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A starting proposal for identifying potential of giftedness in verbal domain

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Highlights:

- This study proposes an initial step toward identifying potential for special talent in the verbal domain.
- İdentification must be specific to the domain.
- Talent development is a dynamic process, and the development of identified potential should be monitored through dynamic assessments.
- The study addresses the relationship between potential and performance in terms of interaction, development, and maturation.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to develop a model for identifying potentially gifted individuals. Because the concept of giftedness varies across disciplines, cultures, and historical periods, there is a need for multiple definitions, identification methods, educational strategies, and assessment models. Drawing on the Differential Giftedness and Talent Theory, which views development as a key factor, this study presents a model aimed at early detection of giftedness potential. According to this theory, superior intelligence is innate and can appear across many domains, while superior talent develops in specific areas through personal and environmental interactions. Both intelligence and talent are usually measured relative to the top 10% of a reference group, with chance as a factor that can influence all variables involved. Building on these ideas, the study introduces assessment tools and original sample items to help identify potential giftedness, especially in the verbal domain. These tools include prototype questions for verbal reasoning, verbal ability, and memory. By providing both a theoretical framework and practical tools, this study seeks to improve field-specific identification methods, advancing educational practices and academic understanding of giftedness.

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1. Introduction

Identification is one of the most critical dimensions in the field of gifted education. This is because supporting and evaluating gifted individuals must align closely with the identification phase. The procedures implemented during identification can trigger ripple effects across the entire educational model. When the identification process is carefully designed and integrated with other components, it can greatly enhance the likelihood that gifted individuals will transform their potential into performance. Although there is general agreement on the necessity of identifying gifted individuals, several points remain contested. Issues such as the diagnostic approach, theoretical framework, test design, and measurement tools used are among the areas where disagreements arise. Ultimately, the way giftedness is conceptualized and defined naturally shapes these variations in identification practices (Mcintosh & Dixon, 2005).

There are several key concepts involved in identifying gifted individuals. Confusion among these concepts is one of the main reasons for disagreements about diagnosis. The diagnostic approach is an example of the first of these concepts. In the identification process, an individual's capacity may be assessed, and a tailored educational program designed. This is called the individual-based approach, while in the program-based approach, an educational program is first designed, and then individuals suited to that program are identified (Heller & Schofield, 2008). Another concept, the diagnostic method, may involve criterion-based, norm-based, or sample-based identification. In the first, individuals who meet established performance criteria are considered gifted; in the second, individuals are identified by comparison to the average of a standardized norm group; and in the third, only those who rank highest among applicants to a program are considered gifted (Karadağ, 2016). Another important aspect is the use of measurement and evaluation tools. A variety of instruments—such as intelligence, achievement, aptitude, and creativity tests, as well as rating scales—may be employed to identify gifted individuals (Kirişçi & Demirel-Dingeç, 2024). A further issue concerns whether diagnosis can be achieved through a single tool. Moore (1992) recommended comprehensive evaluation using multiple tools, while Lohman and Foley Nicpon (2012) similarly argued for the use of multiple assessments and instruments. The timing of diagnosis is another critical factor. Questions such as the most appropriate age for diagnosis, whether it should occur once or be repeated, and whether it should be process-based all directly influence diagnostic timing. Ultimately, the key factor shaping all of these sub-concepts is how giftedness itself is defined and recognized.

Identification practices in Türkiye and around the world differ depending on how giftedness is defined, the structure of the education system, and society's overall perspective on giftedness. Differences also exist regarding the appropriate timing and methods of identification (Rasheed, 2020). For instance, the National Association for Gifted Children in the United States recommends a multifaceted and comprehensive approach, emphasizing the use of multiple criteria and dynamic assessments across various domains of giftedness (NAGC, 2023). Delgado et al. (2025) further argued that identification should prioritize methods focusing on general cognitive abilities rather than relying solely on IQ scores or academic achievement. Moreover, states across the United States employ diverse methods and tools in the identification process (Helal et al., 2025). The adoption of standardized scales at the state level is seen as beneficial for uncovering the actual potential of students within a given region (Tran et al., 2021). Acar and colleagues (2016) categorized identification methods into two broad groups: Performance-based methods relying on test scores and non-performance-based methods utilizing alternative tools.

