Blackburn *et al.*, 2016). One main reason for gifted individuals who may be underachieving is that their achievement is highly reliant on test results. As "No test is 100% reliable" (Reis & McCoach, 2000: 154), it may be useful to gain holistic information about potentially able English language learners from their surroundings, such as the information from their parents and teachers. Nevertheless, there are some factors which may influence the achievement of gifted individuals. Socioeconomic status, parents' educational level, cultural background, and personal issues such as self-efficacy, or ethnic identity can influence the underachievement of gifted individuals (Reis & McCoach, 2000; VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). For instance, VanTassel-Baska, *et al.* (2009) find correlations between families' socioeconomic status and gifted individuals' achievement, particularly with gifted learners from low-income families who have high parental expectations, and such expectations to some extent positively motivate the students to pursue their further high achievement. In other words, identification procedures which only focus on students' achievements may miss the potential representation of gifted students. As such,

taking the perceptions of teachers and parents on gifted students' potential abilities and behaviours into account can be helpful for identifying gifted students comprehensively.

### ***2.3.5 Potential cultural influence***

In the view of ecological anthropology, culture is treated as “a means by which humans adapt to their environments” (Feldman, 1975: 67). In other words, the interactions between individuals with their environment can be mediated by cultural aspects. According to Bruner (1996), attitudes and beliefs can be changed by education but in different ways, rates, and generations across different societies. Although there are many different models and theories of giftedness (See for example Gardner, 1993; Renzulli & Reis, 2000), the majority of them do not consider the differences potentially made by cultural influences on giftedness and its expression. The Actiotope Model of Giftedness developed by Ziegler (2005) does point to the effect of cultural influences on giftedness, and Ziegler (2014) theoretically emphasizes that giftedness is a characteristic or behaviour that can change over time along with environmental components. Thus, it is important to consider cultural influences not only when identifying giftedness in general, but also when gaining information from teachers and parents. This thesis will consider cultural influences on identifying GELLs and provision for GELLs.

## **2.4 Provision for GELLs**

Identification and subsequent educational provision are important for supporting gifted learners to improve their specific abilities and achievement (Briggs, *et al.*, 2008). Ziegler (2014) emphasises the importance of education for gifted individuals to achieve excellence in specific domains and so it becomes important to investigate appropriate provision for GELLs. The methods of supporting gifted students can be broadly classified into two categories: the implication of curriculum models; and the implication of gifted education instructional strategies. According to Briggs, *et al.* (2008), the most common ways to support gifted learners are the use of curriculum models and instructional strategies, with the associated percentages of these being 25% and 63%, respectively. This section will discuss the teachers' provision, and parent's provision for GELLs, in relation to prevalent curriculum models and instructional strategies for supporting GELLs.

Some guidelines and models provide suggestions for how teachers might address gifted children in schools – see for example VanTassel-Baska (2000), Renzulli (2014), Hong, *et al.* (2006), Maker (2005), Betts, *et al.* (2016), Kitano & Espinosa (1995), and Blackburn, *et al.* (2016). These studies note the influence of teachers' attitudes, knowledge and classroom management skills on their provision for gifted learners' learning processes and improvement. There is a substantial body of work about adult language learners (see for example Norton & Toohey, 2001). However, within the research literature there is little written about gifted adult learners. Some earlier studies focus on issues related to the motivation of gifted university students (Hammond, *et al.*, 2007), the underachievement of gifted university students (Baslanti & McCoach, 2006) and the experiences of gifted students on honours programmes (Herbert & McBee, 2007). Peterson's studies (2000; 2001) focused on achievers and underachievers in relation to post-secondary outcomes. Other studies have explored students' perceptions about teaching for gifted students and the strategies university teachers can use for teaching students (Siegle, *et al.*, 2014; Rosemarin, 2009a, 2009b). Interestingly, these studies identify many similar traits to those required by school age children such as active participation during lectures, high expectations etc. There are some studies relating specifically to GELL (Clark, 2008; Cline & Schwartz, 1999; Matthews & Shaunessy, 2008), but these tend to be concerned with populations arriving in a country to live rather than specifically to study and they are often school orientated. In terms of provision, the focus of these studies was often on the provision for gifted children in schools. In addition, they provide perceptions of teachers on supporting gifted learners in class and focus on supporting gifted learners' progress and achievement. This research is interested in teachers and learners in the English language classroom and focuses on the GELLs' learning processes and experiences. Although the contexts are different, the focus was the same. It was therefore anticipated that the guidelines and models which are synonymous with school education would help the researcher to understand how teachers' attitudes and knowledge influence the provision for gifted learners in the classroom, even though the learners were at university level.

The prevalent instructional strategies for supporting gifted students involve enrichment and exposure activities, alternative assessments, focusing on developing problem-solving skills or higher order thinking skills, questioning strategies, and focusing on the interests of the students to modify curriculum (Davis, 2009; Hong, *et al.*, 2006). One of most effective services for gifted students, as argued by Brulles & Winebrenner (2011), emphasizes the inclusive learning environment and involves aspects of four models: self-contained

programs; pull-out classes; honours classes; and the cluster grouping models for meeting the differentiating learning needs of gifted students. The Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model (SCGM) was established by Brulles & Winebrenner (2011) as an effective approach for supporting gifted learners, including those who are underachieving. However, the successful implementation of SCGM is highly dependent on how teachers have been trained to address gifted students' needs and support. Studies find that teachers tend to treat gifted students as peer tutors to help other regular students, regardless of their needs, and thus fail to provide differentiated learning for gifted students in supposedly inclusive classrooms (Bernal, 2003). Indeed, Bernal (2003) also specifically notes that there are limited benefits if gifted students are differentiated in mainstream classrooms in heterogeneous settings. However, David (2008) claims that gifted students can gain social and emotional benefits from helping their mainstream peers in mainstream classes, and that this also to some extent contributes professionally and personally to gifted students' future careers. A study by VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh (2005) claims that teachers' attitudes and their lack of knowledge about gifted students, about their subject matter, and lack of ability or permission to modify the curriculum may cause challenges for supporting gifted students in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to have supportive attitudes, good classroom management skills, specific provision and knowledge for effective differentiation for gifted students in heterogeneous settings in mainstream classrooms.

Although gifted students can develop their social emotional abilities through working with peers in inclusive classrooms, according to Bernal (2003), in traditional and even 'inclusive' classrooms with homogenous settings, gifted students only gain limited benefits holistically, whilst mainstream students under the same situations can achieve more when they cooperate with gifted peers. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to consider the needs of gifted students and to differentiate lessons for gifted students in mainstream classrooms with appropriate curriculum design for supporting their gifted potential. Typical pedagogical strategies for gifted learners involve acceleration, enrichment, and supportive environment (Davis, 2009). For teachers, the study by VanTassel-Baska (2000) investigated the curriculum development for gifted learners in schools, it believes that a thoughtfully planned curriculum can affect gifted student' learning processes positively in class, which can also be useful for this research as foundational guidance to understand how teachers address gifted individuals in their classes effectively. VanTassel-Baska (2000) provides details about the curriculum development guidelines for educating gifted students: a) providing enough opportunities; b) curriculum designed depending on the needs of gifted learners; c)

curriculum experiences of gifted students should involve cognitive, affective, social, and aesthetic areas; d) gifted learners need accelerated and enriched experiences; e) to maximise potential effect, curriculum experiences should be prepared and planned in advance; f) curriculum development should be sustained in order to evaluate and revise it further. Moreover, VanTassel-Baska (2000) notes that an appropriate curriculum is significant for transforming gifted students' initial capacity into mature competence which can contribute to their further academic and professional achievement. Renzulli (2014) notes that the Schoolwide Enrichment model for educating gifted students almost matches these six guidelines. A study by Hong, *et al.* (2006) centres on the basic competences of teachers for supporting gifted students, in terms of being able to promote thinking and problem-solving skills, understanding the nature of gifted students and their needs, and encouraging them to explore independently.

The framework of DISCOVER (Discovering Strengths and Capabilities while Observing Varied Ethnic Responses) by Maker (2005) aims to develop curriculum instructions focusing on the ability of problem-solving of gifted students. The DISCOVER model implements the ideas of Gardner and Sternberg on giftedness into education practice for teachers, parents and communities to understand. In addition, Blackburn, *et al.* (2016) support the view that the DISCOVER model can provide special provision for supporting GELLs, particularly as it considers the needs of gifted students from different ethnicities. Furthermore, for elementary or high school gifted and talented courses, the five-part Autonomous Learner Model has been established with specific content for teachers supporting gifted students (Betts, *et al.*, 2016). In this model, *orientation* refers to the understanding and knowledge about giftedness, self-awareness, and group tasks; *individual development* refers to learning skills in general, communicative skills in particular, and career engagement; *enrichment activities* refers to explorations, investigations, and cultural tasks; *seminars* refers to advanced knowledge or issues; and, finally, *in-depth study* refers to monitoring individual and group studies, such as evaluating presentations or discussion related to the task. The Autonomous Learner model (Betts, *et al.*, 2016) emphasizes providing learner-centred instructions for gifted students and educating gifted students to develop their autonomy in their learning process. As one condition for learner-centred instructions is to consider the needs of the learners (Nunan, 1988, 2012), the Autonomous Learner model considers the needs of GELLs and provides them with specific support. The criteria in the Autonomous Learner model also closely follows the guidelines in the study of VanTassel-Baska (2000). Davis (2009) supports the view that the Autonomous Learner model can be regarded as good

instructional model for gifted students, and Blackburn *et al.* (2016) believed this model particularly can have a positive effect on GELLs in class. The setting for these studies was school education, however the issues raised in the Blackburn, *et al.* (2016) study that specifically considered GELL suggest that utilising these studies within a post-secondary setting might contribute to the paucity of research into GELL.

An early study by Kitano & Espinosa (1995) analyses prior literature and concludes that the best strategies for supporting GELLs in class are: a) appropriate instructional strategies for GELLs without considering language instruction; b) helping GELLs developing their strengths; c) showing high expectations through providing content-rich tasks; d) implementing learner-centred instructions in order to motivate them to participate classroom activities; e) focusing on developing oral and written language; f) promoting GELLs' self-esteem and evaluating their language, cultures and experience. These strategies emphasise the importance of providing learner-centred opportunities for GELL's demand for high level thinking and content, which is similar to the principles of VanTassel-Baska (2000) and the Autonomous Learner model of Betts (1991). The dual-language approach is a prevalent model implemented in the United States particularly for GELLs (Blackburn, *et al.*, 2016). The purpose of the dual-language model is about providing both English language and mother language classroom activities to help GELLs develop their English language proficiency (Briggs, *et al.*, 2008). Gass (2003) and Vygotsky (1986) claim language learning should emphasize the learners' ability in implementing the target language in real communication and pay less attention to the implication of mother language in language learning. Smutny (2012) argues that GELLs should be educated considering multicultural and linguistic components in relation to the students' culture and language. To some extent, the use of dual-language methods regards the needs of GELLs in relation to this cultural and linguistic requirement. Emphasising supporting GELLs through developing their interest, strength, and talents with different cultural backgrounds, the Strength-Based Response to Intervention (RTI) model is highly recommended by Bianco & Harris (2014). However, Bianco & Harris (2014) only investigate the implication of Strength-Based RTI model for supporting gifted Spanish-Speaking English language learners without considering other ethnic groups. In addition, as with other curriculum guidelines or models, the Strength-Based RTI model also requires teachers to have specific knowledge, and to provide culturally and linguistically responsive instructions for the students (Bianco & Harris, 2014).

Besides considering the curriculum development for gifted students in general, Aguirre and Hernandez (2011) specifically suggest differentiating the curriculum for gifted second language learners. They provide six challenges and corresponding proposals for educators to achieve this. Some challenges also have been mentioned by other studies, such as Renzulli & Park (2000) who mention dropout of GELs. With regards to this issue, Aguirre & Hernandez (2011) propose that teachers can provide materials and opportunities for stimulating GELs' interests either in their mother language or in English, in order to increase their motivation and keep their interest of learning with teachers in class. VanTassel-Baska, *et al.* (2004) claim that teacher education programmes do not clarify the relations between giftedness with different cultural backgrounds, and these authors recommend investigating diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly in relation to gifted language learners (Brulles, *et al.*, 2011). Aguirre & Hernandez (2011) argue that teachers should be professional in relation to the understanding, awareness and recognition of potential GELs with different ethnic groups, and also emphasize the sensitivity of teachers to cultural issues.

Hughes & McGee (2011), Kitano & Espinosa (1995), Reichenberg & Landau (2009) investigated the role of parents in identifying and supporting gifted children. According to Hughes & McGee (2011), parents observations play a significant role in supporting their gifted children. The role of parents may include progressing their gifted children's English language development, offering encouragement, accessing community resources, and building social support networks (Kitano & Espinosa, 1995). Parents are recommended to encourage gifted children to be confident with their abilities, to provide a learning goal for them to pursue, to give them abundant educational opportunities for their development, and also to interact with gifted learners cognitively and affectively. Such constant intensive encouragement and enrichment from parents can increase their gifted children's motivation to try more challenging tasks, so their gifted learners have greater possibility of gaining a higher level of achievement (Reichenberg & Landau, 2009). However, this study also points out that parents need to realise that their "over-control" may lead to their gifted children becoming constantly dependent on others' decisions. The degree of parents influencing gifted learners' educational objectives and services was also linked to particular cultural backgrounds (Kitano & Espinosa, 1995; Hughes & McGee, 2011). Reichenberg & Landau (2009) report that cultural and family attitudes can influence high-level achievement. For instance, an early study by Flynn (1991) indicates that, influenced by the aspects of culture regarding working hard, many Asian students with hard-working characteristics can achieve

higher attainments than their higher IQ peers. However, there are limited opportunities for parents to be able to assess advanced resources for supporting their gifted learners (Hughes & McGee, 2011). Again, these studies relate to young learners. Rudasill, *et al.* (2013) note that there is little research about gifted adolescents. However, there is some literature that relates to parenting styles (see for example Arredondo, *et al.*, 2006; Chao, 1994, Lamborn, *et al.*, 1996) that offer some insight into the preference for authoritarian parenting styles in Asian communities. This thesis draws on this literature to consider the influence of family on learners once they reach higher education.

Family involvement is likely to be reduced when the learners are in higher education, therefore, less attention will be paid to providing support for parents to address gifted learners in higher education (Houcun, 2015). This thesis will address the cultural influence of parents on the support for GELLs once they enter higher education. Through analysing the role of parents in supporting gifted family members, the researcher can understand the cultural influence on the perspectives of parents as they support university age GELLs. Some studies argue that, in terms of provision, teachers and parents can be considered as co-operators supporting gifted students collectively. Kitano & Espinosa (1995) supportively state that family involvement as a component cooperates with school effectiveness in this regard. In addition, many parents as the authority figures decide the opportunities and development which their children can receive (Reichenberg & Landau, 2009). However, parents may be lacking in knowledge or understanding of giftedness and appropriate provision for their gifted children (Rotigel, 2003; Hughes & McGee, 2011). Particularly for GELLs, factors such as parents' education level can influence their children's English language proficiency (Hughes & McGee, 2011). In their role of facilitating effective gifted ability development, parents are expected to respect the role of teachers, which can be a successful combination to support GELLs in English language learning (Kitano & Pedersen, 2002). Therefore, given their role of providing support for GELLs, it is important to provide ESL and EFL instructions to parents and encourage them in supporting GELLs with their teachers.

The attitudes, knowledge, and cultural background of teachers and parents also can influence their provision for GELLs. Although there are many curriculum guidelines as well as models for both teachers and parents to provide supports for their gifted students, there are few studies that focus on investigating the perceptions of teachers, parents and GELLs themselves on gifted English language learners' learning experience, identification and



provision. As mentioned above, cultural backgrounds should be considered when addressing the provision for GELs. Although some studies have investigated the provision for Asian groups, few have particularly focused on Chinese GELs.

## **2.5 EFL Education in Scotland**

The previous sections have discussed the identification of GELs, and teachers' and parents' provision for them. Cultural differences have been mentioned as influencing the identification of, and provision for, GELs. In order to investigate the potential influence of culture on GELs, this research has selected two different educational contexts to investigate Chinese GEL's learning experience: Scotland and China. The following two sections, respectively, will discuss the specific contexts of English Language Learning in Scotland and China.

EFL education in the UK has supported non-native speakers since the 1960s, and taught EAP since the 1970s (Jordan, 2002). EFL courses in British Higher Education Institutions comprise of general English, and English for specific purposes including English for occupational purposes and for academic purposes (Jarvis, 2004). EAP teachers in the UK are required to have a general English language teaching background (Campion, 2016; Alexander, 2012). Generally, in the UK, the aim of English language teaching and learning is to develop learners' communicative competence through practicing English language in real communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This corresponds to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2009), which states that English language teaching needs to focus on improving learners' communicative competence. However, British universities offer pre-sessional and in-sessional EAP courses for students who need language support for their studies in the higher education, particularly for international students (Jordan, 2002; Alexander, 2012). EAP in the UK involves the content of mixed-discipline foundation programmes, to meet students' specific needs, related to disciplines, occupations, and activities (Campion, 2016). Scotland follows the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2009) and so English language learners are required to develop their communicative competence, as well as general knowledge in terms of their knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness. This study did not examine EFL programmes. Instead it was interested in the group of students who attend the pre-sessional and in-sessional EAP courses for students who will go on to study across a diverse range of disciplines within higher education.

According to Canale & Swain (1980), developing communicative competence means improving learners' abilities in actual usage of language in real social communications correctly. Communicative competence can be considered as the construct consisting of four components: linguistic/ grammatical competence (grammar rules and lexis), sociolinguistic competence (interpreting and recognising social contexts appropriately), discourse competence (presenting language in different way in different contexts, such as jokes), and strategic competence (ensuring communication effectively, being able to paraphrase). Byram (1997) also notes that communicative competence needs to consider the matter of intercultural operation, especially for foreign language learning. According to Hymes (1972), language learning should require communicative competence rather than linguistic competence, meaning that language learners should apply language in appropriate communicative social contexts instead of only acquiring the form and meaning of the target language. However, Chomsky (1988) claims that language competence is different from language performance, the former refers to the learners' innate abilities and knowledge of the language, and the latter refers to the application of language in correct social communications. In addition, Chomsky (1965) provides a concept of language communicative competence, as among speakers and listeners that also can relate to the learners' innate abilities and language knowledge. Although many studies emphasise the importance of developing communicative competence in EFL classrooms, Hoa (2011) points out that improving EFL learners' communicative competence through real communication cannot succeed without considering the cultural information in language teaching. Accordingly, the EFL curriculum in Scotland emphasises the importance and improvement of learners' communicative competence with consideration given to their diverse cultural background in order to meet the essential needs of EFL learners, which may be beneficial for EFL learners to improve their English language abilities (Council of Europe, 2009).

In specific relation to EFL teaching in higher education, the EAP programme is particularly designed for non-native speakers learning English for English-medium academic settings (Hamp-Lyons, 2001). Many EAP programmes are conducted in pre-sessional courses for international students studying English (Hyland, 2016). English for academic purposes (EAP) focuses on the uses of English language for academic purposes, and EAP students studying English language features in specific academic contexts for general purposes as well as occupational purposes (Hyland, 2016; Hamp-Lyons, 2001). Importantly, EAP is different from general English which concerns with listening and speaking, EAP's focus on

reading and writing is to provide preparation for students in different disciplines in UK universities (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Campion, 2016). Specifically, EAP has four main principles (See Table 2-1).

Table 2-2: Four main principles of EAP

Concept	Gloss
Authenticity	Classroom texts and tasks should be as close to the real academic world as possible.
Groundedness	A commitment to link pedagogy and research. A research base underlies materials and instructional practices.
Interdisciplinarity	EAP is not itself a theory or a methodology but employs an eclectic range of theories and methods.
Relevance	Linguistic and contextual relevance is ensured through needs analysis.

Hyland & Shaw (2016: 3)

From the main principles outlined above, it can be seen that EAP emphasises the academic communication in specific and real situations. In EAP learning process, students can learn English language with its particular genres, practices and communicative conventions in different disciplines, as well as learn the applications of knowledge towards the target language in specific domains (Hyland & Shaw, 2016).

In order to understand English language and knowledge in specific domains, the most important academic skill is to understand reading materials and interpret English in writing (Hyland & Shaw, 2016). In general, discourses and types of academic writing are complex and different from EAP learners' first language contexts and culture, therefore, learning how to engage in academic writing becomes an essential skill for EAP learners (Cumming, 2006). Academic writing has been emphasised as a key feature in EAP, and this points towards academic writing skills such as summary writing, citations, and paraphrasing (Hirvela, 2016). In academic contexts, students are required to write with insights towards the reading materials in specific domains, and therefore they are reading for academic writing (Hirvela, 2016). Within this area of research, James (2014) analysed 41 studies and found that EAP as transfer instruction can be helpful for the students to be involved in other courses and develop the quality of their work. EAP courses can make improvements for postgraduate international students' writing, including accuracy, application of academic vocabulary and

structure (Storch & Tapper, 2009). The writing topics and materials in EAP programmes are authentic which help to improve postgraduate students' writing and critical abilities for achieving graduate level (Storch & Tapper, 2009). In addition, the process of analysing model texts with structures and language (Hood, 2005; Wette, 2014), feedback and revision (Leki, 2006) in the EAP process is useful and helpful for EAP students' work, particularly for achieving postgraduate level requirements (Leki, 2006; Storch & Tapper, 2009).

Halenko & Jones (2011) investigated the oral competences of Chinese EAP learners in the UK and found that the English language teaching instructions provided by British higher education institutions are pragmatic and useful for Chinese EAP learners. The second language environment is helpful for the pragmatic development of the language, and the Chinese EAP students perceived the language environment helpful to facilitate learning English for them (Halenko & Jones, 2011).

Since EAP focuses more on communicative tasks, it has stimulated the application and development of the communicative approach since the early 1970s (Thornbury, 2006). Alexander (2012) reported using CLT to teach EAP, the result indicated that specially for low proficiency students, the CLT approach can provide a functional syllabus and support for students to show better performance and develop their competences. Within this area, a needs analysis is important and essential to both CLT and EAP; however, the needs of students seem to be largely overlooked in teaching practice (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Nunan, 2012). For example, Alexander (2007) investigated 150 EAP teachers in the UK and found that the largest number of teachers showed a lack of knowledge related to the students' needs in their different subjects. Campion (2016) investigated perceptions of teachers on teaching EAP in the UK and found that teachers need to be trained for teaching EAP, particularly with experience in students' disciplines. Salter-Dvorak (2016) investigated the perceptions of college students and lecturers on the EAP curriculum in the UK, the findings indicated that lecturers were focused on the argumentation students made in their oral or written performance, whilst students were focusing on the accuracy of their performance. Overall, this indicates that teachers often show a lack of knowledge concerning the needs of their students which, in turn, highlights the need for teachers to receive proper training.

However, EAP programs in the UK paid less attention to students' high abilities in English language. For example, the study by Alexander (2012) focused on low proficiency students. A study by Donohue & Erling (2012) investigated EAP students' academic attainment in the

UK. The author found that students who had high attainment only showed high ability in the use of materials, not in structure, style and grammar of academic writing. Chinese students as EFL learners are the largest group of international students in Scotland (HESA, 2018). In order to support Chinese international students effectively, it is important and necessary to investigate English language learners among the Chinese speaking population. If Chinese GELs are to be supported in ways that allow them to develop and flourish, then it is also necessary to know how Chinese GELs might be supported in ways that improve their English language ability whilst studying in Scotland.

## **2.6 EFL Education in China**

This section will discuss the literature in relation to EFL education in China and will involve cultural references when discussing the educational context in China. Considering cultural aspects in English language learning is important when investigating Chinese students. Scholars recognise that the traditional Chinese cultural background can influence Chinese learners and teachers, as well as the English language teaching and learning process (Littlewood, 2000; Wen & Clement, 2003; Yu, 2006). According to Wen and Clement (2003: 18), it is important to recognise “the linguistic, communicative and social psychological variables that might affect students’ willingness to communicate in a Chinese setting.” Language learning is an integration of cognitive and sociocultural aspects (Hu, 2001; Wen & Clement, 2003). English language is totally different from Chinese language with different cultural aspects, and language learning should emphasise the development of the actual application in real social contexts (Yu, 2006).

In China, educators and departments realise the importance of developing communicative competences in English language teaching (Hu, 2001; Yu, 2006). According to the College English Curriculum Requirements developed by the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (2007), the aim of English language teaching is to develop learners’ communicative competence in order to further social as well as international communication. There are clear similarities here with the aim of language learning in the Scottish context. However, developing communicative competence needs more communicative opportunities for learners to practice their English language skills in real social contexts. As a result of limited opportunities for practicing English language and the traditional role of the teacher as authoritative figure in China, Chinese English learners may not develop their

communicative competence adequately calling into question whether the curriculum requirements in practice have been achieved (Yu, 2006).

In China, English language learning is predominantly teacher-centred (Hu, 2001; Wen & Clement, 2003). Due to the Chinese culture of learning, particularly the influence of Confucianism, the role of the teacher is authoritative in the teaching and learning process (Hu, 2001). The basic tenets of Confucianism are: *benevolence (Ren 仁)*, *righteousness (Yi 义)*, *propriety (Li 礼)*, *filial piety (Xiao 孝)*, and *loyalty to one's ruler (Zhong 忠)* (Fan, 2010). The core values of Confucianism refer to respecting one's ancestors, strengthening basic human relationships, and implementing family determination more than individual determination (Fan, 2010). Influenced by Confucianism, learners are required to respect their teachers, and to obey the teachers' arrangements and decisions in classroom activities (Littlewood, 2000). This requirement underlines the dominating authority of teachers in the classroom process and tends to result in limited interaction and discussion among learners. The more active learners wish to interact and communicate with teachers frequently, whilst less active or passive learners would rather be quiet in the classroom, due to time constriction and fewer opportunities to build and develop interactive relationships with teachers (Shi, 2006). According to Nunan (2012), language learning should consider the learner's needs and the learning process to this should involve more participation of learners. In the absence of this, the dominant teacher-centred instruction may result in English language learners not developing their communicative competence because of having fewer opportunities to practice and having less interaction in Chinese English language classrooms. Yu (2006) also argues that the teacher's authority in the classroom constrains the interaction among learners, which also constrains their development of communicative competence. Although the curriculum requires a focus on learners' communicative competence development, it may not provide adequate opportunities for the students to communicate in the classroom process in practice.

In China, passing exams is treated as the learning goal (Zhou, 2013). Since the imperial period, exams have been treated as the way for Ministers of Government to select able people so that they can contribute to the Chinese economy, politics, culture, and society (Zheng & Cheng, 2008). Due to the history and the influence of Confucianism, China has a culture of exam-oriented education in English language learning and teaching (Shi, 2006). Within this culture, the role of the teacher is considered to be one of knowledge transmitter. This shares attributes with teacher-centred teaching methods and tends to concentrate on lecturing thus

executing identical teaching regardless of the diverse learning needs in the class (Zheng & Cheng, 2008). Because of the exam-oriented teaching goal, the teaching process includes little consideration of the learners' communicative learning needs. In this case, there is more teacher-centred instruction and less opportunity for the learners to communicate in the classroom process.

According to the College English Course Requirement (The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2007), assessing English language competence is also used as a way of testing the learner's academic achievement. However, the requirements focus on assessing the abilities of listening, reading, speaking, writing, translating, and the range of vocabulary. The College English Course Requirement emphasises language skills as well as the knowledge of vocabulary, which to some extent contribute to translating skills. However, translating skills do not necessarily improve communicative competence, as they focus more on the Grammar Translation Method (Hu, 2001). In addition, according to Cheng & Wang (2004), 74.5% of teachers use the Grammar Translation Method to teach English in China, and most of them prefer to translate English grammar rules into Chinese for their students. Indeed, for English language learners in higher education, one of the most popular English language tests in China are the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4), Band 6 (CET-6), and Spoken English Test (CET-SET) and university students must pass the CET-4 to achieve the requirement for a bachelor's degree (Anne, 2010). The CET consists of four sections: listening comprehension (35% of the total test), reading comprehension (35%), cloze or error correction (10%), and writing and translation (20%) (Zheng & Cheng, 2008). It can be seen that the "receptive" skills assessments contribute to the largest part of the test (with 70% in total). The writing and translation sections as "productive" skills assessment contribute to a small part of the overall score. Although the CET-SET could test English language learners' speaking skills as part of their "productive" skills, the CET-SET is not mentioned as a compulsory test for candidates (National College English Testing Committee, 2006). Therefore, the CET tests learners' "receptive" language skills with little emphasis on "productive" language skills.

Compared with teaching EAP in Scotland, Cheng (2016) reported that the EAP approach was not widely implemented in Chinese higher education. Although the Ministry of Education (MOE) (2001) had established a policy to apply English-medium instruction (EMI) with the intention of improving the quality of university English language courses in China. However Chinese University English language teaching remained predominantly

test-oriented and used materials to teach for the test (Chen & Klenowski, 2009). And some studies argued that University EFL education in China may be restricted by the limited teaching time (Hu, 2002; Zheng & Dai, 2013). A comprehensive study by Zhu & Yu (2010) argued that the effectiveness of EMI on students' learning progress and understanding in their disciplines in the Chinese university context still need to be examined empirically. In addition, compared with the EMI in the English language classroom in Scotland, Chinese universities were mainly Mandarin-medium instruction (Cumming, 2018). Although EAP was not widely implemented in the Chinese university context, Cai (2010) believed the necessity and importance of teaching EAP in tertiary level education in China, in order to improve students' academic literacy and international competitiveness. University students did not confirm the effectiveness of the university EFL courses on their English language proficiency (Zhang, *et al.*, 2015) but there was a belief that the English language speaking environment was helpful for their language learning (Zhang & Cui, 2010). This may be a reason high numbers of Chinese students wish to learn English language in a native-speaking environment.

Guidelines in the requirements of English language teaching in China to some extent lead to the application of the Grammar Translation Method in practice. Although university English language teaching requirements show that English language teaching should be focusing on developing learners' language skills and communicative competence, the practice of teachers in China may still focus on teaching English grammar rules to students. The reason for the distance between the English course requirement and real teaching situations may be related to the cultural aspects and the traditional importance of exams in China (Cheng & Wang, 2004; Yu, 2006; Hu, 2001). In addition, the exam-oriented learning methods share a similar approach to the teacher-centred teaching methods (Hu, 2001). Teachers are the dominant authority in the classroom and this approach reduces the learners' participation in the classroom process. This coupled with a focus on exams may lead teachers to ignore the learners' needs and only follow the examination goals (Yu, 2006; Hu, 2001).

## **2.7 Synthesis**

This chapter has discussed the characteristics of GELLs, the identification of GELLs and their educational provision, as well as EFL education in higher education in two different cultural contexts. Overall, the implications from the literature are threefold; first, while the literature offers confirming evidence for the existence of GELLs, there is no definite



agreement on the characteristics of GELLs. However, from the work discussed above, a broad working definition of GELLs can be attempted, that is, GELLs may demonstrate one or more of the following characteristics: advanced English language learning processing, exploiting and interpreting their English language learning easily and quickly, and manipulating language in interpretation and performance. The implication being that GELLs emphasise the learning procedure rather than just knowledge of the language. Extending this line of argument, the literature is of the opinion that the role of the learning procedure is significant for furthering GELLs' achievement. Second, there is a strong emphasis in the literature that all English language learners need culturally relevant educational experiences to address their language learning (Echevarria, *et al.*, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Some experts have studied the identification of GELLs (Harris, *et al.*, 2009; Lohman, *et al.*, 2008; Wu, 2008; Harris, *et al.*, 2007) and increased consideration has been given to cultural aspects that may potentially influence the identification of giftedness (Ziegler, 2005; Ziegler, 2014). However, current identification practices do not always assist teachers, ELLs, and their parents in identifying and supporting GELLs. Educational and cultural contexts can influence English language learners' and gifted individuals' learning experiences, so this research will investigate GELLs in different cultural contexts, with particular attention being paid to the role of parents and teachers as important factors for identifying and supporting GELLs. An important aspect within identification and educational provision for them is the place of the experiences of teachers, parents and the learners themselves. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to the field of gifted and EFL education by providing empirical evidence of GELL's learning experiences in relation to identification and provision by teachers, parents and the learners themselves.

## **2.8 Research Questions and Research Design**

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the role of teaching and learning practices in the gifted English-speaking Chinese student population by conducting an analysis of the experiences of teachers, GELLs and parents of GELLs in Scotland and China. In-depth interviews with semi-structured protocols were implemented in this research. The purpose of the interviews was to explore how teachers, parents of GELLs and GELLs understand giftedness during English language development. Consideration was also given to teaching and learning practice in cultural contexts potentially affect GELLs. The research questions are:

1. What are the characteristics of GELL?
2. How is English as a foreign language taught in Scotland and China?
3. Do GELLs perceive the place of practice in language learning as important?
4. What supports GELLs to become excellent in English language learning?

The following chapter presents the methodology and design of this study, the rationale for the choice of locations and samples, the sampling method, the method of data collection and data analysis, as well as discussing ethics and potential limitations of the research.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The aim of this research was to conduct a qualitative study to better understand the experiences of teachers, students and parents of Chinese GELLs in Scotland and China. This chapter describes the methods and design employed within the research. It outlines the rationale for choosing in-depth semi-structured interviews as the main method of collecting data. It also introduces the locations and population of this research. Then, the approach to research sampling is introduced, including the reason for choosing snowball sampling methods, the sample size and characteristics of the target groups of participants. It will provide details of data collection and data analysis methods. Discussion of the ethical issues associated with the research will be included. Finally, the reflection, the discussion of the limitations in the design of this study will also be discussed.

### **3.1 Research Method and Design**

It is useful for the researcher to understand this study using the four assumptions outlined by Waring (2012): ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. The ontological position can be regarded as the starting point for research, referring to belief about the nature of the world. Contrary to the realist belief in a single reality of the world, constructivism considers that reality is multiple depending on an individual's perceptions (Waring, 2012). Following constructivist ontology, epistemological stances can help shape the way the existed realities in the world will be presented. Under a realist ontology that believes something is real, positivism wants to observe and measure the actions being investigated and these measurements are then used to explain what is seen as fact. A constructivist ontology believes that views are constructed and so interpretivism sees the knowledge of the world through indirect description of the actions. It seeks to understand the situation and the meanings that people attach to them. The ontology then shapes the methodology selected for the research (Waring, 2012).

The key purpose of this research is to investigate the teachers', GELLs' and parents' understanding of GELL. This qualitative research is "investigating the taken-for granted micro-concepts; individual perspective, personal constructs, negotiated meanings" (Cohen, *et al.*, 2011: 46) in order to explore the learning experiences of Chinese GELLs, therefore the adoption of an interpretivist paradigm is quite appropriate. Lichtman (2013) points out

that an important reason for doing qualitative research is that, the information and perspectives from humans can be gained by qualitative researchers and once they have gathered this, they can organise and interpret the data. In addition, the aim of qualitative research is also to “understanding individual cases and situations and to focus on the meaning that different actors bring to them” (Coe, 2012: 51). Generally, quantitative research lends itself to quantifying a single view of reality whereas qualitative research tends to better describe the multiple realities investigated by researchers (Litchman, 2013). Quantitative research tends to focus on analysing numerically statistical data to test and confirm the veracity of research hypothesis deductively, qualitative research tends to be more interpretive and inductive, and is used to describe the subject’s perception of the real world with detailed and deeper insights (Faribrother, 2014). Indeed, qualitative research can be used to indicate the phenomenon relating to human’s experiences or activities (Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie, 1999). It also can be effectively used to investigate learners’ learning experience within different cultures (Watkins and Aalst, 2014). Having reflected on the literature, it was appropriate to adopt a qualitative approach for this study.

