Full Length Research Paper

Gifted students' perceptions of learning English as a foreign language

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The concept of "giftedness" and "what makes giftedness" have been debated by scholars for decades. Students who are defined as gifted or talented may demonstrate outstanding attributes in different areas. While some have superior intellectual, academic and creative abilities, others show an assortment of traits besides intelligence such as remarkable talents in visual and performing arts. This study is mainly concerned with how to cater for the needs of gifted and talented students learning English as a foreign language. It reports on a study carried out to create an effective learning environment for these children who are enrolled in a center for gifted children (BILSEM) in Adana, Turkey. The programme in the center makes special provision for academically gifted children with a differentiated curriculum. 105 students, already identified as gifted or talented, have been asked about their learning experience in the Centre, learning English in particular, and what types of activities are meaningful to them. They have completed a general attitude to learning English questionnaire and then taken part in a process of critical incident analysis. It is hoped that the findings of the research would lend support to identification and programming practices for gifted children.

Key words: Education for the gifted, foreign language learning, critical incident analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Students who are gifted and talented display high performance capabilities in different areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields. In fact, as Johnsen (2004) rightly puts it, the problem inherent in defining giftedness stems from these many attributes that are identified with giftedness.

In the past, the concept of giftedness was associated primarily with high IQ. This assumption was based on the traditional, although still prevalent, definition of intelligence as a single quality, an inherent trait that is not likely to change over time. Recent research on cognitive sciences and developmental psychology, however, has begun to challenge this understanding.

Broader definitions of giftedness have gained acceptance in recent years and now include an assortment of traits besides intelligence, for example, "practical giftedness" (Sternberg, 1991), creativity (Marland, 1972; Renzulli, 1978), diligence, and commitment (Renzulli,

1978). Sternberg has developed the "Triarchic" theory of intelligence, suggesting that there are actually three dimensions to intelligence (Sternberg, 1986). "Componential" intelligence consists of mental mechanisms for processing information. "Experiential" intelligence involves dealing with new tasks or situations and the ability to use mental processes automatically. "Contextual" intelligence is the ability to adapt to, select and shape the environment.

Renzulli has developed a "three-ring" definition of giftedness, which consists of above-average ability, creativity and task commitment or motivation (Renzulli, 1998). While a few students will demonstrate these behaviors consistently and across disciplines, other students may demonstrate them in specific activities or interest areas. Renzulli suggests that the most effective approach to educating high-ability students is for teachers to choose content, instruction and opportunities according to students' learning needs. As seen in Figure 1, there are three clusters in the conceptualization: above average ability, task commitment, and creativity. What is important to note is no single cluster makes giftedness; the interaction among these clusters is the necessary ingredient for creative-productive accomplishment (Ren zulli, 1978).

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Renzulli's and other studies recognize the fact that superior achievement that is, actualization of giftedness, is not only a matter of superior intelligence, but also of other factors. Some of the general characteristics of gifted, talented and more able pupils given by CCEA (2006) also display the variety of attributes these students might have. He or she may:

• be a good reader
• be very articulate or verbally fluent for their age
• give quick verbal responses (which can appear cheeky)
• have a wide general knowledge
• learn quickly
• be interested in topics which one might associate with an older child
• communicate well with adults – often better than with their peer group
• have a range of interests, some of which are almost obsessions
• show unusual and original responses to problem-solving activities
• prefer verbal to written activities
• be logical
• be self taught in their own interest areas
• have an ability to work things out in their head very quickly
• have a good memory that they can access easily
• be artistic
• be musical
• excel at sport
• have strong views and opinions
• have a lively and original imagination/sense of humor
• be very sensitive and aware
• focus on their own interests rather than on what is being taught
• be socially adept
• be easily bored by what they perceive as routine tasks
• show a strong sense of leadership
• are not necessarily well-behaved or well liked by others

Not all gifted students have all of these characteristics all together. What seems to be important is being aware of, especially on the part of the teachers, these traits so that they can enquire further into a pupil's learning patterns and ability levels in different fields such as learning a foreign language.

