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Exploring English Language Learning Autonomy among Gifted Secondary School Students in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract:
This paper investigated gifted secondary school students' English language learning autonomy, addressing the main research question: "What are the levels of language learning autonomy among gifted secondary school students?" The theoretical significance of the current study is represented in its potential to make significant contributions to the field of language learning and gifted education. It aimed to measure gifted students' English language learning autonomy in terms of technical, psychological, philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions. The findings of this study, practically and theoretically, are expected to make significant contributions to the field of language learning and gifted education. The participants of the study were 64 gifted secondary school female students enrolled in gifted schools in Al-Madinah, Saudi Arabia. To measure the level of learners' autonomy, a scale was used. The scale covers the four dimensions of autonomy with a total of fifty-two items. The findings revealed that, on average, the students demonstrated a high level of autonomy in all four dimensions (Mean = 113.50). The results of the study can be pedagogically contributive to programs similar to the study's context with regard to learner autonomy awareness and learner autonomy development. The study recommended that the study scale should be used in future research to measure the effectiveness of different teaching methods in developing language learner autonomy as a pre- and post-research tool.

Keywords: English language learners, gifted students, learners' autonomy

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Introduction

The prosperity and advancement of nations depend significantly on their human capital, particularly on gifted individuals who contribute substantially to national development. In Saudi Arabia, there is growing recognition of this principle, with increasing emphasis on identifying, nurturing, and developing talented students. The Saudi Ministry of Education (Mawhiba, 2025) defines gifted students as those exhibiting exceptional abilities or outstanding performance compared to their peers in valued domains such as intellectual aptitude, creative thinking, academic achievement, and specialized skills. These exceptional learners require customized educational services that go beyond standard school curricula. This strategic focus aligns with Saudi Vision 2030, as noted by Alammari (2022), supporting both sustainable development and the kingdom's broader economic goals. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education is implementing significant educational reforms (Mawhiba, 2025) that emphasize innovation in advanced technologies and entrepreneurship, aiming to foster an intellectual and creative society that can drive economic growth and diversification in line with the Vision's objectives.

To achieve these goals, the gifted students would require the language and communication skills that enable them to learn and acquire knowledge from various forms of resources available. English language skills would allow them to read and synthesize the materials and later discuss them with their peers and teachers. English language skills should prepare them for their advanced learning, and they should also be developed with the level of content they acquire (Do & Nguyen, 2021). Thus, gifted students must be exposed to language learning skills and activities, which are available in many forms and platforms in the world of academics (Zakaria et al., 2021).

Moreover, today's logic invites us to equip young people, including gifted students, with the skills of learning autonomy, which is the basis for lifelong learning, because they do not need to collect and accumulate knowledge as much as they need to acquire sustainable skills. Aljughaiman et al. (2012) emphasized that currently, the autonomy of learning is one of the basic cognitive goals not only for gifted students but for all students. Wulandari (2017) noted that independent learning skills need training so that students can become individuals who can develop, improve, and regenerate their knowledge throughout their lives.

Consequently, this study is carried out to investigate the level of gifted students' English language learning autonomy based on the four aspects of learner autonomy (technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions). The findings of this study, practically and theoretically, are expected to make significant contributions to the field of language learning and gifted education. Additionally, the results will inform the development of more effective language learning programs for gifted students. The study further provides valuable insights into the English language learning autonomy levels among gifted students, which provides the basis for organizing gifted students' language learning. Moreover, the results of the study provide current evidence of gifted Saudi secondary school students' English learning autonomy levels. In light of these aims, the following questions were formulated: What are the levels of language learning autonomy among gifted secondary school students? What are the levels of language learning technical autonomy among gifted secondary school students? What are the levels of language learning psychological autonomy among gifted secondary school students? What are the levels of language learning political-philosophical autonomy among gifted secondary school students? What are the levels of language learning sociocultural autonomy among gifted secondary school students?

Literature Review

Gifted Students

Gifted students are regarded as valuable assets to the nation and should be allocated appropriate investments. North and Griffiths (2019) asserted that the documented evidence supports the notion that gifted students possess the capacity to make valuable and substantial contributions to our society and economy through their personal growth and development. Siegle (2008) added that the progress of countries relies on the success of their gifted and talented individuals, and the provision of educational opportunities for gifted and creative students is one of the top priorities in advanced nations. In recent years, researchers have shown an increasing interest in describing, identifying, and nurturing talented students.