### **3.2 Locations and Population**

The research was carried out in two cities - Glasgow, Scotland, UK and Chongqing, China. Since the target populations for this research are Chinese GELs, the locations for the research have to be associated with populations of students studying English. Chongqing has a considerable number of English language learners, and English is the most popular foreign language chosen by Chinese students there compared with three other municipalities of Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin (Wei & Su, 2012). As the previous chapters have mentioned, Chinese students are the most populous group of foreign students in Scotland (HESA, 2018) and the University of Glasgow and Glasgow as a city has a considerable number of Chinese students studying there. Although the number of Chinese students studying in this city were unavailable, HESA (2018) indicates that the number of students coming from China was greater than that of students from any other country. In addition, the researcher is familiar with the two cities and the associated educational contexts. This enhances the ability to select appropriate research participant groups.

According to Watkins and Aalst (2014), keeping equivalent features can increase the reliability and validity for research on comparing learning experiences, although as a qualitative study it is acknowledged that such concepts are from the quantitative paradigm

and so not applicable to this research. However, there are equivalent features in so far as this research involves two universities, one in Scotland and one in China. The educational systems, including the postgraduate master programmes, in Scotland and China are very different. In Scotland, the duration of the postgraduate master study is one year, and in China the postgraduate master study is at least two years depending on the subject. In the Scottish university, English is taught as a second or foreign language to non-native speakers. In this institution in Scotland, Chinese students who wish to raise their English level for entry requirements or have a desire to improve their English can study the pre-sessional English language course for pre-master students. These courses finish at the end of August every year. Students then move on to study at Masters' level and are examined as postgraduate students in this university. In the Chinese university, English is taught as foreign language and also as a compulsory course for students, and students finish each year in June. The research was conducted between September and December in order to ensure that every student participant was a postgraduate student attending one of these two institutions. The following information is extracted from both of the participating universities' webpages concerning the postgraduate master programmes which they offer. In the university located in Scotland that teaches English for academic purposes (EAP), the curriculum includes both general language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and academic skills. Similarly, the Chinese university within this study teaches English as a foreign language involving both general English language skills and English for academic purposes. Students learn English in Scotland for the purpose of preparing for further master study. Likewise, the English language course in China also prepares students for master study. For all Chinese students, the fundamental purpose of learning English is the same namely, to learn a foreign language. Therefore, the target learner groups have the same learning goals for the English language courses. The official requirements indicate that each institution teaches both general English and English for academic purposes in specific domains, thus the target learner groups have similar teaching outcomes for English language courses. In this research, teachers in Scotland are native English language speakers or speak English language as a second language, and teachers in China are all Chinese and speak English as a foreign language. In addition, EFL teaching in Scotland are EMI, contrastingly, EFL teaching in China may be also used together with Mandarin in classroom process (see for example Cumming, 2018). All of the teacher participants are experienced English language teachers with discipline-specific academic skills. Although some studies such as Cheng (2016) and Cai (2010) noted that the EAP approach was not widely applied in Chinese tertiary level, the university in China in this research is one of the Chinese universities teaching English

language considering students' specific disciplines (EAP). Since this research will investigate English language teaching in China and Scotland, it will investigate the perceptions of students, teachers and parents in relation to teaching English language considering discipline-specific academic skills. The researcher herself is of Chinese origin and has studied English language learning at university level. Through studying she was introduced to the concept of GELL. Recognising that GELL might exist in the pre-sessional settings lead the researcher to investigate Chinese GELL studying in higher education. GELLs in this study are identified by their English language teachers. The target learner group are aged around 22-24 years which reflects the statistics which show that there has been an increase in the number of students going to the UK to study in the time period between 2004-2015 with the biggest growth in the age band 21-24 (UUK, 2015).

Due to the different education systems, the course schedule or classes and curriculum settings are different in the two countries. However, this research is not focused on comparing curriculum across the two contexts, rather, it aims to investigate the perceptions of the participants through their practical and cultural experiences. Specifically, it focuses on examining the teachers' perceptions of their teaching methodology and identification of GELLs, the learners' perception of their English language ability and performance, and parents' perceptions of supporting gifted English language learners in their studies. The curriculum settings are considered as an influencing factor on teachers' perspectives of English language teaching to be discussed as clearly, they can impact the classroom.

### **3.3 Sampling**

There are relationships between the three groups of participants namely. The target group of GELL was challenging for the researcher to recruit directly. Litchman (2013) argues that able or highly successful learners may be hidden or hard to reach. For getting access to the hard to reach populations, Atkinson & Flint (2001) developed snowball research methodologies and suggested that rather than using formal identification methods, nominations from friends and peers can be useful. According to Cohen, *et al.*, (2011), snowball sampling is also known as the "chain-referral method". The snowball sampling method can help identify participants by asking participants to directly recommend referrals (Noy, 2008). Therefore, the snowball sampling method was implemented in this research in order to contact hidden and hard to reach research participants. However, in using the snowball sampling method to recruit participants, the number of participants is unpredictable.

Noy (2008) and Litchman (2013), recommend that the original informants in snowball sampling should be at least two or three participants, and the original participants should have a close relationships with the next level of target participants. In this qualitative research, the researcher needed to find GELLs. In accordance with the concept of snowball sampling, both teachers and parents can identify GELLs. However, the researcher also investigated teachers' perceptions of English language teaching and the characteristics of GELLs and provision for GELLs. Therefore, the obvious starting point for this researcher was to recruit teachers as original informants to take part in this research firstly, and then asked them to recommend GELLs. Finally, learners were invited to provide information to their parents about participating in this research.

Mears (2013) suggests that the number of in-depth interview participants should be small such as six to eight in each participant group. Thus, combining the requirements of in-depth interview methods and snowball sampling methods (Noy, 2008; Litchman, 2013), six teachers in each University were recruited first in order to help the researcher to identify who were the gifted English language learners and what their characteristics are. In addition, due to the unpredictable nature of the recruitment of further participants (GELLs and parents), and considering the basic criteria of the size of the in-depth interview, the group of gifted ELLs and parents was estimated to be at least six to eight participants in each group. The following table shows the actual numbers of participants in each location.

Table 3-1: Numbers of participants in Scotland and China

	Scotland	China
Teacher participants	6	6
GELL participants	7	6
Parent participants	4	5

### 3.4 Interviews

One basic aim of qualitative research is to capture the participant's perception of values or processes (Faribrother, 2014). Indeed, qualitative research can take an interpretive understanding towards actions, events, or values through gathering findings from the interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Interview, focus groups, and observation are common approaches in qualitative research to gain findings in a specific time and place (Lichtman, 2013). Focus group interviews require participants to be interactive and the researcher to control and monitor the group interview

process, indeed, the group opinion is as important as individual opinion (Gibbs, 2013). However, since focus group interviews require participants to be interactive, a researcher might gain poor quality data from less interactive participants, thus reducing the overall quality of insights gained (Hopkins, 2007). In addition, since this study was about gifted English language learners and focus groups would involve speaking in front of peers, there was concern that students might be worried about speaking in a group less they consider their abilities to be lesser than that of their peers, and so this was not deemed an appropriate approach for this research. Observation aims to learn about the behaviours of different groups rather than focusing on individual behaviours (Angrosino, 2013). Since the researcher wanted to know more about people's perceptions and experiences, this was not an appropriate approach for this research either. According to Seidman (2013: 9): "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience." In-depth interviews can help the researcher to learn what and how participants thought and felt about the certain things, and to then try to explore the shared experience of participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This research aims to investigate GELLs' perceptions of their learning experiences. In order to directly gain the perceptions of target participants, in-depth interviews were the most appropriate approach for meeting this purpose. The snowball sampling method is frequently implemented in qualitative research through interviews (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). This qualitative research therefore employed interviews in order to gain deep, rich, and detailed perspectives of the participants.

Compared with structured interviews, semi-structured interviews are more flexible for both the interviewer and the interviewees, as the interviewer can manage how and when the questions should be asked, and the interviewee has more space to describe their opinions in response to the questions (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The unstructured interview is even more flexible than the semi-structured interview and aims to allow interviewees to represent their perspectives by using their own structure and reference. However, unstructured interviews make it more difficult for the researcher to manage and trace the meaning of interviewee's responses, or to develop unexpected themes (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Lichtman, 2013). Since this research has a clear purpose related to GELL, in-depth interviews, using semi-structured protocols were used in order to gain the perceptions of the participants of this focused topic.



To conduct an effective interview, careful planning is essential, to make sure that the interview schedule is developed clearly to include all the topics and themes the researcher wants the participants to provide responses to (Mears, 2013). In an attempt to capture deep and meaningful insight into the experiences and perceptions of GELLs, a semi-structured interview protocol with themes for each group was developed. Although the crucial purpose of implementing qualitative interviews in this research was to allow all participants to represent their own opinions in their own way, individuals may have felt uncomfortable with no guidelines to follow when being interviewed (Lichtman, 2013). However, the semi-structured interview can be set with a general guideline of questions or series of topics, which could help both researcher and participants. Although the general guideline is offered to all participants, within semi-structured interviews, the researcher can change interview questions and the order in which questions are asked depending on the progress for different individuals (Mears, 2013). As a result of the unpredictability of when and where the answers are given by the interviewee, the researcher is therefore able to explore more deeply the meanings shared by participants. If there is any doubt or contradictory information related to the response, the researcher can express this misunderstanding and confusion, then re-word the question in order to gain clearer answers.

## **Interview protocol**

In order to understand GELLs, it was necessary to explore the experiences and perceptions of teachers who teach them; the GELLs who are identified by their teachers; and the parents of GELLs. All participants followed a semi-structured format implementing an interview protocol (See Appendix II, Appendix III, and Appendix IV). Since all the parent participants are Chinese, a Chinese version of the interview protocol was prepared. Interview questions were reviewed by experts in the fields of gifted education, and English language teaching and learning, and amended to make the meaning of each question clear. Moreover, the Chinese version of the parent interview protocol was double checked by a Chinese doctoral researcher who has a certificate of translation in order to make sure the Chinese sentences were easy and clear for parent participants to understand.

As part of this research, Chinese GELLs in Scotland were asked to self-evaluate their English language abilities on a scale of 0-10 (10 being excellent), including their overall language ability, and their speaking, writing, reading and listening abilities. The scale was designed using the IELTS 9-band scale (See Appendix I). According to the IELTS assessment criteria,

9-band means: “Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding”, but this is not necessarily about addressing excellent English language ability. Given that this research was targeted at GELLs, a tenth band was added to allow for a self-evaluation of excellence beyond normal expectations. The criteria for this tenth band was verbally described as part of the interview process and included statements about high confidence in proficiency and understanding of English.

Open questions were employed to provide as much space as possible for respondents to explain their experiences. For example: “I’m interested in your English language learning experiences, would you please tell me about your experience of English language learning?”. Since the researcher wanted to know how GELL participants evaluated their own English language abilities, and their perceptions of influential factors affecting their learning experience, there were two rating scale questions in the learner interview. For example, the learner participant was asked “On a scale of 1-10, where 10 is excellent and 0 is very poor, where would you place: your overall English language ability, productive skills including speaking and writing skills, and receptive skills including listening and reading?”. The other rating scale question was about the influence of others affecting the learner’s English language learning: “To what extent, 1 being no influence and 5 being very high influence, do the opinions of others influence your English language learning? In terms of teachers’ influence, parents’ influence and peers’ influence”. If participants rated elements as “0” or “10” on their language ability, or “1” or “5” on other’s influence, the researcher asked them to give a reason for these answers in order to understand what specific and strong reasons made participants give those extreme answers.

Chinese GELLs in China were asked to give their latest grade in their English language course. The course was marked following the 100-band scale and indicated students’ English language performance as an overall score without showing listening, reading, writing and speaking separately. The grade consisted of the final paper-based examination (80%) and class performance (20%) as evaluated by the teachers, and a grade over 60 on the combined elements was accepted as a pass for the course. The course was evaluated on a simple pass/fail basis with no further specific distinctions. Chinese GELLs in China were also asked to self-evaluate their English language abilities on a scale of 0-10 (10 being excellent), including their overall language ability, and their speaking, writing, reading and listening abilities as above.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher introduced herself and her research, as well as explaining the intent and potential benefits of taking part in the study. The purpose of the study namely, to understand GELL English language learning experiences, and possible benefits to understanding English language teaching for GELL were shared. An overview of the questions the respondents were to answer was given and the intention to record the interview was explained. This had also been detailed in the Plain Language Statement (See Appendix VI to VIII) which had been given to each participant. Participants were then asked to complete the consent form to make sure that they were willing to be involved in the research (See Appendix IX and X). Showing candour and respect towards participants is considered to help the researcher to build rapport and trust throughout the interviewing process (Mears, 2013; Lichtman, 2013) and so the researcher tried to ensure that participants had opportunity to ask questions about the process. The researcher made sure that a safe environment was provided for the participants to undertake the interview. The interviews took place in the teacher's office, or a quiet environment in the university in both Scotland and China. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the notes and transcripts were carefully produced.

#### **Interview: teachers**

Teachers were interviewed in relation to two themes: what are the characteristics of gifted and potential GELLs; and teaching and learning to support gifted or potential GELLs. The teacher participants in Scotland were interviewed in English, but in China the teachers preferred to speak Chinese and respond with some English words. In Scotland, three of teachers were interviewed through a face-to-face interview in their office or quiet cafe in the university; the other three teachers working in Scotland were interviewed through Skype, because they were not in Glasgow at the time of the interviews. In China, all of the teacher participants were interviewed through face-to-face interviews in their office. At the end of the interview the researcher asked teachers to recommend GELLs that could participate in the study. All teacher interviews were conducted for about 30 minutes.

## **Interview: GELLs**

Gifted ELLs who were identified by teachers were invited to participate in this study. GELL participants were interviewed regarding two themes: English language ability and learning experience; and English language performance. In Scotland all of the learner participants spoke English during the face-to-face interview. In China, all GELL participants preferred to speak Chinese but also included some English words in response. Most of them preferred to speak Chinese because they thought they could express their feelings and experience clearly. Particularly, as the researcher is Chinese, some learner participants felt uncomfortable about two Chinese people speaking English to each other. All learner interviews were about 30 minutes' duration.

## **Interview: parents**

The role of parents is one factor that can impact the learner's language learning. Parent participants were interviewed according to two themes: gifted characteristics; and the role of the parent in their child's English language learning. All parent participants chose to speak in Chinese and undertook telephone interviews. The researcher had hoped to do face-to-face interviews, but all parent participants considered their schedule and the long-distance to the venue precluded them from doing this and so they preferred to participate via a telephone interview. All parent interviews were conducted for around ten to fifteen minutes.

## **3.6 Data Analysis**

The interviews were digitally-recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts were analysed in accordance with thematic analysis under the technique of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Lichtman (2013: 381) describes IPA as an analytic approach that "involves the detailed examination of the lived experience of individuals." IPA can recognise the data with the foundational cultural context, and interpret the meanings of actions, cognition and effect (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Compared with conversation analysis which aims to analyse the talk of more than two individuals, and discourse analysis that focuses on interpreting the structure and syntax of the text content (Lichtman, 2013), IPA focuses on interpreting participants' experiences about their daily life in detail to understand the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As this research explores perceptions

of English language teachers, GELLs, and the parents of gifted English language learners, this specific focus of IPA helped the researcher capture participants' lived experiences and interpret the meaning of their experiences related to this research.

Thematic analysis is an essential method for analysing and identifying aspects in qualitative research (Clarke & Braun, 2013). For this research, using IPA helped the researcher to explore the GELL Chinese population in two different educational contexts. In accordance with Braun & Clarke (2006), there are six phases of thematic analysis as essential steps for general qualitative research: familiarisation with the data; coding; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report (See Table 3-2). Since the IPA was appropriate for this research to analyse data, this phase model of thematic analysis was regarded as giving analysis criteria for the researcher to follow in this study, rather than as a model to analyse data as it gives an opportunity for the themes to be validated during the stages.

Table 3-2: Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic "map" of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Braun & Clarke (2006: 87)

Using thematic analysis (IPA), this research also used qualitative analysis software to sort and manage textual data. This was in accordance with Gibbs (2013) who suggests that software is useful to code and retrieve data. There are many uses in IPA and ethnographic approaches which try to implement thematic data analysis. This research used the software NVivo because it is a powerful analysis tool from QSR and it is helpful for the researcher as they store, organise and manage this kind of data (Litchman, 2013). Although this research used software to help manage and sort textual data, the researcher followed the criteria in the above phase of thematic analysis (IPA) to code data, create and generate themes.

### **3.7 Ethical Issues**

Considering ethical issues is crucial for research to protect human subjects and participants, and the three main ethical issues in qualitative research are related to the relationship between the researcher and participant; subjective interpretation of data by the researcher; and the research design itself (Orb, *et al.*, 2001). All ethical issues were considered and addressed in several ways throughout this research process. Namely, the researcher gained permissions from the two ELL departments - one in Scotland and one in China respectively - to conduct the research. These two permissions were required to access teachers, GELLs and parents for interviews in these two institutions. In addition, the researcher gained ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow ensuring that the researcher had clearly understood and considered the ethical issues in the research process and could protect the rights of any individual participants.

According to Orb, *et al.* (2001: 93), “qualitative researchers focus their research on exploring, examining, and describing people and their natural environments”. These authors point out that the process of the qualitative study is highly dependent on the willingness of participants to share their experience. Therefore, it is important to establish an effective relationships between the researcher and participants in order to gain high-quality data (Webster, *et al.*, 2013). In qualitative research, the researcher is considered as much a part of the research process as the participants; however, during the research process, researchers should “be sensitive to the power that they hold over participants” (Litchman, 2013: 105). In order to avoid that case, the researcher should make an appropriate and trustworthy environment for the research process and establish rapport rather than closed friendship with participants (Litchman, 2013).

The main principles of ethical conduct should fully consider the participants' privacy and anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and data ownership and rewards (Litchman, 2013; Mears, 2013). The researcher guaranteed the privacy of any individual participating in this research although University guidance was "strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies, including the Police" (online). Moreover, it was the researcher's responsibility to keep all information confidential. The researcher made sure of the confidentiality of all participants' personal information and told them how long she would keep the data (Litchman, 2013; Cohen, *et al.*, 2011; Mears, 2013). The personal information of all participants was not published in the research and will not be published in any future papers, or in communication with others, and the researcher removed all identification information from the record. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time and at any stage of the research, if they felt uncomfortable. If they withdrew from the interview, it was explained that their data would be deleted entirely and immediately. The research used teachers' nomination of Chinese GELLs in their classes. This process was in accordance with Busher (2005) who talks about nominations coming from significant and more senior people in the participants life. Participants might not be sure of the consequences affecting them or others after the interview (Busher, 2005). Therefore, having explained the research and any consequences to them, the researcher obtained informed consent from them in order to make sure participants clearly understood the purpose, processes and intended outcomes of the research. For all participants, verbal and written information was introduced through a consent form. When participants fully understood the information about the research, then they confirmed their consent and gave permission for the interview to be audio recorded and transcribed. All consent documents were kept locked in a drawer with only one key kept by the researcher herself. The digital data gathered from the research was saved on the researcher's personal laptop with password protection, the data file was also password protected. The researcher made a copy of all data and this was saved in her personal mobile hard disk, again with password protection. In accordance with standard University practice the primary data will be held by the researcher for ten years, then the researcher will delete all digital copies and use a paper shredder to delete all the paperwork.

### **3.8 Implications for the Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative researchers involve themselves in gathering, interpreting and presenting data by observing and interviewing participants (Lichtman, 2013). Therefore, in qualitative research, the researcher should employ self-reflection in order to have awareness of their influence on the study process. Lichtman (2013: 254) states that “by acknowledging the role of the self in qualitative research, the researchers are able to sort through biases and think about how they affect various aspects of the research, especially interpretation of meanings.” Through the process of self-reflection, the researcher will be able to monitor such effects on the research, and to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Berger, 2015). In this study, the researcher is both a researcher and a Chinese English language learner. It was important that the researcher kept reflecting on the influence her background, experience, and language understanding might have on this project. Due to being in a similar group and having similar learning experience, the researcher was familiar with this field and group and so there was potential for bias in the interpretation of the results. However, being aware of this potential bias meant the researcher could monitor their thoughts and actions to catch any biased tendencies. Having insight into the research context also meant knowledge of the field could be used to gain helpful and useful resources in relation to this domain, and this shared knowledge might also have allowed participants to be more willing to share their experiences with researcher whom they regarded as understanding their situation (Berger, 2015). In this way, the researcher shared her professional identity as a tool for supporting this research rather than as a barrier. Moreover, considering the language issue, in order to ensure that interview questions for participants and the interview protocols were clear, they were double checked by other professionals in translation and interpretation domains. The translated transcripts were also checked by other professionals. In addition, the researcher frequently and regularly shared and discussed the progress of the research with supervisors in order to minimise the aforementioned effects and acknowledged those in the evaluation of findings.

### **3.9 Limitations of the Methodology**

The main limitation of this research methodology is that it may be biased and subjective and may be influenced by using a snowball sampling method when recruiting GELs to take part in this research. In accordance with Atkinson & Flint (2001), the sample was recruited



depending on the subjective choice of first informants. Subjectivity might be present in this study due to the understanding of who the target group, gifted English language learners, are. Snowball sampling methods have bias and may fail to represent from a broad spread within the specific population. But the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalise (Faribrother, 2014), and this qualitative research intended to understand detailed and deeper insights about the teachers', GELLs' and parents' perception of GELL. Indeed, this is qualitative research, using thematic analysis methods under the technique of IPA, which is an interpretive approach that can be also personal or subjective. However, the researcher paid attention to minimise the possibility of any bias which may influence this study by self-reflection.

## **Chapter 4: Research Results - Teachers**

The following three chapters: Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 present the findings of the study. It is structured according to the 6 interview groups. It starts with the data from the teachers in Scotland and China and this is presented in two sections (Chapter 4: section 4.1 and section 4.2). There are two sub-sections within each of these two sections that specifically focus on i) Classroom practice for teaching English language and ii) Teachers' perceptions of GELL. Then findings from the students in each country are presented (Chapter 5: section 5.1 and section 5.2) and again there are three sub-sections within each section: i) Proficiency in English language ii) Intrinsic motivation iii) Extrinsic factors that impinge on learning. The final set of results are from the parents in both countries (Chapter 6: section 6.1 and 6.2) and these sections are presented using two sub-sections i) characteristics of Chinese GELL and ii) The role of parents in GELL.

### **4.1 English Language Teachers in Scotland**

This section will discuss the findings of the interviews with English language teachers in Scotland.

#### ***4.1.1 Classroom Practice for Teaching English Language***

Consistent with the university's programme descriptions, English language teachers in Scotland in this research reported that their courses were concerned with teaching EAP and primarily aimed at providing preparation for students' further postgraduate study in the UK. Consequently, their teaching practice focused on communicative skills. They reported employing a Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) and using learner-centred instructions to encourage students to improve their English language skills by themselves. In addition, teachers in Scotland, in recognition of students' individual capabilities, reported preferring to provide individual support for each student to address their specific needs.

In consideration of the needs of students and the course objectives that relate to supporting master study in Scotland, the teaching content reported by English language teachers in Scotland in this research were teaching EAP for academic purposes and provided preparation for the students' masters level study.

*It's about academic skills. [...] It's moving to teaching academic skills. (T-S-6)*

*They have to pass the English for academic purposes courses before they do their master courses. Generally, we teach study skills on specific language, and receptive skills, so they can adapt to masters' programmes. (T-S-1)*

*I think the course follows the way that they will study at the university, so in the pre-sessional courses students can test what university life is like. (T-S-2)*

Teachers reported that within this programme one of the foci for English Language teachers in Scotland was writing skills. Cumming (2006) argues that discourses and types of academic writing are complex for EAP learners, therefore, academic writing skills are considered as essential skills for EAP learners. EAP teachers in Scotland reported having a clear understanding about their target students, their needs, and the aim and content of the EAP courses.

*Each time, I taught them different skills on academic writing, introductions, conclusions, structures, academic orations and writing, signposting and..... etc., referencing and bibliography. (T-S-2)*

*I would show them the things that they can repeat in their own writing, you know, make an argument to do their essay, or make a comparative essay, or the way like that. And I would like to do things like that, you know, the grammar structures that the comments on that type of writing, or that type of speaking. I would do serious tasks something like that before building up to a paragraph or longer pieces of work. (T-S-3)*

*Because... most of what we do is actually focused on writing. (T-S-6)*

English language teachers in this research reported that for second or foreign language learners, new to studying in Scotland, a particularly challenging aspect can be using English to complete an academic essay. There are two different skills that the students need to learn, English language skills and skills in writing academic essays. This is further complicated for teachers by the range of discipline specialisms that can be represented within a class. Students can intend to pursue further study in anything from physics to philosophy. As this English language course in Scotland was designed for teaching EAP and providing

preparation for students' postgraduate study in UK, teachers were clear about the importance of helping the students to recognise the academic writing styles of specific subjects.

*The students would adapt specific subject groups. I taught bio-medical students. So, they were looking very much at language acquisition of the specific subject. (T-S-1)*

Teachers in Scotland reported that the other focus for this course was communicative oral skills. To encourage the students to speak English in class, over half of the teachers restricted their students from using their mother language in their English language class. However, as the majority of students in this English language course in Scotland were Chinese, it was inevitable for these students to occasionally use their mother language to communicate.

*I discourage students from speaking Chinese. One of the main reasons is because the students actually complained that they don't have enough opportunities to speak English. So, I do encourage them to speak English in the classroom because it's the best opportunity they have. Also, there is not only Chinese students in the classroom, so for example, on the last section I did, there were two Saudi Arabian girls in the class. They actually set a system to encourage everybody to speak English. People, who spoke their native language in the classroom, would have to give a chocolate to the rest of the class. But that was a student-centred initiative, not mine. (T-S-5)*

*I would like to say, to the students, if I hear you speak Chinese I can't assess your ability in English. So, you have to let me see, you can speak English, you can understand. It's important for me to hear English if I hear Chinese I can't assess their ability in English. (T-S-2)*

In particular, one teacher talked about the idea of "culture exchange" (T-S-2) to describe the cultural interaction between teachers and students. Two of the teacher participants in Scotland also encouraged their students to immerse themselves in Scottish culture after class, such as to "go out for dinner" (T-S-4), in order to adapt to the new cultural context and environment.

*When my students arrived, they were usually new to Glasgow, so they really enjoy talking about Glasgow, talking about Scotland and culture. They do have an element in Block B, the first section. They have to do a presentation and they have to choose something*

*connected with studying in Glasgow. So, a lot of them do to choose a cultural aspect. For example, food, what's the problem if you had this food, something like that. (T-S-5)*

*[...] I'm actually training them to adapt to a new kind of cultural context and environment. (T-S-6)*

The reason teachers encouraged their students to immerse themselves in Scottish culture was so that students could gain authentic cultural experiences, which would then be included in the teaching process.

In addition to supporting practicing communicative oral skills, EAP teachers in Scotland also reported providing encouragement and opportunities for the students to speak English in class.

*We try to very much discourage the use of telephones in the class. So, if they want to know the vocabulary, I would encourage them to ask each other "how do you say in English?" (T-S-1)*

*Actually, they are very good, they do generally, if I said, "would you like to try to speak English?", actually they do. I also will give them more opportunities of listening the material, then please try to speak it in English. (T-S-3)*

As can be seen from the quote below, EAP teachers in Scotland were also concerned about the holistic development of, and support for, students. They were acutely aware of the culture change that students may be experiencing and how this may impact on their learning and oral communication skills.

*I tried to encourage the students. The majority of students do need much encouragement. Because I think most of them think it's terrifying. They are looking for their visas, trying to find accommodation they don't know the city they don't know the country. They don't know anything and trying to study. So, it's difficult for everybody. (T-S-2)*

Teachers in Scotland were required to teach both general English and academic skills. This accorded with the literature in the sense that the teaching of EAP focuses on reading and writing for providing preparation for college and university students in different academic disciplines in the UK tertiary level (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Champion, 2016). However, participants in Scotland reported their teaching focus was on listening and speaking, which also matched the purpose of teaching general English to the students. The teachers in Scotland reported that they used the communicative approach to English language teaching, which emphasises teaching students to use English through real communication. This echoed the main principles of EAP which argued that the classroom texts and tasks should be authentic for the students to be involved in the real academic world (Hyland & Shaw, 2016).

*It is a large part of communicative language teaching (T-S-4)*

*I think communicative language approach is very foundational and needs based... (T-S-6)*

Teachers reported starting with implementing controlled language-focused activities. They tended to teach language systems first, and then implement language patterns in communications. For example, they normally begin by modelling language use through an example, using controlled language activities, before carrying out typical communicative activities. However, as teaching writing skills accounts for a large proportion of the teaching process, some teachers emphasised the importance of modelling, and then implementing the communicative approach in teaching writing. Consequently, there were perceived restraints on time for teachers to employ typical CLT approaches in a whole class, because the teaching content was focused on writing. Nevertheless, in academic contexts, students are required to understand reading materials in specific domains and interpret English in academic writing (Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Hirvela, 2016). This could also make EAP teachers pay more attention to teaching academic writing in classroom practice.

*Normally, if I were teaching writing, I would spend more time modelling and practising at sentence and paragraph level. [...] I would show them how I want them to give a presentation or guide them in what I would want them to say. I think modelling is very important, that's how I guide my students, of course for all students actually. (T-S-3)*

*It's not so much about the linguistic features, we are more looking at genre feature. For example, where is the topic sentences, thesis statement, outline, and how the conclusion summarized things. So, it's more structuring. (T-S-4)*

*So that for example week 1, they did the financial crisis, at the start of the week on Monday students are coming to the class and not know anything and they do some reading and listening exercises. Then on the Tuesday they may have a lecture. Wednesday, they may have a discussion group and on Thursday the preparation and then give a presentation on financial crisis on Friday. (T-S-2)*

The aim of learner-centred instruction is to provide communicative practice, and to encourage students to improve their skills automatically (Nunan, 1988, 2012). The teachers provided a large amount of communicative activities, such as presentations and group discussion, to encourage the students to practice English language.

*Again, the students work in groups, work together. And discuss in small groups what changes they made, why they made it, and then present in the class. So, they should get more opportunity to speak English, speak to each other in English it's better for them. (T-S-2)*

*I was also trying to use language as naturally as possible. In that situation... so it might be very formal language if it was a presentation. But it's just if a student is very aware, there are very simple techniques in English, it would help them to be understood. [...] The language activities are very much inbuilt into the outcomes. When you want your students to do a presentation, group work and so on. (T-S-3)*

*So, I do encourage them to speak English in the classroom, because it's the best opportunity they have. (T-S-5)*

Most of the teacher interviewees encouraged their students to do tasks involving cultural aspects of life in the UK and that contained real life relevant information. Adding cultural information and activities helped students to recognise the differences between Scottish culture and their own culture and allowed students to link their cultural experiences to classroom learning.

*[...] Sometimes, students can't understand listening or a reading, no, of course they do understand English. Actually, they don't understand cultural references that had been made in listening or reading. (T-S-3)*

Some of the teachers perceived that the teachers' role is to act as a guide, to give comments on the performance of students, and to provide suggestions to help students to develop by themselves. When conducting learner-centred activities, they therefore preferred to stand back and hand over authority of the class to students.

*For the speaking, usually I don't really like to interrupt the student when they are speaking. So, when we have a section, when we have to do a presentation, or something, I usually write the comments down, and go back to the student later, either in the small group, or individually, and discuss some of the grammar problems they have. (T-S-5)*

Following the approach of learner-centred instruction, teachers reported implementing different kinds of indirect ways to modify students' errors, such as group work and discussion with class members. Through such indirect ways, students could participate in the correction, and recognise and modify their mistakes spontaneously.

*Also like an assessment I was working on is that the students get to assess each other. So, by assessing other students, you can see the mistakes that the other students are making, and you learn yourself, because you know what you are looking for. So, students have kind of assumed the role of teachers, sometimes, assessors. Then, by observing others, you can learn yourself. (T-S-2)*

*I would correct a way that the students are participating in the correction. Because there would be enough knowledge in a class... talk the students... to be able to correct things together. (T-S-3)*

*Not usually point out directly. Maybe some little mistake about the speaking fluency, I will ignore it and not interrupt them. If people can't understand what they are saying, I will ask them to rephrase it. I think... it's usually only if... there is a break in communication. Then I would probably ask them to rephrase it. Sometimes it's just about the pronunciation. (T-S-4)*



The teachers conducting learner-centred instructions also aimed to observe and assess the progress the students make. Therefore, in addition to the final assessment, teachers in Scotland reported using continual assessment, particularly for writing, in order to monitor the progress students made and to give them feedback. Over half of teachers believed that the advantage of continual assessment was that it could be applied immediately, and the students could make improvements based on the comments provided.

*The writing they have to do for the pre-sessional course is much more involved. They are supposed to have done some reading to inform their writing. So, when they come to the assessment, you have to take account of that into consideration, did the student read, did the reading inform their writing. [...] Sometimes in the pre-sessional course, there are sections where the students speak, present, and discuss. And the teacher is able to sit back and only listen. It's really to encourage the students to conduct discussion sections with no teacher interaction. For me, those sections are great. Because I can sit down, and just listen to the students. I'm assessing their ability. (T-S-5)*

*I would like to say... to the tutors that the students should be assessed continually. (T-S-2)*

English language teachers in Scotland reported considering individual differences among students, consequently they tended to provide individual support for each student. In class, some teachers, considering emotional features, tried to enhance the students' confidence in speaking English.

*I will ignore other errors, only focus on new grammar points. If you correct every error that occurs, it will be demoralising for the students. (T-S-1)*

*But I really avoid commenting on any individual's students' problems in the front of the whole class. Because I think my way can build students' confidence. (T-S-5)*

After class, Scottish teachers provided individual tutorials for every student. In the tutorial, teachers reported they would discuss the personal language strengths and weaknesses of each student.

*So, the students have the seminar and a tutorial. [...] That's why we have like a one-and-one consultation. It's a chance for the tutor to tell the students away from everybody else. So, for example, tell the student that you are weak here, you have to come up with this. (T-S-2)*

*Generally speaking, we have speaking exercises and we have tutorials. So, usually during the tutorial, you can get advice about what they can help with your pronunciation or something I think. (T-S-4)*

*For errors in writing, I usually marked their writing. And I will give it back to them in a consultation, which is a one to one session. Then we will discuss the errors, and how they can improve the writing. (T-S-5)*

*We will mark the students' work. But the students can get very individual support. (T-S-6)*

Although teachers in this study mentioned discussing language strengths and weaknesses with the students in tutorials, they did not provide any detail on what this meant in terms of providing specific support, materials, or strategies for the students to improve their English language abilities.

#### **4.1.2 Teachers' Perceptions of GELLs in Scotland**

English language teachers in Scotland believed that GELLs would be able to make particular progress in their English language learning, beyond gaining outstanding academic results. They considered that there were some GELLs in their English language classes. Teachers in this study placed a particular value on the behaviours of GELLs, such as being positive and having extended initiative to learn English. They reported that their behaviour was one of the most prominent characteristics of GELLs. Teachers in Scotland preferred to observe the performance of students to identify students' abilities, and the grade that the students gained was regarded only as a reference to support the teacher's identification. The participants' accounts clustered around three aspects: the characteristics of GELLs, the identification of GELLs and differentiation for GELLs.

#### 4.1.2.1 Characteristics of GELs

Teachers believed GELs have particular behaviours such as a positive attitude and intrinsic motivation in English language learning, and this refers to affective strategies in GELs' learning process. In addition, they perceived GELs might be good at single or multiple English language skills, including listening, speaking, or writing skills. They reported that some GELs might have high abilities in other academic domains, for example maths or science, and they considered the advantages of being gifted in other domains might transfer and influence their English language learning.

