

High Ability/Giftedness in university students from 19 countries

Susana Graciela Pérez-Barrera
Universidad de la Empresa (Uruguay)
Laura Ceretta Moreira
Federal University of Paraná (Brazil)

Abstract

The paper presents a subset from the study carried out by the Phoenix International Research Group, whose objective was to analyze the socio-emotional aspects of adults with High Abilities/Giftedness (HA/GT) who are formally identified, in an advanced process of identification, or self-identified. The objective of this article was to analyze the same aspects of the statements of the 94 participating university students. The methodology of the study is qualitative, of a descriptive-analytical nature. Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire in 10 languages, originally answered by 1,060 adults, including the students whose statements were analyzed here based on the categories: identification, fears and difficulties, preferences, and perceptions about the university. The theoretical foundation was based on the studies of Gardner (1993, 2000), Renzulli (2016), and Pérez-Barrera (2024, 2025). Regarding the socio-emotional aspects, the results showed that the fear of failure, the confrontation with traditional pedagogical strategies, bullying, and perfectionism contribute to their emotional and educational vulnerability.

Keywords: High Ability/Giftedness. University adult students. Identification. Socioemotional aspects.

Altas Habilidades/Superdotação em estudantes universitários de 19 países

Resumo

O artigo apresenta um recorte do estudo realizado pelo Phoenix International Research Group, cujo objetivo foi analisar os aspectos socioemocionais de

adultos/as com Altas Habilidades/Superdotação (AH/SD) formalmente identificados/as, em processo avançado de identificação ou autoidentificados/as. O objetivo deste artigo foi analisar os mesmos aspectos nos depoimentos dos 94 estudantes universitários participantes. A metodologia do estudo é qualitativa, de cunho descritivo-analítico. A coleta de dados foi realizada mediante um questionário em 10 línguas, originalmente respondido por 1.060 adultos, dentre os quais, os estudantes cujos depoimentos foram aqui analisados a partir das categorias: identificação, medos e dificuldades, preferências e percepções sobre a universidade. A fundamentação teórica baseou-se nos estudos de Gardner (1993, 2000), Renzulli (2016) e Pérez-Barrera (2024, 2025). Em relação aos aspectos socioemocionais, os resultados apontaram que o medo de falhar, o confronto com as estratégias pedagógicas tradicionais, o bullying e o perfeccionismo contribuem para a sua vulnerabilidade emocional e educacional. Palavras-chave: Altas Habilidades/Superdotação. Estudantes universitários adultos. Identificação. Aspectos socioemocionais.

2

Altas Habilidades/Superdotación en estudiantes universitarios de 19 países

Resumen

El artículo presenta un recorte del estudio realizado por el Phoenix International Research Group, cuyo objetivo fue analizar los aspectos socioemocionales de adultos con Altas Habilidades/Superdotación (AH/SD) formalmente identificados, en proceso avanzado de identificación o autoidentificación. El objetivo de este artículo fue analizar los mismos aspectos en los 94 estudiantes universitarios participantes. La metodología del estudio es cualitativa, de carácter descriptivo-analítico. La recolección de datos se realizó mediante un cuestionario en 10 idiomas, respondido originalmente por 1.060 adultos, incluidos los estudiantes cuyos testimonios se analizaron aquí en función de las categorías: identificación, miedos y dificultades, preferencias y percepciones sobre la universidad. La fundamentación teórica se basó en los estudios de Gardner (1993, 2000), Renzulli (2016) y Pérez-Barrera (2024, 2025). En cuanto a los aspectos socioemocionales, los resultados mostraron que el miedo al fracaso, la confrontación

con las estrategias pedagógicas tradicionales, el acoso escolar y el perfeccionismo contribuyen a su vulnerabilidad emocional y educativa.

Palabras claves: Altas Habilidades/Superdotación. Estudiantes universitarios adultos. Identificación. Aspectos socioemocionales.

Introduction

Studies on High Ability/Giftedness (HA/GT) are still scarce (Eddles-Hirsch, 2019; Matos, Moreira, & Kuhn, 2021), and for the most part, focus on children. As Pérez-Barrera and Chagas-Ferreira (2024, p. 213) note: "Vötter and Schnell (2019a, 2019b); Alshehri (2020); Vötter (2020); Brown (2021) and Brown and Peterson (2020, 2022) commented on the lack of empirical research on the lives of adults with HA/GT and their needs."

We conducted an initial mapping of the official websites of the Ministries of Education in 20 countries in Latin America, as well as Portugal and Spain, regarding the publication of guiding materials on giftedness in higher education, and found that none existed.