However, there is no global consensus on the definition of the term 'gifted,' and the concept of talent is a contentious issue. Recently, there has been a proposal by Subotnik et al. (2011) to define giftedness more comprehensively. This definition emphasizes the significance of high performance in specific domains, developmental trajectories, and cognitive and psychosocial variables. Furthermore, Sternberg and Grigorenko (2007) have provided their definition of gifted students as individuals who possess a well-integrated set of abilities that are crucial for achieving success in life. These abilities encompass analytical, creative, and practical skills.

There is no doubt that gifted students have different educational needs than their counterparts, which cannot be met through curricula designed for their non-gifted peers. Davis et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of acknowledging the educational requirements of gifted students and providing them with suitable support, as failing to do so may impede their complete educational growth and advancement. Additionally, gifted education programs should provide a range of educational provisions for gifted students who possess diverse abilities, knowledge, and skills in order to leverage their strengths and address their needs (El-Demerdash, 2010). The approach to working with gifted students in the field of gifted education must be based on several core principles, including valuing individuality, fostering independence and responsibility, promoting holistic development and accelerated progress in the learning process, cultivating creativity, employing advanced forms of learning, utilizing cooperative learning methods, and taking into consideration special abilities and strong interests (David et al., 2023).

Consequently, the current study explores gifted secondary school students' English language learning autonomy levels in order to provide information for designing gifted programs that include and foster the above-mentioned core principles.

Gifted Students and English Language Learning

STEM subjects have been the primary area of emphasis in various gifted programs worldwide (Tan et al., 2020). Correspondingly, Alfaiz et al. (2022) and Al Qarni (2010) contended that despite the advancements in recognizing gifted education in Saudi Arabia and implementing regulations to identify and support gifted students in all disciplines, gifted education has predominantly concentrated on STEM subjects exclusively. Supporting gifted students in the field of STEM holds great importance. However, Zakaria et al. (2021) asserted that it is imperative that gifted students possess language and communication skills that facilitate their ability to assimilate and acquire knowledge from diverse sources readily available to them. It is equally crucial to provide support to gifted students in various areas of learning and subjects, such as the English language, which is the primary focus of this particular study.

It is noteworthy that throughout the current century, the English language has progressively gained dominance in numerous significant domains, including international politics, academia, scientific research, and diplomatic endeavors (Althobaiti, 2020). Learning the English language holds immense importance for gifted students due to its potential to provide them with a distinct advantage in comprehending and mastering STEM subjects, as well as all other academic disciplines. Language proficiency can significantly enhance their ability to effectively read, comprehend, and critically analyze various forms of information. Moreover, the acquisition of language skills enables these exceptional students to engage in meaningful discussions and synthesize complex materials with their peers and educators. It is essential to acknowledge the vital role that language learning plays in supporting gifted students' completion of tasks and assignments that necessitate advanced linguistic abilities. Adequate language skills not only prepare these students for their advanced educational journey but must also progress in tandem with their expanding knowledge base. Hence, it is imperative to expose gifted students to a diverse range of language learning opportunities and resources that are readily available within the academic realm (Zakaria et al., 2021).

The recognition of the importance of acquiring proficiency in the English language is highly acknowledged by the people of Saudi Arabia. This acknowledgment stems from the effects of globalization, the expansion of technological advancements, and the growth of the economy in various sectors, all of which have rendered English a crucial language within the country (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). The acquisition of English is viewed as a prerequisite for pursuing higher education, engaging in international communication, and fostering business development. Furthermore, the attainment of English Language Certificate qualifications has become a mandatory requirement for most professions in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the Saudi government is placing significant emphasis on enhancing the English proficiency of its citizens, investing heavily in scholarships that facilitate education in English-speaking countries. Additionally, numerous Saudi learners have enrolled in various English institutions across the nation, while many Saudi parents are expending substantial financial resources to provide their children with education in English-speaking countries (Rahman, 2011).