English language teachers in Scotland believed that GELs presented as being engaged in their studies.

*Always on the day one, you can see the gifted students. Because they sit at the front of the class. It's very interesting. (T-S-2)*

*Yeah, the students need to be positive. (T-S-5)*

*But also have a sort of desire to learn as well. (T-S-6)*

This engagement was also an indication of having the initiative to find situations in which to learn English. GELs reported by teachers in Scotland use metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies to regulate their learning. Most of the teachers in Scotland mentioned that GELs absorb, exploit and use English. A third of the teachers explained that GELs plan and learn English from any situation. The following quotes illustrate these characteristics of GELs that teachers experienced in their classes:

*[...] They can use their initiative. They can see that every situation has something to learn. (T-S-3)*

*They take notes, they pay attention, they ask questions, you can see... they talk about themselves, they help each other, they are motivated, they can cover everything. They ask me questions if they don't understand. If they need something to explain again, they are not afraid to ask questions. (T-S-2)*

Some English language teachers in Scotland reported that GELLs could consciously regulate their study and develop their English language ability.

*Their self-restraint levels are very high. (T-S-1)*

*Consistently, one of the most important ones for me is that, they have to study regularly. (T-S-5)*

In the class, GELLs could absorb information from teachers quickly, and give responses immediately. Teachers, therefore, through the quick interaction with GELLs could understand the students' thought processes and estimate their ability in English.

Language skills are used to describe language use, including listening, reading, speaking and writing. In this research, no teacher participant mentioned that excellent reading ability could suggest students might be GELLs, although teachers in Scotland believed some GELLs could have superior listening skills. Some teachers emphasised the predominance of this listening ability of GELLs citing its importance in the production of spoken language. The following quotes illustrate this:

*[...] I think the teacher should listen and hear which students have a good ear. Because I see a lot of students can present written work. But when I am talking to them, I can't understand what they are saying. I would be looking for someone who can hear it, take it, and produce it. (T-S-1)*

*[...] In my experience, I think listening ability. [...] I often say that good language learner can be very good listener. (T-S-6)*

Teacher participants believed some GELLs should be good speakers of English. Outstanding speaking skills were also related to particular behaviours. For example, GELLs could be outgoing and confident, and could communicate with others in English in a public place. These results match those observed in earlier studies. Prior studies by Norton and Toohey (2001) state that able language learners displayed an active attitude in language learning. Additionally, Rubin (1975) points out that good English language learners have a willingness to communicate and interact with others by using English. In this research, one

teacher claimed that ability in spoken English could also describe the ability to exploit and interpret English language, which GELLs could present where appropriate.

*So, their pronunciation is very good. (T-S-1)*

*Especially for the spoken language, some students, their writing is very, very good. Their reading is excellent. But they just can't do a discussion or a presentation. So, you have to understand some students, their English may be very high, but they can't give a presentation. [...] I think for spoken English certainly you have to be outgoing. You have to have confidence in your ability, you have not to be afraid of people laughing at you. Second language learners sometimes just seek to... ascertain grammar rules, grammar patterns, or words that they know. But the gifted speaker will take the word and use it in the original context. You have to take that kind of use, that language, and play with that language to be a good speaker. (T-S-2)*

Two teachers noted the importance of excellent writing skills as a core element in identifying GELLs. In EAP contexts, academic writing skills are emphasised in teaching process, this may lead teachers in Scotland to focus on students' academic writing ability when they identified GELLs. Interestingly, they also noted that the ability to write did not necessarily mean that students would structure written work well when writing an essay. The structuring of written work was also deemed to be important if the writing ability was to be realised in an essay.

*[...] You can find people write very, very well, but they can't structure an essay. Their writing is very clear and very eloquent. But somehow they just don't know how an essay should be and a piece of writing should be structured. So, the structure is so important. (T-S-4)*

*Be able to structure language very easily. (T-S-6)*

The performance of speaking and writing demonstrated GELL's ability to exploit and interpret language in context. Teachers in Scotland emphasised teaching writing skills as well as communicative oral skills. The results also demonstrated that teachers in this research perceived that GELLs would have dominant listening skills, outstanding oral skills, and good

writing abilities, all of which were consistent with, and could be demonstrated through, the teaching foci.

Two teachers in Scotland claimed that gifted students could also be gifted in more than one domain. Other domains in which the student was considered “gifted” could be articulated and visible through students’ contributions in English language learning.

*Gifted individuals in my experience are tending to be gifted in one or two areas. (T-S-1)*

*Some people might be very good at a certain subject, something goes hand in hand. For example, some people may be very mathematical, they were looking at English in a very constructive and logical fashion. [...] (T-S-4)*

The majority of English language learners in this institution in Scotland were Chinese and teacher participants were very familiar with Chinese English language learners. All teachers responded that Chinese students were very receptive learners, and they were happy to listen to instruction from the teacher in class. Chinese students could learn from the instruction of teachers, in terms of knowledge or strategies such as autonomous learning strategies.

*Chinese students tend to be more amenable to what they have been told. (T-S-4)*

*I think Chinese students are taught....if you teach them strategies of independence and autonomy, the students will use those strategies, and become more autonomous learners. It's up to the teacher to teach things. [...] I think it can be taught, independence, autonomy, and fearless to make mistakes, initiative. (T-S-3)*

Teacher participants in Scotland noticed that Chinese students could be taught to make progress, as they were always amenable to the instruction of the teacher. In addition, teachers reported the strategies such as autonomy, initiative or independence can be taught to all students. Consequently, the teachers perceived that Chinese students, if given the right learning opportunities, could be taught to optimise their English language learning process. While Chinese students may benefit from direct instruction and can become proficient language learners, GELL, who are already independent and autonomous, required appropriate support if they were to flourish.

#### 4.1.2.2 Identification

Teachers explained that innate ability refers to someone who was born with ability, and it therefore might be easy for GELLs to acquire information or knowledge of English language.

*If you got innate ability to begin with, that's going to make language learning easier. It would be easy for you. (T-S-2)*

Half of the teachers maintained that in general students who achieved masters level study and studied in Scotland would possess high innate ability to learn English as they must pass the entrance language test such as IELTS in order to be accepted on to a programme.

*[...] But all of the students who have come to Glasgow are intelligent and high achievers. So, they all have innate ability. (T-S-3)*

*Most of the students, especially the students... come to Glasgow have already shown ability to attend high level. They already have degrees in their first language, and they already have score of 5.5 or 6 on the IELTS. (T-S-5)*

It is inferred from the quotes that the test score can be used to identify the students' English language ability. However, from their responses it can be seen that some teachers did not look at scores as part of their identification of GELLs. The teachers appeared to be unclear as to the role either innate ability or test scores could or should play in the identification process. Instead, in Scotland, teacher interviewees suggested that the identification of GELLs should depend on observation and interaction with the student. There were two main aspects that teachers expected to observe were they to identify GELLs: their learning behaviour and the improvement of their English language learning.

*Through a kind of noticing a couple of days, how students are reacting to questions. And watch them very carefully what they're doing, their work. Whether they're referring to other students a lot to get help, or they're asking me. I would know how they are acting in a group. Whether they take a passive role, or active role. (T-S-3)*

*Because some students, you can feel very confident that your observation tells you what you need to know. But for some students, they might perhaps be a little quiet in the classroom. (T-S-5)*

Specifically, half of the teachers in this research also reported that observing the development of language skills of the students might identify GELLs.

*Well, let's talk about the first woman. Certainly, her syntax was more advanced, sentence structure was more advanced than many others. At first, her organisation was not so good. Then her organisation became very strong. (T-S-4)*

*Just through long-term observation. But more on their language skills rather than personality. (T-S-6)*

Over half of teachers testified that the test results of students could be additional evidence in identifying GELLs, but that they would not be the determining condition on which to judge a students' English language ability. In addition, the score of any test a student received might conceal a student's real English language ability. The following quotes demonstrate this:

*[...] Actually, when I have students in the first week, I never looked at their scores, the IELTS scores. I don't look at their scores. So, I just based on my interaction with the students. I would know he is good, he is better. Then I will look at the score. I think you don't really need the scores. I think if you look at the score first, it gives you bias sometimes. So, I like to clean slates. So, in the first week, I am getting to know my students and the students are getting to know me. By the end of the first week, I can tell them, the good students. And then after the first week I will check the score, my scores and their scores. It's always 99% correct. (T-S-2)*

*The essay they have to write that is also very good assessment too. Because they have to go away, they have to read, they have to integrate the reading. But I wouldn't want to assess them on the test results. (T-S-5)*

Teachers were accustomed to observing improvement in the behaviours and language skills of students to inform identification. The achievement score of the student was treated as a



reference to support, justify, and reinforce the results of their observation. Teachers perceived that the observation and interaction with students could be a more holistic way to identify GELLs. The possible reason for this might be that the aim of language learning is being able to use the language. Therefore, following the learning goal, teachers observing how potential able students act and use the language in the appropriate situation, could identify GELLs.

#### **4.1.2.3 Classroom Practice for Supporting GELL**

Half of the teacher participants claimed that all of the students in class should be treated in same way, because teachers argued that differentiation that singled out GELL was essentially unfair for the other students in class. Therefore, what teachers normally did was to teach mixed groups of students together and then hold individual consultations. During the consultation, the teacher could discuss a student's strengths and weaknesses in language learning, but not necessarily give them extra or more challenging work and so by being "fair" to one group there was potential for learning to be "unfair" for another. In the literature VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh (2005) claim that it is important to provide advanced challenging work for all students, particularly for gifted students. In the current research, some teachers might be unfamiliar with specific subject specialisms and were restricted by the lack of content knowledge. They could not expand their knowledge to accommodate the advanced development of gifted students. In this research, teachers anticipated that students could follow their guidance or advice to develop their English language ability independently and apply this to the subject knowledge. The following quotes illustrate this practice:

*I taught everybody from the same brush, because it's such a short time. The students have to be this level... so if they go down here... I can go down there... but that's detrimental for everybody else. It's up to the weaker students to come up. That's why we have... like a one-on-one consultation. It's a chance for the tutor, tell the students...a way... for everybody else. So, for example, tell the student that you are weak here, you have to come up with this. (T-S-2)*

*I will give it back to them in a consultation, which is a one to one session. Then we will discuss the errors, and how they can improve the writing. (T-S-5)*

*We will mark students' work. But students can get very individual support. (T-S-6)*

In particular, one teacher reported that in their experience gifted students are humble and therefore might not ask for advanced or challenging work. Responses also suggested that teachers leave the additional challenge up to the students and that they know that they are providing work that the students can already do and are therefore aware that they are not challenging them.

*The really gifted are not usually arrogant about the knowledge. They are usually quite humble normally. Even if they are doing things that they know in class, they would try to work with or find something they don't know, and to improve. (T-S-3)*

Nearly all of teachers in this research reported that grouping the students could help GELLs to improve in English language learning. In addition, most of them preferred to group the students with multiple level of language abilities, for example, if someone was good at reading, he or she would be grouped with others who might be good at speaking. The language level of the students could be assessed depending on the observation by the teachers in class. The following quotes illustrate this practice:

*What I try to do... is to pair students, put them into groups, different groups each time. So, there is always someone who is strong at reading, someone is strong at listening, someone is good at speaking, some are good at writing. If they are in the groups, they can help each other. I tried to encourage students. (T-S-2)*

*What I usually do is, to discuss with the students what are their stronger points, what are their weaker points. I try to put students together who can help each other. For example, one student - grammar is strong. But when she writes an essay, she has problems with the structure. I will try to put her with someone who did a well-structured essay, but who needed support with grammar. [...] So, they have to be able to help each other. So, I'm trying to encourage that. I try to make small groups and encourage them to work with each other. (T-S-5)*

One third of English language teachers in Scotland appeared to pair the students with different behaviours:

*I think it's probably the individuals in class are motivated than others more. It's clear to me like that some students are weaker than others. I make sure that when I was working with a group, it's mixture in a group. [...] So, it puts them into a mixed group, very able, I also had someone to talk with low level. (T-S-3)*

*We can group together and teach them. But we don't differentiate, we don't single anyone. Because it's unfair to do this. If they need to go slower, they should have already a place in a lower kind of group. (T-S-6)*

However, one teacher considered the ability of students, and argued that grouping students with mixed ability may have a negative influence on both gifted and other students. In this research, this teacher claimed that it could be more effective to give more challenging work to GELLs individually, and differentiate for GELLs with appropriate content in class:

*Because it's bad for the slow person, and it's also bad for the gifted person... because their minds are so different. The gifted person does understand, while another person can't get it. They become very embarrassed. The gifted person gets it very quickly, and the other person is slow. It seems to be a bad method. Just because people are different. So, I think what we need to be done is, actually, I try to do... I think, what helps more is to give them more work. Because they can do the work easily, and you can give them more challenging work. So, I'm looking at how to make the work more challenging if someone works very quickly, and give them a task, perhaps synthesise that or something they already know. Give them something very active, like problem solving they need to know that language. (T-S-1)*

This teacher noticed the problem of mixed ability groupings which may not be of benefit to either the gifted or non-gifted students. However, Blumen-Pardo (2002) claimed that mixed-ability grouping was of more benefit for non-gifted students than gifted students, as the non-gifted students appeared to produce greater performance than in same-ability groups. This teacher tended to provide more challenging work to GELLs individually considering their quicker learning ability and tried to offer the type and degree of challenging tasks for GELLs that would develop their language ability, such as advanced problem-solving tasks.

Teachers considered that cultural references might influence a student's learning style, but it might not be the only factor directly influencing GELLs to achieve excellence.

*Maybe, Chinese students rely on Chinese culture like to do what teacher says without questioning. [...] We are equal, and the professors are also, if you can question what they say, they will love you, they will say, what a great student. You are in a different culture, teacher's methodology is a bit different. But if you want to do well in this culture, you have to do this way. (T-S-2)*

*Culture, I think, for example... if I think of Chinese students. Culturally, I think they do very well in test situations, because in their schooling, it's very test focused. But Chinese students tend to have more trouble with their pre-session course, because in the British educational system, the culture is to question. So, a lot of students when they first arrived...have a lot of trouble questioning the teacher and questioning the people they read for the essay. And the students overcome that cultural hurdle quickly, at once you make the most progress on the pre-session, at once you can start to question, at once you do well. (T-S-5)*

Chinese students influenced by their classroom experience in China tended to be obedient to their teachers and not question them. English language teachers in Scotland recognised the different learning experiences of Chinese students and tried to take these into account when planning learning and classroom interactions.

Practice and deliberate training were seen as important by teachers in Scotland and were seen as determining whether GELLs achieved excellence in English language learning. Under the teacher's guidance and advice, students would be able to recognise their gifts in English language learning and make progress in achieving excellence. The following quotes illustrate the above points:

*If you don't have that innate ability, the ear, maybe, I don't know. You will never be an excellent language speaker, I don't think. You can practice and practice, that can take you so far. But even you have innate ability still need to practice as well. (T-S-2)*

*The students who make really big efforts to find ways to speak English as much as possible, they also make more progress. So, I really encourage my students to do things like, join the gym, perhaps volunteer, or like a charity shop or something. And students trying to integrate into the society, like that, do better. So, I think the practice or training can most*

*influence students' learning and achievements. I think the most opportunity to speak is important. (T-S-5)*

*I think practice is extremely important. Therefore, that's why the students prepared to come to the conversation class, prepared to do extra reading, and prepared to do extra exercises and so on. (T-S-3)*

*I think training and practice is very important to develop gifted English language learners. (T-S-6)*

English language teachers in Scotland in this study believed in the importance of encouragement, as well as in the importance of practice and training of GELL's English language learning progress. In conclusion, teachers in Scotland believed that deliberate training and practice could be treated as a core condition for helping all English language learners, including GELLs to achieve excellence in English language learning. In consideration of Chinese GELLs, section 2.1 mentioned that teachers believed Chinese GELLs could be taught autonomy and independence which can help them progress their English language improvement independently. In other words, English language teachers in Scotland believed that teaching learning strategies could support Chinese GELLs in English language learning. This seems to confirm the role of teachers as guides in educating GELLs.

## **Implications for Practice**

Based on the evidence presented, English language teachers in Scotland in this research taught EAP in terms of general English and academic language skills in their classroom. They had clear understanding about what target students needed to achieve from studying English language. They confirmed that students presented with various abilities in class and that this might include GELLs. However, this knowledge did not result in differentiated practices within the classroom and indeed catering for GELL was seen as advantaging those who were already advantaged. In class, the emphasis was on all students improving their English language learning, but this did not include deliberate training or support for GELLs specifically and so students were treated as a homogenous group. Given this recognition, teachers should be encouraged to offer more differentiated tasks in the whole class setting that took into account the individual learner to better support the needs of all. Through this, GELL would receive more challenging activities and those who required to work at a slower pace or who needed repeated practice could also be supported accordingly.

When asked about identifying GELLs, they emphasised that they considered the personal traits of the students, including innate ability, to be an indicator of a GELL. Again, the tasks students are offered becomes important if this is to be used as part of any identification process. If tasks are the same for all learners, then GELLs may not have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in English language. In this sense, teachers should carefully construct tasks build in opportunities for higher level and more complex language use. This might allow students to demonstrate their ability thus allowing teachers to identify and consequently tailor the curriculum to their needs. Moreover, teachers indicated that they would help to develop the skills of GELL through individual support. These individual sessions offered opportunities to really challenge GELL in their language development. The importance of having developed a range of more complex tasks and activities will be crucial if challenge is to be offered through individual sessions. While the one-to-one sessions are important, if provision for GELL is only offered outside of the classroom in consultations there is a danger that students will become disengaged in class. Planning at both the classroom and individual level would allow the students to develop English language abilities under their guidance. Teachers understood the importance of immersion in English language learning and saw this as a way for all students to develop their abilities and, crucially, to better understand the culture in which they were studying. The limitations of the teachers' knowledge about subject domains was a potential barrier to being able to support students who had particular ability in that domain once their English language ability began to develop. English language teachers could not be expected to have in-depth knowledge about every subject area, something recognised by Alexander (2007), but this does perhaps offer opportunities to work in interdisciplinary ways to create a bank of materials that could be drawn on. This would also allow GELL to develop further their autonomous and independent learning strategies with the teacher continuing to play the role of a guide.

## 4.2 Chinese English Language Teachers

This section presents the findings from the Chinese English language teachers in China.

### 4.2.1 Classroom Practice for Teaching English Language

The English language course book used within the department in China was created by the course leaders in the university. Teachers appeared to teach English in relation to the content of the course book as the requirements of the final exam were designed depending on the course book. The teachers, to some extent, seemed to be teaching English for the purpose of the exam. However, nearly all of the teachers reported searching for extra academic articles, or news reports as teaching materials to enrich their teaching process.

*The college will provide the course book, but I want to make a deep discussion with my students. So, I need to find some extra materials to support my teaching. I want to give my students a wider range of sources. I think in my class, I use my own materials more than the course book. The course book is very important, but the teaching materials should cover wider range of reading and the knowledge of English. (T-C-1)*

*The university will provide the course book, because we need a unified textbook preparing for the final examination. In some classes, I will find some extra materials. For example, in the speaking and writing class, I will find some IELTS writing and speaking topics, or some extracurricular source book. [...] In speaking class, I would find materials from the Cambridge IELTS textbook. (T-C-4)*

*However, I think the content from our course book maybe outdated, I will give the students some new and popular topic and ask them to do some tasks. (T-C-5)*

Chinese teachers paid relatively more attention to developing speaking and listening skills rather than writing skills. In relation to teaching EAP, one Chinese teacher (T-C-4) reported using IELTS writing materials as a source of reference to progress their teaching. Chinese teachers did not emphasise teaching EAP and academic writing skills.

Regarding searching for extra teaching materials, the Chinese English language teachers seemingly expected their students to be familiar with the use of English language in a native-speaking context. They selected authentic sources for the students in relation to the students'

real-life experience. The curriculum requirements (the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2001; 2007) are to provide real communicative opportunities for university English language learners. For example, one teacher explained that she found sources related to the popular social foci in the world.

*At the same time, the material would be associated with real-life experience as much as possible. I found that when we discuss something related to the students' life or the social focus, the students will be more involved and active, and they will explore their insights more depth based on the real evidences. [...] For example, about the US president election, I found some videos to share with my students. It will help them to image what is the US election, and how it is going on. I also talk about something about Donald Trump. (T-C-2)*

The importance and benefit of teaching EAP for students was discussed in the literature review. In general, EAP in higher education aims to teach students academic English language skills, and EMI aims to improve students' English language abilities for achieving university level in English medium instruction in China. But Chinese English language teachers in the current research did not fully implement teaching EAP or EMI in their classroom process which may be largely due to the exam-oriented teaching purpose.

Nearly all teachers reported the necessity of involving cultural references in their English language teaching, and some teachers also felt that their students seemed to be interested in materials in relation to cultural references about English language. The Chinese English language teachers were not satisfied with the course books alone in their English language teaching process and so they sought out materials that contained a lot of cultural features.

*I will introduce some cultural things. Normally, I will explain some words, and explain some culture references with some scenes. They were very interested in cultural things. I think culture is very important for learning English, especially for some students who are very interested in English language and English-speaking countries. (T-C-4)*

*I will select the materials related to culture. I think, language means culture, and language will influence culture. In addition, language will reflect a lot of cultural things. Culture is very important for language teaching. (T-C-3)*



*I think culture is significant for the students at this stage. For example, Chinese people like number “6”, but “Triple Six” is the name of Satan. So, I think the students need to know the culture differences. (T-C-6)*

The teachers reported that lecturing as a means of instruction featured in their English language class. The lecturing involved a lot of discourse analysis focusing on language system explanations. Although some teachers assumed that students had a certain English foundation at the postgraduate level, they preferred to explain some complex language points in detail. The teachers identified the language points which they perceived might be difficult for the majority of students to understand.

*Of course, when we met some language points, which might be difficult for most of the students to understand, I would introduce that language point and give them a short example. For example, some complex sentence structure, or subjective mood would be difficult for the students to understand, and I preferred to give some examples to help them to understand. (T-C-5)*

*I will provide a simple introduction about the topic and the author, then I would focus on some language points. I think at this level, the students don't need to be taught grammar. But if we meet some difficult grammatical points, I will explain it. When we met some complex sentences, I would also explain it as well. Normally, I would like to pick the key words, difficult words or sentences out, and give explanations in class. (T-C-2)*

Nearly all of the teachers tended to use Chinese when they conducted lecturing in their English language class, such as the situation of explaining cultural differences, and some complex grammatical language points. They perceived the necessity and importance of the Chinese explanation in the lecturing process for the majority of the students. Once they had done this, they were more confident to conduct more learner-centred activities in practice.

*In my class, I try to use English to teach. But when we meet some specific and professional knowledge, I will use Chinese to help my students understand. (T-C-1)*

*R: How about your teaching language?*

*T: English. If I felt most of the students were confused, I would use Chinese to explain again. (T-C-5)*

*We also have an assumption that the students have capability to understand the whole English-speaking lesson. But sometimes, I will use Chinese to help students make a clear idea about the point. For instance, “if you have talent, the industry can help you.” The students may confuse about the “industry” in this sentence. So, I will tell my students, the “industry” here means hard working. Like those examples in relation to culture, I think I can’t use English to express. But, if I used Chinese, the students would recognise immediately. (T-C-6)*

The above quotes show that, although some ELF teachers in China have an awareness of using English as the teaching language in class, they provided more complex explanations using Chinese in the English language teaching process. A previous study by Atkinson (1987) states that using first language in the foreign language teaching classroom could help the students who were at the primary stage in their foreign language learning to make better sense of the teacher’s instructions and the meaning of the target language. However, in this research, the students were at postgraduate level and they had at least ten years of English language learning experience. This suggests that Chinese English language teachers might not be confident about their students’ English language abilities which in the context of GELL might be problematic if there is an assumption that all learners are at a basic stage.

Although the teachers conducted instruction by lecturing, they responded that they have awareness of shifting from teacher-centred instruction to learner-centred instruction. All teachers perceived learner-centred instruction was being implemented in communicative activities, such as presentations, discussions, role-play, and debate. The College English language curriculum requirement in China (The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2007) requires that English language teaching should consider the use of English language in real communication, and also improve the students’ communicative competence. The teachers followed the guidance of this requirement, and then implemented communicative activities in their English language teaching. Although there was more student interaction in the activities, the activities themselves appeared to be directed by the teacher and not to arise from, for example, the interest of the students.

*Generally, in the class, students will be required to do presentation, and group discussion, for example, “Q and A” (Question and Answer). For instance, firstly we assumed that all students have read and prepared the materials. I would randomly select one student (as the Student A) to ask a question based on the reading materials. Then the Student A randomly assigned another student (as the Student B) to answer the Student A’s question. The next student (the Student C) will be assigned by the Student B, and also ask a question after he or she responded the Student B’s question. I think it’s a kind of student-centred way. (T-C-1)*

*Generally, when we start a new topic, we will conduct a discussion or oral presentation. (T-C-2)*

*So, at this stage, we usually did some presentation, discussion, or debate. (T-C-3)*

The reason the teachers conducted more learner-centred communicative activities was because some teachers noted that Chinese students might be shy and lacked confidence to engage in English language in oral communication. Therefore, they tried to provide more opportunities for students to express and practice English in communication, and this in turn would help to develop the students’ confidence in speaking English.

*In China, most of the students do not speak in class, they are shy. But you should help them. I think the teacher should confirm whether the students understand teachers’ instruction clearly or not, according to the situation, the teacher could repeat and explain the question again in English. (T-C-3)*

*I think Chinese students have certain grammatical foundation, but their listening and speaking abilities are weak. They couldn’t give a good expression in English. The first reason may be lacking self-confidence, and the second reason may be the lack of opportunity to speak. As the result, I would like to let them do presentation frequently in class. (T-C-4)*

Over half of the teachers perceived reading practice could help the students get ideas from the materials. They asked students to prepare reading tasks before class as they believed the students were able to present deeper insights into the reading when using English language in class.

*I try to provide a lot of reading tasks for the students to do before the class. I think the students must improve their reading ability at this stage. So, I will give them a lot of reading tasks, then check them through a lot of ways in class. (T-C-1)*

*The students will be given a reading pre-task, and they will be asked to prepare the pre-task. The topic of pre-task will be related to the main task. After the pre-task, students will be familiar with the topic certainly. (T-C-2)*

*In general, at the beginning of the class, I will let the students to do “story teller”, or news report. Normally, two students will be a group; two or three groups will report per week. They can tell narrative stories, and they need to prepare and read the materials before the class. In every unit, I will let my students to do presentation in relation to the background information of this unit. (T-C-3)*

All teacher participants preferred to correct students’ errors in a direct and immediate way in class. They explained that the direct way could be effective for all students to recognise their mistakes clearly and modify these directly. In addition, some teachers claimed that they took students’ emotional factors such as self-esteem and confidence into account and tended to politely correct errors in class.

*Normally, I will correct the students’ errors directly in class. Regarding to some misunderstanding, I will assign some students to express their opinions. If most of the students present similar misunderstanding, I will give them the referential answer. Then ask the students to comprehend by themselves. [...] I think using the direct way to point the students’ errors is very effective. The students will know their mistakes directly and accordingly. Of course, I will take the students’ feelings into account. I will point errors with some gentle words and try not to influence the students’ self-esteem and confidence. I think as a teacher, you should consider the confidence and the self-esteem of the students, in that case the students would participate classroom processing positively. (T-C-1)*

*Generally, I would like to point the students’ errors directly. I will tell my students at the beginning of the course that I will correct their mistakes in class directly. [...] Of course, I would take the student’s self-esteem into account, use polite way to correct their errors. I will consider their emotional factors. In addition, I’m afraid I will forget their mistakes*

*after class. I think the only way is that I correct errors immediately and directly, and then they can realise their mistakes, and they can revise it. (T-C-4)*

*Immediately, directly. But some students may be shy, I will let them know their errors after class. I will consider the student's personality to choose a way to correct his or her mistakes. (T-C-6)*

Another issue not featured in the quotes above was that teachers in China felt restricted by the time and the size of the class and opted to use a direct way to help the students to revise their mistakes. Considering the numbers of the students (approximately 40 students in one class), it seemed to be difficult for Chinese English language teachers to arrange face-to-face tutorials for every student after class. In addition, the teachers believed that it was effective for all students in class to know their mistakes and to hear the corrections. They believed that this could also help others in the class who might make similar mistakes and thus they would revise their language themselves having heard the explanation given to another student.

Chinese English language teachers observed the students' continued progress in English language learning, and they assessed students continually. Teachers responded that the final grade of each student contained the score of the final paper exam, oral test, and their performance and participation in class. Continual assessment was conducted based on the students' performance in the learner-centred communicative activities such as presentations, discussions and debate in class. This indicates that the teachers in China perceived assessing the students' English language abilities was not merely reliant on the final paper exam.

*I would like to check their homework per week through presentation, PPT making, and case study analysis. I will select some homework and check it in class. I don't want to use the exam to assess the students' English language ability. I hope that their performance and participation in class account for 90%, and the final exam only takes 10%. (T-C-1)*

*In general, the assessment includes three parts, including the participation and performance in classroom process, the oral test and the final exam. (T-C-2)*

*Generally, the exam will take 70%, and the other 30% will be determined by their classroom performance. (T-C-6)*

Moreover, software and apps were frequently mentioned by some Chinese English language teachers as popular tools for English language teaching. They preferred to use software to test and check the students' written work. As the software could provide feedback and correction quickly, it also reduced the interaction distance between teachers and students.

*Now, we use the called "Pigai website", and it can check students' writing work and give them scores and comments. In addition, this software is related to the corpus. It can help the students to notice some phrases or idiom whether they used appropriately or not. I think it's a very good way for the students. (T-C-5)*

In addition, a chatting app was also implemented by some teachers to interact and discuss with the students after class. By using a chatting app, the students could ask questions and gain advice from the teachers immediately. Namely, the students could be closer to their teachers, and the teachers also could give feedback and contact their students directly.

*Sometimes, we also conducted discussion after class through WeChat app. The students would be very active to discuss in that way. (T-C-1)*

The main benefit of applying technology in English language teaching might be that it shortened the time and the distance between teachers and students to communicate. However, some teachers were concerned about the numbers of students in each class as it might be difficult for the teachers to provide feedback individually. Those teachers did not report using software or apps to communicate with their students.

#### **4.2.2 Chinese Teachers' Perceptions of GELLs**

GELLs were understood by the majority of teachers in China as having English language proficiency in listening and speaking. Chinese teachers also thought the interest of GELLs in English language stimulated the students' motivation, initiative and self-discipline in English language learning and that these were important aspects of a GELL. The teachers reported identifying GELLs by observing and interacting with the students, and the test score of the students could be regarded as a reference to support their observation. In addition, they perceived providing more opportunities, encouragement and challenging tasks for GELLs to improve their English language ability. This section will introduce the Chinese teacher participants' perception of GELLs, in terms of their characteristics; identification;

and the differentiation teachers made for GELLs in class. Chinese English language teachers confirmed the existence of GELLs in their classes.

#### 4.2.2.1 Characteristics of GELLs

Most of the Chinese teachers perceived that GELLs should have outstanding language abilities, including listening and speaking abilities. For listening skills, half of the teachers reported that GELLs were able to be sensitive to the phonic elements in English language learning.

*I think listening ability is crucial for gifted English language students. (T-C-2)*

*For gifted English language students, I think their listening and speaking should be excellent. I think gifted English language students should have some same characteristics with gifted music learners. Because your input ability, such as listening and speaking should be very good and sensitive on phonetic features. (T-C-1)*

*Their listening ability is very good, and they can differentiate pronunciations. For example, gifted English language students may not realise the difference between “/æ/” and “/a/”, such as “glad /glæd/” initially, and they may pronounce as “/glad/”. I would show them the correct pronunciation again, the gifted student could realise it immediately. But the normal students may not be sensitive with phonetic features. (T-C-4)*

*I think gifted English language learners should be very sensitive to the phonetic features. (T-C-5)*

Chinese teachers indicated that GELLs would have high ability in phonetic coding. Phonetic coding is one crucial component of foreign language aptitude as stated in the conception of foreign language aptitude in MLAT which includes the ability to recognise, identify and remember the auditory materials (Carroll, 1962). However, MLAT is focused on rote learning and grammatical aspects, and may be applicable in audio-lingual teaching classroom (Skehan, 1998). In this study, teachers in China reported providing communicative classroom for their students. Therefore, using MLAT to identify GELLs may not be applicable or may mean some students go unnoticed.

Some teachers also mentioned some GELLs may be good at speaking. One teacher reported that some GELLs have the capability of speaking English in public situations, and they could be confident and willing to communicate with others in English.

*His oral expression is excellent, although he didn't speak like a native speaker, but it's very fluent. I think this is gifted English language learner. (T-C-4)*

*Firstly, I think gifted English language students can be confident to communicate with others in English. Secondly, they can express themselves in English very well. They can speak English to public, and they have "English public speaking skills". (T-C-2)*

Chinese English language teachers recognised GELL's English language proficiency in oral communication, and the importance of teaching focusing on improving students' communicative competence. Most of the teachers mentioned the importance of reading practice in English language teaching. However, no teacher considered the possibility of outstanding reading ability being an indicator of a GELL or considered that differentiated reading materials might be required.

Afshar & Movassagh (2017) argued that critical thinking ability is an outstanding quality for high-achieving English language students. Similarly, half of the teachers reported the ability to engage in critical thinking would be an outstanding characteristic of GELLs. In this research, the teachers believed critical thinking reflected the capability of the students to explore and interpret the English language. This echoes the findings of Donohue and Erling (2012) who indicated that GELLs use of materials rather than structure, style and grammar was an indication of ability. Teachers in this study argued that students were able to question teachers and capture an in-depth understanding of the content of the English they were studying.

*For gifted English language learners, I think the way of thinking is very important, especially their logical thinking, not only focusing on language skills. I think the capability of critical thinking is very important for language learning. (T-C-3)*

*I have a student, at the beginning, I didn't think he is strong and outstanding when he did his self-introduction. But later, I found that he was very good at critical thinking. For example, when I taught vocabulary, other students may just only listen to you and follow*



*your instruction, but he would ask you “how to express this...? Why it should be this..., not that...?” I feel he is gifted English language student, and he is very good at critical thinking. (T-C-4)*

Apart from their outstanding language abilities, some teachers considered the intrinsic motivation of GELLs towards English language learning to be important. Over half of the teachers believed that gifted students should be motivated in the area in which they were gifted.

*In my mind, the gifted students should have high motivation. After the students finished their undergraduate study, they would be more outstanding in their gifted areas or majors in their postgraduate study. (T-C-1)*

*I think, the most important things for gifted English language students is highly motivated. They have strong motivation. They would like to do what they real want to do, and the high motivation will stimulate their initiative to do things. (T-C-2)*

*I think gifted English language students must be self-motivated. (T-C-4)*

Half of the teachers perceived that an interest in English could be a fundamental element to stimulate GELL's intrinsic motivation in English language.

*I think the gifted English language students should be interested in English language. (T-C-6)*

*I believe the gifted English language students have interest in English. To some extent, the outstanding listening and speaking abilities will promote the gifted English language students to increase their interest in English learning. Because, I think when someone have good listening and speaking abilities, it will raise their confidence to express their opinions in English, at the same time, it may increase the interest of students, and then they will be motivated to study English. (T-C-1)*

As all the Chinese English language teachers were English language learners, they have learning experience in English language learning. One teacher provided an example related to her own experience to explain the importance of interest in English language learning.