Similarly, when we took the Brazilian educational system as a reference, we noticed that the official publications of the Ministry of Education focus mainly on characterization and identification; on the construction of proposals for specialized educational services; on guidelines on how to identify and stimulate the potential of students with HA/GT, among other aspects; however, with a focus on elementary and secondary education.

The scarcity of studies and research on the subject associated with how the development of students with HA/GT presents itself leads to a significant delay in the observation and recognition of the indicative signs of their specific educational needs (Matos, Moreira, Kuhn, 2021). As a result, these individuals tend to be largely invisible, impacting their personal, academic, and professional lives.

The problem of invisibility is also related to the perpetuation of myths, which,

[...] like all popular beliefs, are the product of ignorance and fear of the unknown, flourish in the social imagination, and

take root in all spheres, but particularly in education, which is perhaps one of the most important, because it includes students and their families, teachers, administrators, and staff who work there (Pérez-Barrera, 2025, p. 16) (our translation).

In Brazilian higher education institutions, students with HA/GT are present, although enrollment data is underestimated. The study conducted by Oliveira and Orlando (2022), based on the analysis of microdata from the Higher Education Census in the previous three years, revealed that:

In 2017, there were 11,589,194 enrollments in higher education. Among these, the number of students with high ability in public institutions was negligible (472), representing a percentage of about 0.004. In contrast, private institutions had about 0.008% (1,003). In 2018, the number of enrollments rose to 12,043,993, but the percentages remain below 1% for students with high ability, with public institutions continuing to be represented by 0.004% with 509 enrollments. Private institutions saw a slight improvement to 0.01% (1,491 enrollments). In 2019, there were 12,350,832 enrollments, but the percentages for high ability remain low, with public institutions representing 0.003% (459 enrollments) and private institutions remaining at 0.01% (1,673) (Orlando, 2022, p. 9).

In the following years, we observed a drop in the number of general enrollments in higher education, totaling 8,680,945 in 2020, 8,987,120 in 2021, 9,444,116 in 2022, and 9,977,217 in 2023. Regarding students with HA/GT, the numbers remain almost non-existent, with 2,214 (0.02%) in 2020, 2,146 (0.02%) in 2021, 2,969 (0.03%) in 2022, and 4,309 (0.04%) in 2023.

Given this scenario, this article presents a subset of a qualitative study analyzing the socioemotional aspects of formally identified highly able/gifted adults, those in an advanced identification process, or self-identified. The study was conducted by the Phoenix International Research Group, currently composed of 54 researchers from 27 countries, who administered a questionnaire translated into 10 languages and adapted to each country, which was answered by 1,060 participants from 49 countries in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe. The subset presented here focuses on 94 participants in the study, all university

students from 19 countries, who reported on aspects of their identification, their fears and difficulties, preferences, and perceptions about the university.

Methodology

The research presented here is a qualitative descriptive-analytical study. The inclusion/exclusion criteria for participants were:

1. Being over 18 years old.
2. Self-identified as a “student” in questions requesting information about profession and/or occupation.

Thus, 59 identified themselves as students by profession and 35 by occupation, totaling 94 participants.

Like the other participants in the study conducted by the Phoenix International Research Group, the students agreed to take part in the study and answer the questionnaire only after agreeing to the Consent Form, which described the objectives of the research, guaranteed their anonymity, and confirmed their voluntary participation in the study.

Given that the research coordination is linked to a Uruguayan researcher, the procedures related to ethical procedures were carried out through the Research Unit of the School of Education Sciences of the Universidad de la Empresa, which analyzed the ethical aspects in October 2023 and approved the study to begin the empirical investigation.

To preserve the anonymity of the participants, we used a code with the first letter indicating gender (F for female, M for male, and N for those who preferred not to identify their gender) and the number with which they were registered in the database.

Analyzing the data

Next, we will characterize the participants and the *a priori* and *a posteriori* analytic categories that we chose to examine.

For a better understanding, we present the sociodemographic data of the participants (gender, age, nationality, income, and country of residence).

Participants

Of the total of 94 participants, 56 were women, 36 were men, and 2 preferred not to identify their gender, with ages ranging from 18 to 52 years. Below, we present the nationalities and countries of residence of the participants.