Despite the recognized importance of English language proficiency in Saudi Arabia, both regular and gifted learners continue to face significant educational barriers, particularly regarding instructional quality and the failure to address diverse learning needs (Alfares, 2024). The Saudi education system presents several systemic challenges that disproportionately affect gifted English language learners. Al-Tamimi (2019) identifies a critical limitation in teachers' rigid adherence to prescribed curricula, which severely restricts their ability to modify instructional approaches to meet individual student needs. Compounding this issue, Alfaiz et al. (2022) demonstrate that most English teachers lack specialized training to work with gifted learners, as Saudi teacher preparation programs focus exclusively on typical student populations. This combination of inflexible curricula and inadequate teacher training creates an educational environment particularly ill-suited for gifted students, often resulting in negative academic and psychological outcomes. As Winebrenner and Brulles (2012) document, these systemic failures frequently lead to gifted students experiencing underachievement, emotional distress (including anxiety and feelings of isolation), decreased motivation, and overall dissatisfaction with their learning experiences.

Therefore, it is imperative to adequately address students' educational needs, as their engagement will be enhanced when course curricula and English lessons are customized to their individual interests, requirements, and current level of English proficiency (VanTassel-Baska and

Brown 2009). The task of accommodating the needs of English language learners, particularly those with special requirements such as gifted students, poses a significant challenge in numerous countries at present (Do & Nguyen, 2021). As a result, the present study aims to examine the levels of autonomy of gifted students in language learning. Since, in today's language learning landscape, the scope extends beyond conventional textbooks and teaching materials. With the ever-expanding options and advancements in technology, gifted students have the potential to independently explore the vast realm of the internet to find materials that align with their interests. This is particularly relevant as many gifted students possess an inherent drive to seek out learning opportunities that extend beyond the standard curriculum.

Language Learning Autonomy

The advent of the new world has presented novel challenges and distinct demands for individuals within society. Gholami (2016) asserts that these challenges primarily encompass technological advancements, the global expansion following the Second World War, diverse educational requirements, the growing student population in schools and universities, and the evolution of educational systems. Nguyen and Habok (2021) further emphasize that learning is no longer confined to traditional classroom settings but can occur at any time and place as desired by learners. Consequently, the pursuit of autonomy as an educational objective has gained significant attention, as it holds the promise of facilitating lifelong learning. Additionally, Alzubi and Singh (2017) contend that education in the 21st century should prioritize communication, autonomy, and students' control over their learning, as well as foster increased innovation and creativity. Furthermore, studies focusing on the necessary skills for gifted students' education consistently highlight the importance of learning autonomy (Tortop, 2015).

The concept of learning autonomy in foreign language teaching and learning has long been a prominent subject of interest. However, it should be noted that the concept of language learning autonomy does not have a single definitive definition due to its multifaceted and complex nature. The term "learner autonomy" was initially introduced by Holec in 1981, and many researchers in this field refer to Holec's conceptualization of autonomy (Klimas, 2017). According to Holec (1981; 3, as cited in Alzubi and Singh, 2017), learner autonomy is defined as the "ability to take charge of one's learning." Holec further elaborates on this definition by emphasizing the learner's responsibility for all decisions related to their learning, including setting objectives, determining content and progression, selecting methods and techniques, monitoring the learning process (such as pace, timing, and location), and evaluating acquired knowledge.

Benson (1997) also defines autonomy as self-evaluation and the internal capacity of learners to manage their work (as cited in Gholami, 2016). Benson sees autonomous learners as individuals who determine their directions, states, and contexts in the learning process, making them more accountable for their learning (Butt et al., 2020). Benson further provides three definitions of language learning autonomy, including the act of learning on one's own and the technical ability to do so, the internal psychological capacity to self-direct one's learning, and control over the content and processes of one's learning (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2021). Benson's definitions aim to identify three components of learner autonomy, namely technical, psychological, and political dimensions, with Oxford's (2003) extension of the sociocultural dimension. These four dimensions were used as a conceptual framework of language learning autonomy in the present study.

The initial dimension, technical autonomy, is characterized by students learning a language independently, without the assistance of a teacher, and outside of the classroom. It also pertains to the students' ability to manage their learning, as well as the practical skills they acquire through autonomous learning (Gholami, 2016). Technical autonomy is of utmost importance for secondary school students, who are the focus of this study, as they are on the verge of transitioning into autonomous professionals beyond the confines of the educational environment. (Carcamo & Perez, 2022). According to Melvina et al. (2021), technical autonomy comprises two sub-dimensions: behavioral autonomy and situational autonomy. Behavioral autonomy involves the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as goal-setting, planning, and monitoring, to take charge of one's learning. Situational autonomy, on the other hand, refers to the ability to take control of one's learning in situations where independent learning is necessary (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2021).