*I think the interest of English language is very important. I think gifted English language students should be interested in English language. [...] I want to talk about myself as an example to describe the relations between interest and motivation. When I studied in university, I found that my English language ability was relatively weak compared with my classmates. I had four good friends, and we always did presentation together. The other three were very excellent in English language. But I like English, and I'm so interested in English. So, I never give up learning English. Then, because of the interest of English language, I would work so hard to improve my language abilities spontaneously. Gradually, I felt the gap between my friends and I was getting smaller and smaller. Finally, they said to me, "Wow, you are so excellent in English!" I felt that I made the most progress of English language learning. So, I think the interest of English language could stimulate the motivation of students to learn English, and the interest and motivation are extremely important for gifted English language students. (T-C-4)*

For Chinese GELLs at the postgraduate stage, some teachers perceived that the use of self-learning strategies had a positive correlation with GELL's achievement in English language learning. This emphasises the use of metacognitive strategies of GELLs to regulate their own learning process.

*At this stage, gifted English language students should plan their study very well. They have clear learning goals, high self-management and self-discipline, and keep going. [...] But I still believe self-discipline is very important. gifted English language students should have high self-discipline, in order to improve their gifted abilities regularly. (T-C-1)*

*For example, one girl came from rural area, she is very good at listening, and she can give you response very quickly. But her speaking no matter in Chinese or English was very bad. However, I discussed with her about her weakness at the end of the first semester. At the second semester, I was so supervised about her speaking and pronunciation in English. She told me that, in holiday, she was listening and imitating British accent from BBC and TED. I think she has high self-discipline and can regulate her study well. As the result, she can improve her English language ability in a short time and get an excellent performance in English language learning. I think she is a gifted English language learner. (T-C-6)*

Studies by Pae (2008), Noels, *et al.* (2000), Wen (1997) found that intrinsic motivation can help to maintain students' interest intensity and persistence, and it is beneficial for a students' self-regulated learning process. Teachers in this study indicated that interest and motivation resulted in the student using their initiative and self-discipline in relation to their study. It was argued that GELs can use this to regulate their study and consciously improve their English language learning.

#### 4.2.2.2 Identification

Over half of Chinese English language teachers tended to identify GELs through a long-term interaction with the students, and they appeared to identify GELs through assessing the oral communicative competences of the students in class.

*I will observe them for a while. I will observe their performance in class, and I will interact with them in English. Then I will know whether they are gifted English language students or not. (T-C-2)*

*I would like to identify gifted English language learners through a long-term observation, not only the test score. For example, sometimes, for master students, we will test their English language ability through a debate. (T-C-6)*

In the above quotes, the teachers reported the identification of GELs reflecting their foci of the characteristics of GELs, in which GELs have proficiency in listening and speaking and crucially this was achieved over time.

Chinese teachers did not indicate the possibility of proficiency in writing as a characteristic of GELs or writing as the teaching focus in the English language classroom in China. Although some teachers did report that an improvement in the writing of students could be a way to identify GELs in their classes. They believed writing was a productive skill that can help them recognise the performance and progress of GELs in English language learning.

*Generally, I will see how they responded questions, because the expression of speaking and writing are different. Considering the numbers of students in one class, it would be impossible for me to assign all students to express themselves by using English in class.*

*But I think in their writing work, I can see how they thought, and how they interpreted the materials. Although it couldn't indicate entirely, through a long-time observation, I would know who is gifted one. (T-C-3)*

*I usually identify their gifted English language ability through a long-term observation. [...] Actually, I would like to focus on their writing and reading abilities, especially writing ability. Generally, in one semester, I would give them 10 short-essay topics. I think the number of the writing work is enough for the students in one term. (T-C-5)*

Over half of the teachers believed the test score of the students would not indicate the real English language ability of the students entirely, and this was treated as a reference to support their observations.

*I think English as a language is used to communicate, not to test. So, the result and the score can't indicate the ability of the students. (T-C-1)*

*I don't care the test score. I think the score is only treated as a reference for identifying gifted English language students. (T-C-2)*

*Someone could get a good mark through training some test skills. I think the test score could not reflect the students' real English language ability. (T-C-5)*

The Chinese English language teachers tended to assess their students partly by continued assessment, focusing on the performance of the students in their classes. In the above quotes, the teachers were consistent with their teaching practice, appearing to focus on the performance of GELs in class rather than identification only relying on the result the students get from the exam.

In China, some English language teachers perceived the influence of innate ability as the essential factor on GELs achieving excellence. They described innate ability as a range of attributes such as intrinsic motivation, interest, personality and desire to communicate.

*I think the innate ability is the most important feature on achieving gifted English language students. It can be regarded as motivation and the ability of imitation of English language. (T-C-1)*

*I think the innate ability is the most important one, namely their motivation. If you were willing to do, you would do practice. I think the innate ability includes motivation, language ability, personality, curiosity toward surroundings, and the willingness of communication. It must be felt from their inside. Practice also important, but it's less than innate ability. Because, you want to get the excellent achievement, you may do a lot of practice. Namely, it should be said that these accomplishments may built on practice. You should do practice. But initially, you should have motivation to do practice. I think the innate ability can be treated as the most important foundation, practice as the middle support to achieve excellence for gifted English language students. (T-C-2)*

#### **4.2.2.3 Classroom Practice for Supporting GELL**

Half of the Chinese English language teachers considered the different personality of each GELL and they appeared to provide more opportunities for GELLs to express and present their opinions by using English in their classes than they did for other students.

*There are some gifted students who are very active. If they were willing to present, I would give them more opportunities. (T-C-1)*

*In general, I would let my students present in class voluntarily. For gifted English language students, some students might be active or positive, and they would be willing to present and express by using English more in class. I would give them more opportunities to do presentation. (T-C-2)*

Some teachers in China regarded the different language levels of each GELL as a plausible means to assess GELLs by different standards. They did this in order to encourage GELLs to make progress in their English language study. For some GELLs with a higher language foundation, the teacher tended to implement higher criteria when assessing GELLs. They then expected those GELLs to be able to be motivated should they receive a “lower result” than expected and this in turn would motivate them to achieve better results in future English language learning activities.

*Considering the differences of capability of the gifted students, I have different criteria to assess them. For able student, my criteria will be higher than others. [...] For example, I know you were gifted, I would have higher expectation on you. For example, one gifted*

*student and one un-gifted student, they were required to do the same writing. If I didn't know who did those two essays, I would give score of 90 and 70 respectively. But I knew them, I knew their level. I think the essay of the gifted student could not achieve my expectation of 90 score. So, I would like to give the gifted student 80 or 87 score. I think this gifted student can be better. (T-C-4)*

*I think in China, the situation of English language teaching in different provinces is not the same. For example, the English language foundation of some students from the coastal cities would be much better than other provinces, because, such as the other cities may not test listening skills, the students from those cities may be weak on listening abilities. But you can't define some of them that they are not gifted language learners because of the weaker language foundation. I think you can't belittle their potential abilities. I think some of them could be gifted English language students. I think you can provide more deliberate training and encouragement for those students. (T-C-3)*

In the second quote the teacher indicated that different English language teaching practices in different provinces might result in a potentially gifted language learner not having had appropriate instruction in particular aspects of language learning. This might result in a GELL having particular abilities in ELL but not having had the appropriate instruction and so those abilities were not evident in the classroom.

There was only one teacher who reported providing more challenging tasks specifically for GELL to improve their English language ability:

*For gifted English language students, I would give them extra work with more challenges. In the classroom process, I would also assign gifted English language students to respond my questions. I would like to give them more practice and challenges in class. (T-C-6)*

Although this teacher mentioned giving more challenging tasks for GELLs to develop their language ability, the teacher did not report the type and degree of these tasks and it is noticeable that the challenging work was in addition to the class work. The teachers seemingly had awareness of the need to differentiate for GELLs in their English language classes with more opportunities, encouragement, or challenging tasks. They also tended to focus on improving the communicative competence of GELLs, which was consistent with their approach to teaching.

Most of the Chinese English language teachers spoke about the cultural influence in relation to the learning environment and the impact of that on attitude and motivation. Half of them believed the cultural and educational context of English language learning in China might be positive and allow some GELLs to achieve excellence in English language learning.

*I think the culture of English language learning and teaching in China is more intense than in the Western countries, I mean the students' willingness of English language learning. I think the cultural influence should not be a negative influence for Chinese gifted English language students in China. So, I think the culture of learning English in China should be regarded as a positive factor influencing gifted English language students. Because I think the students learning English in China is more positive and enthusiasm. (T-C-1)*

*Some gifted students learning English aim to pass the exam, they can learn very well. In that case, they may get an excellent achievement, because, in China, we pay more attention to English language learning and teaching, it's our learning and teaching environment. Teachers can support the students, and the students also can be motivated to learn English in this English learning environment in China. (T-C-2)*

Over half the teachers in China reported that training and practice could be treated as the determinant factors influencing GELLs to achieve excellence in English language learning.

*I think practice is more significant for language learning. I think someone may have innate ability in English language, and they may be better than others at the beginning of their learning. But the gifted English language students should have a long-time training and practice, and finally they can achieve excellence in their English language study. (T-C-3)*

*I think training and practice are the most important factors for gifted English language learners to achieve excellence. (T-C-4)*

*I think the practice should be the most influential factor for gifted English language students. [...] Generally, some students may have innate ability in English language study, and they might spend less time than other who might not have the innate ability in this area. But through a long-time training and practice, I think gifted English language*

*students can be excellence in English language study, and even the general students also could achieve excellence in English language learning. (T-C-5)*

Most of the Chinese English language teachers believed in the importance of practice in helping GELs to achieve excellent proficiency in English language learning, and that the innate ability of the students was regarded as adjunct with motivation in helping GEL to learn English easily or quickly. They also believed that all students could improve their English language learning if they were offered opportunities to practice.

In conclusion, the Chinese English language teachers in this research believed that the innate ability of GELs might result in intrinsic motivation and that this may accelerate their English language learning. Cultural influence was considered as extrinsic motivation in relation to the learning environment, which the teachers believed could have a positive impact on GELs to study English in China.

## **Implications for Practice**

Based on the evidence presented, Chinese English language teachers have awareness of teaching EAP or EMI for their target students. But this seem to be only at the surface level of this process in trying to provide English language communicative contexts for the students, without considering the real life academic written context. Some focused on the language abilities of GELs as the outstanding characteristics and tended to provide specific support in terms of giving more opportunities for GELs to perform tasks (such as assigning challenging work) in their classes. However, considering the large number of students in each class, it might be difficult for Chinese English language teachers to provide much specific supports for GELs to improve their English language ability in class. It was suggested the use of software and chatting apps in English language teaching outside of class time might offer additional support and they were considered convenient for both teachers and all students in English language learning. Through these technological approaches it might be possible for teachers to communicate and interact with GELs individually. Indeed, the Chinese teachers reported the provision of deliberate training through social media tools for GELs to improve their English language ability. Overall, it can be seen that Chinese teachers had an awareness and willingness to support them to achieve excellence in class or after class albeit that at times this was challenging to do in practice.



Teachers in China need to go beyond the textbook for teaching purposes. Of particular importance, teachers reported doing preparation before the class, such as sourcing from online relevant English language resources, English-writing books and/or English language proficiency textbooks (e.g. IELTS textbooks) to fulfil the needs of the learners and to enrich the classroom process. This may also have benefits for implementing EMI in the English language classroom in China. However, considering the restriction imposed by exam-orientated teaching, the implementation of EAP could start from revolutionising the content of English examination. For instance, writing academic essays or making academic presentations could be encouraged to be part of the English language examination.

Teachers need to think more about individuals in their classes. For example, there was a problem with the teachers assuming a basic level of knowledge in relation to language and then explaining more complex issues in Chinese. For GELLs, if they are already proficient about the grammatical issue being discussed then this may not be challenging enough for them. In this respect teachers could use software and apps to provide more challenging works for GELLs in class or after class. However, there are a variety of software and apps developed, the strength and weakness of these technologies requires to be evaluated by teachers before being implemented in their classes.

## Chapter 5: Research Results – Chinese GELLs

### 5.1 Chinese GELLs in Scotland

Having been recommended by their English language teachers, seven Chinese GELLs in Scotland participated in this research. As explained in chapter 3, the research methodology chapter, participants were asked to rate their English language ability. Table 5.1 shows the latest grade they had achieved and their self-evaluation assessment of English language ability.

The following table shows the latest achieved grade and self-evaluation assessment of English language ability of Chinese GELLs in Scotland.

Table 5.1: Latest grade and self-evaluation of Chinese GELL’s English language ability in Scotland

Items/learners	Latest grade in university (9-band scale)					Self-evaluation (10-band scale)				
	Overall	Speaking	Writing	Reading	Listening	Overall	Speaking	Writing	Reading	listening
L-S-1	7	7	7	7	7	6.5	6	5	7	7
L-S-2	7	7	7	6.5	6.5	6.5	7	7	6.5	6.5
L-S-3	7.5	7	7	7.5	7.5	6.5	5	6.5	7.5	8
L-S-4	7	7	6.5	7	7	5	6	6	8.5	6
L-S-5	7	7	6.5	7	7	6	5	5	7	7
L-S-6	7	6.5	6.5	7	7	7	8	5	6	6
L-S-7	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	6	8	5	6	7
Average	7	6.86	6.71	6.93	6.93	6.21	6.43	5.64	6.93	6.79

Note: Chinese GELLs in Scotland are individually identified by the number from 1 to 6. For example, number “1” refers to the first learner participant in Scotland and the short form is “L-S-1”.

Table 5.1 above shows that the latest grades of the Chinese GELLs in Scotland in this research are higher than the self-evaluation of their English language abilities. The highest overall grade was achieved by participant L-S-3 with 7.5 points, however, this student’s self-evaluation grade reported 6.5 points. The lowest overall grade of self-evaluation was reported by the L-S-4 with 5 points, however, this student’s latest grade as assessed by the university was the second highest of the group with 7 points. In particular, L-S-4 reported the highest reading grade in the self-evaluation scale with 8.5 points, and this student’s self-evaluation grades for the four English language skills were higher than the overall grade. In addition, the writing grades in both “the latest grade” and “the self-evaluation grade” were

the lowest ones with the average 6.71 points and 5.64 points respectively. All participants reported having good reading skills, and the average grade of their reading abilities in both scales are the same with 6.93 points, which is the highest item compared with the other three abilities.

Based on the interview data, Chinese GELs considered that proficiency in English language was related to productive skills, including speaking and writing. Chinese GELs' English language learning was motivated by their interest in English language, and they reported that extrinsic motivation such as was provided by the learning environment in Scotland also contributed to their desire to learn. They appeared to suggest self-learning strategies and the role of teachers as guide as two of the most important factors influencing their proficiency in English language learning. Not unsurprisingly Chinese GELs perceived that there were more opportunities for them to practice English in real communication situations in Scotland compared with the situation they had faced before in China. They described the importance of the learning environment on developing their proficiency in English language learning. This section will classify the Chinese GEL accounts in Scotland into three themes: 1) Proficiency in productive skills, 2) Intrinsic motivation and self-learning; and 3) Other influential factors on GEL's proficiency in English language learning.

### ***5.1.1 Proficiency in Productive Skills***

Nearly all Chinese GELs in this research in Scotland perceived that the aim of English language learning was to use English to communicate with others. They believed that the proficiency of GELs in English language learning was related to excellent communicative competences, including oral and written skills. They reported that the ability of using English in communication included the capability of exploring and interpreting language, the way of thinking, and emotional features of speaking English in appropriate situations with the public. Speaking ability was understood by Chinese GELs in this research as a comprehensive competence of using English in real communication.

*Firstly, I think the most important one is to communicate with others without any other's help, or other's translation. That is mostly important. (L-S-1)*

*I think we need to learn the student from a comprehensive prospect, like their speaking, how they communicate with others, are their thoughts easily be understood by others, or they have their own ideas. (L-S-2)*

*In my opinion, I think I would more look at the speaking. Because I think when you speaking, it also tests your listening, your vocabulary, the first reflection. Sometimes it's also about your mind and how to organise thoughts in a short time. (L-S-3)*

*In my opinion, I think, people could speak all right, some words to express their own opinion. I think that means excellence. They can use this language very well. And also show the logic of their own ideas. (L-S-5)*

GELs in Scotland reported emphasising proficiency in communicative skills, but they also noted the need for GELs to learn and perform English language in different situations. This corresponds to the concept of language aptitude which considers the specific language tasks in real-life situations (Robinson, 2005).

In addition, some of the Chinese GELs reported that GELs are also sensitive to the cultural references and use English where appropriate. A previous study by Dean (2001) states similar characteristics of more able language learners in that they are able to realise the features of, and the information about, the cultural symbols in the target language. Chinese GELs considered the importance of the cultural information in exploring English language. As the Chinese GELs were learning English language in Scotland, they became immersed in Scottish culture because of the real-life situations they faced in everyday life. Cultural information for those Chinese GELs to some extent could be considered as the Scottish cultural context, which offers an authentic experience of speaking English.

*I think at least you need to speak English fluently and you can accurately show your opinion, demonstrate what you want to say. And also, I think you must have better understanding about English culture. (L-S-4)*

*I think for example, you can understand the local people - what are they talking about. That's the excellence. You can use this language, communicate with people, and you can write something, like write an essay. I think the most important thing is that you realise that is a tool, you can use it, that's all. You can use it smoothly and have no problem to*

*communicate with others. Similar to native speaker. They can use English in appropriate situations. (L-S-7)*

Besides the proficiency in relation to speaking ability, over half of the Chinese GELs believed in the importance of excellent writing proficiency. Writing was treated by Chinese GELs in Scotland as the other productive way to express their opinions in English.

*And writing also is important. So easy to interpret language. (L-S-1)*

*Because I think like here, the criteria are quite various. Maybe they are good at writing, they can focus on the writing, and they can write a lot of good articles. it's also a good aspect of good English language learner. (L-S-2)*

*I think speaking and writing are very important. (L-S-7)*

In particular, compared with speaking, in which people use English relatively informally and in less structured ways, Chinese GELs perceived that writing needs systematic instruction and practice, and such skills can be developed gradually. This provides time and opportunity for Chinese GELs to concentrate on improving their written ability individually, with the additional assistance and support such as pre-reading practice, or the use of some study tools, a dictionary, etc. One of the Chinese GELs provided an example where they believed writing practice helped them to comprehend English language over time. Their writing ability was presented as depending on the accumulation of the knowledge of English language.

*I think I'm little bit good at writing. Because when I write something, I can use dictionary, and have more time to think how I can express my ideas. (L-S-3)*

Chinese GELs in Scotland appeared to have a clear sense about the difference between the processes of learning to speak and learning to write. It seems that Chinese GELs preferred to pay attention to how to produce English language, and how English language was explored and interpreted in real communication. This perhaps underlines that the purpose of English language learning is for communication.

### **5.1.2 Intrinsic Motivation and Self-learning Improvement**

Nearly half of the GELs reported being interested in English language learning and this was an essential motivator for them to progress in their English language study. Because of the interest in English language learning, they appeared to immerse themselves in their English language study both in class and after class. At the heart of this was a desire to communicate.

*I just want to talk with people by using English. It's very pleasure experience for me. (L-S-4)*

*I think this is an interesting way of English language learning, and I enjoy it. (L-S-6)*

*I think learning English is quite interesting, because we can use the language to communicate with others. (L-S-2)*

Over half of the Chinese GELs reported that GELs would have a positive attitude towards improving English language. This positive attitude in English language learning was revealed through personal characteristics such as being outgoing, active, or curious. They thought that these personal characteristics would stimulate GELs to engage in their English language study.

*They have outgoing personalities. So, I think personality is quite important for gifted English language learners. (L-S-2)*

*I think firstly they have the aspiration to learn English. (L-S-3)*

*More active in the class, so they can understand what I'm talking about. (L-S-7)*

From the example, the quote below underlines the importance of intrinsic motivation in English language learning, alongside having a positive attitude. This is believed to motivate a student's willingness to progress in their studies.

*Also, some other issues like student is a positive learner, or they are willing to learn English by themselves. I think that's really important. Because some students even before*

*they came here, they stay at a relatively higher level. But some students are not. But for those students who do not stay at high level, if they are willing to learn positively, I think that should be a good student. [...] Obviously, I think the student should be curious. I mean feel thirsty for learning. they would like to try to learn by themselves. (L-S-6)*

Chinese GELs in Scotland were able to recognise the challenges they faced when learning in English language. A study by Norton and Toohey (2001), also indicated that proficient adult language learners were able to manage and monitor their difficulties in their language learning. In this research, GELs reported that difficulties were often in relation to the lack of accumulation of language knowledge and a lack of confidence to speak in English.

*R: What challenges do you face when learning English?*

*L: I think it's remembering the words, and the grammar principles...(L-S-2)*

*At the beginning, when you start to learn English, the vocabulary is more challenging for you. You need to learn how to describe opinions precisely. (L-S-4)*

*The big problem of mine is about the word, the vocabulary, the range of the words. I don't have wide range of words. That's the problem of mine. (L-S-7)*

*I think, as I mentioned before, I think speaking is the most challenge for me. It's about the speaking anxiety. I think it maybe also because of the vocabulary. Because you don't know so many words. If you want to express yourself, you don't know how to say it. (L-S-5)*

Some of the Chinese GELs seemed to be sensitive and cautious about making mistakes when they used English to communicate with others. They were concerned about the reactions of the interlocutors in conversations. In particular, when the interlocutors hesitated in the conversation, Chinese GELs were likely to feel nervous and this impacted on their confidence about speaking. Although Chinese GELs appeared to have a willingness to communicate with others using English, some students seemed to be overcautious in communication in English, which might influence their confidence in speaking English. One of the Chinese GELs provided an example relating to emotional progress when they communicate with others in English:

*I think it's about the feelings. Because as I said I think I'm a good English language learner, and I can use English, I can speak to the native speakers. But when you really talk to the native speakers, sometimes, because of the speed of their speaking or some accent, I may feel "Oh my god, I'm not as I thought. I'm not good at English." I think sometimes it will destroy your confidence. I think, maybe, it's because of the translation problem. When you speak English, you always want to find equivalent characters in Chinese. But sometimes you can't find very exactly words to express your feelings. Sometimes it will cause confusion and misunderstanding. (L-S-3)*

The above quote shows that although the Chinese student is proficient in English the local context and speed with which native English speakers speak impacted on their self-confidence. They felt they were no longer as proficient as they first believed. In addition, this Chinese GELL presented an insight into the influence of their mother language on their English language learning and production.

In this research, after Chinese GELLs recognised their difficulties and weakness in their English language learning. In particular, they consistently reported having self-discipline in English language study. All Chinese GELLs in Scotland showed that they set a time per day for improving their English language ability. Since they perceived themselves as lacking in the accumulation of the knowledge of English language, they reported focusing on accumulating this knowledge in terms of vocabulary, or analysing sentence structure.

*I have learned English more than 10 years, when I was in primary school. I spend maybe 2 hours per day to practice my English here. (L-S-2)*

*I need to learn some vocabularies or some sentences, I will spend 1-2 hours a day. But in the extensive learning experience such as the pre-sessional course here, I will spend 2-3 hours learning some new words. (L-S-3)*

*I think during this month, I usually spend one hour per day. (L-S-5)*

*Everyday. Especially why I came here, because I have to pass the exam which is required as a very basic requirement of the entrance of this school. (L-S-6)*



Over half of the GELLS reported using apps or online activities to engage in communicative practice and emphasised the effectiveness of implementing technologies in their English language improvement.

*I like using the apps. There are lots of apps can help me to learn English. (L-S-2)*

*Now, I try to use the social media, such as Facebook, to communicate with others. (L-S-3)*

*[...] It's an online learning practice, the teacher is in America. (L-S-5)*

*And I also buy some course online. This is speaking course with some foreigner teachers. Besides that, I think I just sat in the city library, practiced the exam papers, and some apps help me to remember some words. [...] I buy some courses on the internet. That means I can communicate with some foreigner teachers, and practice it. (L-S-7)*

Chinese GELL seemed to have accepted the new methods of English language learning and were confident in finding and deciding what they considered to be appropriate and effective methods to improve their language abilities. As Chinese GELLS mainly practiced their oral ability, their willingness to be immersed in the English-speaking context and desire to communicate with others by using English were clear.

### **5.1.3 Extrinsic Factors Influencing GELL's Proficiency**

Chinese GELLS considered that the role of teachers and the learning environment provided extrinsic motivation to support their proficiency in English language learning. Chinese GELLS believed that the teaching strategies implemented by Scottish teachers were effective for developing proficiency in English language learning. In addition, they perceived that the tolerant and inclusive learning and speaking environment that was fostered in Scotland was also important.

The Chinese GELLS were asked about the role of parents, teachers and peers in influencing their proficiency in English language learning, with “1” being no influence and “5” being very high influence. The Chinese GELLS in this study wanted to use “4.5” or “1.5” in answer to the questions. For example, 4.5 was used by L-S-3 to describe her perception of the influence of her peers and teachers on her English language proficiency. The student also

expressed that the influence of peers and teachers had not reached the “very high level” (5 points) but would be higher than “high level” (4 points). Therefore, the student perceived the score of 4.5 was required to describe their view. Figure 5.1, below, shows the perceptions of Chinese GELLs in Scotland on the role of teachers, parents and peers on their English language proficiency.

Figure 5.1: Perceptions of Chinese GELL in Scotland on the role of teachers, parents and peers on their English language proficiency

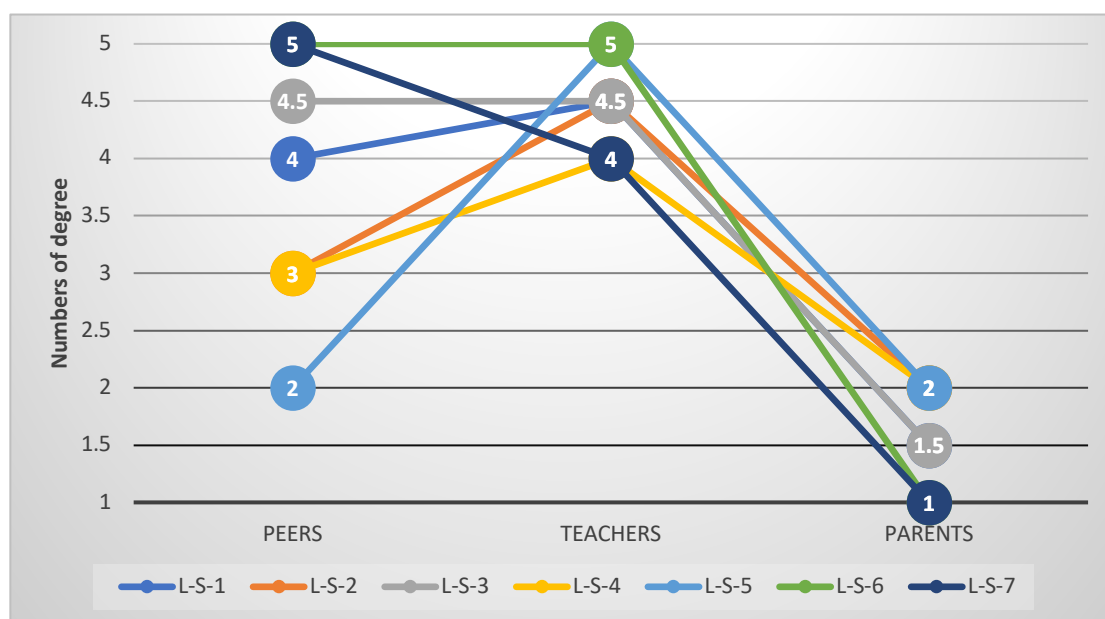


Figure 5.1, above, shows that Chinese GELL generally felt that teachers were the most important influence on their proficiency in English language learning with parents having the least influence. One participant (L-S-6, green line) perceived teachers and peers to be the highest influencing factors on proficiency in English language learning, with parents having no influence on the students’ proficiency in English language learning. The greater variability on perceptions of peers seems natural as they would have variable interest in this aspect of individual GELLs.

Nearly all of the Chinese GELLs in Scotland reported the importance of the teacher on the development of English language learning. Chinese GELLs thought that teachers in Scotland conducted learner-centred oriented instruction and helped the students to understand their responsibility towards improving their English language ability. In particular, Chinese GELLs on the whole perceived English language teachers in Scotland guided them in their English language study. This guidance mainly focussed on teaching them English language learning strategies in order that they could make improvements.

*But here, I think sometimes when you ask your teachers some questions, they will help you to answer it by yourself, or they will recommend some articles or books to you, and you can find the answer in those researches. (L-S-1)*

*Sometimes she just pointed out the main problems of mine, I can't recognise pronunciation. She just told me, and the practice is depended on myself. I think this is the most important point in this English language course, that our idea to want to learn the English. (L-S-7)*

Chinese GELLs considered it important to engage in critical thinking and questioning in their English language learning classes.

*My advantages are speaking and critical thinking. I also consider things from different perspectives. I would not just be restricted by some principles, or stereotypes. Critical thinking and easy understanding and good listening are really helpful for you to get involved in the culture here, and to communicate with teachers, and the easier it is to understand a lesson. So, I think it's may be a part of it. (L-S-2)*

*Also, as well as critical thinking is also important. When you have some questions about issue, you want to figure out why things going like that way. That will motivate you to find the answer, that's a good way to learn English. (L-S-6)*

*Maybe it depends on what they're thinking about the problems, more critical thinking. [...]  
It's critical thinking, the way they think about the problem. (L-S-7)*

In addition, Chinese GELLs believed that this ability to think critically helps them to have an awareness of the differences between the learning strategies of English language learning in Scotland and China. In the Scottish context students were encouraged to find answers for themselves and to understand that there might be more than one answer to a question. One of the Chinese GELLs suggested that the ability to think critically results in a change of mind. The role of the teacher is crucial in developing critical thinking skills and abilities.

*They're willing to change their minds of thinking. Because when you use English, you will find that, no matter about the sentence structure, or the form of words. It's a little bit different from Chinese. So, you need to change the thinking model, I think, to use English. (L-S-3).*

Chinese GELs in this study felt that teachers in Scotland affected the emotional aspects of their learning in positive ways. Chinese GELs seemed to be sensitive to discussing their deficiency and weaknesses in front of the class.

*They want you to know your own errors by email or other ways, instead of pointing out our errors in the front of others. I think it is a way to protect your confidence. (L-S-1)*

*They will not correct our errors directly. They may repeat the right answer, or ask you questions and make you realise your mistakes. I think it can develop our confidence. (L-S-2)*

They expected their teachers to consider these emotional features and implement ways to help them recognise their deficiency or weakness out of the public eye. English language teachers in Scotland respected the students' feelings and conducted consultations and support individually after class. This approach from the Scottish teachers was reported as being beneficial for their confidence and for the development in communication. Two Chinese GELs provided examples in relation to this:

*She would like to give us feedback. Because when we are talking, we are showing our opinion about something, our tutor didn't interrupt us during the process. Sometimes we have some about 15 minutes talking with our tutor. So, we could share our opinion about recent learning, or if we have any problem, and any difficulties about learning English, we can just tell our tutor and our tutor also will judge our performance and give us some feedback. I think this way would be more comfortable for me and build me to become more confident. It also encourages me to present my English more. (L-S-4)*

*I think it's really helpful. Because if you are still in the process of learning, and you make some mistakes, if the teacher points out very directly, and you will feel you are a loser guy (Laughing). You know people always concerned about other people's opinion on you. So, I think since the teacher's encouragement or the such things can really help you to build your confidence. (L-S-6)*

Chinese GEL argued specifically that the way their teachers in Scotland taught them made a difference in their language expression in written and spoken English language layout.

*I think teacher encourages us to speak more. Just to be open to communicate with other people. Because I think the language is just a tool to help you to communicate with other people, or just to show how you thought about something, or something like this. (L-S-4)*

*The most useful part I think is to teach us how to write an essay in here, how to think criteria. So, I think it's good. (L-S-7)*

The learning strategies and techniques in English language learning appeared to be the foci of concern for Chinese GELLs. English language teachers in Scotland emphasised teaching techniques and strategies to the students and offered feedback therefore, Chinese GELLs believed in the positive effect of the teachers on their English language proficiency and development.

Chinese GELLs on the whole described the environment of studying English language in Scotland as effective for their English language improvement. Chinese GELLs treated English language as a tool for communication. They detailed that learning English language in Scotland had many communicative opportunities for them to practice spoken language both in class and after class.

*Also, for the environment, for example, the class use English, and we use English to discuss problems with peers, teachers use English to teach us also would help for English language learning. (L-S-2)*

*Because during our English language course here, we have chat club. Our university organized this event. People from different country can just sit together and talk with each other in English. In English! That's the point. For about one hour I think it's a really good way for us to make new friends and to practice English. (L-S-4)*

*Because in Glasgow, our tutor force us to speak English. In China, we don't have that environment. Because all Chinese people speak Chinese. And in Glasgow, we have to speak English. (L-S-5)*

In addition, all Chinese GELLs felt that the restricted the use of their mother language in English language class created a fully English-speaking environment in class and that this

created an environment in Scotland that helped them to increase their confidence in English conversation.

*But sometimes because there were so many Chinese students, we sometime discussed with each other in Chinese. But this is forbidden. (L-S-3)*

*[...] the teacher would not allow us. Also, in the class, if you speak Chinese, the teacher will not know what you are doing. (L-S-5)*

*In class, no, I will use English. All my classmates also use English. (L-S-6)*

With the above-noted sensitivity and cautiousness of Chinese GELs in speaking English, they described that the English-speaking environment in Scotland was tolerant, and the interlocutors in this speaking environment preferred to focus on the content of what the students wanted to express, rather than on correcting grammatical errors in the conversation. This made Chinese GELs feel relaxed when using English in their communication. Homework was set so that they had to work with their peers, and this offered a more relaxed setting in which to practice. They also recognised the real purpose of learning English for communication and recognised that it was more than simply pursuing exact grammatical expressions in English and that part of this process would involve making mistakes. Realising that it was permissible to make mistakes increased their confidence in communication in English.

*Sometimes teacher will give us some homework, practicing our spoken language with peers, or with our classmates. So, sometimes we will practice our spoken language after school. I think, I like practicing it with my friends, because when the environment and atmosphere is relaxed, I want to practice it more. (L-S-1)*

*To be honest, I didn't take it very seriously. (Laughing) I just want to have more contact with my tutor and classmates. So, I didn't treat it as a class, some traditional class. I just want to talk with people by using English. It's very pleasurable experience for me. (L-S-4)*

*I think the biggest obstacle for me is that I'm afraid to speak. Maybe it's for most people. We are afraid to make mistakes. So, we afraid to speak something stupid. Well here,*

*everyone is learners. So, if you speak something wrong, they wouldn't laugh at you. So, I think it help me to, it encourages me to speak English. I think it gives more confidence. (L-S-5)*

*I think learning environment is very helpful. Before I came here, it's unbelievable that I can communicate with other people from other countries. I would feel nervous, and I'm so worry about making mistakes. But after I came here, I find that making mistake is very normal. It's not problems. And the accent problem is not a problem. So, I feel more confident than before. (L-S-7)*

Chinese GELLs in Scotland were able to research and locate helpful sources and materials that supported them to achieve excellence across the components of English language learning. Over half of the Chinese GELLs in this research reported that access to the library had been key in this endeavour.

*I think learning to the most extent is on ourselves. So, I think like the sources in library is most important and helpful for our English language development. (L-S-2)*

*You know the most important part, maybe not the most important, maybe relatively important part is the essay, academic essay in language learning. We are required to do that to assess our writing skills. So, we have to find some resources, reference. So, I think the library is really helpful. We can practice our writing skills. [...] I was also required to listen to the BBC news. This is my tutor ask me to do that. You know the BBC news, if you want to listen it, you have to have a TV license. Otherwise you will against the law. Fortunately, I have TV license, so, yes, I think that help me lot, especially in listening and speaking. (L-S-6)*

## **Implications for Practice**

Based on the evidence presented, Chinese GELLs in this study perceived learning English language in Scotland to be effective and of benefit to improving their language skills. The role of teachers was reported as an important factor in influencing their English language proficiency. In particular, Chinese GELLs perceived that positive encouragement from their teachers was beneficial and effective for them. A more learner centred approach coupled with access to appropriate resources and opportunities to learning through practice seem to

be important. These kinds of approaches may require English teachers to adopt a different kind of planning and classroom organisation, for example, preparing more learner-centred instruction, such as doing group discussions and providing different information relevant to a central task.