BEING TALENTED AND LEARNING LANGUAGES

Piaget suggests that a child's ability to use a language informatively depends upon his stage of intellectual development. Children of 4th grade are in the concrete operations (7 - 11/12 years) stage having the characteristics of demonstrating intelligence through logical and systematic manipulation of symbols related to concrete objects, operational thinking, egocentric thought including private language or speech for oneself diminishes (Foley

and Thompson, 2003).

Studies (e.g. Scott and Ytreberg, 1990) have revealed that children at the age of eight or ten have a language with all the basic elements in place. They are component users of their mother tongue and in this connection they are aware of the main rules of syntax in their own language. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) also point out that by the age of ten, children can understand abstracts, symbols (beginning with words) and they can generalize and systematize.

This suggests that most eight to ten year olds will have some sort of language awareness and readiness which they bring into the foreign language classroom. Similarly, Halliwell (1992) suggests that young children do not come to the language classroom empty-handed. They bring with them an already well-established set of instincts, skills and characteristics helping them to learn another language. For example, children:

• are already very good at interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding the individual words.
• already have great skill in using limited language creatively.
• frequently learn indirectly rather than directly.
• take great pleasure in finding and creating fun in what they do.
• have a ready imagination.
• above all take great delight in talking.

These are general characteristics of children learning languages. But how about gifted learners? There is a significant amount of research on gifted learners and how they excel in different areas such as music, art or physical sciences. However, the research on how these students apply their abilities in learning foreign languages is quite scanty.

In fact, advanced verbal and higher order thinking skills inherent in those learners with a high aptitude for learning suggests a high learning potential for a rapid competence development in foreign languages. Hayes et al. (1998), for example, state that "there is a strong connection between language ability and learning ability." Van Tassel-Baska (2000) also calls for the inclusion of foreign languages in the gifted and talented curriculum in order to maximize the linguistic understanding that is commensurate with their abilities. As Deveau (2006) puts it, high-ability students use their verbal gifts and test their hypotheses analyzing the structure of the target language and comparing it to other languages.

In an empirical study of the bilingual language development of a gifted child, Hoh (2005) concluded that "driven by a strong desire to communicate mental meanings to others, the gifted child often seems to be able to operate outside of the linguistic and cognitive constraints restricting the general population". Hoh suggests that the greater linguistic sophistication typically observed in gifted students must be honored and encouraged as a prior ability that can significantly enhance language deve-

lopment.

However, Deveau (2006) warns against the potentially debilitating trait of perfectionism associated with some high-ability students and suggests that language teachers should focus more on developing strategic competence rather than grammatical competence. To that end, teaching communication strategies to assist in their ability to successfully communicate ideas can dramatically improve self-efficacy and lessen the debilitations of perfectionist tendencies.

THE STUDY

The study described in this article was conducted to learn more about foreign language learning experiences of a group of gifted students and to examine practices that occur with them.

Setting

The Center for Gifted Children (BILSEM) in Adana has been established by the government to develop, implement, promote and support educational opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people as well as providing support for parents and educators. It is a nationally recognized centre of expertise which develops and helps the delivery of gifted and talented education in Adana, Turkey.

Identification of gifted children

On the basis of standards for the assessment and identification of gifted learners published by the Ministry of National Education, BILSEM employs a three-phase process: nomination, screening and selection and placement.

Nomination: Every year BILSEM sends observation forms to pre-school, primary and secondary schools. Teachers are asked to nominate gifted children by using the observation forms including characteristic traits of gifted children. Teachers observe their students when they are involved in activities that are more open-ended and require more complex thinking and other behaviors. Students who fit within these categories are included in the nomination process and forms are sent to the Centre.

Screening: Once all of the nomination information is collected, the identification committee determines which students will proceed to the second phase: screening. A two-stage process of screening is employed: Group screening and individual screening. All nominated students take a screening test and on the basis of their performance on this test, the identification committee decides which students will proceed to further screening. At this stage, students are administered an individualized intelligence test in which the cut-off score is 130 and above.

Despite receiving considerable criticism in recent years, individualized intelligence testing is almost routinely used to determine whether a student qualifies for early gifted placement (Sparrow et al., 2005).

Selection/placement: Students who score 130 and above in the intelligence test are placed in support programmes. Once the students finish the support program in which they are observed systematically, they are accepted to the individual training in which they are taught subjects according to their interests and abilities.