Psychological autonomy, as a crucial aspect of language learning autonomy, pertains to the individual learner's ability to assume greater responsibility for their learning (Benson, 1997, p. 19, as cited in Gholami, 2016). This dimension can be further categorized into three sub-dimensions: motivational, metacognitive, and affective (Murase, 2015). The motivational sub-dimension encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation towards learning English, the capacity to employ effective strategies for self-motivation, and the acknowledgment of personal accountability for success or failure in language acquisition (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2021). It encompasses the learner's desires, sense of responsibility, willingness, and agency (Oxford, 2003). On the other hand, the metacognitive sub-dimension refers to the metacognitive knowledge that enables students to effectively utilize metacognitive strategies. It involves understanding one's own learning needs, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses, thereby enabling learners to take control of their learning process (Melvina et al., 2021). Lastly, the affective sub-dimension involves the capacity to regulate one's learning by recognizing and managing affective states such as anxiety, self-esteem, and other emotions that may impact language learning (Melvina et al., 2021).

The concept of **political** autonomy, as the third dimension, encompasses both group and individual autonomy, as stated by Murase (2015). Group autonomy pertains to the teacher's authority and the role of parents or government policies as other forms of authority. On the other hand, individual autonomy refers to the learners' ability to make decisions regarding certain aspects of their learning, such as content, goals, and objectives in learning English. Furthermore, the political dimension is closely linked to the notion of freedom in learning. Negative freedom denotes a situation where students have the liberty to study based on their preferences without any restrictions, while positive freedom implies that students can control their learning freely with the support and cooperation of teachers or other authorities, as explained by Melvina et al. (2021).

Sociocultural autonomy, the fourth dimension, pertains to the contextual environment in which individuals engage in educational experiences. While autonomy is a universally recognized concept, its value varies across different regions, resulting in diverse interpretations depending on the specific context (Carcamo & Perez, 2022). The perception of autonomy is influenced by the cultural perspectives on learning, which can differ between Eastern and Western cultures due to factors such as national identity or expected roles within the classroom (Chirkov, 2007).

Consequently, students' inclination towards autonomy is affected, making it crucial to consider these cultural influences when assessing student autonomy levels. This dimension encompasses two primary sub-dimensions: social-interactive and cultural. The social-interactive sub-dimension draws from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Murase, 2015), emphasizing the significance of social interaction in fostering learner autonomy. Through interactions with teachers and peers, students develop their autonomy in language learning. On the other hand, the cultural sub-dimension focuses on the social aspects of learner autonomy, encompassing national or ethnic cultural influences (Melvina et al., 2021).

Method

This study aimed to explore the English language learning autonomy of gifted secondary school students in Saudi Arabia. The study adopts a quantitative method to measure the levels of English language learning autonomy of gifted secondary school students. Accordingly, this study was designed as a survey research with data collected through a questionnaire. Students' perceptions regarding their levels of English language learning autonomy were collected using a questionnaire, and the study's data were analyzed using SPSS.

Participants

The study population is composed of all gifted students at the secondary level in Medina, Saudi Arabia. According to the Department of Capacity Development in the General Directorate of Education in the Medina region, it consists of a total of 383 students in the academic year 2024-2025. The study followed a non-probability sampling design named voluntary response sampling technique, in which participants volunteer to be part of the research. The study sample consisted of 64 talented female students in the 24th Secondary School in Medina (n = 64), with members ranging in age from 14 to 16 years. This constitutes 8.35% of the study population and is an acceptable percentage in educational research and studies.

Instrument

The study utilized a scale to measure the levels of English language learners' autonomy among gifted secondary school students. The scale is adopted and adapted from the Measuring Instrument for Language Learner Autonomy (MILLA), originally developed by Murase (2015). Murase (2015) reconceptualized Benson’s (1997) and Oxford’s (2003) learner autonomy and developed a questionnaire to assess learner autonomy consisting of four interrelated dimensions. MILLA comprises four dimensions of learner autonomy: technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions.