Feedback appeared to be important for this group of GELLs. Building classroom practice that has at its core positive feedback will require teachers of English to recognise and identify the strengths, advantages and good qualities of the students. This offers a starting point to providing learning opportunities matched to the learner. Fear of making mistakes inhibited some from speaking. This is not unusual where people perceive that they are good at something and do not want others to know that they make mistakes. Teachers have a role to play in creating safe places to talk and where mistakes are encouraged and learned from.



## 5.2 Chinese GELs in China

English language teachers in China nominated six Chinese GELs to participate in this study. As with the students in Scotland, Chinese GELs in China were asked to rate their English language ability. Table 5.2 shows the latest grade they had achieved and their self-evaluation assessment of English language ability.

Table 5.2: Latest grade and self-evaluation of Chinese GEL's English language ability in China.

	Latest grade in University (100-scale)	Self-evaluation (10-scale)				
		Overall	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
L-C-1	80	6.5	6	6	6	6
L-C-2	83	6.5	6.5	7	6.5	6.5
L-C-3	89	7	8	8	8	8
L-C-4	80	7	7	7.5	8.5	8.5
L-C-5	96	6.5	6.5	7.5	7.5	6.5
L-C-6	89	8	6	8.5	8.5	6.5
Average grade	86.17	6.92	6.67	7.42	7.50	7.00

Note: Chinese GELs in China are individually identified by the number from 1 to 6. For example, number “1” refers to the first learner participant in China and the short form is “L-C-1”.

Table 5.2, above, shows that the latest grades of Chinese GEL in China in this study are all over 80, and the average grade is 86.17. In addition, the Chinese GEL's average self-evaluation on their English language abilities is around 7 points, which means that they

perceived themselves as good English language users according to the band descriptor. In particular, as we can see in Table 5.2, the participant L-C-5 got the highest grade in the university in this group, but their self-evaluation reported the lowest grade in English language ability. The highest overall self-evaluation grade is 8 points reported by L-C-6, however, this student's latest grade in university did not achieve the top in this group. In conclusion, although the latest grades in university of Chinese GELL in China were high, they did not perceive their English language ability to be excellent.

Based on the interview data, Chinese GELLs in China treated English language as a tool for communication, therefore their desire for proficiency in English language was related to their desire for communicative competence. Chinese GELLs' English language learning was motivated by their personal interests. They seemed to focus on learning strategies in English language learning, and particularly self-learning strategies. They reported that teachers, parents, peers and themselves as learners all play a part in their proficiency in English language learning. Chinese GELLs perceived that there was little opportunity for them to use English to communicate in China, and they described the importance of providing opportunities to communicate on their proficiency in English language learning. This section will classify the Chinese GELL accounts in China into three themes: 1) Proficiency in communication; 2) intrinsic motivation; and 3) role of others.

### ***5.2.1 Proficiency in Communication***

Chinese GELLs reported that English language learning was for communication. They believed that proficiency in English language learning was gained by exploring and interpreting English language in communication, so as to be excellent in interpretation, or using English to communicate in specific areas.

Chinese GELLs reported that they felt that high grades would not indicate about proficiency in English language learning. A high grade was expressed as evidence which focused on testing the content of what the students had learned in a short-time period.

*I think someone with great grade might not be really good at English, the student might be good at test skills. So, I think the grade cannot indicate the real English language ability. (L-C-3)*

*I think there is no relation between my grade and my real English language ability. I think the grade only indicates your ability at that time, and the ability of exploring and interpreting some language points which you have been tested. It's not comprehensive. (L-C-4)*

Considering the latest grades they had received from the university, some Chinese GELs perceived this high grade mainly consisted of results from the paper-based examinations, which did not, in their view, indicate their English language ability accurately as it did not refer to other language learning dimensions.

*The teachers preferred to do the test and examination to assess our English language ability. I don't like this way, I think it's not effective. The test normally focused on the content of the course book. If you do not have a good review of the book, you will not get a good result, compared with other students who made good review of the book. [...] I think the assessment did not reflect my real English language ability, it did not involve all aspects of English language abilities. (L-C-1)*

*My last grade is 80 points. I think it just reflects my ability of reviewing the course book. (laughing) (L-C-4)*

*I think the grade is higher than my real English language ability. (L-C-5)*

One participant did emphasise the importance of a high grade in demonstrating proficiency in English language learning, in particular how a high grade was required in order to achieve the educational criteria in English-speaking countries for entry into institutions.

*I think the proficiency of gifted English language learners in English language learning will be to get a high grade and be able to achieve the English language requirement of a good university in English-speaking countries. (L-C-1)*

The quote above showed this Chinese GEL perceived that proficiency in English language learning should be assessed by their ability to study in an English-speaking country in the assumption that a higher level of language ability may be required.

The Chinese GELs in China perceived English as a tool for communication.

*I think English language is a tool for communication. When you communicate with others in English, it would stimulate your motivation to make English expression, and improve your English language ability. I think it's important for you to use English to communicate. (L-C-2)*

*I think language is used to communicate. [...] I think it should be considered the function of English language. English language is used to listen and speak, then should be used to read and write. I think teachers should consider the students' ability of listening and speaking firstly, to identify whether the students are gifted or not. It should focus on communicative competence. I think the communication is the purpose of English language learning. (L-C-4)*

*I know English language is a tool for international communication. It would help me to know the world. (L-C-5)*

Being able to use more advanced vocabulary was considered to be an indication of proficiency.

*I think the proficiency of gifted English language learners is focusing on the speaking and writing, the productive skills. If you communicate with gifted English language learners, if they can speak English like a native speaker, use advanced vocabularies or sentences. I think they should achieve excellence in English language learning. If you ask them "What do you feel today?" If the students answered, "I feel good" or "I feel bad". It's very simple, it's not the proficiency of gifted English language learners. If they can say some adjective word, such as "excellent", "unbelievable", etc. That would be better. I think the standard of evaluating proficiency in English language learning might be able to follow the criteria of TOEFL or IELTS test. (L-C-6)*

The Chinese GELs reported that translation was a common activity in their English language learning process and that simultaneous interpretation would be an indication of proficiency.

*I think the excellent proficiency of gifted English language learner should be able to do simultaneous interpretation. (L-C-3)*

However, previous studies such those of Rubin (1975), Norton & Toohey (2001), Dean (2001), Evans & Goodhew (1997 cited in Holdness, 2001) seldom discuss the characteristics of able language learners in relation to their capability to translate.

As Chinese GELLs perceived English language learning to be for communication purposes, half of them reported that proficiency in English language learning would be indicated by the capacity to address language issues in specific areas, such as for business, or law.

*I think gifted English language learners are able to address some language issues in specific areas, such as business English, which means they achieve excellence in English language learning. I want to achieve this level. (L-C-1)*

*I think the proficiency of gifted English language learners should be able to communicate with others in English frequently in specific areas, such as using English in law. (L-C-5)*

One Chinese GELLs described the importance of a standard accent in English language communication as they believed that an accent, that of a native speaker, would indicate proficiency.

*I think the proficiency in English language learning should be the outstanding accent, either British accent or American accent. I think language is used to communicate. So, I think communication could help to identify the proficiency of English language learning. They can use English to communicate frequently with perfect accent. (L-C-4)*

As discussed above, Chinese GELLs in China focused on the use of English language in real communication. They perceived proficiency in English language learning as demonstrated by the capability to explore and interpret English language in communication accurately and fluently. In addition, they expected proficiency in English language learning to equate to the standards of native English speakers, even to the point of adopting an accent.

### **5.2.2 Intrinsic Motivation**

Interest in English language was treated by all Chinese GELLs as an essential motivator for their English language learning. They preferred to self-study and to have greater responsibility for their own learning.

*I think my interest in English language is the most motivated factor for me to learn English language. Because of the interest in English language, I can keep learning and improving my English language ability and insist on English language learning. (L-C-3)*

*I'm so interested in English language. I think the interest in English language helps me to be motivated in English language learning. (L-C-5)*

Learning English was not perceived by Chinese GELL in China as merely learning for academic purposes or achieving professional goals. They reported that the English language learning process was important for developing their personal abilities and interests.

*I'm interested in English language. I think I'm not the special one, lots of people are interested in English language as well. I think learning English language is a habit for me. I don't set down a time per day to learn English, but if I have time, I will learn English. I would like to read some English books or watch movies. Sometimes, when I see some interesting things, I will talk with myself in English. (laughing) (L-C-6)*

Over half of the Chinese GELLs reported that their personal motivation for learning English language was demonstrated by the activities they choose to engage in, for example watching English-speaking movies, listening to English music or reading English books.

*I would like to learn English by watching English movies. (L-C-1)*

*I would like to watch movies, listen to the English songs... (L-C-3)*

Some Chinese GELLs reported that tests and exercises did not stimulate them to progress in their English language learning. Tests and exercises were completed by Chinese GELLs in China under pressurised conditions, such as the pressure to pass the final examination. In addition, the repetitive language exercises were seen as boring and could have a negative influence on their interest in English language learning. There was also an acknowledgement that knowing how to take the test might be important for the final outcome.

*There is challenge for me when I learn English. Sometimes, I just feel little bit boring when I was doing some exercises. (L-C-2)*

*But I think it's little bit difficult for me to take the paper examination. I don't paper examination. I'm not good at the test skills. (laughing) (L-C-6)*

On the other hand, Chinese GELLs reported that BBC documentaries were a good choice for them to learn English language. They seemed to be interested in the content of English language materials.

*[...] listen to the BBC news. I'm interested in English movies or BBC documentaries. (L-C-1)*

*I also prefer to watch BBC documentary. (Laughing) Today I just watched one called "Super Animal Parent". It's quite interesting. (L-C-5)*

Chinese GELLs reported having high responsibility for their own learning. Specifically, they emphasised the importance of personal learning strategies in English language improvement, and they preferred to learn English independently.

*In my experience, I always learn English independently. I like self-study. (L-C-1)*

*Now, I would like to do self-study. (L-C-5)*

As part of the self-learning process, the Chinese GELLs set clear personal goals for short-term and long-term study progress. The long-term goal was related to proficiency in English language.

*I think it's important for gifted English language learners to set down their learning goals. For example, I want to study abroad, then I would have high motivation to learn English, and to find appropriate learning strategies to achieve excellence in English language study. I think the motivation is so important. (L-C-2)*

They showed a clear understanding about their English language abilities and appeared to be able to recognise their weaknesses in English language learning. They seemed to be confident in their ability to improve their areas of weakness by self-study using

metacognitive and cognitive strategies. In addition, they also described being able to select materials and sources to improve their English language ability effectively. One participant expressed using these strengths to progress English language learning within group work.

*I have a plan about my English language improvement. For example, I prepared to take IELTS test. I would plan 4 months to do the test oriented exercises. The first two months, I would focus on the listening and reading practice, then other two months I would focus on the speaking and writing practice. I would choose the Cambridge IELTS test book to do practice. Each book I would practice at least three times. When I did the first time, I would make a summary about my errors from practicing the test exercises. Then, the second and the third time I would review the test exercises. Speaking and writing I would prepare near the examination. I would practice speaking and writing every day. It would take me 8-9 hours. (L-C-2)*

*When I was in middle school, the grammar might be difficult for me. But I practiced and self-learned it a lot, and I would like to buy some textbook to do practice. Then I learned grammar systematically. So, I had addressed it. (L-C-3)*

*I think I should be 9 points, the full mark. One question I knew I made the wrong answer. [...] But I think there is something I need to improve for my English language proficiency. (L-C-6)*

*Generally, I would like to be the leader of our group and organise the term work. I think this way is more effective than the teacher-centred instructions. (L-C-4)*

They reported having self-discipline in relation to improving their English language learning and achieving their goal.

*I just keep doing, and never give up. I think it's good for you to have a study plan. I think you should have self-discipline in your English language improvement. (L-C-2)*

*The interest in English language can motivate them to use their self-discipline to improve their English language ability, then to achieve excellence. (L-C-6)*



They described the importance of being focussed when learning English and considered that it took effort to achieve their main goal – to become a proficient English speaker.

*I think learning English language you must be very concentrated. It's not a gradual progress. (L-C-2)*

*I think it's unnecessary to study English language abroad. I think learning English is depending on yourself. You should have self-discipline and be concentrated on English language learning. (L-C-3)*

*I think there is no shortcut for English language learning. You must make effort and be concentrated in English language learning, then you can achieve excellence. For example, when I was reading an article, it might be difficult for me to understand because of the lack of accumulation of vocabulary. Then I would like to remember and repeat this article. I think the way of repeat is quite effective. (L-C-4)*

They reported GELL would be able to monitor their own English language learning process and when asked about the influence of their peers, they reported little anxiety about making mistakes when speaking in front of them. They preferred to ignore the negative attitudes from others and move forward to progress their English language learning.

*They would like to ignore negative influence from others. They don't be afraid to make mistakes. (L-C-4)*

*I think they have little influence on my English language proficiency, as I would like to do self-study. [...] I think the influence of teachers on my English language achievement count for 30%, and the other 70% would rely on myself. (L-C-2)*

*I think English language learning should rely on myself. (L-C-5)*

This result is in accord with that of previous studies indicating that able language learners could be enthusiastic in their English language learning process (Rubin, 1975; Evans & Goodhew, 1997 cited in Holderness, 2001).

### ***5.2.3 Role of Others***

In parallel to their own role in their learning as discussed above, the Chinese GELLs in China perceived that other important people in their lives functioned as extrinsic motivators and they were quite important in their quest for proficiency in English. They reported feeling that teachers were one of the most influential factors on their proficiency in English language learning. The role of teachers was considered as an important guide for stimulating their interest in English language learning and providing learning strategies which complemented their self-learning in English language learning. They also perceived that their parents through their provision of financial support were also quite important. Having this support eased any financial burden they were facing. In addition, since Chinese GELLs in China treated English language as a tool for communication, peers were considered as partners to practice communicative competence together. This key external support was particularly important as they believed that there was little opportunity for them to use English language to communicate with people in China.

The Chinese GELLs were asked to place the role of teachers, parents and peers in order of influence: “1” being no influence and “5” being very high influence. Similarly to the students in Scotland, the Chinese GELLs in China used “3.5” or “1.5” to describe their perceptions. For example, 1.5 was used by LC1 to describe her perception of the influence of her parents on English language proficiency. The student also expressed that the influence of her parents was not “little influence” level (as 2 points) but would be higher than “no influence” (as 1 point). Therefore, the student perceived the score of 1.5 better described the role of her parents in her English language learning. The perceptions of Chinese GELL in China on the role of teachers, parents and peers on their English language proficiency can be seen in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Perceptions of Chinese GELs in China on the role of teachers, parents and peers on their English language proficiency

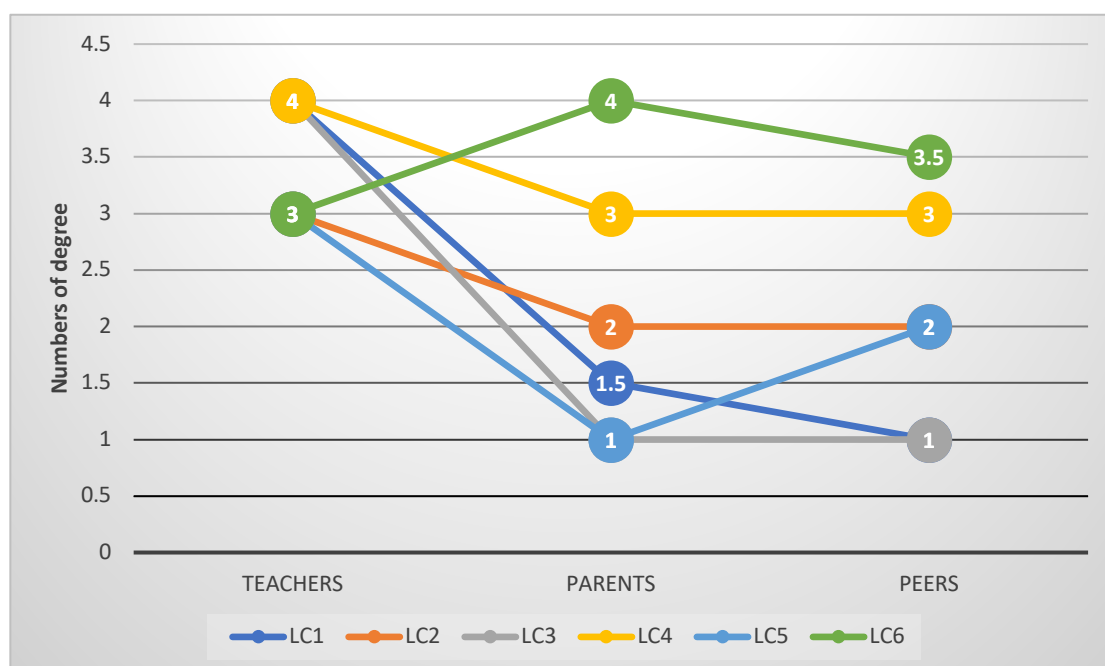


Figure 5.2, above, shows that participants generally perceived that teachers were more important in their language learning experience (as LC1 – LC5 reported).

Considering the role of teachers, they described how their first English language teachers stimulated their interest in English language learning and they believed an interest in English language could be excited by teachers. In class, their first English language teachers provided a comfortable and relaxing learning environment for students and from there they were able to build a solid foundation of English language. This relaxed learning environment helped the students to immerse themselves in English language learning, and not only to learn English for academic purposes. In addition, the first English language teachers seemed to teach the GELLS some important learning strategies.

*I think my first English language teaches is very important for my English language learning. When I was in middle school, I had a private tutor. I think she taught English with a very interesting way. She preferred to let me be interested in English language. (L-C-2)*

*I think my first English language teacher in my middle school is the most important one. She provided me a good English language enlightenment. So, I'm interested in English language, and I have a good and solid English language foundation. My teachers made*

*our English language class interesting, and they preferred to stimulate our interest of English language and teach our learning strategies. The learning environment in class is very comfortable for you to learn English. It's so interesting, and I like this way. (L-C-3)*

*My first English language teacher in my middle school is quite good. She had perfect accent. I learned from her. I treated her English accent as standard accent to follow and imitate. I think she provided me a good English language learning enlightenment. She would like to teach us learning strategies and set down some learning principles for us to follow, such as "English only, and no Chinese in class". I think it's a good way for me to study English. (L-C-6)*

Considering their recent English language teachers in this study, most of the Chinese GELL in China described how their teachers or tutor introduced cultural information into the teaching which increased their interest in English. In addition, the teachers encouraged them to be aware of cultural differences, which raised the students' interest in English language and their English language class.

*My teacher introduced cultural information, I think it's really interesting, I like this part. I think language is an expression of culture. I like English language because I'm so interested in the culture of English language. My teacher would introduce some culture reference, history. I like this way, and I think this way is quite important for my English language improvement. (L-C-3)*

*In English language class, my teacher would introduce some cultural difference between the Western culture and Eastern culture, something in relation to history, something related to our postgraduate subject specialism. (L-C-4)*

The Chinese GELLs in China perceived that their recent English language teachers were helpful in providing learning strategies for their English language learning. As teachers adjusted and developed learning strategies for the GELLs' proficiency in English language learning, they could see their continual and sustained progress. They seemed to expect that their teachers would be able to help them find appropriate learning strategies for their English language improvement.

*Then the teacher would provide me some learning strategies, which would be so important for my improvement. (L-C-2)*

*I think my English language teacher provide me lots of learning strategies, academic suggestions. I think it's helpful. [...] I think the influence of teachers on my English language achievement is quite important, 4 points. I think the teachers would teach you the learning strategies. But it's depending on you how to implement the learning strategies to make achievement. (L-C-4)*

They reported their recent English language teachers encouraged them to learn English language independently and talked about their teachers providing advice for their English language learning, such as recommending books and being available to provide individual support.

*[...] they would also recommend some books for use to read. But they wouldn't analyse the discourse, they just asked you to do self-study. They would suggest you buy some exercise books, and they would tell us that if you have any questions, it would be - feel free to ask them. (L-C-1)*

*My teacher recommended some learning strategies, materials, for example, so grammar book for us to self-study. I think it's really helpful. (L-C-3)*

The Chinese GELLs also discussed how their English language teachers provided opportunities to use English in class. The teachers were described as conducting learner-centred instruction in class and encouraged students to use English language to communicate. Common activities included presentations, discussions and debating.

*Those teachers would like to ask us to do presentation in class... (L-C-1)*

*Generally, most of my English language teachers would ask me to prepare some extra materials, then to do presentation. (L-C-2)*

*The teacher conducted presentation, discussion and debate in class. My teacher will ask us to do pre-task before class, and then give presentation in class. (L-C-3)*

*My English language teacher preferred to ask us to do presentation in class. I think presentation is a good to practice my English language skills comprehensively. It conducted as group work. (L-C-4)*

*My English language teacher is quite good. Although there is little translation practice in class, the most common activities are presentation, discussion and debating. [...] The teacher would introduce some background information about the main task, and then ask use to debate. I like this way. I think English language is used to communicate, it's for you to know more of the world. (L-C-5)*

The above quotes show that Chinese GELs seemed to be willing to learn English through learner-centred instruction in their English language class. Learner-centred instruction encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning progress. This adoption of learner-centred instruction could help Chinese GELs in China implement their self-learning strategies in English language learning.

According to Chinese GELs, teachers in China restricted the use of Chinese language in class in order to push the students to practice English spoken language in class. Considering the numbers of students in one English language class (approximately 40 students in one class), it could be difficult for all students to have opportunities to express themselves using English. However, some teachers appeared to differentiate for Chinese GELs in their English language classes and gave them more opportunities to speak English in class.

*Generally, my teacher uses English to teach us. Because of the different capability of English language, some students who have good English language ability were able to use English to interact with the teacher or the other students. Some students who may not have good English language ability preferred to use Chinese to do interaction. For me, I would like the whole English-speaking class. But some points may be difficult for us to understand, I think the teacher can use Chinese to give an explanation. I also prefer to use English to interact with my teacher. (L-C-3)*

*In my recent English language class, my teacher preferred to use English to teach. In class, we normally used English to discuss with others. Sometimes, we used a little Chinese to express something in order to make clear sense about our insights. But I prefer to use English to express myself. (L-C-4)*

Chinese GELs in China believed that proficiency in English language learning was demonstrated by using English to communicate in specific areas. Chinese GELs think that it is quite important for the teacher to have an awareness of the subject specialisms of their students so that they could match the English language learning to their specialisms.

*They would like to teach English in relation to my postgraduate study major. I think it's useful. (L-C-2)*

*The teacher would like to teach us how to use English in specific areas. (L-C-3)*

*The English language course teach English in relation to our postgraduate major. I think this course is to help us use English to improve our major ability. (L-C-5)*

Chinese GEL perceived their teachers were able to stimulate their interest in English language learning and teach extra self-learning strategies in order to learn English effectively but they recognised there may be subject specific language that would be useful for future study.

Nearly all Chinese GEL reported that their parents provided financial support for their English language learning and that this had influenced their proficiency in English language learning in some way.

*The role of parents on my proficiency in English language learning is 1.5 point, because they will provide financial support, to buy books, or pay the test fees. I think the role of parents is little important, if they have negative attitude toward your English language learning and didn't support you to buy or pay something in relation to your English language learning. It would be negative for your study. I think my parents are so happy and satisfied with my excellent English ability. So, they support me a lot on my English language improvement. (L-C-1)*

*The role of parents on my proficiency in English language learning should be 2 points, because they can give me financial support. (L-C-2)*

One participant mentioned the genetic influence from parents as being quite important but, crucially, also argued that the training she had received from her parents in music had contributed to her English language study .

*I think my parents give me innate ability is quite important. My mom is good at music. She would like to train me music, when I was a child. I think that train was quite important and influenced on my English language learning. It made me be sensitive with the accent about the English language pronunciation. I also like music, and I think it's quite helpful for my speaking and listening. (L-C-6)*

The influence of parents as understood by Chinese GELLs in China was mainly in providing financial support for their English language learning. As postgraduate students, they might not have a salary to support their English language learning and so the role of parents seemed to be important for giving them financial support and stability.

Most of the Chinese GELLs in China treated English as tool for communication, they believed that it was necessary to communicate and practice with their peers through using English language, in order to make improvements together.

*In my experience, as I'm so interested in English language learning, so, I usually encourage my peers to study English, and help them improve their English language ability. (L-C-3)*

*I tried to use English to communicate with my roommate three days in our daily life. Finally, my roommate gave up, then I stopped it. I think this way is quite helpful for my English language improvement. [...] I think the influence of peers should be 3 points. Because I will ask my peers to practice English with me. They will do. I think it's helpful as well. (L-C-4)*

One learner participant emphasised the importance of communicating with high-level peers in English language learning. They believed this would be more effective for improving their English language ability.

*My peers should be 3.5 points. I would like to practice with people who have a high level of English language ability. I think if you interact with lower or weaker peers, you cannot learn anything from them. I prefer to learn from each other. I think learning English language is a skill, which you need to interact and communicate with others to progress your English language improvement. (L-C-6)*



Some Chinese GELs perceived their intrinsic motivation could be stimulated by the competition with the people. One Chinese GEL noted that successfully competing in a language competition had stimulated their interest in English language:

*I attended an English language competition when I was in middle school. I got an award, although it's the least award in my province. But I think this award encouraged me a lot in my further English language learning. And it also increased my interest of English language. (L-C-5)*

In particular, one Chinese GEL reported that being able to speak English better than others and that this made him feel more confident. This confidence to some extent stimulated their interest in English language learning.

*I think learning English is a fashion and popular thing. When I can use English to communicate with others, I feel more confident, and I feel "I'm better than others who may not learn English well". I'm the fan of English language, and I want to learn it well. It makes me feel better than others. (L-C-3)*

Generally, it seemed that Chinese GELs became interested in learning English when they received positive encouragement and the recognition from educational institutions or other people round about them.

The Chinese GELs in China also reported that the opportunity to communicate was extremely important for proficiency and the improvement of English language learning. However most of the Chinese GEL reported that there believed there was less opportunity for them to communicate in English in China.

*But I think there is less opportunity for me to practice my communicative competence in English in China. [...] I think I'm restricted by the time and opportunity to practice English in real communication. (L-C-3)*

*I think the learning environment is quite important for my English language achievement and improvement. I tried to use English to communicate with my roommate three days in our daily life. Finally, my roommate gave up, then I stopped it. I think this way is quite helpful for my English language improvement. Because you immersed in English*

*language speaking environment, it would help you to think how to express yourself in English. It's totally different from the expression of Chinese. It practiced me to think and describe things through the view of English. (L-C-4)*

*I think the learning environment and opportunity is quite important for my English language improvement and achievement. At this stage, it's quite important for us to use English to communicate. Although the university provides opportunities for us to communicate with international students in English, but it's not enough. I will also find opportunity to use English to do communication. But I think I just find limited chance to communicate by using English. (L-C-5)*

In particular, some Chinese GELs expressed that opportunities to communicate can stimulate their motivation to speak and communicate by using English language. One learner participant shared her experience studying in Japan to express the importance of the speaking environment in motivating her to communicate in English:

*I think the learning environment is helpful for my English language achievement and improvement. For example, I have learning experience in Japan. I found that you must use English to communicate with foreigners in that environment. In addition, our teachers in Japan also used English to teach. I think I have a good foundation of English language, but I'm not good at produce English language in China. When I was in Japan, I could use some vocabularies which I remembered but had no chance to use in China. I have to speak English in my Japanese class, because I'm the only Chinese in class, and I could only use English to communicate. The learning environment would motivate you to speak English, practice English, and learn English. When I communicated with foreigners in English, I could learn some English expression from others which I never know when I studied English in China. Then I can use those English expression spontaneously and frequently. (L-C-1)*

Chinese GELs have a willingness to use English language but were restricted by the speaking opportunities in China. Although some Chinese GELs reported a willingness to create or find opportunity to communicate in English, it seemed to be quite difficult for them to find people with the same desire to speak English language in their daily life.

## Implications for Practice

Based on the evidence presented, the Chinese GELLs in China were interested in English as a language and had a desire to learn and communicate using English language. One thing hindering this was the opportunity to communicate with others. While such opportunities can be offered within the classroom through strategies such as debating and presentations, it is perhaps necessary to consider how such opportunities can be offered outside of the classroom.

GELLs in China understood that relying on paper-based test scores for identification of GELL might mean some were missed. Adopting a teaching, learning and assessment approach that looks beyond test scores becomes important and would perhaps go some way to ensure that the other language learning dimensions become part of the process. This might, for example, mean teachers can assess GELLs by observing their performance through group discussion, presentation, or debating in classes. Teachers involving more these activities in class could also make a contribution towards implementing EAP in higher education in China.

GELL in China indicated that the complexity in English language use might be an indicator for identifying a GELL. Classroom activities therefore need to be developed in such a way that opportunities might be created for GELL to demonstrate their higher-level abilities. GELLs noted that working with more advanced language learners was helpful in improving their language and so thinking carefully about group compositions within class might be one way that teachers could support GELL to develop further. For example, in EAP class, teachers need to do preparation for the class, such as to understand the language level and needs of the students in class. For GELLs, besides providing more challenging tasks for them to practice, teachers also need to know the strengths and weakness of each GELLs in their class and to offer appropriate group compositions for each GELL. To clarify, for instance, one GELL might have outstanding oral speaking, and the another GELL might be better at reading or listening. These two GELLs could be put into one group, for fulfilling the needs of GELLs in terms of working with others who would be more advanced compared with their own abilities.

GELL were keen to adopt self-learning strategies and were willing to use these after class to further develop their language skills. In addition, they were keen to access other materials

beyond the prescribed course work. To ensure students are equipped to engage in self-study, English language teachers need to consider how to support GELLs' self-learning. Teachers may conduct pre-class tasks before the class for the students to do in preparation for the class. The pre-class tasks would not only be beneficial for GELLs, as presumably all learners will benefit from this.

One interesting finding from the GELLs in China was the importance of the first English language teacher in raising the students' interest of language. They reported that the way the teacher had taught them had been influential on their continuing language study. This has implications on two levels. On the first level, teachers of English language have to consider how they are organising classes for learning as the approach had been influential. Teachers who teach English in early childhood education or to beginners should consider how they can stimulate students' interests in English language learning, and teaching learning strategies in order to help the students to build their own self-learning strategies for their English language learning and further studies. Secondly, there are implications for those who train English language teachers. Ensuring that teachers entering the work force would have sufficient knowledge of student-centred learning and teaching approaches becomes vital if GELL are to be challenged and engaged from the start of their language learning experience. Considering teaching EAP in higher education in China, a training programme for English language teachers could help teachers to recognise the needs of the students and GELLs. Part of this would involve more learner-centred instruction in their classes effectively.

The setting of long term and short-term goals were seen as important and this meant that students had a sense of purpose within their studying. Within the classroom, English language teachers would do well to examine when and how they support students to do this. For teachers, the individual consultation for each student can be implemented at the start of the course. Teachers and students could work together and set long-term and short-term goals for the students through their interaction and discussion in the consultation. In classroom processes, teachers could organise group-study for the students who have similar or equivalent learning goals and encourage the students to undertake self-study as well as working with peers in and after class. At the end of the course, teachers and students could check their own role in achieving the goals, for example, learners can reflect on what and how they have met their long-term or short-term goals, and the effectiveness of the learning strategies and teachers' support for achieving their learning goals. Teachers also can reflect

on their teaching practice and guidance for each student and on the basis of this reflection they could modify and improve their teaching strategies for their students.

## Chapter 6: Research Results – Parents

### 6.1 Parents of GELLs in Scotland

Four parents of Chinese GELLs in Scotland participated in this study. All parents believed their daughters or sons were GELLs. Parents perceived Chinese GELLs have gifted English language ability, in that they had interest in English as a language, had a good memory and excellent communicative competence. In addition, parents believed that Chinese GELLs have high responsibility for their own English language learning and used self-learning strategies effectively from childhood to adulthood. Parents believed they had a role in Chinese GELL's proficiency in English language learning but also believed that English language teachers in Scotland were effective. The interview data from parents in Scotland will be presented under two themes: 1) the characteristics of Chinese GELL; 2) the influence of parents and teachers on Chinese GELL's proficiency in English language learning.

#### *6.1.1 Characteristics of Chinese GELLs as understood by parents in Scotland*

Parents in Scotland perceived that an interest in English language was an intrinsic motivation for Chinese GELL. Some of them believed that this interest in English language was a kind of gifted behaviour and could be used for their identification of GELLs.

*I think English as a language, she has interest in English as a language. [...] I think she is interested in English language learning. (P-S-2)*

*Considering English language learning, I think the student has interest in English language learning, which means the student is gifted English language learner. [...] She has interest in English language learning, and she would like to be willing to learn English as a language. (P-S-3)*

In particular, two parents described Chinese GELLs as being able to learn English quicker than other subjects and other students. One parent stated that the ability to learn English quickly was influenced by the Chinese GELL's innate ability and that this speed of learning impacted on progress.

*I think innate ability is quite important. If you have innate ability in one specific area, you will achieve excellence in that area more quickly than the others who may not have innate ability in that area. (P-S-3)*

*At the beginning, I didn't know her any gifted ability in English language learning. But, I found that she learned English quickly with less time than other students. She didn't spend lots time on remembering vocabulary or being familiar with grammar principles. She often got great grade in English language course. I remembered that she was not good at Math when she was in middle school. So, she spent lots of time to improve Math, and pay less attention on English course. But finally, she got 112 points on Math, and 127 points on English language (150-band scale). (P-S-4)*

In addition, two parents believed that their children had excellent communicative competence in Chinese and English. This result is consistent with data obtained by Rubin (1975) who found that good language learning resulted in being highly motivated to communicate. Parents felt this was important as the purpose of language learning is to use language to communicate. They described the communicative competence of GELLs in relation to their personal characteristics such as being active and engaging in positive learning behaviours. Parents believed that the outgoing characteristics of GELLs could be effective for them to develop their communicative competence. They reported their children who were identified as GELLs in this study indicated their willingness to communicate both in Chinese and English and that both were important for GELL's proficiency in English language learning.

*I think my daughter is gifted English language learner. She often talked with my colleagues, young people or older people, she has high communicative competence. My colleague often told me that my daughter was very active and was able to communicate with others fluently. My colleagues are willing to talk with her. So, I think she is good at communicative competence, and she is gifted in English language learning. She also told me that she like to communicate with others no matter in Chinese or English. She never feels any nervous when she was talking to others. I asked her before: "Are you afraid to talk to others?" She said, "I think there is nothing make me nervous or scared." So, I think she might have potential to be an English language teacher. (laughing) (P-S-2)*

*I think my daughter is sensitive with the accent of English language, she is quite good at speaking. (P-S-3)*

In particular, two parents reported their daughters has good memories which they thought might help GELLs to remember vocabulary at the early stages of English language learning.

*She has good memory to remember vocabulary. (P-S-3)*

*I think my daughter has good memory. And I think good memory is quite important for English language learning. (P-S-4)*

Parents also reported that the students took responsibility for their own English language learning. One parent, for example, expressed that her daughter addressed challenges by herself in English language learning.

*When she met some challenges in her English language learning, she would search resources to address the challenges by herself. And she would also remember vocabulary every day. I think she has goals and plan for her English language learning. I think it's her motivation to learn English language. (P-S-2)*

These characteristics discussed above were observed from childhood to adulthood by parents. Parents believed that these characteristics were important for Chinese GELL's proficiency in English language learning.