Participants

The participants of this study are 105 gifted and talented students whose ages differ from 10 to 12. They have already been identified as gifted or talented through the process explained above. They attend both their regular state schools located in Adana and BILSEM. At the time of the study, they have been following the support program in which they are introduced to Turkish, English, Math, Art, Music and Science lessons for one class hour (40 min) per week.

Instruments

The participants were first administered questionnaires through which they were asked about their attitudes toward English and the way English is taught. The questionnaire was adapted from Gregory (in Moon, 2000).

At the second phase of the study, the children were asked to fill in the classroom critical incident questionnaire developed by Brookfield (1995). Student answered the questions related to three different activities carried out in English lessons right after the lesson was over. The purpose was to find out students' reactions to specific parts of the lessons and to see how they view or even name the activities.

Data analysis

Findings on pupils' attitudes: In the first phase of the study, participants have been asked to express their attitudes through a questionnaire. For the purpose of the analysis, the questions were grouped under three headings: Attitudes to English, to Learning English and to English Teacher. The following section presents the results in that order.

As Table 1 shows, an overwhelming majority of participants like English do not find it hard and believe that English may be useful to them later in their life. There was only one participant who stated that she did not like English very much. Her comment was: "Whether I like it or not, I know English is necessary for the future." Another 16 students added that they like English only in BILSEM, but not in their regular schools. While some pupils find English lessons hard (8%), others find it hard

Table 1. Attitude to English.

Items	Yes		No	
	No.	%	No.	%
1. I do not like English	1	1	96	99
3. English may be useful to me later	105	100	0	0
4. I like English	88	99	1	1
7. English is hard	8	9	77	91
12. I would like to learn other languages.	102	97	3	3
19. English is usually boring.	1	1	87	99

Table 2. Attitude to learning English.

Items	Yes		No	
	No.	%	No.	%
5. Learning English is a waste of time.	1	1	99	99
6. English lessons are fun.	83	99	1	1
10. I am no good at English.	14	17	69	83
11. I would like to find out more about English	81	98	2	2
13. I think my parents are pleased that I'm learning English.	103	98	2	2
14. I think everyone should learn English at primary school.	102	99	1	1
15. My friends think that learning English is good.	80	96	5	4
17. I think that doing English now will help me in secondary school.	84	99	1	1
20. I am glad I am learning English.	105	100		

at school (7%) or in BILSEM (1%). These results show that children are exposed to different teaching methods and techniques in two different institutions. Apparently, what they find enjoyable, easy or difficult can change according to their learning experiences. It should also be noted that this positive attitude is not confined to English language per se, since 97% of participants express a wish to learn other languages as well.

The questionnaire also includes some items asking their attitudes toward the process of learning English both at their schools and at BILSEM. As seen in Table 2, a great majority of the students disagree with the idea that English is a waste of time. However, five students believe that the English they learn at school is a waste of time. Only one pupil chose "partly". As she put it, talking about the things they already know just to practice is a waste of time and has no meaning. She said "I wonder whether it is ever possible for a tourist to show me a pencil and ask what it is." Additionally, 21 children wrote that English lessons are fun only in BILSEM, not at their own school. But, in general, a great majority of the children think that English is fun.

Not only educators, but also parents have become more aware of the importance of learning English at an early age (Ellis, 2000). Thus, when we asked whether their families are happy with their learning English, except for two pupils who said that they do not know, all of them said "yes." The Ministry of National Education decided to introduce English in the 4th grade in state primary schools in 1997. Our participants seem to be happy with that policy since they, overwhelmingly, chose the option "yes."

The participants have also expressed their attitudes toward the way they learn English and their English teacher (Table 3). However, before looking at the results pertaining to this item, the two contexts namely, students' schools and BILSEM should be noted. The conditions provided at BILSEM are much more different than the schools the participants attend. The class size is much smaller than their regular schools, for example. Moreover, they are learning among pupils closer to their own pace. These facts change the types of activities carried out. Hence, all the students acknowledged the difference between the two institutions. Some added that;

BILSEM is more enjoyable.
We just memorize at school.
We play and learn here.
All we do is write at school.