A report prepared by the Parliamentary Research Commission on the identification of gifted children in Türkiye emphasized the need to recognize different areas of talent at an early stage and to employ diverse tools in the identification process (GNAT, 2012). Similarly, the Ministry of National Education's 2013–2017 Strategy and Implementation Plan highlighted the importance of nationwide diagnostic models that can be expanded and embedded within sustainable state policies (MNE, 2013). Güçyeter (2016), in reviewing studies on the identification of gifted individuals in Türkiye, noted that much of the research has focused on adapting intelligence and talent measurement tools. However, such adaptation studies often face challenges related to cultural relevance. This limitation is evident when diagnostic models are transferred wholesale, much like the tools themselves. Consequently, there is a pressing need for diverse diagnostic models capable of exploring a range of talent potentials across societies, including Türkiye. While intelligence scales remain the most commonly used method for identification in Türkiye, other approaches include talent assessments in entrance exams for conservatories and achievement tests administered by some after-school programs. Nonetheless, in order for gifted individuals to exercise their legal rights—such as access to supportive education in schools affiliated with the Ministry of National

Education—evaluation reports issued by Guidance and Research Centers are decisive (Avcı-Doğan & Tamul, 2024). In the identification procedure for Science and Art Centers, a prominent institution serving gifted students, Gifted individuals are identified in the domains of general intellectual ability, art, and music, with psychometric tools and individual assessment practices employed for evaluation (MNE, 2025). Karadağ (2016) further argues that alternative measurement tools are required to advance the identification of giftedness in Türkiye.

Identifying gifted individuals requires assessments tailored to specific domains beyond general ability, supported by standardized, norm-referenced, validated, and reliability-tested instruments (Şahin & Zorlu, 2022). This study proposes a model for identifying potential of giftedness through dynamic assessments, drawing on Gagné's (2003) perspective on giftedness. Such an approach may contribute to the literature by offering a new initial phase of diagnosis grounded in the The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) framework. Moreover, the quality of measurement tools aligned with the diagnostic purpose or talent domain is regarded as critical for accurate identification (Güçyeter, 2016). In Türkiye, adaptation studies dominate field-specific research on gifted identification, particularly in the numerical domain (Erdoğan, 2006; Güven, 1997; Özyaprak, 2006). Along with these, tests such as WISC III and WAIS III, which are used in Turkey to measure verbal intelligence, are foreign in origin and may contain various adaptation problems (Salman et al., 2017). The Kent E-G-Y test, like these tests, is of foreign origin and is a measure used in Turkey based on verbal performance (Karadağ & Baştuğ, 2018). Based on a literature review and the author's implicit theories derived from approximately 20 years of experience in the field, the proposal presented in this study stands out as an alternative for identifying potential talent in the verbal domain specifically. This situation creates the misconception that giftedness can only be observed in certain areas. However, as mentioned in the DMGT theory, the giftedness and talent can be observed in different areas. Studies conducted in verbal areas to identify this potential are limited. To clarify the model, it has been operationalized with a focus on potential verbal abilities, including proposed tools and specific sample item types. After this diagnostic stage, identified students could be grouped homogeneously in verbal domains, such as Turkish language classes. They could also receive remedial instruction in specialized classrooms. Where such arrangements are not feasible, remedial instruction rooms could provide targeted support in students' areas of strength. The theoretical framework, content, and potential technical specifications of the test model developed for this purpose are detailed below.

2. A Model Proposal for Identifying Potential of Giftedness

This study discusses the concepts of giftedness and talent based on Gagné's (2003) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT). The proposed dynamic assessment approach and test model are also rooted in this framework. According to Gagné (2004), giftedness and talent can be defined separately. Giftedness refers to advanced innate mental capacities in at least one talent area, while talent indicates the systematic development of these capacities into observable performance and knowledge through advanced learning. In both cases, an individual is considered gifted or talented if they rank in the top 10% of their peers. Beyond these definitions, the central focus of the theory is transforming giftedness into talent. This process is initially explained through six components: Giftedness, talent, individual catalysts, environmental catalysts, experience and learning, and chance (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Gagné revised the DMGT between 2007 and 2008, creating a second version of the model. The updated DMGT is structured around five main themes: rationale, five components, guiding questions, theoretical foundations, and dynamic rules for talent development. Within this framework, the three core components are giftedness, talent, and development, supplemented by personal and environmental catalysts. In the revised model, the concept of chance is incorporated differently than in the original, representing how environmental factors influence the transformation of giftedness and affect all other components (Gagné, 2009, 2021).