### **6.1.2 Influence of Parents and Teachers in Scotland on Chinese GELL's Proficiency**

Parents understood the importance of their role in Chinese GELL's proficiency in English language learning. All parents reported that they had provided financial support for activities and learning that had stimulated interest in English language learning since childhood. To clarify, parents suggested that Chinese GELLs should attend extracurricular English language courses. This was perceived by parents as a way to stimulate the students' interest in English language and allow them to immerse themselves in English language learning.

*I will provide some opportunities for her English language improvement, such as encouraging her to attend some English language event, or to be volunteer in some events. Her aunt is an English language teacher, and her uncle will take her to attend some*



*English language courses and let her communicate with foreigners in English. I also would try my best to provide such kind of support and opportunity for her to learn English language. (P-S-2)*

*As my daughter has interest in English language learning, we would encourage her to attend English language extracurricular courses. (P-S-3)*

*I think making a solid foundation of English language is quite important. For example, when she was in primary school, I would let her to learn Cambridge English course as extracurricular class. I think that course could help her be interest in English language learning and make good foundation of English language. (P-S-4)*

In particular, two parents believed it was helpful for Chinese GELLs to learn English language in native speaking countries. They reported that they believed it was important to provide financial support for Chinese GELLs to study abroad.

*So, we would provide any financial support for her English language improvement, in particular, the study abroad. (P-S-3)*

*I think the best thing I did is to support her study abroad. (P-S-4)*

All parents of Chinese GELL in Scotland reported that they themselves had previously had good study experiences for English language learning. The parents appeared to be using their own learning experiences to guide and monitor Chinese GELL's English language learning. Similarly, the study by Chan (2005) suggested parents' behaviours and experience can be the model of work and learning for their children to imitate and follow.

*I think there are some influence of parents on the student's English language learning. At least in our family, we would like to tell him about the importance of learning English language. [...] I would like to monitor his progress in English language learning, provide financial support, and discuss with him about the learning strategies and learning goals according to our experience. I'm a professor in a university, so sometimes I would like to guide him according to my experience. (P-S-1)*

*We believed the importance of English language for my daughter's future. [...] When she was undergraduate, we encouraged her to take ACCA examination. I know ACCA examination is English-based examination, so I encouraged her to do it. (P-S-3)*

*I'm an English language teacher. So, in our daily life, we often use English to communicate with each other. I would provide a kind of English-speaking and English language learning environment for her to practice and improve her English language abilities. (P-S-4)*

Although parents appeared to monitor and supervise the progress of English language learning, they reported this monitoring and supervising process was done without pressure. Parents seemed to respect the decision of Chinese GELs as to whether they would learn English or not.

*But I think it's our learning experience, might not be effective for him. So, we didn't require him to follow our guidance. (P-S-1)*

*Her father and I, we are democratic. Anything if she wants to learn, we will let her do. We are supportive, no matter to support her decision about her life or her study. I would not give her any pressure to do anything, just let her go and do what she wants to do. I would like to encourage her to learn English language. I encouraged her to plan and make decision about her English language learning. (P-S-2)*

*I think the support and guide of parents is quite important for her English language improvement and proficiency. I think it's important for parents to stimulate the student's interest in English language learning. Parents should provide positive encouragement for their children. (P-S-4)*

Parents believed that positive encouragement without pressure could be helpful for the proficiency of Chinese GELs in English language learning.

Parents perceived that their children were progressing effectively in English language learning in Scotland. They believed this progress was due to the support and guidance of English language teachers in Scotland. In particular, one parent emphasised the effectiveness of the role of the teachers on Chinese GEL's proficiency in English language learning.

They believed English language teachers in Scotland had helped Chinese GELLS to recognise their abilities in English language and had provided deliberate training for them. They felt students had not received this in China.

*But I think the Scottish education context is quite good. I think my daughter made the most progress when she learned in Scotland. She changed a lot. I think it's depending on the guidance and encouragement from the teachers. I'm very satisfied that the Scottish English language teachers help her to develop her gifted English language ability. I think it's totally different from the situation in China. [...] I think my daughter was quite depressed when she was leaning in China. But when she immersed in Scottish cultural context, she became quite positive and active. I think she like the Western culture. And the cultural influence is quite positive for my daughter's English language improvement. (P-S-2)*

From the quote above this parent felt that their daughter's emotional state had changed when she was learning English in Scotland and that this had helped with language development. The holistic experience of a different learning context had impacted positively.

## **Implications for Practice**

Based on the evidence presented, it would appear that parents' past experiences, financial support and encouragement were key in developing GELL. Some students will come from a supportive and engaged family background and enter the classroom with a range of positive experiences and language knowledge. Where students have not had this parental support or been offered opportunities to take part in English language lessons outside of school it is important to consider how to differentiate materials so as to meet the needs of learners who have potential but lack experiences. This becomes particularly important for two reasons. Firstly, if GELLS from supportive families are to build on the learning they have already taken part in then it is vital that they do not spend time repeating foundational materials and so consideration has to be given to prior learning. Secondly, offering foundational materials to those who have not had learning opportunities outside of school will allow for GELL within this group to emerge since their abilities might have been masked by lack of opportunity rather than reduced capacity for learning English. The importance of self-learning strategies was mentioned by parents and seen as a strength of the teaching experience in Scotland. Therefore, teachers, and particularly teachers who teach English for

young learners, could provide some self-learning strategies for students to develop their English language abilities. For GELLs in higher education, in class, teachers should provide more opportunities for GELLs to use English language in specific academic areas.

## 6.2 Parents of GELLs in China

Five parents of Chinese GELLs in China participated in this study. Parents reported that Chinese GELLs had high grades in English language learning, and they also considered high grades to be a standard to identify Chinese GELLs. Parents reported the importance of having personal English language learning experiences to guide and monitor GELL's English language learning. In particular, parents expressed the role of teachers on Chinese GELL's proficiency in English language learning, and they suggested Chinese GELLs should be obedient to their teachers. The interview data of parents in China will be analysed under two themes: 1) the characteristics of Chinese GELL in China as understood by their parents; 2) the role of parents in Chinese GELL's English language learning.

### ***6.2.1 Characteristics of Chinese GELL as Understood by Parents in China***

All parents in China in this research perceived their daughters and sons to be GELLs and believed GELLs would have high grades in English language learning. Three parents expressed that a high grade assessed through paper-based examination was the only way for parents to know their GELL's attainment in English language learning. As the assessment was created by the school and teachers, this also meant that parents in China trusted the judgement and identification methods of teachers.

*He was good at English. We have our business. So, we have less time to monitor and support his English language learning. But one day, her teacher asked parents to sign the exam paper, in order to let parents to know the grade the student got. Then, I found he got a very high grade, almost the full grade. So, I think she was working so hard, and she should be gifted English language learner. (P-C-2)*

*I didn't see him spend lots of time to remember vocabulary or grammar principles. But he can get good grades. (P-C-4)*

*I think my son learning English language was quite relaxed, and he often got great grade in English language learning. (P-C-5)*

One parent reported being willing to compare their child's attainment with the attainment of other students to indicate his son's gifted ability and high achievement in English language learning.

*Under such circumstances, his grade of English language course was good. Compared with other students who might attend such extracurricular English language, my son didn't gain such extra support in English language learning. Then, he can get good achievement in English language learning. So, I think he is gifted English language learner. (P-C-1)*

The above result is similar to that of the study by Chan (2005) who found that Chinese families traditionally focussed on their children's academic attainment in schools. In addition, Glascoe and MacLean (1990) discovered parents prefer to compare their child to other children in order to appraise their children's performance and development and this seems to have continued into tertiary education.

Parents in China believed that Chinese GELLs used self-learning strategies effectively in English language learning. They reported that Chinese GELLs take responsibility for their own English language learning.

*She has high self-discipline and uses self-learning strategies in her English language learning. (P-C-2)*

*I think he was mainly using self-learning strategies. I didn't take care about his English language learning. (P-C-3)*

*So, I think he might have some effective learning strategies. (P-C-4)*

Parents believed Chinese GELLs have an interest in English as a language. They emphasised the importance of the interest in English language as intrinsic motivation for Chinese GELLs to learn English quickly and spontaneously. One parent, for example, expressed:

*I think for example, the student has interest in one area, and the student can follow the interest to do things. [...] I think the interest in English language learning is quite*

*important. If he didn't like English, I think the deliberate training would be useless. (P-C-1)*

Parents believed learning quickly provided evidence to indicate the effectiveness of Chinese GELLS using self-learning strategies.

*I think being gifted means learn something quickly. [...] (Laughing) I don't think he has special ability in English language learning. But he can learn English very quickly. (P-C-4)*

*The gifted person can recognise and understand English quickly and directly. [...] He can get great grade in any examinations. I think he has effective learning strategies. Because I think he didn't spend much time on English language learning, but he can get good grade. (P-C-5)*

Chinese parents identified academic achievement, comparison to others and ability to learn English independently and quicker than others as the main ways to indicate that their child might be a GELL.

### **6.2.2 Role of Parents in Chinese GELL's English Language Learning**

Parents in China considered it important that parents have English language learning experiences in order to monitor and guide Chinese GELLS in English language learning, however some of the parents reported having no experience in English language learning themselves. They were, however, willing to help their daughters and sons in their English language learning through nurturing their desire to learn. Although the parents had a willingness to guide their child in English language learning, their own inexperience in English language learning, meant that they were limited in what they could do. One parent for example stated:

*I think if I can give her more support and focus on her English language learning much earlier she would gain better achievement than now. Since I didn't have any experience in English language learning. If I had experience in English language learning, I think I would guide her and monitor her learning progress well, and this could help her proficiency in English language learning. [...] I think parents can be effective in nurturing their son/daughter's English language learning. But I think parents should have English*

*language learning experience, in that they can help their son or daughter in English language learning. (P-C-2)*

Parents inexperience in English language learning unsurprisingly resulted in them relying on the teachers helping Chinese GELLs in English language learning. Some parents felt that Chinese GELLs should be obedient to their English language teachers, and follow the teachers' instructions strictly and carefully in order to progress.

*I just let him to follow the school teachers to learn English. (P-C-1)*

*I just told him about having high responsibility for his own English language learning and being obedient to his teachers. (P-C-4)*

*I think she followed her teachers' instruction well. (P-C-2)*

*I think he is gifted English language learning. He is a good student and follow the teachers' instructions well. I never worried about his English language learning, as I know he can do well. (P-C-3)*

All parents reported providing financial support for Chinese GELLs in English language learning. The form the financial support took depended on GELLs circumstances. One parent (P-C-4) reported giving rewards for high grades in order to stimulate their child's English language learning. Garn, Matthews, & Jolly (2010) found that 30% of parents believed in using behaviour modification techniques such as giving rewards or punishments for stimulating gifted students' motivation. Other support was of a practical nature such as paying for the IELTS examination.

*I provided financial support for her English language learning. For example, taking the IELTS examination, I encouraged her to do it. (P-C-2)*

*I told him, I will give him financial support, but the learning process is depending on himself. (P-C-3)*

*I would like to provide financial support and gave him some present if he gets great grade. [...] I think parents can be effective in nurturing their son and daughter's English*



*language development. I think parents should know their interests, buy some books, let them to watch English movies. I think these are helpful for their English language learning. (P-C-4)*

*I just provided financial support for his English language learning. (P-C-5)*

However, some parents perceived that extracurricular English language courses would not necessarily support Chinese GELL's proficiency in English language learning and so while it appeared that they could have financed this option, they chose not to do this for GELL. They reported that if the student's engagement with learning was missing then the class might have little effect.

*When my son started to learn English, I didn't let him attend extracurricular English language courses. [...] I have heard from some educators, they told me that the student might feel little unconfident about his English language ability[.....]. Then the student would be working hard and focusing on English language learning in school, as he might want to catch up with his peers in class. I think this way is really good, so, I just follow it, and didn't let him to attend such extracurricular courses. (P-C-1)*

*In addition, I think the extracurricular English language courses might not be effective for Chinese GELL. Compared with my son, I let him attend lots of extracurricular English language courses. But he didn't like English and can't get achievement in English language learning. I think my son don't have gifted ability in English language learning, but my daughter has. (P-C-2)*

*I think the extracurricular English language course might not be effective for all student. I think gifted English language learner like my son has effective learning strategies, which another student might not be. (P-C-5)*

Most of the parents reported providing positive encouragement for Chinese GELLs to progress their English language learning. Parents appeared to be proud that their daughters and sons had been identified by their teachers as GELLs and although their daughters and sons were adults, parents seemed to be delighted about their child's gifted English language ability.

*I would like to provide positive encouragement and financial support. I never refused his requirement about buying any learning materials and staff. I don't praise him directly, but I would like to praise him when I talked with my friends and colleagues. I'm so proud of him. (P-C-1)*

*I always give her lots of positive encouragement. I'm so proud of my daughter. I also have a son, but he didn't like learning. I would like to provide positive encouragement and support for my daughter's English language learning and taking care of her emotional development. (P-C-2)*

*I'm so proud of him about his English language ability. But I don't want to let him know this. He is quiet, and obedient. So, I didn't worry about his English language learning, I know he can do well. Anything he would like to learn, I would like to support him. I think I provided positive attitude. This made him confident, I think. (P-C-3)*

*I also provided some positive encouragement and encouraged him to be persistent in English language learning. I think the encouragement of parents is quite important for our son or daughter in English language learning. I don't like to make him feel depressed. I would encourage him to use self-learning strategies. (P-C-4)*

However, one parent felt that positive encouragement might make their son proud and so they played down their English language ability in order to make them work harder.

*I wouldn't like to give him positive encouragement. (laughing) I just told him "Don't be proud of yourself" or "You're not good enough." I just used these ways to encourage him to be better. (P-C-5)*

Some parents also reported providing opportunities for Chinese GELL to practice English for pleasure without academic learning pressure.

*I think his uncle was quite good at English, so, he would like to communicate with his uncle in English. I just help him to choose a better school and university and provided good learning environment for his English language learning. [...] When he was a child, I would unconsciously provide an English language learning environment for him, such as letting him to listen English songs, watch English movies. This English language*

*learning environment was quite conformable for entertaining purpose without any pressure. (P-C-1)*

*I think he has effective learning strategies. So, when he was back home, he just watched TV, I think it's fine. Because I knew he learned well and made notes in school. [...] I think it's important to create the English language learning environment. (P-C-4)*

Parents in China were willing to help Chinese GELLs choose and create English language learning environments and opportunities and understood that these would not always occur in the school context.

## **Implications for Practice**

Perhaps unsurprisingly parents relied on test results as an indicator of their child's level of ability. Test results give an easily understood score and allow parents to measure improvement over time. However, as argued in Chapter 2 tests cannot fully measure individual's abilities, measuring ability is not straight forward. While a test result might indicate a level of attainment, it does not necessarily indicate a GELL. If use is to be made of different kinds of assessment within the classroom to aid identification of GELL then it will be important to explain this change to both students and parents. EAP would suggest that teaching English for the students depending on different disciplines in higher education, in that case the assessment of English language learning also should consider the students' different disciplines. For the identification of GELLs in higher education, it should also consider the individuals' major differences. Parents demonstrated a lot of trust in the teacher, encouraging children to obey their teachers. As teachers this means that there is a responsibility to ensure that current EAL learning research informs classroom planning. The training programme for teachers should consider this and keep up to date with current developments in English language teaching in higher education in China.

Self-learning strategies were again seen as important in the English language learning experience. Parents were happy to support their children but many thought that their child had to take ownership and use the strategies to learn. Understanding what skills and strategies the learner brings to the classroom is important if GELL are to be supported appropriately. There is a need to ensure that those with particular ability in language learning,

as seen for example in their spoken English, also have strong self-learning strategies in other aspects. Monitoring learners becomes an important aspect of class work.

Parents in China felt that if they had experience of English language learning they would be better placed to support their children. The assumption seemed to be that they would be able to help their children more if they spoke English with them at home. In a classroom situation this might mean that more opportunities have to be created for interactive discussions and dialogues, especially for those GELL, who do not have the opportunity to practice at home. Currently, English language teaching in China has started to provide more opportunities for the students to do practice in class, such as presentations and discussion. Teachers could provide more real communicative opportunities for the students. It would be both beneficial for English language learners and GELLs in class.

## Chapter 7: Discussion

There is no agreed definition of the term gifted (Davidson, 2009) or of what giftedness actually is (Stoeger, 2009), however, within the literature there are common characteristics that people who are considered gifted display. While not all gifted people will display all characteristics, they might, for example, include:

1. Certain high level of self-concept about their abilities
2. Effective interpretation and negotiation with their surroundings
3. Display excellence in a specific domain
4. Independence in work and study
5. Persistence
6. Critical thinking ability
7. Learns quickly and can apply learning

(Davidson, 2009; Ziegler, 2005; Ziegler & Stoeger, 2008; Clark 2008)

Underpinning this study is the idea that learners who demonstrate particular characteristics, including the characteristics above, could be considered to be gifted in a specific or general domain (see for example Gardner, 1993; Maker, *et al.*, 1994; Davidson, 2009). GELL are considered to share characteristics with general ELLs but within the field it is acknowledged that some perform and acquire language more easily than others. This is referred to as proficiency in English language within the field of English language learning (Dean, 2001; Cummins, 2008) and this is described as students' successful ability to communicate fluently in English language in both oral and written modes and present concepts and ideas (Cummins, 2008). A GELL may perform these English language tasks successfully and therefore be deemed to be a proficient English language learner but within the gifted literature it is argued that giftedness presents as a complex phenomenon (Ziegler, 20112) that moves beyond proficiency which can be taught. Within both fields there is debate around the place of innate ability. In the theory of universal grammar, Chomsky (1965) suggested that there is an innate ability connected with language learning. Within Gagne's (2005) differentiated model of giftedness it was proposed that giftedness is innate. However, within both fields, innate ability on its own is not enough to ensure learning development or proficiency. ELL literature (see for example Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 1985, and Mclaughlin, 1978), and gifted literature (see for example Gagne, 2005, Ziegler, 2012), all point to the importance of the learning environment, motivation and practice as being crucial to learning development. This study sought to explore perceptions around ELL in order to understand the experiences of GELL in Scotland and China.

## 7.1 What Are the Characteristics of GELL?

In this research all participants - teachers, GELLs, and parents – reported what they believed to be the characteristics of GELLs, and a summary of their views is presented in Table 7.1. Generally, GELLs were described as being mainly process-oriented, as having one or more of the following characteristics: intense intrinsic motivation and interest in English language; having a high level of self-concept about their own abilities, weaknesses and strengths in English language learning; advanced English language self-regulated learning processing; exploiting and interpreting their English language learning easily and quickly; and manipulating language in interpretation and performance. This section will discuss these findings in relation to three broad areas including personality (attributes), learning experience (actions), and English language proficiency (acquisition).

Table 7.1: Characteristics of GELLs

<b>Personality (Attributes)</b>
1. Intense intrinsic motivation and interest in English language (28 responses)
<b>Learning approaches (Actions)</b>
1. Taking responsibility for their own learning, and being able to regulate their study progress (23 responses)
2. Having positive attitude in their learning process (27 responses)
3. Having initiative to find opportunities to learn and practice English language (15 responses)
4. Being able to explore and interpret English language quickly and clearly (14 responses)
5. Highly engaged and amenable in class (12 responses)
6. Seeing practice as an opportunity to absorb English language (9 responses)
7. Critical thinking ability (5 responses)
8. Good memory recall (2 response)
<b>English language proficiency (Acquisition)</b>
1. Should have excellent communicative competence in Chinese and English (17 responses)
2. Should be exceptional listening, speaking or writing abilities (15 responses)
3. Near-native speaker accent (4 responses)
4. Being able to do simultaneous interpretation (5 responses)
5. Proficiency in English language in specific areas, e.g. Business, or Law (4 responses)
6. Having high grade and high achievement in English language learning (9 responses)
7. Not necessarily achieving high academic attainment (4 responses)
8. Being more sensitive to cultural aspects (7 responses)

### ***Personality (Attributes)***

In total, 28 respondents recognised interest as being a key contributory attribute to learning. In the AMG model (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012) motivation and interest are considered as internal non-cognitive factors possessed by gifted individuals and these help them to pursue their learning goals. This is consistent with the study by Lee, *et al.* (2010) which said interest as intrinsic motivation could encourage students to participate and be persistent in seeking to achieve goals. Intrinsic motivation as one source can stimulate and maintain students' autonomy, and help students regulate their learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008; Vansteenkiste, *et al.*, 2004; Reeve, *et al.*, 2008). From an educational-psychological perspective, the concept of interest can be treated as internal learning-motivation (Krapp, 1999). Gottfried & Gottfried (1996) and Vallerand, *et al.* (1994) recognise the importance of such intrinsic motivation in the learning experience of gifted students. This perspective takes the learning goal of students into account, where learners execute intense engagement in specific learning activities to achieve learning goals. Interest is then linked to future goals and this results in students persisting with their studies and performing well in order to achieve that goal (Kauffman & Husman, 2004; McInerney, 2004). Harackiewicz, *et al.*, (2008) reported that students who were striving for competence in a subject were more likely to develop an interest in the subject and so it not surprising that the GELL in this study were understood as having an interest in English language learning. This becomes a cyclical process where the students present as being a GELL, this along with an end goal of entering university motivates them to learn more and, in turn, when they develop proficiency in English language learning their interest increases. When GELLs have high interest and a clear goal they can be motivated to engage in, and to develop, English language learning. Although the cooperative nature of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation on learning processes and achievement has been confirmed (see for example, Lens & Rand, 2000; Gonzales, 2011), the findings of this research suggest that participants across the groups pay more attention to the importance of intrinsic motivation on the learning process than extrinsic motivation. This is evident in the results where participants demonstrated they were more involved in their learning process, were autonomous and engaged in self-regulated learning. In this regard, this result corresponds to the literature that, for language learning, compared with extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation can promote students to be involved and proactive whilst adopting a continued language learning process (Csikszentmihalyi, *et al.* 1997; Reeve, *et al.*, 2008; Wang, 2008; Pae, 2008).

All the teachers in this study (12 participants) noted high motivation as a key attribute of GELL. All GELLs in Scotland and one GELL in China in this study reported learning English for a purpose and in the case of those trying to enter English speaking universities, the motivation to become proficient was high. This goal – entering university – seemed to provide the motivation that impacted on their study. With reference to goal orientation theory, the goal of entering university is categorised as a performance-oriented goal. According to Wolter (2004), students' performance-oriented goals relate to the learning purposes in showing the students' intellectual abilities (such as possessing the required abilities in order to be accepted by the university) to others and this is related to students' extrinsic motivation. In line with this observation, the findings of this research suggested that the gifted students, their parents and teachers recognised the importance and effectiveness of motivation in gifted students' achievement. It should be noted that although the effectiveness of extrinsic motivation on the learning process is dependent on the students' success or failure in the specific tasks (Wang, 2008; Pae, 2008), GELL in this sample were motivated by a love of English language learning suggesting the role of intrinsic motivation is also important. They held certain self-concepts about their abilities for being successful, and a positive attitude in the face of their academic failure (McCoach & Siegle, 2003b). In this regard, gifted students were able to demonstrate high level of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation regardless of the potential success or failure in specific tasks (entering the university in this case). As such, the results of this thesis concur with the study by Phillips and Lindsay (2006) who reported that gifted students had ambition to reach high performance levels with those levels acting as a stimulus for learning.

### ***Learning approaches (Actions)***

Metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies and affective strategies of GELLs were emphasised by all participant groups. Participants perceived that engaging in these strategies allowed gifted characteristics to emerge. These strategies were all utilised by GELLs in their English language learning process. They have certain high levels of self-concept about their abilities, and they preferred to use metacognitive strategies to plan, evaluate and arrange their learning, to recognise their weaknesses, challenges, and strengths in English language learning. In this research, GELLs were recognised across the participant groups as being able to regulate their study process with 23 respondents reporting this as a key learning approach. According to Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of language learning strategies, metacognitive strategies are linked to students' self-regulated learning and students use metacognitive strategies to centre, arrange, plan and evaluate their learning.



Within the gifted literature gifted learners were shown to apply metacognitive strategies more easily and in a variety of ways (Muir-Broaddus, 1995) and so it was perhaps not surprising that the utilisation of metacognitive strategies was reported by participants across groups as key characteristics of GELLs.

Using these strategies resulted in engaging in practice and absorbing relevant English language learning information and sources. In this research, GELLs used initiative to find opportunities to learn and practice English language. They reported searching out opportunities to learn English. For example, they reported using social media tools that were designed to support English language study, watching movies and listening to English language songs. According to Ziegler's AMG model (2005), gifted individuals have an excellent action repertoire to do deliberate learning in different domains. To form an excellent action repertoire, gifted individuals need to prepare for learning. They may go searching for information to set their goals, which in turn is helpful for formulating their action repertoire (Ziegler, 2004). Teachers recognised the importance of using initiative and were aware that the GELL were searching out opportunities in addition to things they offered in class. Ziegler (2014) argues that gifted individuals are able to recognise their ability to do well and are willing to improve their skills in accordance with certain environments. Gifted individuals have a high level of enthusiasm and confidence to plan and address their learning in order to improve their performance and so the idea of absorbing English from various contexts links to students seeking out opportunities to engage in the practice of English. Some studies for example Evans & Goodhew (1997 cited in Holderness, 2001) note the suitability of English language used in appropriate situations by able English language learners. Dean (2001:17) points out that able language learners, "demonstrate a more sophisticated enjoyment of language for its own sake – more able language users usually have better developed sense of humour, enjoying puns, irony etc." This emphasises that able language learners have the ability to use the target language in appropriate circumstances, which is similar to a characteristic of GELLs suggested by Aguirre & Hernandez (1999 cited in Brulles, *et al.*, 2011:305). They argue that GELLs usually "possesses advanced knowledge of idioms and native dialects with ability to interpret and explain meanings in English." This was highlighted by one GELL in the present study who indicated that this would be a characteristic of GELL. With reference to the results, both teacher and GELLs in Scotland and China state that GELLs are able to explore and interpret English language quickly and clearly. This is also to some extent indicates GELLs' abilities of exploring and interpreting English language appropriately. After absorbing information from their surroundings,

GELLs reported they would practice applying English language in appropriate situations. This is also consistent with English language learning which emphasised the role of the social, cultural and linguistic environment in English language improvement (Vygotsky, 1986; Gass, 2003). It should be noted that GELLs in this study reported having desire to gain information and knowledge in relation to English language, and to practice English language in use. Therefore, they seemed to be sensitive to their surroundings and sought out more opportunities and ways to absorb relevant information and explore and interpret English language.

During the learning process, after GELLs realised their weaknesses, challenges and strengths, they also applied compensation strategies to overcome limitations, and develop their competences and performance in English language learning, particularly in speaking and writing performance. In this research, GELLs were recognised across the participant groups using compensation and affective strategies in their English language learning. This was perhaps surprising as Chamot's research (2004) indicated that Chinese students were less likely to select affective strategies. To clarify, affective strategies can be treated as supportive as GELLs overcome limitations or challenges in their English language development in order to keep improving their English language abilities. During this period, GELLs also reported having a positive attitude to pursue their studies and this was considered a key attribute. Having a positive attitude in English language learning matches the observations in earlier studies, such as McCoach & Siegle (2003b) where they reported gifted individuals having a positive attitude as they faced and dealt with academic failure. Likewise, Dörnyei (2009b) emphasised the importance of students' motivation and positive attitude in second language learning. Indeed, individuals' positive attitudes and motivation could help them to be more engaged in their language learning process, working hard in particular tasks (Dörnyei, 2009b).

The interaction between metacognition, motivation and the affect domain and their relationship to, and interaction with, gifted learners is recognised within the gifted field. Although recently there has been a call for further research into these relationships (Efklides, 2019). Previous studies investigated the three - metacognitive, cognitive and cognitive strategies - that were frequently used by general language learners (Dawadi, 2017; Charoento, 2016; Wu, 2008; Chen, 2009). These studies argued for the frequency of language learning strategies for general language learners to become good language learners. GELLs reported in this research had capacity to use appropriate language learning strategies

to organise in their self-regulated learning. This is consistent with Dörnyei & Ryan (2015) who pointed out that learning should emphasise the capacity of using strategies in students' self-regulated learning for their further successful language improvement rather than the frequency of utilisation of language learning strategies for students' language achievement. There is perhaps a need for the two fields of study, ELL and gifted, to share findings and consider how they impact on each other.

According to the literature adult learners have mature cognitive capabilities, strong memory capacity (Robinson, 2005; Smith & Strong, 2009) and working memory, and these have been linked to the ideas of intelligence (Conway, *et al.*, 2002). Memory, although mentioned, was not identified as a key characteristic with only two parents in Scotland thinking that a good memory was important for English language learning processing and they thought this would be demonstrated by their ability to remember vocabulary. Louis & Lewis (1992) state that some parents believed that good memory is an indication of the individual being gifted. However, parents' perceptions of the characteristics of gifted individuals and GELLs are subject to the level of educational background, knowledge of giftedness, and social-economic status (Steinmayr, *et al.*, 2010; Ablard & Parker, 1997; Wu, 2008; Yang, 2007). This was evident in the results of this study where parents in China reported being unable to support their child due to their restricted English language ability. Conversely, the parents in Scotland had experience of learning English abroad and used this to encourage their children. Teachers in this study did not specifically mention memory as a characteristic of GELL. This is consistent with Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius, (2006) who argue that teachers may overlook the aspect of memory when identifying giftedness. In an elementary or secondary school context information provided by parents can be treated as additional evidence and will support teachers' identification of gifted individuals (Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006; McBee, 2006, 2010). Parents may be able to provide different and additional information and perceptions of gifted behaviours from those observed by teachers. However, university systems do not always allow for this kind of information to be shared, since the young people are considered to be adults. Certainly, adult learners have matured cognitive capabilities, and they should be able to express themselves according to their environment (Robinson, 2005; Smith & Strong, 2009). Therefore, to know gifted adult learners' perceptions of themselves and their learning experiences first-hand and as another additional reference, would also be a way to understand the characteristics of gifted individuals in the absence of information from parents. The study by Vejnovic, *et al.* (2010) revealed interesting links between the age of the person learning the second language and working

memory, the authors argue that in spite of the recognition that there is a connection between memory and language learning, there is still little research that has fully explored these concepts. Since this field is still in its infancy, it may be too soon to expect it to impact on ELL teaching practice.

### ***English Language Proficiency (Acquisition)***

Good or able language learners had been identified by previous studies as having excellent communicative competence (Rubin, 1975; Dean, 2001; Evans & Goodhew, 1997 cited in Holderness, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2001). Dean (2001) states that able language learners are interested in listening and speaking tasks. In this research, 17 respondents considered that GELLs should have the excellent communicative competences, exceptional listening, speaking or writing abilities. Although all teacher respondents noted excellent communicative competence of GELLs, teachers did not appear to consider the relationship and influence between the mother tongue language and English language. Briggs, *et al.* (2008) suggested mother tongue language classroom activities would be helpful for GELLs to develop their English language proficiency. Mother tongue language would be helpful for language learners to understand complex language meanings, and also be treated as important for translation skills (Kodura, 2019). Since translation ability seen as a high language skill, it could be provided for advanced language learners or learners with high level of language proficiency (Kodura, 2019). In that case, the role of mother tongue in GELLs' language learning and identifying the characteristics of GELLs should be noted. Parents of GELLs in Scotland, however, believed that GELLs should have excellent communicative competence both in Chinese language and English language. Parents believed the purpose of language learning was for communication, and as such GELLs should be active and demonstrate a willingness to communicate with others no matter whether in English or Chinese. An early study by Rubin (1975) also argues that good language learners have high motivation in communication and suggest there should be no restriction on communication of the target language. Teachers in this study, particularly teacher participants in Scotland, maybe influenced by the application of the Communicative Approach in their English language teaching, banned the use of mother language in their English language classroom. This may lead teachers to miss the characteristics of mother tongue language skills of GELLs. Considering the characteristics of GELLs, particularly who showed high translation skills in English language learning, the role of mother language skills should be noted for identifying characteristics of GELLs in showing communicative competence in both mother tongue language and English language proficiency.

Good listening abilities and being sensitive to phonetic features in oral expression were mentioned as characteristics of GELs. Although previous studies have indicated that good or able language learners are able to use English language in appropriate communication or interactions (Rubin, 1975; Norton & Toohey, 2001), these studies do not specifically note the sensitivity of phonetic features of GELs which might be different from good or able language learners. According to Ellis & Shintani (2013), listening is one of the “receptive” aspects for language learners to receive information and it is a helpful source for learners to produce the target language in speaking or writing tasks. In this study, GELs in China confirmed that one result of being sensitive to phonetic features could be the contribution to acquiring a near-native speaker accent. Communicative language teaching aims at conducting communicative activities depending on meaningful and authentic interaction, and focusing on intelligible pronunciation, so it may pay less attention to highlighting the training of phonetics (Brinton, Celce-Murcia & Goodwin, 2010). All teachers in this study reported teaching English language by conducting many communicative tasks. When they identify GELs, they note the importance of recognising and being sensitive to phonetic features in listening. It is interesting to note that no Chinese students in Scotland talked about native speaker accents being an influential aspect of their language learning. This is interesting since they were surrounded in everyday life by native speakers who might have acted as role models for spoken language development.

Aguirre & Hernandez (1999) indicated that Haitian GELs appear to have a high level of accuracy in interpretation and translation, which was also identified as GELs trait by Chinese respondents in this research. Translation is one productive skill for language students to present the target language. The English language CET test consists of 20% translation assessment. GELs in China might be influenced by the examination requirements, and therefore have the belief that being able to do translation and interpretation between English language and Chinese language is one English language proficiency for GELs in general. In contrast, Chinese GELs in Scotland did not mention any characteristics in relation to translation skills when discussing GEL. The possible reason for this difference might be that the system and design of the English language assessments in Scotland and China were different. English language teaching in Scotland, as reported by participants, mainly focuses on the language application in authentic situations, and trying to restrict the use of the mother language. Therefore, GELs in Scotland might not engage in interpretation between English language and their mother language as frequently. However, as the literature shows translation is a highly developed skill, particularly for

students in higher education (Kodura, 2019). Therefore, translation might be a possible characteristic of a GELL at tertiary level if it requires great proficiency in language.

Brulles, *et al.* (2011) noted the GELL's ability to be sensitive to the cultural aspects associated with learning. In this research, only GELLs in Scotland reported that GELLs should be more sensitive to cultural information and be able to recognise the differences between English language culture and their own culture, although GELLs in China were interested in English. Chinese GELLs in Scotland saw themselves as able to meet Scottish cultural references in their daily life and were involved cultural information exchanges in their learning experience. A study by Aguirre & Hernandez (1999 cited in Brulles, *et al.*, 2011) also supports the view that being sensitive to the cultural patterns and differences between their own culture and the target language culture could be treated as a characteristic of GELLs. In addition, teachers in Scotland also reported encouraging their students to be familiar with Scottish cultural references, as they believed that understanding cultural references could be helpful for their students' English language development. Teachers in China also reported involving materials in relation to cultural references in their English language teaching process, and they also encouraged their students to be sensitive to cultural differences between English-speaking contexts and their own contexts. However, GELLs in China did not highlight being sensitive or being able to recognise cultural references as English language proficiency for GELLs. The distinction between Chinese GELLs in Scotland and China in relation to this issue may be influenced by their living environment. GELLs in Scotland were surrounded by the Scottish cultural environment and to cultural references of Scotland and a predominantly English-speaking culture. GELL might treat these as authentic learning materials involved in their English language development. Living in this environment they will also be able to notice the differences between Scottish cultural references and their own culture in order to understand both. When Aguirre & Hernandez (1999) investigated Haitian and Haitian-American adults at Kent State University, USA they noted the same phenomenon among gifted Haitian English language learners studying and living outside of their own country. Donohue & Erling (2012) noted that it was the use of materials that contributed to GELL's understanding. This means the teaching material and learning environment can influence people's understanding of the cultural differences so as to develop sensitivity to the cultural aspects of language learning.