Chart 1 – Number of participants by nationality and country of residence

Nationality	Country of residence	Number
Argentina	Argentina	5
Argentina	Peru	1
Belgium	Belgium	1
Brazil	Brazil	16
Canada	Canada	7
Chile	Chile	6
Chile	Argentina	1
China	China	6
China	Canada	1
Cyprus	United Kingdom	1
Denmark	Denmark	6
Slovenia	Slovenia	3
France	France	1
Germany	Germany	3
Greece	Greece	7
Greece	Germany	1
Mexico	Mexico	10
Netherlands	Netherlands	2
Peru	Peru	1

Source: The authors

Chart 1 – Number of participants by nationality and country of residence

Nationality	Country of residence	Number
Poland	Czech Republic	1
South Korea	South Korea	6
Uruguay	Uruguay	6
Uruguay	Mexico	1
United States	United States	1

Source: The authors

Most of these students had an income of less than one to five minimum wages (67.02%), although more than 10% did not report their income. In terms of education, 38 had not yet completed higher education, 35 had already completed their undergraduate degrees, 15 had specialization or master's degrees, and 6 held a PhD, indicating that, at the time of the survey, they were pursuing a new undergraduate degree or postgraduate studies at levels higher than the degree reported.

7

Categorization

The questions that provided data related to identification as highly able/gifted persons (year of identification and age at the time of identification, instruments and professionals who performed it, and previous diagnoses) were selected for analysis, as well as 7 qualitative questions that indicated their main fears, difficulties, and likes; what irritated and discouraged them the most; and what they liked and disliked the most in their courses.

The following chart shows the categories listed based on the qualitative questions formulated.

Chart 2 – Categories of analysis

Identification
Fears and difficulties
Preferences
Perceptions about the university

Source: The authors

Identification of High Ability/Giftedness

8 Participants were identified between 1982 and 2023, aged between 6 and 52, although some were still in the process of being identified or reported not having been formally identified. It is noteworthy that 18 participants were identified between the ages of 6 and 10, 23 between the ages of 11 and 18, and 44 in adulthood, with one still in the process of identification, three not responding to the question, two saying they did not know the age at which they were identified, and three responding that they had not been formally identified.

These results raise an important point for reflection. Although among the 18 people identified in early childhood, 10 were women, seven were men, and one person did not identify their gender, we can establish a relationship with the nationalities of these people, most of whom are from more developed countries (n=13), where there is a greater tradition of identification.

According to research by Pérez (2011), in Latin American countries, particularly in Brazil, the proportion of students who were identified in childhood is 30% girls and 70% boys.

In the second age group (11 to 17 years old), the number of men was the same as that of women (n = 11), with one person preferring not to identify their gender, and eight Latin Americans out of 23 people identified in this age group.

The significant difference emerges in adulthood, where 30 of the 44 individuals (68.2%) identified were women, and 14 (31.8%) were men. This disparity prompts consideration of the substantial number of late-identified women,

which reverses the typical rates observed in childhood. This proportion was also found in the total number of participants and in the study by Pérez-Barrera and Chagas-Ferreira (2021), conducted with 103 participants from Latin American countries, in which 65 were women, 37 were men, and one person preferred not to identify their gender.

In addition, these data show that most participants entered higher education without having been identified as having AH/SD.

It is also noteworthy to highlight the instruments used for the assessment: 45 participants were assessed using psychometric tests, two through academic performance, one through creative thinking, and one through observation. Additionally, 45 participants reported not knowing the type of instrument used.

The assessment carried out by health professionals who have no training in HA/GT is concerning, as is the exclusive use of psychometric instruments, which are not sufficient to identify this behavior.

Renzulli (2016, p. 62) warns about this by stating that “there is no ideal way to measure intelligence and, therefore, we should avoid the typical practice of believing that if we know a person’s IQ score, we also know their intelligence.”

There is no code in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) or in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) that allows a person who scores above 130 to be identified as someone with HA/GT.

Intelligence quotient (IQ) tests measure the so-called “intelligence,” considering only vocabulary and mathematical logical reasoning. The scores obtained in these tests use the “Bell curve,” a bell-shaped graph in which a score of 100 is understood as the population average and scores of 15 points to the left and right are understood as standard deviations, with two standard deviations to the left, it is considered an intellectual disability, and from two standard deviations to the right, it is considered “gifted.”

However, these tests are insufficient to assess other intelligences, such as those proposed by Gardner (1993, 2000). In summary, intelligence and High Ability/Giftedness cannot be considered synonymous. This demonstrates the complexity of assessing HA/GT and, at the same time, how much not

identifying them is to deny these people their identity. Neumann and Sabatini point out that:

Lack of identification and misdiagnosis are forms of exclusion, that is, attributing to a person what they are not and failing to identify what they are. This leads to other exclusionary consequences, such as failure to meet the specific educational and health needs of each of the neurodevelopmental conditions involved, at any age (Neumann; Sabatini, 2022, p. 13).