As understood from the theory, talent development is a dynamic process, and the starting point for identifying talent is potential. Similarly, according to Simonton (2001), talent develops through a process influenced by both heredity and development. In this context, identifying giftedness should also rely on dynamic assessments. The performance level achieved after potential interacts with stimuli to represent actual giftedness. The prototype tool proposed in this study is only recommended for determining potential in the verbal domain. This potential, based on the theory, interacts with personal and environmental catalysts, as well as formal and informal learning opportunities. Chance also influences all of these factors. If this potential in the verbal domain translates into performance in a specific area and ranks in the top 10%, that talent can be considered true superior talent. Therefore, dynamic assessments should

take place throughout the learning process, and maturing talents should be reassessed in specific areas. The test proposed in this study is limited to identifying the initial potential.

3. Recommended Test Model for Determining Potential of Giftedness

According to the theoretical model underlying this study, giftedness represents potential that can manifest across broader domains and turn into performance when certain catalysts interact. In this framework, four stages of identification can be followed effectively: identifying potential, teaching and learning based on this potential, final evaluation, and decision-making (Demirel-Dingeç, 2023). This study focuses on the identification of potential and offers a detailed explanation of this stage. It is recommended that students with identified potential be taught using alternative teaching methods and learning strategies during instruction. Consequently, assessments continue throughout the dynamic talent development process. Field-specific achievement tests can also be used during the final evaluation phase. In the decision-making stage, data collected throughout the process are combined to determine which individuals can be classified as gifted. The educational needs of students identified with potential can be addressed through measures such as placement in specialized talent classes and instruction tailored to their level. After this training, in the final assessment phase, students who rank in the top 10% receive a formal gifted designation.

In the first stage of the proposed model (identifying potential of giftedness), tools aligned with the underlying theoretical framework can be used. Gagné (2005), in the first version of the DMGT, described the intellectual potential of giftedness as including fluent reasoning, crystallized intelligence, visual-spatial skills, memory, and metacognitive abilities. In the second version of the model, Gagné (2009) revised this view, proposing that intellectual giftedness consists of general intelligence, which can include fluid intelligence as well as verbal, numerical, and spatial abilities. He emphasized that not all of these skills need to be present at the same time. These abilities are not strictly limited to specific domains; many skills can overlap across intellectual and other fields. According to Gagné, intellectual potential of giftedness also involves capabilities such as learning to read, acquiring a language, or understanding mathematical concepts. Accordingly, the tool developed in this study focuses on assessing verbal reasoning, verbal ability, and memory skills to identify students with potential talent in the verbal domain.

3.1. Verbal Reasoning

In this study, reasoning is evaluated solely within a verbal context and is distinguished from skills that depend on basic knowledge. As a result, verbal reasoning and verbal ability are regarded as separate constructs. Verbal reasoning includes skills such as vocabulary, comprehension, recognizing verbal similarities, and distinguishing differences (Youngstrom, Glutting, & Watkins, 2003; Wilhelm & Schulze, 2002). In widely used intelligence scales, including Kaufman's, Wechsler's, and Stanford-Binet's, reasoning is assessed within verbal, numerical, or figurative frameworks (McIntosh & Dixon, 2005). Since this study aims to identify potential giftedness in the verbal domain, special attention is given to verbal reasoning as a key type of reasoning skill. Common diagnostic tools measure verbal reasoning through subtests such as the WISC-IV similarities and lexical reasoning subtests, the KAIT logical steps subtest, the RIAS guess-what subtest, and the UNIT analogy subtest (McIntosh & Dixon, 2005). Reynolds and Kamphaus (2005) noted that analogies are particularly useful for measuring verbal reasoning. Several studies have explored the relationship between reasoning, especially verbal reasoning, and general intelligence. Zhu and Weiss (2005) found that the comprehension and similarities subtests are most strongly correlated with g (general intelligence). McGrew (2005, 2009), Schneider and McGrew (2018) also identified reasoning, knowledge, and short-term memory as broad mental domains highly relevant to the Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) battery. In a study by Tirre and Field (2002), the broad domains of the CHC model were reorganized through 15 different factor analyses, consistently showing that reasoning, verbal ability, and numerical ability have strong correlations with general intelligence. The CHC theory of intelligence is regarded as the most comprehensive psychometric theory of intelligence (Flanagan et al., 2013). The inclusion of numerous ability domains and the cross-battery studies conducted among these domains have also facilitated a more detailed interpretation of intelligence test scores.In the process of determining verbal reasoning, classification skills can be assessed, and for this purpose, questions similar to the type of question in Example 1 can be developed and used.