Young learners tend to be influenced by their feelings for their teacher, the general learning atmosphere in the classroom and the methods used (Moon, 2000). Two of the most important reasons for pupils liking English appear to be teacher and teaching methods. Thus, the participants were given the statement "I don't like the way we learn English". Their responses are thus displayed.

Table 3. Attitude to English teacher.

Items	Yes		No	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
2. I think there is a difference between the way we learn English here at BILSEM and at school.	105	100		
16. I don't like the way we learn English.	15	14	90	86
21. I like my English teacher.	91	87	14	13

Table 4. Further comments.

Comments	No.
I would like to have more lesson hours for English	2
Everything is perfect at BILSEM	3
I love English	17
Everyone should learn English	7
BILSEM is better and more enjoyable than my school.	18
Sometimes I come across many unknown words in English lessons.	3
I wish the English lessons at school were like the ones at BILSEM	8
I do not want English lessons at school.	2
I would like to learn more about English.	2
We do not need the grammar we learn at school.	2
Reading lessons in English are needed.	1
Team teaching would be useful in English lessons as well.	1

As has previously been mentioned, teacher and the teaching methods are prominent for young learners; so they were asked whether they liked their English teacher. The percentage of those who are not happy with the way they learn English is 14 and those who do not like their teacher is 13. This shows that appropriate teaching methods and positive attitudes of the teacher are very important for motivating young learners to learn English. Fourteen percent of the participants do not like the way they learn English at school. This response is parallel to their ideas about learning English at school. However, 86% of the children are happy with the way they learn English.

As seen in Table 4, some students felt the need to comment further on their learning experiences both at BILSEM and their schools.

Participants have useful and interesting suggestions regarding teaching English, team teaching for example, which is practiced in other lessons in BILSEM and supplementary reading classes for learning English. They also criticized the way they learn English. During the interview, they complained about the books and routine tasks which make English lessons boring. These students do not want to waste time repeating the same things over and over again. Observations conducted, questionnaires administered and their comments make it clear that they want to explore new things about English in each lesson.

FINDINGS FROM CRITICAL INCIDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

In the second phase of the study, the participants were given a critical incident questionnaire for three different activities carried out in English classes in BILSEM. The questionnaire was administered right after the lesson and the researcher took some field notes. This section of the study analyzes the responses of students to critical incidents. The students described the most difficult and enjoyable parts of the lesson as well as what they would change if they participated in the same activity once again.

Activity 1 (Talking about pictures)

Aim: To make students use English to describe pictures. The teacher brings colorful pictures of places and people in large flash cards and sticks them on the wall. First, the students are encouraged to make guesses about what the flash card is about. They are given small clues like: "It's a picture of a park. Everywhere is green. Guess what you can see in the picture." Then, the students are divided into groups and they try to make as many guesses as possible in a given period. They get 10 points for each correct guess.

Some examples from the pupils' sentences are:

Table 5. How students describe the activity.

What we did	No.
We played a picture guessing game	36
We learnt new words in this lesson	7
We had a competition in this lesson	4
We did a group work	11
We learnt describing places in English	5
We learnt how to name some objects in English	26

Table 6. The most difficult part of the activity.

Comment	No.
Nothing was too difficult for me	20
Guessing about the pictures	8
Some words that I do not know	12
Rules of the game (No Turkish)	2

Table 7. What students would change.

I would …..	No.
Change nothing, everything was good	19
Put more new words	6
Use new pictures	8
Add music	1
Like to perform better so that our group could win	6
Make the lesson an hour longer	3
Use the computer for the activity	3

Table 8. What I liked most in the activity.

Comment	No.
Guessing about the pictures	21
Group work-competition	11
Colorful pictures	4
Winning	7
Everything	2
The teacher's attitudes	2

There are children, they are playing.
There are trees and flowers.
There is a car.
There are swings.

What did I do in this lesson?: In response to this question, students give different answers which shows that each student perceives the same activity differently and what is meaningful to one student may not be even interesting for another. Table 5 describes how the students describe what they do in the activity.