Given this complexity, the increasing number of reports and diagnoses is worrying, as is the number of people with HA/GT who are misidentified due to a lack of knowledge about the characteristics and indicators, whose behavior ends up being confused with psychological and psychiatric disorders. What Webb (2000) said about children is no different for adults, as he himself states:

Many gifted and talented children (and adults) are being misdiagnosed by psychologists, psychiatrists, pediatricians, and other health care professionals. The most common misdiagnoses are attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and Mood Disorders such as Cyclothymic Disorder, Dysthymic Disorder, Depression, and bipolar disorder. These common misdiagnoses stem from an ignorance among professionals about specific social and emotional characteristics of gifted children, which are then mistakenly assumed by these professionals to be signs of pathology (Webb, 2011, p. 1).

10

Among the 94 students participating in this study, 28 had 53 misdiagnoses before being identified as individuals with HA/GT, with all receiving between 2 and up to 7 different diagnoses. The diagnoses listed were: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder - ADHD (n=11), anxiety disorder (n=9), depression (n=9), mood disorder (n=7), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and others (n=3 each), autism (n=2), bipolar disorder, learning disorder, personality disorder (n=2 each), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), psychosis, and schizophrenia (n=1 each). Twenty-two participants received a dual diagnosis.

Chart 3 – Relationship between global percentages of psychological or psychiatric disorders and the percentages found among participants

Disorder/pathology	Global percentage (WHO)	Percentage in this study
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	4	11.7
Anxiety Disorder/Social Phobia/Dissocial Disorder	3.8	12.76
Depression/bipolar disorder/mood disorder	3.9	26.6
Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)	3	3.2
Autism (ASD)	1.00	2.13
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	1-3	1.06
Schizophrenia/psychosis	0.30	2.13

Source: Prepared by the authors

If we compare the frequency of these diagnoses with global percentages (Chart 3), we see that there is a huge discrepancy, which in most cases is also the result of a lack of knowledge about HA/GT. With the exception of OCD and ODT, which are approximately in line with global estimates, the other disorders have extremely high percentages, which is a cause for great concern.

As Pérez-Barrera and Chagas-Ferreira (2024) state, it is not uncommon for adults who have not yet been identified to experience feelings of anxiety, low self-esteem, and even depression when they do not understand their identity as people with HA/GT and often feel rejected at work, at school, and even within their families. In this regard, Webb (2006) states that:

The gifted individual's inherent drive to understand, to question, and to search for consistency is likewise intense, as is the ability to see possibilities and alternatives. These characteristics, with the resulting idealism for social and moral issues, can result in anxiety and depression. (Webb, 2006, n.p.).

Fears and difficulties

Among the main fears and difficulties, we find a very significant number related to the fear of failure or making mistakes, which is the most frequent fear (21.27%) and the most discouraging factor (17.02%) for the participants. This difficulty can be dramatic, as expressed by a Danish university student when referring to her greatest fear: "That my worldview is wrong - that what I experience as real is not real" (F467, 2023).

We can link the fear of failure to a high level of perfectionism, as noted by Argentine authors Irueste, Ziraldo, and Seco (2024, p. 204) in a study on adults, when they comment that "[...] these individuals tend to set high expectations for themselves and seek perfection in their achievements, which a low tolerance for frustration may accompany." Similarly, a Brazilian university student (F30, 2023) comments that her most significant difficulty is "[...] dealing with frustration and my mistakes [...]" and the South Korean university student (M957, 2023), who expresses his feelings more objectively: "My deepest fear is the possibility of failing in my field of interest. If that happens, the people around me would think that being identified as a talent is not worth it."

Another recurring theme among the fears and difficulties mentioned by participants is loneliness. Although one of the most common myths about HA/GT is a lack of social interaction, this fear is recurrent, as illustrated by the Peruvian university student (M896, 2023) when he states that his greatest fear is "[...] being alone and not being understood [...]" as does Brazilian university student F214 (2023), when she says she feels "[...] pain from being different, from not belonging and having to isolate myself."

Lack of motivation to study also appears as one of the main difficulties, as mentioned by Canadian university student M322 (2023), who comments that his most significant difficulty is "[...] motivation, surviving my university course, arriving in a new environment and not knowing anyone." Similarly, Greek university student M629 (2023) comments that his most significant difficulty is "[...] my university (I feel like I can't concentrate and the stress that university causes me)."

A very enlightening statement comes from the Polish student, who declares:

Right now, what worries me most is disappointing the expectations that teachers have created based on my previous results. This prevents me from developing and making decisions freely (for example, whether I should do a PhD and whether I will be a burden there (F453, 2023, n.p.) (our translation).