The researcher has made some adjustments and deleted some items to adapt the tool to the study's objectives, namely, to measure the levels of language learning autonomy among gifted students at the secondary level. She also made sure to select items that fit the nature of the study sample and the context of its application in Saudi Arabia. The researcher also applied the 4-point Likert scale instead of the 5-point one adopted by Murase (2015). Students choose their degree of agreement with the phrases to indicate that they possess the skills mentioned for the autonomy of learning English (4 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Disagree, 2 = Agree, 1 = Strongly Agree). The researcher deliberately selected the 4-point rather than the 5-point Likert scale to avoid the possibility that members of the sample might not understand the midpoint of neutrality. In addition, the researcher's concern is about the need for the student to make the decision and not to remain

impartial with regard to the extent to which she possesses autonomy skills. Based on this, the researcher worked on a number of procedures to ascertain the instrument's reliability once again after the amendment.

After arriving at the initial version of the scale (69 items), the instrument was subjected to evaluation by a group of arbitrators. According to their comments, some items of the scale had been deleted, similar items had been merged, and several items had been paraphrased. Next, the scale was piloted with a group of students (N=12) with the aim of calculating the internal consistency of the scale items using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to calculate the degree of each item in the dimension and the overall degree of the dimension. The results have shown that the correlation factor values between the grades of each item and the overall degree of dimension to which it belongs range from 0.59 to 0.94, which is statistically significant at a level of 0.05. That is, the items are considered to be valid and internally consistent to measure what they are designed to measure.

The pilot study further aimed to measure the construct validity of the scale dimensions to show the extent to which each of the dimensions is related to the overall degree of the scale using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The results revealed that the correlation values between the grades of each dimension and the overall score of the scale range from 0.74 to 0.89, which are statistically significant at 0.05. Therefore, the dimensions are valid and consistent to measure what they are designed to measure.

In addition, the pilot study aimed to calculate the reliability of the scale using Cronbach's alpha. The results showed that the Alpha Cronbach coefficient for all dimensions of the scale is between 0.92 and 0.75, which are high, and the Alpha Cronbach coefficient for the scale as a whole is 0.91. This revealed that the study tool is highly reliable. Consequently, the researcher is confident in the scale's validity and reliability to test the study hypotheses and answer its questions. Thus, the study tool is ready to be applied to the original study sample.

Procedures

A number of ethical considerations were ensured in the current study. The method and the tools of the study were approved to ensure their compliance with the standards for conducting human studies. The researchers sent a consent letter to the participants and their guardians. This letter included the purpose and methodology of the study, as well as assurances to the participants regarding respect for their privacy, the confidentiality of their information, and the restriction of its use solely for scientific research purposes. The researchers further ensured that the participants' personal information, such as their names, remained confidential and provided them with the option to omit such details if they chose. The scale of the study was distributed during the first term of the academic year 2024-2025 to gifted secondary school students online using Google Forms. Students were instructed to answer and submit their responses within two days. Responses were then collected and analyzed using the SPSS program. The means for each dimension and the standard deviation were calculated in the analysis process.

Results

The results are organized into five sections: (a) the levels of language learning autonomy among gifted secondary school students, (b) the levels of language learning technical autonomy among gifted secondary school students, (c) the levels of language learning psychological autonomy among gifted secondary school students, (d) the levels of language learning political-

philosophical autonomy among gifted secondary school students, and (e) the levels of language learning sociocultural autonomy among gifted secondary school students.

Language Learning Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table One shows the participants' responses to the first question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning autonomy is 113.5. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. The standard deviation of 41.654 indicates a moderate degree of variability among respondents.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the autonomy of English language learning*

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
41.654	113.50	52	32

Language Learning Technical Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table Two shows the participants' responses to the second question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning technical autonomy is 41.63. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. A value of 16.133 for the standard deviation means that individual scores typically vary by about 16.13 points from the mean.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the technical autonomy of English language learning*

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
16.133	41.63	20	32

Language Learning Psychological Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table Three shows the participants' responses to the third question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning psychological autonomy is 23.47. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. A value of 7.750 for the standard deviation means that while there is some diversity in responses, the scores are relatively clustered around the mean.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the psychological autonomy of English language learning*

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
7.750	23.47	10	32

Language Learning and Political-Philosophical Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table Four shows the participants' responses to the fourth question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning political-philosophical autonomy is 28.38. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. A value of 13.569 for the standard deviation means that while there is some diversity in responses, the scores are relatively clustered around the mean.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the political-philosophical autonomy of English language learning*

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
13.569	28.38	14	32

Language Learning and Sociocultural Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table Five shows the participants' responses to the fifth question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning sociocultural autonomy is 18.06. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. A value of 6.584 for the standard deviation means that while there is some diversity in responses, the scores are relatively clustered around the mean.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the sociocultural autonomy of English language learning

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
6.584	18.06	8	32

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Discussion

The questions of the study aimed to identify the levels of English language learners' autonomy among gifted secondary school students. The questions investigated language learners' autonomy as a whole, and in addition, they focused on measuring the levels of the four dimensions of autonomy (technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural). The findings have revealed that the levels of English language learners' autonomy among gifted secondary school students are significantly high. Furthermore, the results showed that the levels of gifted secondary school students' language learning autonomy in all four dimensions are significantly high as well.