"Which of the following foods is different: milk-honey-cream-olive-cheese-egg"

Example 1. Sample item for classification skill

Classification skills can be assessed during the verbal reasoning process, and questions similar to the one in Example 1 can be developed and used. In this question, students are asked to classify animal products and identify non-animal foods. Answering this item will identify common relationships and utilize classification skills. In such items, attention should be paid to whether the question allows for another correct classification. Verbal reasoning can also include questions similar to those in Example 2 that establish relationships.

"Create the relationship between the words "lazy-hardworking" for the words below and write the appropriate word in the blank.
Loquacious: ...
Generous: ...

Example 2. Sample item for similar relationship building skills

In the question type in Example 2, the student is expected to explore the antonyms between the words "lazy" and "hardworking" and to generate answers by continuing this relationship in other items. For example, they might answer "quiet" for "loquacious" or "stingy" for "generous." Questions of this type may have more than one correct answer and may be included in the correct answer pool.

3.2. Memory

Memory can be described as a mental skill that affects learning capacity by storing previous experiences (Castel, 2024). In this proposed test phase, memory is discussed under three subheadings: long-term memory, short-term memory, and working memory. These three types of memory are sometimes described as interconnected, while other definitions use them synonymously. Although the relationship between memory and intelligence is not fully clarified in the literature, it is widely acknowledged as significant. According to Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968), information is first received through sensory memory, then stored and processed in short-term memory for a period of time, and finally consolidated in long-term memory. Information is transferred from sensory memory to short-term memory via attention and perception, and from short-term to long-term memory through repetition. Working memory is the system in which information is primarily processed and is proposed to bridge the gap between short-term and long-term memory (Floyd, 2005; Vinkhuyzen vd., 2010). Common diagnostic tools measure memory using tasks such as sentence memory in the SB-5, coding in the WISC-IV, design recall in the DAS, block design in the KAIT, spatial memory in the UNIT, and figural memory in the CAS (McGrew, 2005). Kyllonen (1996) argued that differences in general intelligence scores are largely attributable to working memory, and McGrew and Woodcock (2001) similarly noted a strong relationship between working memory and general intelligence, particularly in studies with large samples. Pomplun and Roid (2005) reported that studies involving groups with varying intelligence levels found working memory predicts 58% or more of general intelligence across all groups. As noted earlier, McGrew (2005) also included short-term memory among the broad mental domains most appropriate for the CHC battery. Colom and colleagues (2005) emphasized that many studies acknowledge the relationship between working memory and general intelligence, although working memory and short-term memory are often conflated in the literature. Both types of memory are simultaneously related to general intelligence. According to Hulme and Maughan (1991), long-term memory contributes to short-term memory, influencing performance in both verbal and non-verbal domains. The items in Example 3 can be used to measure short-term memory in the verbal domain.

Now listen to me and repeat after me.
"with your eyes that sparkle,
paws like pink cotton,
tail wrapped tight,
hearts intertwined"

Example 3. Sample item for similar relationship building skills

To measure short-term memory, a verse can be read to the student. The student is asked to listen carefully and then asked to repeat it. The student may have a chance to try it; the verse or text read can be reduced or increased depending on age. Items like those in Example 4 can be used to measure working memory.

Listen carefully; I'll ask you questions about what I'm about to say, now and later.

"Begüm, Çınar, Haktan, and Mira are deskmates. No girls sit in the first or last row. Haktan sits to the left of Begüm and Çınar. In which row do these children sit from left to right?"

Example 4. Sample item for working memory

In a short-term memory task, instructions are read aloud, and the student is expected to respond within a set time limit. This item qualifies as a working memory task because it requires simultaneous processing of elements such as gender, order, and nouns. It also engages linear reasoning and sustained attention. For long-term memory assessment, items similar to those in Example 5 can be employed.

What were the names of the people who were your classmates in the text I read to you before?

Example 5. Sample item for long-term memory

When evaluating long-term memory, a piece of information can be stored and later used to formulate related questions in later stages of the assessment. For instance, after answering questions based on the text in Example 4, a student who has gone through different sections can be asked a follow-up question that requires retrieving and applying the previously learned information.

3.3. Verbal Ability

Skills such as vocabulary, word fluency, semantic relationships, speed of articulation, and the ability to use proper nouns or suffixes fall within the scope of verbal ability (Carroll, 1941). Verbal ability primarily assesses domain-specific foundational skills. For instance, this is measured through the vocabulary and knowledge subtests of the WISC-IV, the vocabulary subtest of the SB-5, and the general knowledge subtest of the WJ III COG (McGrew, 2005). Zhu and Weiss (2005) reported that vocabulary and knowledge are two subtests most strongly correlated with g (general intelligence). Reynolds and Kamphaus (2005) noted that verbal reasoning is inherently involved when assessing vocabulary; however, they categorized the vocabulary-related "Guess What" subtest of the RIAS specifically under verbal intelligence. Research also indicates that children with high verbal abilities tend to exhibit high general intelligence (Happe, 1995). Pomplun and Roid (2005) emphasized that vocabulary constitutes a fundamental skill for determining intelligence. In the proposed model, question types similar to those in Example 6 can be used to assess verbal ability.