Preferences

It is not difficult to identify the main preferences of people with HA/GT. Reading, studying, learning, and researching are the most frequently cited; 40.42% mention them as their main preferences, as reported, respectively, by the university student from Cyprus M435; the Mexican university students F763 (2023) and F754 (2023); the Brazilian university student F17 (2023) and the Chilean university student M388 (2023), who comment on the pleasure of learning new things in different ways. Chinese university student F700 (2023) states that her two main preferences are “studying without the pressure of exams and writing.” Almost all participants report a preference for learning new things, in their own way, without barriers or demands. In this regard, Argentine university student F1008 (2023), for example, specifies: “Learning, I am a machine for seeking things to learn.” On the other hand, Uruguayan university student M51 (2023) comments that his preference is: “when I can take exams freely and don’t have to keep up with the pace of the class.”

Another preference highlighted by the participants was music, encompassing appreciation, performance, and interpretation. Brazilian university student M24 (2023), Chilean M388 (2023), and Chilean F394 (2023) report preferences in different aspects of music, and Mexican F764 (2023) combines music and the need to learn: “Studying/learning, singing, and organizing personal things.”

Again, despite the myths and social and cultural beliefs about HA/GT that attribute social interaction difficulties to these people, we find a strong preference for getting together with people and talking, as reported by South Korean university student F954 (2023), Uruguayan F103 (2023), or Brazilian M33 (2023), and even the combination of several preferences, as stated by Canadian university student F300 (2023), when she comments that she likes to “learn, explore, meet interesting people, and try new things.”

The results of the survey corroborate the statement by Irueste, Ziraldo, and Seco (2024, p. 202) that one of the main difficulties in identifying people with HA/GT is the heterogeneity of their profiles and the variety of aspects in which they stand out.

Perceptions of the university

The participants' responses indicate their main perceptions and feelings about the university. In this sense, we observed that the fear of failing and not achieving good results, as well as the fear of not being able to progress for different reasons, appear to be linked to university.

Working on something they dislike was a situation pointed out by several participants. The Chinese participant, who preferred not to identify their gender (N709, 2023), states that what discourages them most at university is "doing something that is not in line with my beliefs." Mexican university student M740 (2023) points out that what discourages them most are "people, the monotony that tends to be everything, the educational system," as does Uruguayan student F1019 (2023), who lives in Mexico, who says that what is most discouraging is "having many tasks or pending issues accumulated, performing activities that are not of interest to me."

The lack of recognition, dialogue, feedback, and understanding are other elements that cause discouragement among participants.

Danish university student F467 (2023) comments that she becomes discouraged "[...] when ideas are not understood and are rejected without justification [...] and that [...] when my enthusiasm/initiative in relation to something is not recognized, I lose the desire to contribute. I can easily feel stupid, alienated, unappreciated [...], the same [...] lack of recognition [...]" that French student M596 also feels. Canadian participant N351 (2023), who preferred not to identify their gender, states that they become discouraged "[...] when the people around them are apathetic to what they want to show them."

For Mexican student F764 (2023), her greatest discouragement is "[...] that people are not valued for their qualities, but for the convenience they can bring to something or someone, the benefits that can be obtained from them."

American university student F1054 (2023) mentions that she is discouraged by “stagnation and waiting. When I am ready to change or grow, and there is a delay.” Brazilian university student F14 (2923) states that “[...] in the university, what discourages me the most is comparison and competition with other people.”

Brazilian university student F17 (2023) complains about hostility when it comes to understanding diversity:

Having to deal with hostile reactions without provocation. These are situations where I am doing things that are normal for me, yet other people become hostile for no reason. For instance, I take a test and get a good grade, but I don't comment on it. However, when they find out, they start making verbal 'digs'.

Another factor that leads to repetition in the educational system, as mentioned by Dutch student M85 (2023): “Repetition and slowness. That is, doing things over and over again (it's crazy how much we repeat), ending up bored, losing interest, and not caring anymore.”

Uruguayan university student F1002 (2023) comments that she is discouraged by “[...] having to work in an area I don't like. I know there is no possibility of growing and pursuing my goals. I feel alienated, and this limits me academically.” The Polish university student explains:

At university, I was placed in the 'A student' category, and I feel a lot of pressure not to fail, which discourages me from taking risks and developing myself. In the parallel study, I was able to enroll in whatever I wanted without fear of disappointing anyone, as the professors in the main course generally did not know me (F453, 2023, n.p.) (Our translation).

German university student F614 (2023) points out in relation to university that: “Sometimes there are processes that are just not good, but there's nothing you can do about it.”