Despite the well-documented constraints in Saudi Arabia's English education system - including rigid curricula, insufficient teacher training for gifted learners, and limited differentiation (Al-Tamimi, 2019; Alfaiz et al., 2022) – the research results indicated that gifted Saudi students demonstrate surprisingly high levels of autonomy in language learning, which may be attributed to several understudied compensatory factors. These students likely develop self-regulated learning strategies as an adaptive response to unchallenging classroom environments (Zimmerman, 2002), while also leveraging digital resources like language apps and online courses to circumvent traditional instructional limitations. Furthermore, cultural and familial support for academic achievement may foster independent learning habits, as families often encourage extracurricular English study through private tutors or international programs. Peer collaboration through study groups and online communities, combined with gifted students' intrinsic motivation for mastery (North & Griffiths, 2019), creates alternative pathways for autonomous learning despite systemic barriers. This emergent autonomy suggests that while the education system may not actively promote autonomous learning, gifted students develop these competencies through necessity and opportunity outside formal classroom structures.

The findings are supported by previous research projects and studies that have already investigated the English language learners' autonomy among gifted secondary school students. For instance, Reis (2011) investigated self-regulated learning in gifted students. This study explores self-regulated learning (SRL) among gifted students, which aligns with the technical dimension (learning strategies) and the psychological dimension (motivation and self-regulation). The study reveals that gifted students exhibit higher levels of SRL, which contributes to their high levels of autonomy in learning. However, the political-philosophical and sociocultural dimensions were not explicitly addressed in this study. Similarly, Benson (2008) studied autonomy among students transitioning from school to university, including gifted students. It addresses the technical dimension (learning strategies), the psychological dimension (self-regulation), the political-philosophical dimension (learner control), and the sociocultural dimension (adaptation to new environments). The study reveals that autonomy levels vary based on individual and contextual factors. The study further revealed that gifted students exhibit higher levels of autonomy, particularly in self-regulation and adaptability. In a similar vein, Smith (2008) explored learner autonomy in gifted language, focusing on the technical dimension (advanced language learning strategies), the psychological dimension (motivation and self-efficacy), the political-philosophical dimension (learner agency), and the sociocultural dimension (cultural influences). The study reveals that gifted language learners exhibit high levels of autonomy and that gifted language learners demonstrate advanced autonomy, particularly in self-directed learning and cultural adaptability.

Conclusion

This paper presented a valuable investigation into the English language learning autonomy of gifted secondary school students in Saudi Arabia, with a focus on the technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions of autonomy. The study is theoretically significant as it contributes to both the fields of language learning and gifted education, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia, where research on gifted students' language learning autonomy may be limited. A scale consisting of 52 items was used to assess the four dimensions of autonomy. This tool allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the students' autonomy levels. The results indicated that the students exhibited a high level of autonomy across all four dimensions. This suggests that gifted students in this context are capable of self-directed learning and possess the skills and motivation necessary for autonomous language learning. The study was limited to female gifted students at the secondary school in Al-Madinah, Saudi Arabia. The study's findings can inform the design of educational programs aimed at fostering learner autonomy, particularly in similar contexts. It emphasizes the importance of raising awareness about learner autonomy and developing strategies to enhance it. The study recommends using the developed scale in future research to evaluate the effectiveness of various teaching methods in promoting language learner autonomy. It suggests employing the scale as both a pre- and post-research tool to measure changes in autonomy levels over time. The study adds to the understanding of how gifted students approach language learning autonomously, bridging the gap between gifted education and language learning research. The scale developed in this study can serve as a valuable tool for educators and researchers to assess and promote learner autonomy in diverse educational settings. Future research could expand to include non-gifted students or other regions to provide a broader perspective. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to observe how autonomy develops over time and how it is influenced by different teaching methods or interventions.

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