As seen in Table 5, for more than half of the children (36 out of 50) the activity was a game. To others, it was an activity carried out to teach new vocabulary while quite a number of them put the nature of the activity, which is group work, at the center while describing what they did. One plausible interpretation might be that that grouping students has an impact on their description of the activity. Some children give details such as "I learnt the importance of pronunciation: like in bedroom-bathroom" or "I learnt how to make 'child' and 'woman' plural; we do not put s!" One pupil states that he learnt the word 'curtain' in this activity.

The most difficult part of the activity: The students were asked to write about the most difficult part of the activity. Their answers are displayed in Table 6.

For nearly half of the students, the activity was manageable. However, many students had difficulty when they could guess an object in the picture but did not know how to say it in English. They did not want to give clues to the other group while trying to learn that specific word. Thus, not knowing some words was the most difficult part of the activity for 12 pupils.

What I would change in the activity: When asked how

they would modify the activity, they responded as shown in Table 7.

Nearly half of the pupils were happy about the rules, pictures and the activity itself as they stated that they would change nothing in the activity. Children like colorful pictures, flash cards and anything visual, so some pupils would like to see different pictures for other activities. It seems that the success of the group is very important for them since some students wished that they could perform better so that their group could win. This shows that winning is an important factor for the children. Giving less importance to scores in future activities would be helpful.

What I liked most in the activity: The students were asked what they liked most in the activity. Their answers included comments on the activity itself, group work and pictures and giving clues about the type of activities they would like to do in future.

Responses of pupils to this question show how different parts of lessons can be viewed differently by the pupils and how some small details can be important for individuals. In the previous question, where the students were asked about the most difficult part of the lesson, guessing about the pictures was the most difficult part for some pupils. However, in Table 8 we see that it is the part the students liked most. The importance of group work can be seen in this item as well. Eleven pupils indicated that they liked the group work and the competition most (11 pupils); for those who won, winning is the best part of the lesson (seven pupils). For others, attitude of the teacher was the most important part of the lesson. This implies

Table 9. How students describe the activity.

What we did	No.
A drama activity	42
We learnt what to say at a restaurant in English	10
I had a role in the drama activity (I was the waiter, taxi driver, e.t.c.)	15
We did group work	7
We did a very enjoyable activity	5
We learnt new words and expressions	13
I spoke English	11
Pronunciation of the expressions	10

Table 10. The most difficult part of the activity.

Comment	No.
I did not have any difficulty	8
My role (I was the waiter)	9
Speaking in English- pronouncing the words correctly	23
Remembering my sentences during the activity	20
Role playing activity	5
Filling in this form☺	2
Group work	1
Saying twenty "dollars"	2
I fell down while escaping in order not to pay the bill, my leg still hurts	1
Not being able to say "how come there is not raki?" angrily	1

that even if the children are busy with the activities, they seek teacher's encouragement, guidance, and support.

Activity 2 (Role playing)

Aim: How to invite someone to go to a restaurant, how to order food and drink and how to ask for the bill. The teacher first introduces a restaurant environment by pretending to be a waiter. The purpose of this lesson is to give beginners the skills to order food in a restaurant. This role playing activity can be expanded by the students by including scenes of going to the restaurant by a taxi, complaining about the food, meeting a friend at the restaurant, e.t.c.

What I did in the lesson: Table 9 displays the responses of students regarding what they did in the lesson. For majority of the students, it was a drama activity. However, there were some who viewed the activity as a group work (7 pupils), as having different roles (15 pupils) or as opportunities to speak English (11 pupils). Ten pupils stated that the purpose of the lesson was to teach how to behave and what to say at a restau-

rant. A group of 13 pupils focused on the new words and structures they learnt in the activity. They even gave some examples:

"It is such a boring day, let's go to BILSEM restaurant, what would you like to eat", e.t.c.

The most difficult part of the activity: This was the first drama activity where all the students had a role. Thus, their comments were significant.

Most of the students' comments are related to the difficulty level of the activity. This is understandable since it was the first time they encountered role play as an activity and there were new words and expressions they were supposed to use. The fact that the activity lasted one lesson hour, 40 min as planned, and students did not have enough time for rehearsals made the experience hard to cope with. They cited, for example, pronouncing the words correctly and remembering their sentences as difficult parts of the activity. The role they chose also had an impact on how they perceived the activity. The waiter, for example, was a leading role and those performing stated that it was difficult.