On the other hand, Argentine student F1008 (2023) comments that what bothers her most is: “[...] because I am curious or a perfectionist in work such as college assignments, I am labeled as annoying or strange.”

The lack of preparation to meet their specific needs is highlighted by several participants. The Brazilian university student talks about what he likes most about his course:

Constant contact with other people, who are often vastly different from one another, yet share a common goal: to live. In education, we are always learning from each other, and it encompasses a wide range of knowledge, including things you never imagined you would know (M23, 2023, n.p.).

At the same time, he says, "I think it [the course] is too easy, there aren't many challenges, I don't feel intellectually challenged most of the time." Brazilian university student F36 (2023) questions the education system, pointing out that it is: "[...] inefficient, excuses to deny my report and rights, an environment of toxic competition, lack of consideration for deadlines and rules, favoritism, etc." Another Brazilian university student (F74, 2023) warns of the difficulties encountered at university, stating: "The archaic and narrow-minded mentality of some education professionals and educational institutions." Similarly, Canadian university student F289 (2023) states: "[...] classical methods, protocols, norms, and rigid frameworks... (which is why I am evolving in a field that allows me to explore all of that...)"

Canadian university student M322 (2023) complains about the complexity and poor organization of his school but says he likes his course because it gives him "[...] the power to have a real impact, to apply mathematics and physics to real problems [...]", while Cypriot university student M435 (2023) rejects the standardized tests commonly used in the United States, where he lives.

French university student M596 (2023) is bothered by "[...] the lack of pedagogy of certain teachers," while Belgian university student F778 (2023) points out that one of her most significant difficulties is: "[...] having to deal with teachers who do not want to learn about giftedness."

Chinese student F700 (2023) reflects on what: "[...] studying subjects that don't interest me and sometimes having to wait for others to learn something before I can move on to new topics."

Argentinian student F993 (2023) comments, “it bothers me a lot that education is not updated and leaves no room for creativity, that it is trampled on [...],” which is reinforced by fellow Argentine F1008 (2023), when she mentions her discomfort with “[...] that teachers want to impose a single way of doing things and do not promote creativity.”

Slovenian student F938 makes the following complaint: “[...] pressure to do more and more work (overload) and not give me different work [...],” but also states that she likes her course, saying that she feels good in this situation: “[...] when I can be creative, when I have a free path, when there are no right solutions, only better and worse ones.”

Uruguayan M985 (2023) states that he likes his course, declaring: “[...] the way I express my curiosity in the form of learning, of interest in new ideas, proposals, objectives, questions of analysis.”

Final considerations

In conclusion, this research, which aimed to present a subset of the qualitative study conducted by the Phoenix International Research Group, focusing on the socioemotional aspects in the testimonies of 94 university students, we highlight that the investigation contributes to filling a gap in international studies, which rarely address adult university students with High Ability/Giftedness.

We observed the incidence of fear of failure, lack of results, and the inability to progress for different reasons, particularly due to the use of traditional teaching strategies that do not allow for the development of innovation and creativity that people with HAZGT possess.

On the other hand, we found that the element mentioned by the students was *bullying*, which promotes their vulnerability in both emotional and social aspects, affecting their ability to develop their above-average abilities.

Therefore, we consider that, first of all, raising issues related to their identification, their thoughts and feelings about life, and their academic and professional trajectory provokes important reflections not only for these and other students, but also for society and the university, as an institution that should have a respectful view of diversity as a form of inclusion.

Secondly, we note the coincidence in the testimonies of these students from 19 countries on 3 continents, who, regardless of their geographical, economic, and cultural situation, face the same difficulties in relation to identification, as well as experience very similar feelings and perceptions. Issues such as injustice, ambiguity, insincerity, betrayal of trust, dishonesty, and corruption were raised by students as very discouraging and having a significant impact on all areas of their lives.

Thirdly, we found that demotivation and a feeling of incomprehension of their identity and personalities are fundamental elements that reinforce their invisibility in society and at university.

The recurrence of errors in identification and the confusion of HA/GT with psychological and psychiatric disorders are painfully repeated in all 19 countries studied, which makes us reflect on the urgent need for adequate training of all professionals who may be involved in the identification process.

Initial training is the primary responsibility of the university, which must coordinate with other areas of continuing education to ensure that the pathologization observed in this study, as well as in other studies, does not occur.

We hope that the findings of our study will contribute to future research on this population and to the implementation of public policies in education, labor, and culture, with a view to including in higher education this segment of society that is still extremely vulnerable in terms of its rights.