Some gifted individuals might be demotivated and underachieve in classroom settings (Gross, 1993), and tests and examinations cannot fully indicate behaviours and abilities of

gifted individuals (Dooley & Oliver, 2002; Gunderson & Siegel, 2001; Siegel, 1989; Reis & McCoach, 2000). In this research, parents and GELLs in China considered academic achievement as evidence of language proficiency of GELLs. Parents of GELLs in China believed in that academic achievement would indicate GELLs' English language proficiency. Studies by Wu (2008) and Yang (2007) argue that Asian parents pay more attention to their children's academic achievements. Chinese parents have high expectations of their children's academic achievement and success is believed to be more often contributed to by hard work of the students (Flynn, 1991; Wu, 2008). Although parents of GELLs in Scotland are Chinese, they did not emphasise high academic achievement as being an indicator of GELLs. Instead they paid more attention to their children's communicative and learning competence development than grades. The possible reason for this distinction might be the English language experience of parents in these two countries. Since parents of GELLs in China have no experience in English language learning, they presented themselves as highly reliant on teachers' identification for their children, and academic achievement as a proof of identification of teachers on their gifted children. On the other hand, parents of GELL in Scotland had experience of English language learning and may appreciate that competence in English will not only be measured through a test. The test dominated system in China may also have played a part. Interestingly GELLs in China also considered that high academic achievement would not necessarily indicate gifted English language ability. The apparent disagreement between some parents and their GELLs in China could again demonstrate the influence of the parents' English language experience. Considering their own experiences in English language learning, GELLs in China knew the value of language application in real communication or specific areas rather than in achieving a high academic grade in any English language examination. It is interesting that in such a test-driven culture there were some respondents who could see beyond test scores as an indication of giftedness.

GELLs in this study reported focussing on language application in specific domains, having high responsibility towards language learning and intense motivation for English language learning, all of which can contribute to their self-monitoring during the learning progress. These attributes suggest that the learning processes of GELLs go beyond mechanical and grammatical language learning that results in proficiency in English language (Donohue and Erline, 2012). Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Worrell (2011: 3) argue that "Giftedness is the manifestation of performance that is clearly at the upper end of the distribution in a talent domain even relative to other high-functioning individuals in that domain". GELLs can be very proficient English language learners since they are presenting outstanding performance

or achievement; however, there may be underachievers who show a lack of proficiency in English language through the normal channels, tests etc (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Equally, where a particular set of skills are considered or have been deemed to be an indication of giftedness then students presenting with low proficiency in these skills will not be considered gifted. Consequently, those with high proficiency might be labelled gifted (Newman and Sternberg, 2004). These tensions highlight the arbitrary nature of labelling and when combined with the multiple definitions of gifted that exist (see for example Renzulli, 2005; Sternberg, 2005a) the problematic nature of identification can be seen. However, this does not detract from the particular skills and abilities some learners display that results in them acquiring and using language in ways that are different from others. Zeigler (2012b) argues that it is the interaction of the individual with the environment that will develop giftedness. This emphasises the importance of identification procedures that look beyond traditional methods of identification taking into account the perceptions of teachers, parents and GELs and the curriculum and environment in which the language learning experience is offered.

### ***Strategies for identifying GELs***

The use of IQ test, IELTS, non-verbal tests or other achievement test scores is synonymous with identifying gifted individuals (Urbina, 2011; Schmidt & Hunter, 2004; Dooley & Oliver, 2002; Lohman, Korb & Lakin, 2008). Language aptitude tests such as MLAT have been widely used to test foreign language learners' aptitude (Saito, 2018). Although language aptitude is process-oriented (Cronbach & Snow, 1981; Robinson, 2005) it also emphasises the importance of the learning process as a strength in language learning. Language aptitude tests such as MLAT focus more on the components of learning and grammatical aspects, and these instructions may be more applicable in audio-lingual teaching classroom (see section 1.2.2) rather than communicative classrooms (Skehan, 1998). However, both classrooms in Scotland and China in this study adopt a more communicative approach for developing students' communicative competence rather than focusing on students' knowledge of English language in audio-lingual classroom. Thus, aptitude tests such as MLAT may not be appropriate to identifying GELs.

In this research, characteristics of GELs were reported as process-oriented, and these results may possibly relate to the teachers' long-term observation. In this research, in Scotland, teachers reported using observation and tests to identify GELs. Teachers in China preferred to identify GELs through long-term observation. The general responses of



teachers both in Scotland and China indicate that test scores were an additional reference to support, justify, and reinforce the result of their observations for identifying GELLs. Studies (see for example Dooley & Oliver, 2002; Gunderson & Siegel, 2001; Lohman, 2005; Keith, 1999) question whether tests are the most effective strategy for identifying gifted individuals. Examination-oriented teaching has been inherent in the Chinese educational system for long time (Zheng & Cheng, 2008; Shi, 2006). Teachers in China in this research may not be able to ignore the essential teaching goal of this educational system. Teachers in China prefer to develop the students' communicative competence in their classes, but the essential teaching goal of the courses is reported to be for examination. Teachers in China specifically emphasised the ineffectiveness of test scores as evidence to identify GELLs. They explained that the essential purpose of English language learning is for communication, and the score of tests cannot fully indicate the communicative competence of an English language learner and thus would not be used to identify GELLs.

Theories and giftedness models state that the appropriate way to identify gifted individuals is to observe the individuals' behaviours (Ziegler & Stoeger, 2004; Freeman, 1998). In this research, the main methods reported by both teachers and parents in Scotland and China are observing the students' behaviours and progress. Indeed, both teachers in Scotland and China prefer to observe the interactions between teachers and gifted individuals and peers and gifted individuals. Since both teachers in Scotland and China report implementing learner-centred instructions to encourage all learners to communicate in class, it becomes possible to pay attention to the interactions of GELLs with teachers and other students. Nunan (1988, 2012) and Koster (2007) state that to encourage learners to be at the centre of the learning progress, the more interactive tasks among the students should be promoted. The meaningful interactive activities in classroom progress and observation of the interaction process allow teachers to identify GELLs in their classes.

Previous ways of identifying gifted individuals (see for example Ziegler & Stoeger, 2004 (the ENTER model) and Freeman, 1998 (the Sports Approach), argue that opportunities should be provided for all, and then observation should take place and result in identification of gifted learners. Since educators are able to observe gifted learners' learning procedure (Harris, *et al.*, 2009; Dean, 2001), the role of teacher is crucial for identifying GELLs in their classes. Teachers in this study implemented activities that could allow for this approach to identification. However, teacher observation is also criticised (Lassig, 2009, Harris, *et al.*, 2009) and may be dependent on the teachers' understanding of giftedness which will in turn

affect how they use the observations to identify. Across the two institutions teachers could talk about the existence of GELLs in their English language classroom. However, their understanding of the characteristics of GELLs were varied and there was no agreement of what constituted a GELLs or how they should be supported. This perhaps calls into question the place of training for teachers to better understand giftedness. This might be helpful for making a contribution to the arrangement of the identification and support of GELLs.

## 7.2 How Is English as a Foreign Language Taught in Scotland and China?

As was acknowledged at the start of this study, the desire to engage in English language learning has seen a dramatic growth in recent years (The British Council, 2013) and China's desire to participate on the global stage has contributed to this surge in numbers (Eaves, 2011). It is therefore to be expected that alongside this, there has been increasing interest in the developing effective practice in the English language classroom. Within this group of ELLs is the sub-group of GELL, who are the focus for this thesis. This section will discuss the English language teaching practice as reported by teachers in this research, and then discuss teachers' provision for GELLs.

### *English Language Teaching*

Teachers in Scotland reported teaching EAP in their classroom, and a key focus was the teaching academic writing. With reference to the associated literature, academic writing was treated as essential and a key skill for foreign language learners to be familiar with the academic written work (Cumming, 2006). Due to the influence of EAP learners' mother language context and culture, implementing modelling in the EAP classroom to help students understand particular genres, structures and language in specific disciplines is necessary and useful for EAP learners' English language learning (Hood, 2005; Wette, 2014). In this research, teachers in Scotland (three respondents) reported using modelling to teach academic writing. Although teachers in China in this study (six respondents) have an awareness of the application of English language in specific disciplines, they reported teaching general English language rather than teaching EAP and this may be due to the restriction in terms of the course purposes and teaching materials. For example, four teachers in China said that they had to teach English language in order to help the students pass the final examination. Three GELLs in China said they were dissatisfied with this kind of examination-oriented teaching in the classroom. This tension between preparing students to study at university at the same time as preparing them for a test such as IELTS was noted by Moore & Morton (2005) and the result of this may be an unintended focus on teaching for the test. However, Moore & Morton (2005: 64) concluded that 'it would be most unwise to view test preparation on its own as an adequate form of EAP writing instruction.' That the focus in the Chinese institution was still on exams was consistent with the findings of Cai

(2010), Zhang, *et al.* (2015), Cheng (2016), Zhu & Yu (2010), namely that the EAP approach was not fully implemented in Chinese higher education.

Teachers in both countries reported the importance of Communicative Language Teaching methods (CLT) in their English language classes. Teachers in both institutions also recognised that, considering the needs of the students in their classes, they would slightly modify their teaching methods, in order to support their students effectively in English language learning. However, teachers in Scotland also reported making no change to their teaching if they thought a student was a GELL. In addition, half of respondents indicated that it might be difficult for teachers to implement CLT approaches in Scotland. Needs analysis is important and essential to both CLT and EAP. If teachers are to support GELL and develop their English language abilities, then consideration as to be given to the activities they are offered. Teachers in China demonstrated some awareness of challenging GELL and in spite of large classes (40 students) and a focus on exams they reported offering activities like pre-class reading. Neither institutions reported talking to students about what they thought would be challenging and this is consistent with research which suggests that the needs of students seem to be largely overlooked in teaching practice (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Nunan, 2012).

An essential skill for students studying in other countries is being able to communicate in English. The official policy of European countries also advocates teaching English sufficient for students' communicative needs. For instance, the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2009) emphasises teaching English for developing students' communicative competence in Europe. Scottish teachers in this study followed the CEFR as the primary guidance in their teaching. Because of this primary guidance, teacher participants might have a clearer understanding about the CLT. Nevertheless, they seemingly believed that the typical CLT might be equal to providing more communicative practice such as presentations, group work, or discussion for students to practice English in class. Therefore, implementing these communicative activities, teachers maintained that the students could develop their communicative competence. Likewise, in the result of national surveys by Kam (2002), the most popular understanding of CLT was to involve communicative activities and provide more communicative opportunities for students to practice. CLT offers opportunities for developing appropriate activities for GELL and it also offers opportunities for identification. However, teachers in this study will require support,

perhaps in the form of professional development, if they are to fully implement CLT and make the most of the opportunities for GELL that it can offer.

In this study teachers' perceptions of the function of learner-centred instruction are consistent with the study by Thornbury (2006) which shows that learner-centred instruction could help the student to develop autonomy in their learning. Particularly, in the view of psychology, the learner-centred task is positive for the relationship between the teacher and the student, and this in turn might also accomplish a positive outcome for the student (Cornelius-White, 2007). In this research, all teacher participants reported offering guidance to their students in order that they correct their errors by themselves.

In agreement with the findings of some studies mentioned above, educators and departments in China have realised the importance of communicative competence in English language learning (Hu, 2001; Yu, 2006). In addition, the College English Course Requirement (CECR) (The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2007) also requires that university teachers should develop students' communicative competence and give more opportunities for students to communicate in class. From the responses of teachers in China, teachers tended to be willing to give more opportunities for students to communicate, and to conduct more learner-centred instruction. This is an apparent shift from dominantly teacher-centred instructions to learner-centred instructions. However, the study by Yu (2006) considers cultural aspects and claims the role of teachers might constrain learner-centred communicative activities. As influenced by Confucianism, students in the class would be obedient to the teacher; students might not stretch themselves entirely and be fully motivated when they are involved in the learner-centred communicative activities. For instance, one respondent reports students might be shy and passive in the classroom process, and that as a result the teacher prefers to assign the students to respond to questions, so they become involved in classroom tasks. This means that the learner-centred communicative activities would seemingly not be implemented by students voluntarily, and teachers still hold authority in the class. However, they tried to motivate their students to engage in communicative tasks.

An earlier study by Atkinson (1987) and a recent study by Sabriye & Perihan (2017) point out that the mother language can help language learners to make sense of texts. However, teachers in Scotland reported banning the use of their students' mother language in class. While not all teachers in Scotland had English as their first language, the classes did have

multiple cultural backgrounds and so English language was considered the only way for teachers and students and students and peers to communicate and interact. Atkinson (1987) claims that the mother tongue language would be important for language learners, particularly at the beginning stage of English language learning. In this study, teachers in Scotland are facing learners at least with middle and advanced level of English language abilities. Nevertheless, although teachers appeared to limit the opportunity for the students to use their mother tongue language, they understood why students used their mother tongue language and were aware of the willingness of the students to express themselves well in their first language. The high number of Chinese students in the class also gave rise to a certain inevitability that students would end up using their mother tongue. This is consistent with the result of the studies by Atkinson (1987) and Sabriye & Perihan (2017) which found that students desired to express themselves in English but sometimes resorted to using their mother tongue language. Considering the Communicative Approach was implemented by teachers in Scotland, the role of mother language in this setting was seen as a support for students when learning English language (Swan, 1985). All teachers in Scotland were realistic about this situation but encouraged their students to express themselves in English. All of the teachers in China focussed on the students' willingness to communicate and develop their communicative competencies whether in English or Chinese. Therefore, if the student was willing to speak, teachers would provide the opportunity for the student to express themselves even in Chinese. Carless (2008) argues for the use of the mother language in the English language classroom in Hong Kong and shows that teachers would encourage their students to conduct communication in English instead of using Cantonese. However, in Carless' study, teacher informants noted the students' anxiety as they may not be confident and so they were reluctant to communicate in English in class. Considering the differences of the capability of English and the confidence of students, teachers offered some strategies, such as helping students to translate mother language utterances into the target language to increase confidence and reduce anxiety of the students. Holiday (1994) also points out, in discussion about texts, that students using the mother language were also involved in communicative tasks, in which students can learn and recognise the target language as well. If an aim is for GELL to improve in ELL and competence, then teachers need to provide opportunities to practice real language communication and this could include the use of mother tongue in order to develop high competence in both languages.

All teachers in China appear to frequently use English in their teaching process, but they also resorted to the use of Chinese when they were giving explanations about difficult

language points, vocabulary, or cultural references. Although teachers in China reported using the Communicative Approach in teaching English language, some exercises and practices akin to the Grammar Translation Method were still used in their language teaching classrooms. This is consistent with study investigated by Matamoros-Gonzalez, *et al.* (2017), in which students completed grammar and vocabulary exercises by memorising and translating. However, the teachers gave these explanations in Chinese as they believed that once students understood the more complex process being discussed, they could move on to the next stage. From the point of view of a GELL this could be problematic as the literature (see for example Siegle, *et al.*, 2014; Rosemarin, 2009a, 2009b) suggests that over learning of materials can lead to boredom.

The English Course Requirement (The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2007) focuses on assessing the abilities of listening, reading, speaking, writing, translating, and the range of vocabulary. Translation skills also need to be assessed in the CET test for university students (Anne, 2010; Zheng & Cheng, 2008). Because of the exam-oriented teaching instruction in China (as mentioned above), teaching translation skills seems to be necessary for all English language learners in higher education in China. However, a study by Kodura (2019) argued that translation skills are seen as a quite high language skill and would be appropriate for students with certain language proficiency. Five participants reported that they thought being able to do simultaneous interpretation was a characteristic of GELLs. English language teaching in Scotland was teaching general English and EAP, which was not specific translation settings. This might be a possible reason for teachers in Scotland not focussing on teaching translation skills for general English language learners or GELLs in their communicative approach classrooms.

### ***Provision for GELLs***

Appropriate educational provision is important for supporting gifted learners to improve their specific abilities and to raise achievement (Briggs, *et al.*, 2008; Ziegler, 2014). Teachers' attitudes, knowledge and classroom management skills can influence their provision for gifted learners (Kitano & Espinosa, 1995; Blackburn, *et al.*, 2016). This section will discuss the findings relating to provision.

According to the AMG (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012a, 2012b) and Ziegler (2014), the training process is important if gifted students are to achieve excellence in different domains. Everyone has the opportunity to achieve success in different areas depending on deliberate

training (Ziegler, 2014). Of particular relevance to this study is that this model emphasises the importance of the learning procedure and progress rather than the outcome the students may achieve. In this regard, the results of this study provide supporting evidence to the importance of training and learning progress as proposed by the concept of the AMG model. In this study, the cooperation between motivation and high self-concept is confirmed by participants across the groups and is seen as contributing to how GELLs learn English language effectively and progress in their studies. Motivation as a non-cognitive factor is emphasised by Ziegler's AMG model as a significant resource and preconditional factor for gifted students to get high levels of performance and achievement (Ziegler, *et al.*, 2010; Sternberg, 2000). In this study, motivation was the most significant characteristic reported by participants across the groups. According to the responses in this study, interest and motivation acted as the essential drives for gifted students to make progress. As argued by March & Craven (2006), such motivation can be generated as a result of students possessing high level of self-concept. This is evident in the results that GELLs in this study reported having high self-concept about their English language ability (23 responses), which further contributed to their achievement. In this regard, the results of this study provide supporting evidence in that students' motivation and self-concept work collectively in effective self-regulated learning, acting as the precondition for student's achievement (Lent, *et al.*, 1997, Choi, 2005). Debates within the ELL literature argue that for learning strategies to be successful, a range of concepts need to be in place (Gao, 2007; Macaro, 2006; Gao & Zhang, 2009) and so motivation and self-concept when combined with strategies were likely to be more effective.

English language teachers in Scotland (six respondents) stated that they preferred to focus on helping weaker students to improve their English language abilities in order to achieve an average level in class, rather than providing deliberate training and support for GELLs' English language ability development. This is consistent with findings from primary and secondary school education (Bain, *et al.*, 2007; Gallagher, *et al.*, 2011; Troxclair, 2013, Vreys, *et al.*, 2017). A study by Pereira and Oliveira (2015) stated that GELLs can learn quickly, and an earlier study by Kenny, Archambault & Hallmark (1995) claimed that gifted students can produce more when grouped with students who are also gifted. In particular, VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh (2005) also found that it is effective to group gifted students together and provide advanced tasks for them to practice. Although, GELLs in study were students in higher education, the courses in Scotland were teaching EAP to all general students and helping all students to prepare for their postgraduate studies in Scotland. This



may have lead teachers in Scotland to focus on helping lower students to achieve the language level for master study, rather than specifically supporting GELLs to achieve excellence in English language learning. Although teachers in Scotland reported that they did not conduct deliberate practice for their GELLs in class, having said this, in practice English language teachers in Scotland tended to provide one-to-one consultations for students. During such consultations, teachers gave feedback to the student highlighting their weaknesses and strengths. Scottish teachers reported that they could not give GELL extra or more challenging work in class and instead they preferred to group GELLs with non-GELLs, so that they can help others. This is similar to debates within school education literature where teachers prefer to encourage gifted students as peer tutors to help non-gifted students (Bernal, 2003). However, for example, the study by Pereira & Oliveira (2015) argues that as GELLs are able to learn English quickly and so teachers should provide more challenging work for them in order to develop students' language proficiency. Group work might be of benefit for non-GELLs in English language learning, however English language teachers in Scotland seemed not to consider the quicker learning capability of GELLs or provide appropriate training for them to improve their abilities in English language learning. In addition, there was only one teacher in Scotland who notes the ineffectiveness of gifted students helping their peers to improve their English language abilities. Nevertheless, group work can help gifted individuals' emotional and social development (David, 2008). In consideration of the perspectives of English language teaching in Scotland focusing on developing the students' communicative competence and encouraging the students to do more real English language communication in class, might allow for their social and communicative development.

Although from the literature we can see there are few official documents and requirements indicating special provision for GELLs in China, considering the differences of the capability of each student, teachers in China in this research appeared to provide more work and opportunities for GELLs to make progress than teachers in Scotland. Indeed, teachers in China believed in implementing tasks that would stretch all students. In addition, contrasted with teachers in Scotland, Chinese teachers preferred to provide more challenging tasks for GELLs and assess GELLs with higher criteria than non-GELLs. One traditional Chinese belief about ability indicates: *San Fen Tian Cai, Qi Fen Xue* (30% of individual's intelligence is genetically determined, and 70% depends on the learning and training). This might influence Chinese teachers focus on providing deliberate training for gifted individuals.

Empirical studies on giftedness (see for example Ziegler, 2014) emphasise that gifted students can reach excellence in a specific area depending on deliberate training and practice. The prevalent instructional strategies for supporting gifted students involve enrichment and exposure activities, alternative assessment, focusing on developing problem-skills or higher order thinking skills, questioning strategies, and focusing on the interests of the students to modify curriculum (Davis, 2009; Hong, *et al.*, 2006). For example, critical thinking is a key requirement for post graduate study in Western-based universities (Shaheen, 2016), the literature in the field of gifted education (see for example Sternberg & Davidson, 2005) suggests that the ability to think critically is important for gifted students and thus emphasise the need for gifted learners to learn to engage critically with materials. For example, Mahyuddin, *et al.*, (2004) argues that critical thinking in language learning can promote some learners to engage in language learning at a higher level and, in this regard, Lipman (2003) argues that English language teachers have the responsibility to ensure that critical thinking skills are promoted in English language learning programmes. However, in this research, only two teachers in China and one in Scotland noted the importance of developing critical thinking abilities for GELLs'. Studies (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005; Aguirre & Hernandez, 2011) acknowledge that teachers' attitudes, professional knowledge of giftedness and cultural background can influence their provision for gifted individuals. One teacher in Scotland responded that teachers were not sure what kind of challenging tasks should be provided for GELLs or how such tasks would be conducted in the classroom. Teachers in both institutions had an awareness of providing deliberate training for GELLs but were less clear about what appropriate tasks could be provided for improving GELLs' gifted abilities. Aguirre & Hernandez (2011) argue that learning for GELL and indeed ELL should take account of the proficiency of the learner, the learner's strengths and needs. Teachers in this study would benefit from continuing professional development around addressing the needs of GELLs in the English language classroom.

Due to the rapid development of mobile devices, smartphone apps are frequently used in education (Bae & Kim, 2014). The effectiveness and satisfactory use mobile phones as innovative and resourceful materials supporting for English language learning is noted by researchers (Nalliveettil & Alenazi, 2016). Bae & Kim (2014) found that the utilisation of smartphones in education can avoid time and space restrictions in learning and can provide an effective learning environment and opportunities for teachers and students, with stimulating learning motivation and interactivity among students and teachers. Since gifted

individuals have openness to new knowledge and challenges, and are sensitive and curious about activities (Renzulli, 2014) involvement of new technologies in GELLs' learning processes could support them to be motivated in English language learning. Teacher participants in China frequently used smartphones and chatting apps to communicate and interact with students. This was an informal system for students to gain comments from teachers. Responses from teacher participants in China indicated that both teachers and students enjoyed and were satisfied with this technology. Kessler (2018) highlighted the effectiveness and timesaving features of the software and where classes were large (40 students in China) it is understandable that this technology was popular with teachers. The software can help them to check work and give feedback to students in a short space of time. For students, through the current feedback and comments, they could develop their study immediately with fresh thinking about their work. The effectiveness of using mobile phone apps in English language learning also was confirmed by GELLs in Scotland in this research. For instance, GELLs in Scotland mentioned that they were willing to try new and popular methods to learn English language independently, such as using smartphone apps. Since all Chinese GELLs in this study emphasise the importance of self-learning improvement in their English language study, the benefit of utilising mobile device applications, with no limitation of time and space, can be helpful for GELLs' to pursue self-learning improvement. However, the utilisation of mobile devices applications was not reported uniformly by teachers in Scotland. Indeed, only one teacher in Scotland reported having an awareness of using software for assessment and providing feedback for students. One teacher in Scotland reported banning the use of smartphones in class, even for using dictionary applications. The possible reason for teachers doing this might be in relation to the restriction of mother language use and the encouragement of the whole English language communicative environment in class. However, given the benefits of using technology along with the rapidly developing technological world, this finding is interesting and has implications for teacher continuing professional development.

### **7.3 Do GELLs Perceive the Place of Practice in Language Learning as Important?**

Practice is important for gifted individuals' improvement in a subject domain (Gardner, 1993; Sternberg, 1985 & 2005; Ziegler, 2004). Since gifted individuals are needed to make a contribution to their countries in various domains (Siegel, 2008), they need practice, training and opportunity to develop their talent abilities to achieve excellence in different fields (Ziegler, 2014). This section will discuss findings of this research in relation the importance of practice.

GELLs in this research reported focusing on effective self-learning processes in their English language learning. Therefore, they perceived the importance of the place of practice in their language learning. Gifted individuals have an openness to new challenges, willingness to take risks, as well as being sensitive and curious about activities (Renzulli, 2014). Therefore, gifted individuals are able to engage in those activities and practices. EAP teaching context, the materials and practice EAP courses try to provide authentic communicative situations and tasks in order that learners undertake language practice (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Hoa, 2011). GELLs in this research reported needing this practice in order to utilise English language in real communication. As international students studying in Scotland, Chinese GELLs reported being interested in, and sensitive to, cultural references in English language. A study by Hoa (2011) argued that providing real communicative practice for EFL learners should consider the cultural information in language teaching. This also has been noted by both teacher participants in Scotland and in China. Teachers in this research reported involving cultural references and materials for their learners. Particularly, teachers in China helped learners to recognise the cultural difference between Chinese language and English language, so that learners could understand and apply English language appropriately and accurately in specific communicative situations. GELLs in China present a willingness to communicate in English but reported having limited opportunities for them to practice. They felt bored doing paper exercises and taking exams. China has a culture of exam-oriented education in English language learning and teaching (Shi, 2006). Because of the exam driven system in China, the role of teachers is more often to be treated as one of knowledge transmitter, sharing attributes with teacher-centred teaching methods, concentrating on lecturing and learners' executing identical teaching regardless of their diverse learning needs (Zheng & Cheng, 2008). These approaches resulted in GELLs having limited opportunities

to practice their English language in class. However, both groups of GELLs seemed to be confident and attempted to address these challenges by themselves by accessing resources for example. GELLs preferred to do self-learning and had strong motivation to pursue their learning goals and practice was seen as an important element. GELLs in this research reported having both cognitive and affective self-concept, which could help GELLs self-evaluate their self-regulated learning processes and develop their English language learning (Oxford, 1990). In Ziegler's AMG model (2004), the component of subjective action space can be used to analyse this situation. GELLs in this research had certain cognitive space in which they can make decisions regarding the various possibilities related to their personal behaviours. Both the cognitive and affective self-concept (Oxford, 1990) can help GELLs to recognise their abilities and make decisions about how to undertake practice and manage their emotions in their English language learning. Debating, out of class activities, using apps to learn English language were all ways that GELL had found to engage in further practice (Dawadi, 2017; Oxford, 2011).

It should be noted that the English language application in specific areas was treated as an English language proficiency by GELLs in China, but GELLs in Scotland only mentioned applying English language to real communication. Since English language teaching in these two institutions focuses on improving students' communicative competence, the possible reason for the above distinction might be influenced by the learning and living environment. For Chinese GELLs, they may have learning and living culture shocks when they are studying abroad, and these might cause stress in communicating and learning (Gu, 2016). GELLs reported having the ability to recognise the challenges and weakness in their learning progress, and Byram, *et al.* (2001) also point out that international students negotiated and mediated the surrounding environment when they were studying abroad. For Chinese GELLs as international students the stress of learning and living in Scotland might lead them to pay more attention to the surrounding unfamiliar environment and in order to try to help themselves to adapt to the new cultural environment and educational context (Oxford, 1990). Therefore, Chinese international GELLs might focus on improving their communicative competence rather than on applying English language to specific areas. In contrast, GELLs in China have limited opportunities of English language communication with their surroundings, so they might be focused on the English language application in specific areas.

According to Dennis, *et al.* (2005), university students' motivation includes students' aspiration for their further career. GELLs in this study were postgraduate students at tertiary

level. Seven participants reported that their motivation related to their further career aspiration, which may lead them to focus on the application of English language rather than the knowledge of English language. To clarify, since GELs in this study are all university students studying at tertiary level, their self-concepts were not only focusing on academic areas, but future career aspirations (Bjorkland, *et al.*, 2002). This may be an additional reason for university GELs to focus on the use of English language in specific areas. EFL courses in British Higher Institutions mainly focus on teaching general English, English for academic purpose and for specific purposes (Jarvis, 2004). In this research, teachers in Scotland saw their role as teaching English for academic purposes and preparing for the students' further postgraduate study in the UK. Considering these essential teaching purposes, the Scottish teachers expected GELs should be excellent at applying English language for specific purposes in other domains. Within each specific subject there will be associated technical language. This raises questions as to how generic English language courses take this into consideration.

GELs in China stated that they were confident in their ability to address difficulty and challenges in their English language learning process through self-learning and the pursuit of regular study time and exercises. GELs in Scotland presented performance-avoidance goal orientation, namely they seemed to be cautious and wanted to avoid poor performance in communicative tasks with others. Although performance-avoidance goals orientation might cause negative outcomes, high anxiety, or low grades (Wolter, 2004), Chinese students could be motivated by these negative emotional feelings and this resulted in making more effort to improve (Lau & Chan, 2001). GELs in this research had clear learning goals and practice was seen as part of their English language development. In accordance with Cheng & Phillipson (2013), Wolter (2004), Pekrun, Elliot & Maier, (2009), mastery goals could stimulate the students' interest and intrinsic motivation in the classroom and stimulate them to have a positive attitude and persistence in the face of difficulties and challenges. GELs clear learning goals cooperated with their self-concept, motivation and the frequent utilisation of learning strategies, and this resulted in engagement with effective self-regulated learning processes.

Goals were treated as a significant element for the expansion of gifted individuals' action repertoire, and goals can be updated and refined depending on changes in the environment (Ziegler, 2005). Although in this research all GELs are Chinese, they were living and learning in different environmental and cultural contexts. Their goals orientations were

slightly different. For instance, considering the performance goals orientation, GELs in Scotland reported focusing on performance-avoidance goals, whereas GELs in China focused on the performance approach referring to their simultaneous interpretation abilities when working with other English language users. In addition, Ziegler & Stoeger (2008) found that the influence of environment changes on gifted individual's learning-orientation subjective action space meant that gifted individuals were able to recognise, modify, and expand their action repertoire confidently and successfully. This links to the work by Oxford (2011) and Chamot (2004) and the debate about the different aspects that impact self-regulated learning particularly for language learners, namely, learners' autonomy and the interaction between the individual within in a context and the use of strategies that are important and result in success. Chinese GELs in Scotland also reported finding English language learning differences between Scotland and China and they then modified their learning goals and learning plans to adapt to the new learning environmental contexts. GELs in this research seemed to be able to plan their learning goals according to the different environmental contexts, and organise practice depending on the changes. This also relates to their cognitive self-concept, and to making decisions about practice according to different learning environment. Because GELs have goals such as going to University, they saw the need to practice writing and speaking because they wanted to achieve their longer-term goal. This performance-oriented goal can be considered as an extrinsic motivation (Wolter, 2004) in GELs' English language learning. GELs have set a goal (such as going to university) and practice is one of things that will help them to achieve that goal.

According to English language literature the learning context is important for second language learning (Cohen, 2014; Gass, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986). Learning English language in a native-speaking context could provide the social, cultural and linguistic environment for learners to practice the target language in real conversational interactions (Gass, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986). Environmental factors can influence the students' language learning progress (Chomsky, 1965; Chastain, 1976; Vygotsky, 1986; Gass, 2003) as well as gifted abilities (Sternberg, 1985, 2005; Gardner, 1993; Ziegler, 2005). The AMG by Ziegler (2005) emphasises giftedness as the result of the interactions between gifted individual and the environment. The construct of the learning environment is important and students in this study recognised this in relation to opportunities to practice English language. Although GELs in China were studying English language in a context of English as a foreign language, they expected there would be more opportunities to learn English language in native-speaking countries. In addition, from the literature we can see that although the

university English language curriculum in China emphasised the importance of providing more opportunities for students to use English language communication, GELs in China reported their discontent with the communicative opportunities for real practice in class. This was a mismatch between what was meant to happen and what happens. This may be because of the big classroom size (about 40 students in each class in this research) and exam-oriented teaching instruction in the Chinese context. However, the communicative approach can offer more opportunities for students to practice English language in communication in class (Stern, 1991). Policy is assuming a more communicative approach is adopted and thus opportunity for practice would be offered but in practice, teachers seem to be adopting aspects of the grammar translation method which cut down opportunities for practice.



## **7.4 What supports GELLs to become excellent in English language learning?**

Besides GELLs undertaking their own practice for English language, teachers and parents also provided support for GELLs' English language learning. Teachers' support and provision are closely linked (VanTassel-Baska, 2000; Blackburn, *et al.*, 2016). There were things teachers did that supported GELLs in their ELL and these were discussed in the previous section about provision. This section considers the wider aspects that GELLs said supported their learning and so it examines support in relation to that offered by parents and the support that GELLs reported as being helpful. In this study, parenting styles have continuing influence on GELLs English language learning. Parents of GELLs in this research reported providing financial support for their GELLs.

### ***7.4.1 Support from peers***

According to Cheng & Phillipson (2013), Chinese students hold social approval goals towards their peers, namely that approval from peers can take the form of positive learning motivation of Chinese students. Although in this research GELLs present their peers in the role of partners to engage in English language communicative practice with, GELLs in China highlighted the positive result of encouragement from their peers' approval for their English language improvement, although they also noted they would ignore peers if they were not supportive. It can be seen that the social interaction with peers can stimulate this GELL's intrinsic motivation to make progress in their English language. Ziegler & Stoecker (2004) and Freeman (1998) suggest peers can provide support and interactions with gifted individuals in their learning process. In consideration of this, teachers have to decide how to organise learning within the classroom. Students learn from and with each other and so social goals become important and this in turn could be considered when supporting Chinese students (Cheng & Phillipson, 2013). Students reported that having the opportunity to speak with others after class was helpful. However, Bernal (2003) argued that gifted individuals only gain limited benefits in "inclusive" classrooms with homogenous settings and so GELLs may need to see out a like-minded peer if they were to advance their speaking abilities. Since Confucian perspectives have infiltrated deeply into Chinese people's thinking and behaviours, Chinese students were observed to have social reasons (such as satisfy affiliation or recognition needs) for their academic achievement (Hau & Ho, 2010). For instance, in this research, GELLs reported that being successful in competitions with

peers could motivate them in their English language learning. Being successful in competition could be treated as a social reason for GELLs' academic achievement.

#### ***7.4.2 Support from parents***

The role of parents has been investigated and they are considered to have a significant role in supporting gifted children (Hughes & McGee, 2011). Silva, *et al.* (2007) argued that the parenting university students received in their childhood continues to influence their life at university, in terms of influencing students' anxiety levels, academic motivation and grades in university. Parental influence was reported as the cause of stress for international students in a number of studies (McMahon, 2011; Wei, *et al.*, 2007). The degree of parenting influencing gifted learners' educational objectives and services was linked to particular cultural backgrounds (Kitano & Espinosa, 1995; Hughes & McGee, 2011) and Chinese parents generally had high expectations for their children's academic achievement and required their children to working hard and do well (Flynn, 1991; Wu, 2008). GELLs in Scotland claimed that there was no influence from their parents on their English language improvement. However, the parents' educational level can influence GELLs English language proficiency (Hughes & McGee, 2011). In this research, parents in Scotland had their own English language experiences which the parents in China did not have. This seemed to influence their beliefs about language learning and how GELLs might engage with the learning process. Two of the parents of GELLs in Scotland explained their preference for studying English language in English-speaking countries, and therefore, they stated that they had recommended that their children study in Scotland. Parents of GELLs in China had no experience in English language learning some believed that having English language learning experiences would be beneficial to supporting their GELLs and others thought this experience would not be of benefit.