Write words that start with the root "write" that you can write in 1 minute.

Example 6. Sample item for verbal ability

In the question in Example 6 above, the student is asked to write as many words as they know that begin with the root "write." The student is given a time limit. Correct answers are scored by checking whether the words beginning with the root "write" are derived using the correct root.

4. Discussion

Giftedness is a difficult concept to define and measure, and it should be assessed within the framework in which it is understood. Because talent development is a dynamic process, individuals who are not currently identified as gifted may later be recognized as such. In this study, the DMGT model was used as the theoretical basis for defining giftedness and talent. Within this framework, giftedness can develop through maturation in a specific area, resulting from the interaction of potential with personal and

environmental factors. This study focuses on a potential assessment tool and the types of items that can be used to measure giftedness, specifically the potential dimension.

While a single tool or method may be limited in diagnosing concepts like intelligence, talent, giftedness, and special abilities—which have diverse definitions—alternative approaches should be developed even for the best assessment instruments. Helal and colleagues (2025) also recommended adopting an inclusive and diverse approach in diagnosing gifted individuals. The current study reviewed existing scales for assessing potential in the verbal domain and developed alternative question types. These questions are categorized under main headings such as verbal reasoning, memory, and verbal ability. Verbal reasoning has been assessed within verbal, numerical, or figurative frameworks in scales such as the KABC-II, WISC-R, WISC-IV, SB-5, UNIT, KAIT, and RIAS (McIntosh & Dixon, 2005). McGrew (2005) noted that reasoning is one of the broader cognitive domains most suitable for the CHC battery. Another key domain is memory, with sample questions provided for short-term, long-term, and working memory in the verbal context. The literature shows a strong positive correlation between working memory and general intelligence (Colom et al., 2005). Memory items are also included in widely used diagnostic scales such as the SB and WISC, highlighting their importance for accurate potential assessment. Verbal ability is another main focus. Measuring verbal ability independently is challenging. For example, verbal reasoning, as included in the proposed model, is considered by some perspectives to reflect fluid intelligence, while verbal abilities such as reading, speaking, language learning, and mastery of grammar indicate crystallized intelligence (Alfonso, Flanagan, & Radwan, 2005). The proposed model does not distinguish between fluid and crystallized intelligence but emphasizes verbal potential, providing sample item types for verbal reasoning and verbal ability. One such item focuses on word-generation skills. Pomplun and Roid (2005) noted that vocabulary is a critical component of verbal ability and is highly correlated with general intelligence.

5.1. Implications for theory and practice

The focus can be placed on the dynamic assessment process used to convert the potential identified in further research into performance. The verbal domain selected in this study may differ from the potential domains included in the DMGT model. Identification tools and approaches can also be developed for different specific areas such as the verbal domain. In future studies, tools for determining potential in different domains, such as the numerical-spatial domain or the physical domain, may also be developed. The difficulty levels of the questions should be adjusted according to the age group being studied. In practice to develop tools to determine the potential abilities in the proposed verbal domain, a question pool could be developed with a team of experts, and the questions could be tested with students.

5.2. Limitations and directions for future research

Since this study focuses on the verbal domain, the sample questions are limited to this domain. The subtest items are merely examples presented by the author for the skills they represent. This study is limited to a literature review and the author's implicit theories.

5. Conclusion

Students whose potential is identified through the proposed phase of the study should be matched with tasks of appropriate difficulty during the implementation phase. The evaluation process should continue through dynamic assessments, allowing gifted individuals to be recognized as they mature through interaction with various stimuli according to area of talent. Early identification of potential can lead to accelerated talent development, producing multiplicative effects (Dickens & Flynn, 2001). The comprehensive diagnostic approach underlying this testing model enables students to be assessed with multiple measures, explore their strengths, and access opportunities to cultivate their potential. Such a process benefits the individual and contributes meaningfully to society through the development of capable individuals. Talent development can be further supported by minimizing the potential negative impact of the chance component described in the underlying theory. Potential talent identified at an early age can be transformed into performance through the interaction of individual and environmental catalysts outlined in the DMGT framework.

Statement of Researchers

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