18

References

ACEREDA-EXTREMIANA, Amparo. **Niños superdotados**. Madrid: Pirámide, 2000.

BARDIN, Laurence. **Análise de conteúdo**. edição ampliada. São Paulo: Edições 70, 2016.

EDDLES-HIRSCH, Katrina. O papel do contexto social no processo de desenvolvimento de talentos no ensino superior. **Revista Australiana de Educação para Superdotados**. v. 28, n. 2, p. 17-28. 2019. Disponível em: https://scholar.google.com.br/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=pt-BR&user=vM4EFKgAAAAJ&citation_for_view=vM4EFKgAAAAJ:ljCSPb-OGe4C.

Acesso em: 24 fev. 2025.

F14. **Relato**. Brasil, 13 set. 2023.

F17. **Relato**. Brasil, 4 ago. 2023.

F30. **Relato**. Brasil, 8 ago. 2023.

F23. **Relato**. Brasil, 17 ago. 2023.

F74. **Relato**. Brasil, 23 ago. 2023.

F103. **Relato**. Uruguai, 11 ago. 2023.

F214. **Relato**. Brasil, 6 out. 2023.

F289. **Relato**. Canadá, 23 ago. 2023.

F453. **Relato**. Polônia, 6 set. 2023.

F467. **Relato**. Dinamarca, 8 ago. 2023.

F614. **Relato**. Alemanha. 9 ago. 2023.

F700. **Relato**. Hong-Kong China, 7 ago. 2023.

F754. **Relato**. México, 10 ago. 2023.

F763. **Relato**. México, 9 ago. 2023.

F764. **Relato**. México. 10 ago. 2023.

F778. **Relato**. Bélgica. 29 ago. 2023.

F938. **Relato**. Eslovênia. 4 ago. 2023.

F954. **Relato**. Coréia do Sul. 11 ago. 2023.

F993. **Relato**. Argentina. 15 set. 2023.

F1002. **Relato**. Uruguai. 25 ago. 2023.

F1008. **Relato**. Argentina, 13 ago. 2023.

F1019. **Relato**. México. 20 ago. 2023.

F0154. **Relato**. Estados Unidos. 23 set. 2023.

GARDNER, Howard. **Estruturas da mente**: a teoria das inteligências múltiplas. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas Sul, 1993.

GARDNER, Howard. **Inteligência**: um conceito reformulado. Rio de Janeiro. Objetiva, 2000.

GAGNÉ, François. From gifts to talents: The DMGT as a developmental model. In: Sternberg, Robert; Davidson, Janet (Eds.). **Conceptions of giftedness**. 2. ed. Cambridge University Press. 2005.

IRUESTE, Paula; ZIRALDO, Marianela, SECO, Ailen. Personas adultas con altas capacidades: ¿dónde quedó el potencial? In: PÉREZ-BARRERA, Susana Graciela (org.). **Altas Habilidades/Superdotación**: una nueva mirada. Montevideo: Universidad de la Empresa, 2024.

MATOS, Denise Maria de; MOREIRA, Laura Ceretta; KUHN, Cleusa. Jovens Superdotados na Educação Superior: um desafio para a docência. **Aprender – Caderno de Filosofia e Psicologia da Educação**, n. 26, p. 198-214, 2021. Disponível em: <https://periodicos2.uesb.br/index.php/aprender/article/view/8632>. Acesso em: 14 mar. 2025.

M23. **Relato**. Brasil, 25 ago. 2023.

M24. **Relato**. Brasi, 5 ago. 2023.

M33. **Relato**. Brasil, 6 set. 2023.

M51. **Relato**. Uruguay, 4 ago. 2023

M300. **Relato**. Canadá, 5 ago. 2023.

M435, **Relato**. Estados Unidos, 18 ago. 2023.

M85. **Relato**. Países Baixos. 20 ago. 2023.

M322. **Relato**. Canadá, 5 out. 2023.

M35. **Relato**. Chipre. 6 nov. 2023.

M388. **Relato**. Chile, 23 ago. 2023.

M596. **Relato**. França. 20 ago. 2023.

M629. **Relato**. Grécia. 5 out. 2023.

M740. **Relato**. México. 30 ago. 2023.

M896. **Relato**, Peru, 9 set. 2023.

M957. **Relato**. Coreia do Sul, 8 ago. 2023.

N351. **Relato**. Canadá. 25 set. 2023.

N709. **Relato**. Hong-Kong China, 23 ago. 2023.

M98355. **Relato**. Uruguai. 27 ago. 2023.