Some parts of the activity required improvisation. For instance, in one group one of the customers ordered raki (a Turkish drink) and the waiter simply replied "no raki". The acting customer was supposed to raise the tension and argue with the waiter, but his English was not efficient enough to do that. As a result, as seen in Table 10, not being able to say "how come there is not raki?" in an angry tone was the most difficult part of this activity for this student.

Likewise, two students from another group had a hard time in pronouncing "dollars." One of them said "twenty colors" instead of "twenty dollars" and found himself in an embarrassing situation. Another group tried to end the activity in a different way. While the customer was sneaking out of the restaurant without paying the bill, he fell down, again putting the student in a difficult position in front of the others.

What I would change in the activity: As shown in Table 11, many pupils are happy about the activity and they stated that they would change nothing (19 pupils). However, a number of students commented on the different parts of the activity. For instance, six pupils preferred knowing the expressions beforehand so that they could practice before performing. They said "I wish I had more time (four pupils), I wish the expressions were easier (two pupils). Others seemed to adapt well. They even suggested wearing costumes or speaking with native speakers beforehand

What I liked most in the activity: As Table 12 displays, 27 pupils liked the role playing activity itself. For 13 of them, it was the role they performed. As thus mentioned, some groups attempted to modify the scenario and this caused some funny scenes to happen. Seven students

Table 11. What the students would change in the activity.

I would …..	No.
Change nothing	19
Add new expressions	6
Prefer knowing the expressions beforehand	6
Like to carry out more and more role playing activities	6
Like to have more time for the lesson	4
Want to be free about the topic of the role playing	2
Want to talk with the native speakers	1
Want to perform better	7
Bring costumes	1
Change my group	2
Would like to have easier expressions	2

Table 12. What I liked most in the activity.

I liked…..	No.
Role playing	27
My role	13
Everything	11
Improving my English by speaking	4
Nothing	1
The teacher's attitudes	4
The song	5
Funny things happened while improvising	7
Being better than the other group	2
Working in a group	2

Table 13. The most difficult part of the activity.

Comment	No.
I didn't have any difficulty	15
Describing some of the words	44
"No Turkish-No body language" rule	4
Pronunciation	4
Some unknown words	15
We could not hear the girls' voices well	1

Table 14. What the students would change in the activity.

I would …..	No.
Change nothing	28
Add more animals	4
Like to know the meanings of all the words	2
Add easier words	4
Add more difficult words	8
Like to play the same game with different cards	11
Like to play the real taboo game with forbidden words	3
Put the pictures under the words	1
Exclude some words not easy to explain (pizza, carpet)	2
Like to have more time	5
Like to get more points next time	1
Like to describe the words to my own group	2
Like to perform better	6
Like to have a time limit	2

said they enjoyed these unpredictable events. Similarly, another five found that the song they composed as part of a show at the restaurant was the most wonderful part. Four pupils stated that the activity was helpful because it helped them practice English. However, for one student nothing was pleasant.

Activity 3 (Word game)

In this activity, the students are given colorful cards with familiar words written. The word classes can be classified as colors, animals, classroom objects, household items, parts of the body, etc. The students were divided into two groups and each pupil in the groups had at least one card to define. Both groups score points for the words successfully explained.

What I did in the lesson: Most of the students described the activity as a "vocabulary description game", while many students named it taboo referring to the commercial game. This activity was also new to the students.

As for the most difficult part of the activity, as seen in Table 13, more than half of the students indicated that

they had difficulty explaining some of the words (44 pupils). One plausible explanation would be that it was a new experience and also quite demanding as well. Guessing the meaning of the unknown words rather than defining them in their own words is the common practice in language classes. Moreover, while 15 students mentioned that words were not familiar to them, another 15 said they had no difficulty. This is not surprising because some of the students attend private lessons to learn English and some are familiar with taboo game.

What I would change in the activity: The students were asked which specific parts of the activity they would change if they had the chance. Table 14 displays their comments.