Parent participants in this study reported providing positive encouragement to do well but they claimed it was given without pressure. This less authoritarian parenting style that used positive encouragement could promote students to be confident and independent in their self-regulated learning (Silva, *et al.*, 2007). In addition, five parents reported their children made an effort to pursue their English language ability and to achieve high levels of academic performance. This idea of hard work to achieve their goals resonates with previous studies (Wu, 2008; Yang, 2007) that show not only do Chinese American parents prefer to encourage their children to work hard to achieve excellence in gifted areas, but that for

Chinese parents, hard work and effort is a characteristic of gifted individuals. They therefore expected their child to engage in hard work.

One contributory factor for GELL in this study, and indeed all students studying English, was the financial support that they received from parents. Partly this might be rooted in Chinese culture that considers education to be important and worth spending money on (McMahon, 2011). It might also come from the belief that educational success brings the family great honour (Kim, Li & Ng, 2005). Gifted education is often associated with privilege (Winstanley, 2006) and indeed is often accused of being elitist (Tomlinson, 2008). Although the socio-economic status of the families of the students in this study was not the focus for the research, it cannot be ignored that the participants came from families appeared to be in a position economically to fund their children's education. From the literature (Trower & Lehmann, 2017) studying abroad is known to help students gain better employment and develop what Brown & Hesketh (2004) call "personal capital". It is important for the development of personal capital to access cultural resources (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Even for students from low socio-economic status background, studying abroad can provide positive effects on these students' personal capital development and employment benefits (Trower & Lehmann, 2017). Students in this research were all studying at or aiming to study at university. Financial support from their parents was crucial to them achieving this, since studying abroad requires financial support, not only in terms of the tuition fees, but also the travelling and living expenses and expenses for the preparation for studying abroad such as taking IELTS examination (Trower & Lehmann, 2017). Resources such as financial support was emphasised as crucial capital to help gifted individuals pursue their learning goals required for high levels of performance and achievement (Ziegler, *et al.*, 2010). In this research, parents of GELLs in Scotland particularly mentioned they gave financial support for their GELLs to study in Scotland. This kind of financial support gave them the opportunity to study in an English native-speaking environment. This chance had been appreciated and accepted by GELLs, and both parents and GELLs in Scotland reported the English native-speaking environment was an effective environment for English language improvement. These enormous resources such as financial, social support, attention, etc. can benefit the individual's self-regulation, which is treated as preconditional factor for high performance (Ziegler, *et al.*, 2010; Sternberg, 2000). Financial support from parents particularly for Chinese GELLs, seems to be important for their academic studies. According to Reichenberg & Landau (2009), as the authority figures, many parents decide the opportunities and development which their children can receive. In this research financial

support from their parents was a determinate factor for GELLs studying in an English native-speaking environment. This offered different opportunities to those GELLs studying English language in China (a non-native-speaking environment). This was also confirmed by GELLs in China, when they expressed high expectation of studying English language abroad.

#### ***7.4.3. Technology support***

Technology seemed to offer support to GELL but also, teachers can use it for assessment too. In this research, all GELLs reported using mobile apps in their self-regulated learning process and some teachers also reported using new technologies in their English language teaching, such using chatting apps, so they could interact with their students after class. Technology is developing and a study by Sweeney & Moore in 2012 estimated between 1,000 to 2,000 apps for language learning had been developed with the numbers of language learning apps set to increase over the years. The educational software and apps can offer learners more opportunities to absorb information from a variety of sources in the English language learning process, and these would benefit students' self-regulated learning (An & Reigeluth, 2011). Since GELLs in this research were reported focusing on their self-regulated learning, technology support might be harnessed and used in the future for supporting GELLs as well as other individuals and teachers.

## Chapter 8: Conclusions

The purpose of the present research was to investigate gifted English language learners (GELLs) experiences in both Chinese and Scottish classrooms. The empirical research focused in one English language university in Scotland and one English language university in Chongqing, China. The study has drawn on English language learning approaches and gifted models to examine the lived experiences of GELLs and to gain insight into the influences on the learning and teaching of GELLs in different cultural contexts.

The premise of the study is that GELLs exist in English language classes but if they are to be challenged and developed then appropriate learning experiences must be offered (Ziegler, 2005). Teachers' understanding of who the GELL are and what they do or are capable of doing along with their knowledge about provision will impact on support and achievement (Dai, 2012; Grigorenko, 2012). It was also recognised that parents play a vital role in their off springs lives and so capturing their voice gave an important added dimension to the study (Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). Equally, GELL themselves have valuable information about the kind of learning opportunities that support them and prepare them for English language study Harris, *et al.*, 2009) and so finding out their experiences in the English language classroom offered further evidence of the strategies and techniques GELL find helpful in their studies. Through analysing the qualitative interview data of English language teachers, GELLs and parents, this research gives some insight into the influences on GELLs' English language learning and experiences.

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the gifted English-speaking Chinese student population. In order to provide a response to this aim the research questions were addressed. To summarise the conclusions from the data and discussion a brief overview and analysis of the work will be presented.

### 1. What are the characteristics of GELL?

GELLs in this study were identified as having process-oriented characteristics, intense intrinsic motivation and interest in English language and a certain high level of self-concept about their own abilities all of which benefitted their self-regulation and formulation, and implementation, of learning strategies. They showed ability to monitor their learning

progress and were aware of the importance of self-learning strategies in their English language learning. They frequently used metacognitive, cognitive, compensation and affective language learning strategies for their English language development. By conducting affective strategies, they were able to manage their emotions, and this supports them to be positive and overcome limitations and challenges in their English language learning. Many of these strategies would be used by all ELL within the class (Dörnyei, 2005) and so on one level, there appeared to be nothing particularly special about these findings since these strategies are good for all learners (Gao & Zhang, 2009, Oxford, 2011). But more recently the field of gifted education has been exploring the role of motivation and affective characteristics in relation to gifted learners (see for example Obergriesser & Stoeger, 2015, Al-Dhamit & Kreishan, 2016). As a result, self-regulated learning and self-regulation (see for example Obergriesser & Stoeger, 2015, Kroesbergen, *et al.*, 2016) and their relationship to, and impact on, gifted learners' autonomous learning and desire to learn (Deci and Ryan, 1985) is being explored. Findings from the current study identified that GELL would learn material quickly and be deeply interested in English language and this is consistent with findings from studies such as (Winebrenner, 2000) and so particular characteristics associated with GELL come into play in the learning process alongside the psychological concepts described above. If GELL are striving for excellence (Ziegler, 2014), then it is important to examine how established ELL practices, namely self-regulated learning, could take account of GELL and their particular learning approaches.

## 2. How is English as a foreign language taught in Scotland and China?

Both institutions reported teaching both general English and EAP. They focused on developing the students' communicative language competence and providing communicative opportunities for the students to practice in class. However, teachers in Scotland focused on helping students to achieve an average level of competence in the class, with less focus on providing special support for GELLs within the class although there was some differentiation during individual tutorials. Teachers in China reported providing some opportunities for GELLs in class but there were few opportunities for language practice. Learner-centred instruction was the main method used in Scotland whereas in China they used lectures alongside learner-centred instruction. None-the-less, there was recognition in both countries that GELL existed in class and that some adaptations to learning and teaching should be made although teachers were not always clear how it could be done. Perhaps both settings were constrained by the circumstances they were in. EAP classrooms are often preparing students to study and work in English (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001) and are

therefore developing English language proficiency. Acquiring appropriate language and communication skills required to access the subject content on courses becomes the focus in this setting (Kennedy, 2001). Teachers in the current study reported spending time with those who struggled with their English language learning and this was perhaps understandable in light of the EAP classroom. But within this setting the GELL have specific goals (Gottfried & Gottfried, 2004) and when offered the right support GELLs can have high academic motivation which in turn impacts on high achievement (Friedman-Nimz & Skyba, 2009). If practice in ELL classrooms focus only on those who struggle then GELL are unlikely to develop and research (see Van der Meulen, *et al.*, 2014) suggests they may even underachieve. In China, the testing culture along with large class sizes and limited opportunities to practice communicative approaches seemed to curtail the opportunities for addressing the needs of GELLs. In some ways the issues both settings faced in relation to challenging GELLs was similar and linked to the development of communicative competence (Hymes, 1966) where the focus is on the use of language. Both settings knew the importance of developing communicative competence and tried to implement strategies that would allow this to happen. GELLs in this study wanted to practice their English language and sought ways to do this and parents thought communicating in English was an important characteristic for GELL. Developing communicative competence links to the debates around proficiency (Dean, 2001; Cummins, 2008) and giftedness (Gardner, 1993; Maker, *et al.*, 1994; Davidson, 2009) and draws on the work of Dörnyei & Ryan (2015) who argued that it was when students used a combination of concepts (for example affective, autonomy) in their learning that self-regulation became important for success and communicative competence would happen. Once again, the importance of the learning environment for GELL (Ziegler, 2012) can be seen. GELLs in this study reported intense interest in English language and this in turn drove their desire to learn English. The approach to language teaching could be effective and teachers knew what kind of learning opportunity might support GELL, the difficulties arose when the classroom environment impacted on learning or when focus was on those other than GELL. This study sheds some light on how GELLs could benefit from communicative competence practices.

### 3. Do GELLs perceive the place of practice in language learning as important?

GELLs in this study reported practice is significant in their language learning, and they emphasised the importance of self-learning by utilising metacognitive, cognitive, compensation and affective language learning strategies. Because of a high level of self-

concept and use of language learning strategies, they made clear goals (short-term or long-term goals) and then undertook practice in order to achieve the goals. They had a willingness to acquire language knowledge and they wanted to learn more about learning strategies and the utilisation of technology to support them in their learning. They had clear learning goals and wanted to improve through engaging in more challenging work and they recognised the value of support from peers in practice. The construction of the learning environment was seen as important in relation to opportunities to practice English language.

As can be seen in section 3 above, the ideas of practice (Skinner, 1941; Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Chomsky, 1965; McLaughlin, 1978; Gardner 1985; Ellis, 1985) link well to a communicative approach found in ELL classrooms. Consistently reported characteristics of gifted learners is their ability to learn quickly and easily (Gagné, 2000; Sternberg, 2005). They also make links across learning (Van Tassel-Baska, 2000) and so can transfer skills. Although GELs in this study were keen to practice their language learning skills and practice is important for development (Ziegler & Philipson, 2012a), there is a danger that practice without challenge might become boring because they are already proficient (Kitsantas, *et al.*, 2017). The opportunities to practice with someone at their level of language learning is important and Gross (2006) suggests that gifted learners need an opportunity to work with those operating at the same level and therefore being grouped with others who were not as good so that they could teach them was not going to be helpful to GELs in the longer term (Bernal, 2003). One issue holding back GELs from speaking in public was a concern that they might not be as good as others. The socioemotional effects on gifted learners are well documented (see for example Gardner, 1999; Gagné, 2000; Sternberg, 2005) and Oxford (1990) includes the affective domain in her taxonomy of language learning strategies. The development of the use of technology for GELs' self-regulated learning (An & Reigeluth, 2011) might offer an opportunity for GEL to either practice by themselves or meet other virtually so as to reduce some of the socio-emotional influences of others.

#### 4. What supports GELs to become excellent in English language learning?

According to this study self-learning strategies, challenging tasks and positive encouragement can support GELs to become excellent in English language learning. The main support from parents took the form of financial support and in addition positive emotional support such as encouragement to succeed in their studies was offered. Providing opportunities for practice of English language and self-learning strategies were identified as



important ways for teachers to support GELL. Findings suggest that there are gaps in both countries between what teachers know they could do and what actually happens in the class although many of the strategies used - presentations, one to one consultations and group work – could support GELL if teachers considered them at the planning stage of the activities. VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh (2005) argued that teachers' attitude and lack of understanding about gifted learners influenced their ability to modify the curriculum for supporting gifted learners in their classes. The evidence from this study suggests that many of the strategies that could support GELL were already in operation in both settings as aspects of the communicative approach were used. The most frequently used language learning strategies - metacognitive, compensation and cognitive strategies (Dawadi, 2017; Charoento, 2016; Wu, 2008; and Chen, 2009) were in evidence. Self-regulation (Oxford, 2011) was crucial to language learning. What was missing was a connection between those skills and how they might be used specifically to support GELL. Having knowledge of giftedness and GELL will allow teachers to develop effective differentiation for gifted students in classrooms (Efklides, 2019).

## **8.1 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research, the main recommendations centre around advice for teachers in identifying and supporting GELLs in English language classrooms, since there is little explicit research on GELL in ELL classrooms. Providing challenges for gifted students is important for stimulating and sustaining gifted students' interest in class (Kitsantas, *et al.*, 2017), however, overchallenge, complex tasks, and a lack of teacher direction can be problematic and have a negative influence on gifted learners' learning (Scager, *et al.*, 2014). Gifted education is looking at self-regulated learning more closely (Obergrösser & Stoeger, 2015; Kroesbergen, *et al.*, 2016; Efklides, 2019). ELL has been utilising these strategies for some time (Dawadi, 2017; Charoento, 2016; Wu, 2008; Oxford, 2017 and Chen, 2009), so there is a need for the two fields (ELL and GELL) to inform each other and consider how ideas of proficiency, giftedness and self-regulation strategies might present. Although self-regulated learning acquisition might be developed by gifted learners' themselves over time, it can be positively impacted by teachers' instrumental guidance and systematic support in educational context (Efklides, 2019).

Notwithstanding the small sample size, this research offers insights into the understanding of GELLs, their teachers and parents and their English language learning experiences. Although previous studies have investigated GELLs (Harris, *et al.*, 2007; Lohman, *et al.*, 2008; Robinson, 2005), the perceptions of GELL's learning experiences and English language improvement have not received much attention. This study offers a starting point for thinking about best support for GELL in English language classrooms and so the key contribution to arise from this study are the implications for teachers of English language. Future continuing professional development for staff could include the following topics for exploration, discussion and guidance:

1. Characteristics of GELL. With no clear definition of gifted, English language teachers should consider what GELL do and are capable of doing in the classroom. A framework for understanding GELL and the likely demonstrable actions that are visible in the classroom should be developed bringing together aspects of proficient language learners and characteristics of giftedness in order to develop a framework for addressing the needs of the GELL.
2. Having considered the characteristics of GELL, ELL provision should be examined to better articulate the policy guidance and EAP and communicative language learning approaches in order to develop curriculum opportunities that allow GELL to demonstrate and develop their abilities. Whilst it is recognised that ELL and GELL have similar approaches to learning, acknowledging that GELL often present with additional abilities will allow for tailored support. Building this into a framework for GELL will also enable teachers to examine ELL guidance.
3. The framework for ELL would allow the theoretical models for language learning and models in gifted education to be combined in order to examine how best support GELL and this will allow for the development of practical classroom activities.
4. Developing a framework for providing instrumental guidance and systematic support to develop self-regulated learning acquisition for GELL could be used to support GELL to have the capacity to overcome challenges, limitations and socio-emotional issues in their self-regulated learning.
5. Exploration of the use of technology for supporting learners is crucial. GELLs in this study were using technology and since technology is advancing rapidly and the use of apps, voice blogging and digital reading are becoming common, it is important that English language teachers are aware of how to use and include such technology in their classes to the benefit of all learners and to enhance their teaching.

## 8.2 Limitations

This research conducted in-depth interview to collect data, and the sample of each group was relatively small and so should be used with caution. However, the purpose of this research is not to provide generalisations to all relevant areas. This is qualitative research and the associated risks of researcher bias and subjective interpretation have been discussed in Chapter 3. The researcher acknowledges that by interviewing participants she has gathered perceptions and as such the respondent may have given their opinion about an issue in ways that perhaps made them look good. The researcher has tried to avoid these as much as possible by self-reflection and adopting a neutral stance. Adopting a neutral stance as far as possible was important since the researcher is as a Chinese English language learner was aware that this could influence the way she interpreted the data. The current research only investigated one ethnic group - Chinese GELLs. Since different cultural backgrounds might influence people's perceptions of gifted individuals and GELLs, some findings in relation to cultural influences might not be applicable to explain the issues related to other different ethnic groups.

Chinese GELLs in this study were all nominated by their teachers. Teachers' nominations were not depending on formal measurement such as an IQ test which, as discussed in the chapter 2, have been used as a measurement to identify giftedness (Harris, *et al.*, 2009; Dean, 2001). Equally, IQ tests have been criticised as a way to identify giftedness (Gunderson & Siegel, 2001; Schmidt & Hunter, 2004; Okan & Ispinar, 2009) and so may not have identified GELLs anyway. GELLs in this study were nominated by their teachers because they were showing high levels of competence in class. It is acknowledged that other GELL may have been present in class but not selected due to the teachers' understanding of GELL and their selection process. Equally it is acknowledged that high proficiency that results in high performance without the learning and processing attributes discussed previously may result in someone being identified as GELL although they do not possess the attributes associated with GELL. Notwithstanding these issues, the participants in the study were deemed to be displaying GELL attributes as recognised by the teachers.

This study focused on abilities in English language learning. It did not consider how being highly proficient in a subject other than English might impact on English language learning. While being competent in one domain does not ensure competency in another, it could be that investigating GELLs abilities in other subject areas could have provided useful

information about high performance in English language learning. This could have implications for teachers as their lack of knowledge of different subject areas could impact on the guidance they can give GELL to ensure that they are appropriately challenged within language learning and the subject domain in and EAP class.

### **8.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

The study was undertaken to add to the limited work that brings together the fields of English language learning and giftedness. Being qualitative in nature it attempted to understand the language learning experiences from a range of stakeholders. These perspectives open up opportunities for further research.

The current research investigates the perceptions of teachers, GELLs, and parents on GELLs' English language learning experience. Since the literature notes that peers play a relevant role in influencing gifted individuals, further research on the influence of peers on GELLs' English language learning could be explored.

Self-learning strategies in English language learning could be further investigated from the perspectives of both GELLs and teachers. This should include the use of technology given its rise in the learning and teaching process and its status within 21 century learning and society. Harnessing the students' understanding of this to better support teachers would add an important dimension to future studies.

The influence of parents' English learning experiences on their understanding of how to support GELLs suggests that further research that focuses on how parents' and schools work together to identify and provide at pre-university level for GELL would be beneficial. Undertaking research that looks at school to university transition could help both schools and universities to better support GELL.

This research focused on English language learning. GELLs had expectations about their English language proficiency and achievement and future research that investigates how proficiency and achievement of GELLs in specific subject areas impacts on their English language learning could offer insights into how best to support gifted learners in subjects other than English. It would also offer institutions guidance on how to tailor English

language classes in ways that support students in specific subject areas. It would also raise the status of gifted learners within and across universities.

In a globally interconnected world communication is crucial if societies are to share ideas and engage in debate and discussions. Language can be a barrier to such debate. Ensuring that effective English language learning and teaching contributes to the breaking down of these barriers is important. The place of GELL within this will not only enhance English language learning for all but will also have the potential to contribute to the development of knowledge across domains. Harnessing technology will be an important part of this process in the 21 century.

## Appendix I: Purposes and Principles of Teaching methods

Purposes, principles, and analysis of Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Audiolingual Approach, and Communicative Approach			
Approaches and Methods	Purpose	Major Principles	Critical analysis
<b>Grammar Translation Method (GTM) 1840s-1940s</b>	-Understanding literature; -Developing language competence	-Focus on grammatical rules; -Memorization of vocabulary, syntax; -Co-Translation of texts, sentences with first language; -More written and reading exercises. (Brown, 1994) -Deductive learning (Thornbury, 2006); -Culture was treated as consisting of literature as well (Larsen-Freeman, 2003)	-Little teaching and practice of oral communication; -More focus on reading acquisition proficiency; -Cooperate with first language; -Exposing differences and similarities of target language and first language.
<b>Direct Method 1860s</b>	-Practice target language absolutely; -Opposition of Grammar Translation Method	-Focus on development of oral skills; -Absolutely utilized of target language in classroom process in instruction and communication; -Avoidance of first language translation. (Stern, 1991) -First language internalized; -Inductive learning (Thornbury, 2006); -Culture was taught through daily life communicative contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).	-Uncertainly describe the meaning of target language without misunderstanding; -How to extend to advance learners.
<b>Audiolingual Approach 1950s</b>	-Helping students build their own language laboratory and language habits -Through repetition, memorization, and drill practice	-Focusing on the linguistics; -Oral-based, and drilling practice; -Repetition and memorisation of material -Teacher as the leader to guide and control students' practice and behaviours (Larsen-Freeman, 2000); -Learner as imitator to follow teachers' instructions and direction accurately (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).	-Massive modelling and imitation practice leads more teacher-centred class, and miss the needs for learners to do real target language communication.

<b>Communicative Approach (Task-based Learning)</b> <b>1960s-2000s</b> -Humanistic approaches -Principled Eclecticism / Post method	-Developing communicative competence	-Learning language through communication with target language; -Relate to real life situation; -Focus on language as well as learning process; -Relate to learners' personal experiences consisting as learning elements; -Correlate to classroom with outside classroom language learning. (Nunan, 1991) -Not encourage to use mother tongue in classroom process (Swain, 1985)	-Relatively inappropriate for different cultural contexts; -Relatively weak awareness of accuracy (Thornbury, 2006; Widdowson, 1990)
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## Appendix II: Teacher Interview Protocol

Theme A: What are the characteristics of gifted English Language Learners (GELL) in your class?

1. In general what do you consider to be the characteristics of a gifted student?
2. More specifically what do you consider to be the characteristics of a gifted English language learner?
3. How are these abilities demonstrated in the classroom?
  - What characteristics did he/she demonstrate that are different from other learners with different English language ability in the class?
4. What strategies do you use to identify students' different abilities in your classroom?
5. What additional information do you think should be considered when identifying potentially gifted English language learners?
  - What kind of achievements do you think should be used for identifying GELLs achieving excellence in English language learning e.g. test scores?
6. To what extent do you think innate ability, practice, or culture can influence students' learning and achievement?

Theme B: How do you teach English in your class?

1. I'm interested in how English is taught in China/Scotland. Would you please give examples of how you approach the following topics?
  - Grammar translation
  - Communicative language
  - Use of Chinese or English in your teaching process e.g. immersion
  - Cultural contexts for language
  - Language activities or grammar tests
  - Classroom materials e.g. real-life experiences or textbook
  - Correction of students' errors
  - Assessment
  - Anything else you would like to comment on
2. In what ways do you differentiate according to ability in your classroom?



3. Can you think of any gifted English language learners who fit the description above in your most recent class?

## Appendix III: Learner Interview Protocol

Theme A: English language ability and learning experience

1. Could you please tell me about your experience of English language learning?

How long do you spend on your English language learning?

How and where do you practice English?

- What practice do you do?

2. On a scale of 1-10, where 10 is excellent and 0 is very poor, where would you place:

- Your overall English language ability
- Productive skills (Speaking and writing);
- Receptive skills (Listening and reading)

3. What do you think is the role of the teacher in relation to English language learning?

- Grammar translation
- Communicative language
- Use of Chinese or English in the teaching process e.g. immersion
- Cultural contexts for language
- Language activities or grammar tests
- Classroom materials e.g. real-life experiences or textbook
- Correction of students' errors
- Assessment
- Anything else you would like to comment on

4. In what ways do you find your English language class helpful for your English language development?

- Learning environment
- Learning support

5. What challenges do you face when learning English?

6. In your opinion, what kind of achievement demonstrates excellence in English language learning?

7. What additional information do you think should be considered when identifying and providing for gifted English language learners?

8. To what extent, 1 being no influence and 5 being very high influence, do the opinions from others influence your English language learning?

Teachers

Parents

Peers

#### Theme B: English language performance

1. Do you share your teacher's assessment of your English language ability?  
If not, why not? Do you think your ability is higher/lower than their assessment

2. What was your last English language grade? Do you think it appropriately reflect your English language ability?

3. What skills do you think a gifted English language learner would exhibit?

## **Appendix IV: Parent Interview Protocol**

### Theme A: Gifted characteristics

1. What do you think it means to be gifted?
2. To what extent do you think innate ability, practice, or culture can influence students' learning and achievement?

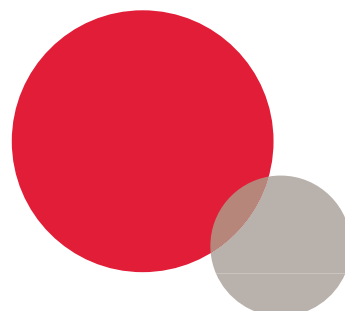
### Theme B: The role of parent in your son's/daughter's English language learning

- Do you think your son/daughter is a gifted English language learner?
- If yes what characteristics do they demonstrate that leads you to this opinion?
- How important do you think your influence is on your son/daughter's English language development?
- How do you support and encourage your son/daughter's English language development?
- How do you think parents can be effective in nurturing their son/daughter's English language development?

## Appendix V: IELTS 9-band Scale Descriptor

**IELTS™**

**IELTS 9-band scale**



<b>9</b>	<b>Expert user</b>	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
<b>8</b>	<b>Very good user</b>	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
<b>7</b>	<b>Good user</b>	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
<b>6</b>	<b>Competent user</b>	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
<b>5</b>	<b>Modest user</b>	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
<b>4</b>	<b>Limited user</b>	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
<b>3</b>	<b>Extremely limited user</b>	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
<b>2</b>	<b>Intermittent user</b>	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
<b>1</b>	<b>Non user</b>	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
<b>0</b>	<b>Did not attempt the test</b>	No assessable information provided.



[IELTSSessionals.com](http://IELTSSessionals.com)

## Appendix VI : Plain Language Statement for Teachers



College of Social  
Sciences

### Plain Language Statement

**Study title:** Gifted English Language Learners: A comparison between the cultural and practical experiences of Chinese students learning English in Scotland and in China

**Researcher:** Ruihua Chen, PhD in Education

**Supervisors:** Dr Margaret Sutherland and Dr Niamh Stack

You are being invited to take part in a research study to compare the educational, cultural and practical experiences of gifted Chinese English language learners in Scotland and in China. Before you decide if you wish to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like to know more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### Details

The purpose of this study is to compare the educational, cultural and practical experiences of gifted Chinese English language learners in Scotland and in China.

You are invited to participate in this research project because you are an English language teacher. I am interested in hearing about your experiences as an English language teacher in relation to gifted English language learners. The results of this research may be used to help researchers and educators understand how best to support and challenge gifted English language learners.

If you decide to take part in the interview, we will find a mutually convenient time to meet. During the interview I will ask you questions related to two themes:

- What are the characteristics of gifted English Language Learners in your class?
- How do you teach English in your class?

The interview may take 45 minutes and with your permission will be recorded by audiotaping.

## **Explanation**

All information which is collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. You will only be identified by an ID number and you will not be identified in any report or publication. Any information about your name and address will be removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

The results will be written up for my thesis and completed in October 2018 approximately. I will give a summary of my findings to all participants if requested. In addition to thesis that articles, conference papers, or books may be published. The data and recording will be stored in my personal laptop which will be password protected and locked in the cupboard in my own accommodation. All electronic or paper copies of data will be retained for 10 years after completion of the project after October 2018.

This project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee

For further Information please contact Ruihua Chen, PhD in Education, School of Education, University of Glasgow, email: [r.chen.1@reseach.gla.ac.uk](mailto:r.chen.1@reseach.gla.ac.uk)

Further information and where to pursue any complaint: this should be the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

## Appendix VII : Plain Language Statement for Learners



College of Social  
Sciences

### Plain Language Statement

**Study title:** Gifted English Language Learners: A comparison between the cultural and practical experiences of Chinese students learning English in Scotland and in China

**Researcher:** Ruihua Chen, PhD in Education

**Supervisors:** Dr Margaret Sutherland and Dr Niamh Stack

You are being invited to take part in a research study to compare the educational, cultural and practical experiences of gifted Chinese English language learners in Scotland and in China. Before you decide if you wish to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like to know more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### Details

The purpose of this study is to compare the educational, cultural and practical experiences of gifted Chinese English language learners in Scotland and in China.

You are invited to participate in this research project because you are an English speaking Chinese student, and you were identified as a gifted or potential highly able English language learner. I am interested in hearing about your experiences in this area. The results of this research may be used to help researchers and educators understand how best to support and challenge gifted English language learners.

If you decide to take part in the interview, we will find a mutually convenient time to meet. During the interview I will ask you questions related to two themes:

- English language ability and learning experience
- English language performance

The interview may take 45 minutes and with your permission will be recorded by audiotaping.



## **Explanation**

All information which is collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. You will only be identified by an ID number and you will not be identified in any report or publication. Any information about your name and address will be removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

The results will be written up for my thesis and completed in October 2018 approximately. I will give a summary of my findings to all participants if requested. In addition to thesis that articles, conference papers, or books may be published. The data and recording will be stored in my personal laptop which will be password protected and locked in the cupboard in my own accommodation. All electronic or paper copies of data will be retained for 10 years after completion of the project after October 2018.

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For further Information please contact Ruihua Chen, PhD in Education, School of Education, University of Glasgow, email: [r.chen.1@reseach.gla.ac.uk](mailto:r.chen.1@reseach.gla.ac.uk)

Further information and where to pursue any complaint: this should be the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

## Appendix VIII : Plain Language Statement for Parents



College of Social  
Sciences

### Plain Language Statement

**Study title:** Gifted English Language Learners: A comparison between the cultural and practical experiences of Chinese students learning English in Scotland and in China.

**Researcher:** Ruihua Chen, PhD in Education

**Supervisors:** Dr Margaret Sutherland and Dr Niamh Stack

You are being invited to take part in a research study to compare the educational, cultural and practical experiences of gifted Chinese English language learners in Scotland and in China. Before you decide if you wish to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like to know more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### Details

The purpose of this study is to compare the educational, cultural and practical experiences of gifted Chinese English language learners in Scotland and in China.

You are invited to participate in this research project because your son/daughter has been identified as gifted or potential highly able English language learner. I am interested in hearing about your experience as a parent of a gifted English language learner. The results of this research may be used to help researchers and educators understand how best to support and challenge gifted English language learners.

If you decide to take part in the interview, we will find a mutually convenient time to meet. During the interview I will ask you questions related to two themes:

- Gifted characteristics
- The role of you as a parent in your son's/daughter's English language learning

The interview may take 30 minutes and with your permission will be recorded by audiotaping.

### Explanation

All information which is collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. You will only be identified by an ID number and you will not be identified in any report or publication. Any information about your name and address will be removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

The results will be written up for my thesis and completed in October 2018 approximately. I will give a summary of my findings to all participants if requested. In addition to thesis that articles, conference papers, or books may be published. The data and recording will be stored in my personal laptop which will be password protected and locked in the cupboard in my own accommodation. All electronic or paper copies of data will be retained for 10 years after completion of the project after October 2018.

This project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee

For further Information please contact Ruihua Chen, PhD in Education, School of Education, University of Glasgow, email: [r.chen.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:r.chen.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

Further information and where to pursue any complaint: this should be the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

## Appendix IX : Plain Language Statement for Parents (Chinese Version)



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### 研究陈述申明

研究课题：有天赋的英语语言学习者：对比在苏格兰和在中国学习英语的中国学生的教育文化和实践经验

研究者：陈瑞华，教育学博士生

博士导师：博士 Margaret Sutherland 和 博士 Niamh Stack

我有幸邀请您参与这次调查：研究有天赋的英语语言学习的中国学生，通过对比在苏格兰和在中国学习英语的教育文化与实践经验。在您决定参与此次调查之前，了解清楚这个研究的意义，研究的内容，对您来说是非常重要的。请花几分钟时间，认真阅读接下来的内容，如果您有需要，也可以和他人讨论一下。如果您有任何不清楚的地方，或者想知道更多的信息，请及时与我交流。

感谢您的耐心阅读。

### 具体细节

这次研究的目的是为了研究有天赋的英语语言学习的中国学生，通过对比在苏格兰和在中国学习英语的教育文化与实践经验。

邀请您参与此次调查，我很想了解您作为学生家长，对于有潜力的或者有天赋英语学生的英语学习的看法。这次调查的结果能帮助研究者更好地了解有天赋的英语学生，以及怎样帮助有潜力的英语学生在英语学习上有更好的表现。

我邀请您参加此次调查是因为你的子女被评定为有潜力的英语学习者。我相信您对于在怎样支持和鼓励您子女的英语学习，发现他们的英语学习天赋方面是很有经验的。

如果您决定参与此次调查，我会问您关于两个方面的内容。内容包括：

- 英语学习天赋的特征
- 您在您子女的英语学习中所起到的作用

我会积极配合您的时间安排此次访谈。此次访谈会被录音，访谈时间大约在 30 分钟左右。

## 说明

所有关于您的信息都是被严格保密的。您在我的研究报告中会被描述为特定的号码，您将不会在任何报告或者文章中被辨认出来。所有关于您的信息如姓名，地址都将被删除，您也不会从中被辨认出来。

请注意对于保密性的保证将会被严格的遵守。除非发现有不法行为或者潜在的危害，在这种情况下学校有责任联系相关部门予以关注。

此次调查将会被记录在我的博士毕业论文中，完成时间预计在 2018 年 10 月份左右。如果您需要，我会给您一份调查结果的摘要。此次调查结果可能会发表在博士论文，学术期刊，研讨会记录，或者书籍中。所有的数据会被储存在我的私人笔记本电脑中，而这些数据和信息会有密码保护，并且我会将电脑锁在我的住所。所有的数据备份将会被保留直到研究结束后的 10 年。

这次调查研究已经通过学校研究道德规范委员会的审核。

如果您需要了解关于此次研究的更多信息，请联系我，我的电子邮箱：  
[r.chen.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:r.chen.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

如果您需要投诉建议，请联系社会科学院研究道德规范委员会工作人员，Muir Houston 先生，电子邮箱：Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

## Appendix X: Consent Form



College of Social  
Sciences

### Consent Form

**Title of Project:** Gifted English Language Learners: A comparison between the cultural and practical experiences of Chinese students learning English in Scotland and in China

**Researcher:** Ruihua Chen, PhD in Education

**Supervisors:** Dr Margaret Sutherland and Dr Niamh Stack

1 I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3 I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.

(I acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to participants for verification.)

4 I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

5 All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

6 The material will be retained in secure storage for 10 years after completion of the project.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

Name of Participant ..... Signature .....

Date .....

Name of Researcher ..... Signature .....

Date .....

End of consent form .....

## Appendix XI: Consent Form (Chinese Version)



University  
of Glasgow

College of Social  
Sciences

### 确 认 信

研究课题：有天赋的英语语言学习者：对比在苏格兰和在中国学习英语的中国学生的教育文化和实践经验

研究者：陈瑞华，教育学博士生

博士生导师：博士 Margaret Sutherland 和 博士 Niamh Stack

① 我确认我已经阅读并理解关于这次调查的陈述申明，并且询问了不清楚的内容。

② 我确认自愿参加此次调查，并了解我能无条件随时退出此次调查。

③ 我同意此次访谈被录音。(我对于研究者把访谈内容副本交回于我予以审核表示感谢)

④ 我确认所有关于个人姓名和资料都是被匿名保护的

⑤ 我同意所有的数据备份将会被保留直到研究结束后的 10 年。

我同意参加此次调查研究 ☐

我不同意参加此次调查研究 ☐

参与者姓名..... 签  
字 .....

日期 .....

调查者姓名 ..... 签  
字 .....

日期 .....

同意书结束.....



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