N351. **Relato**. Canadá. 30 ago. 2023

N709. **Relato**. Hong-Kong China, 30 ago. 2023

NEUMAN, Patrícia; SABATINI, Juliana. O Equívoco entre Superdotação e TEA na avaliação psicológica: um estudo de caso de uma mulher adulta. **Revista Neurodiversidade**, v. 3, p. 1-17, 2022. Disponível em: <https://www.institutoneurodiversidade.com/3105>. Acesso em: 24 mar. 2025.

OLIVEIRA, Ana Paula Santos de; ORLANDO, Rosimeire Maria. Perfil dos estudantes com altas habilidades no ensino superior: uma análise por indicadores educacionais. **Pesquisa, Sociedade e Desenvolvimento**, v. 11, n. 6, 2022. Disponível em: <https://rsdjournal.org/index.php/rsd/article/view/28697>. Acesso em: 13 abr. 2025.

PÉREZ, Susana Graciela Pérez Barrera. **Proposta de orientações pedagógicas para a organização e oferta de Atendimento Educacional Especializado (AEE) – para alunos com Altas Habilidades/Superdotação**. Brasília, UNESCO/MEC/SEESP, 2011.

PÉREZ-BARRERA, Susana Graciela; CHAGAS-FERREIRA, Jane. ¿Y después que crecí? In: Susana Graciela PÉREZ-BARRERA (org.). **Altas Habilidades/Superdotación: una nueva mirada**. Montevideo: UDE, 2024.

PÉREZ-BARRERA, Susana Graciela. Mitos sobre Altas Habilidades/Superdotación: creencias y prejuicios que siguen espantando. In: Maria Isabel de ARAÚJO, Eliamar GODOI; Letícia Leite de SOUZA; Susana Graciela PÉREZ-BARRERA. **A escolarização da pessoa com altas habilidades/superdotação: metodologias, estratégias propositivas e práticas inclusivas**. Jundiaí: Paco, 2025.

RENZULLI, Joseph S. Conceptions and Identification of Giftedness. In: REIS, Sally M. **Reflections on Gifted Education**. Critical Works by Joseph S. Renzulli and Colleagues. Wako, Texas: Prufrock Press, 2016.

TOURÓN, Javier; RANZ, Roberto. **Características del alumnado con altas capacidades**: algunas pistas para su identificación. In: PFEIFFER, Steven. Identificación y evaluación del alumnado con altas capacidades. Madrid: UNIR Editorial. Disponível em: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348566561_Caracteristicas_del_alumnado_con_altas_capacidades_algunas_pistas_para_su_identificacion Acesso em: 25 fev. 2025.

WEBB, James. Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnosis of Gifted Children. **Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted**. Saint Paul, 2000. Disponível em: <https://www.sengifted.org/post/misdiagnosis-and-dual-diagnosis-of-gifted-children>. Acesso em: 12 abr. 2025.

WEBB, James. Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnosis of Gifted Children, **Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented annual conference**. The newsletter of the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented (MCGT). University of Saint Thomas, Saint Paul, September/October 2006. Disponível em: https://www.jeffcogifted.org/uploads/1/0/8/9/108938165/misdiagnosis_and_diagnosis_of_gt_by__james_t_webb.pdf. Acesso em: 24 nov. 2024.

WEBB, James. **Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnosis of Gifted Children**. Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted. Saint Paul, 2011. Disponível em: <https://sengifted.org/misdiagnosis-and-dual-diagnosis-of-gifted-children/> Acesso em: 12 abr. 2025.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. **Newsroom**. Fact sheets. Health Topics. Disponível em: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets>. Acesso em: 3 maio 2024.

Prof. Dr. Susana Graciela Pérez-Barrera
Coordinator of the Doctorate in Education and Master's in Education for High Ability/Giftedness
Postgraduate Program in Education
School of Education Sciences
Universidad de la Empresa (Montevideo, Uruguay)
Leader of the Research Group on High Abilities/Giftedness (GIAHSD)
Member of the Special Education Research Group: policies, practices, and human development processes
Leader of the Phoenix International Research Group
Harry Passow International Leadership in Gifted Education 2025 Award
Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1449-469X>
Email: sperezbarrera@gmail.com
Email: susanapb56@gmail.com

Prof. Laura Ceretta Moreira
Federal University of Paraná (Brazil)
Graduate Program in Education
Productivity research
Inclusive Education Research Group
Special Education Research Group: policies, practices, and human development processes
Member of the Phoenix International Research Group
Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4569-7369>
Email: lauracmoreira@gmail.com

Translator's names and email
Isabela Borges Paluch
isabelapaluch@gmail.com

Received May 20, 2025

Accepted July 18, 2025



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.