Similar to the other activities, a number of students (28 pupils) wrote that they would change nothing in the activity. While 11 students preferred doing it with different word cards, others would like to see more animal names in the activity. For some students, the activity was challenging as they would like to have more difficult words (eight pupils), have a time limit (two pupils) and like to play the real taboo game (three pupils). However, the comments made by others asking for easier words (four pupils) and excluding some difficult words (two pupils)

Table 15. What I liked most in the activity.

I liked……	No.
Describing the words	22
The game	18
Trying to guess the words	9
Being able to guess the words	13
Our group was good at describing	2
Learning new words	6
Words' being easy	3
"No Turkish-no body language" rule	8
Everything	11
Group work	3
The teacher's motivating us	3
Funny things happened during the game	2

should also be considered. The idea of defining the words to their own group is also worth thinking for future use of the same activity.

What I liked most: The students were also asked what they liked most in the activity. Their responses are shown in Table 15.

As seen in Table 14, many students liked the game itself (18 pupils) and enjoyed describing the words in English (22 pupils) and 11 pupils wrote that they liked everything related to the activity. The students also reported that they liked trying to find out the words being described (13 pupils). For some children "no Turkish-no body language" rule was problematic; but eight pupils indicated that they liked the rules more than anything else. Six students found this game as an opportunity to learn vocabulary and so learning new words was the most enjoyable part for them.

It should be pointed out that at first, when they introduced the game, they were quite frustrated. However, they could manage rather well. We must admit that the game was difficult for the 4th graders, although the group work helped a lot. They could work together and asked for more help when necessary. In terms of grammar, it was observed that the children had difficulty in making up sentences in which they tell where something is. Their mother tongue occasionally interfered and they came up with sentences like "Television living room in the."

Conclusions

The study reported here offers only a snapshot of a huge and complex learning phenomenon. We confined the study to 105 gifted and talented students, so we realize that the results might be peculiar to our situation and we should be careful in drawing our conclusions. Yet, even if the details of a single situation cannot be easily transferred to a wider population, some important lessons may still be learnt from this particular collection of data that

could lead to further research in the field. The findings of the study could provide useful information for the teaching of the gifted and about language learning environment for the gifted. Based on students' perceptions, the findings related to the language learning environment and to teacher-student interactions and language activities used are particularly useful to administrators and teachers. From the teachers' perspective, the findings could help language teachers to reflect on the various aspects of the language classrooms, their interactions with students and how they approach language teaching.

The findings were significant predictors of gifted students' attitudes to learning English. They are very enthusiastic about learning English. As Brumfit et al. (1991) point out, children have fewer negative attitudes to second languages and cultures than adults and consequently they are better motivated than adults. The first practical implication of this finding is that teachers might attempt to adopt teaching approaches which would maintain their interest in learning second languages. The data from the critical incident questionnaire indicated that even in unfamiliar situations, gifted children did not experience any problems in adapting themselves to roles in the activities. This shows that gifted and talented children do not easily give up and they try to do their best when they are expected to do something for their learning.

It seems that they do not like limitations much. They enjoy challenging activities rather than those with constraining elements such as time and place. They are full of new ideas and put them forward freely. In the role playing activity, for example, although they were given structured dialogues, they did not restrict themselves to these. Instead, they added new scenes and conversational turns. These findings suggest that teachers might adopt a more creative teaching and learning approach in the gifted classroom. The teachers would establish an intellectually stimulating environment in which varied and exciting activities are used. Also, teachers might create opportunities to speak and use the second language in the classroom through a variety of resources and materials.

The study also presents corroborative evidence that young learners are "emotionally excitable" (Brewster et al., 2003). They can be overjoyed with an activity or can easily create fun in the classroom. Gifted and talented children have a lively and original imagination and a sense of humor. Additionally, they usually have an ability to work things out in their head very quickly and have a good memory that they can access easily.

In general, if gifted children are to retain what they have learnt in a second language, it must be presented through varied, exciting as well as challenging activities. The implications are that there should be a qualitatively different presentation of second languages for talented students. This will require group work activities encouraging both competition and cooperation among students and opportunities to speak and use that language in the classroom rather than delivery through the more traditional presentation of ling-

uistic items followed by individual practice such as drills and repetition.

Perhaps more importantly, we should be ready to listen to what gifted students themselves have to say about their education and see their feedback as an essential part of high-quality programmes to be designed for them.

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