Integrating a process-based challenging lesson plan framework into the syllabus for gifted EFL learners

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Abstract

Learners vary in the acquisition of foreign language learning. Among these are the gifted learners. What makes gifted learners unlike is that they acquire rapidly and they are good at thinking differently and creatively. Moreover, they have curiosity, attention, a superior memory and an excellent ability to learn a language. Remarkably, they are independent enough to reject something purposely when it seems pointless. Besides, they can perceive the world as competently as an adult, and they are even different from each other that make it difficult to define their character correctly and to prepare a lesson plan that meets their needs exactly. Therefore, when we consider this challenging character, teachers need a particular lesson plan that helps them cope with gifted children's challenging character. This study aims to review the literature about gifted children to identify the needs and nature of them and suggest a lesson plan framework for EFL learners which includes the standard functions and skills required by the implemented syllabus in Turkey to help the teachers design their lessons according to gifted learners' needs and nature.

Keywords: gifted, EFL, process-based, syllabus, curriculum;

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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem

Foreign language is acquired in many different ways. Learners who are at different ages, levels and characteristics prefer various ways to acquire the target language. Theorists try to analyse these learning ways to develop new methods or models which support the learners' progress while they are creating their learning strategies. Each language learner has individual differences. However, gifted learners are the most complicated ones because of their unique characters. Gifted learners also form an important group who require a special kind of instruction which is compatible with their intelligence and include appropriate tools (Ozcan & Kaya, 2016; Ozcan & Zaroglu, 2016). Anyone who deals with the learning strategies of the gifted learners faces with some problems (Renzulli, 1988). The nature of the gifted learners is the first and also the most compulsive one. They have many individual differences that make it complicated for teachers to develop strategies to cope with their learning styles. They learn rapidly; as a result, they get bored easily. They have strong critical thinking skills and productiveness, academic competence, leadership, curiosity, attention, excellent memory, unique ability to learn a language and adult-like perception of the world. In addition to these challenging aptitudes, they can reject others' ways or solutions if they seem unreasonable or inappropriate to their learning way. This complicated, challenging and unique character lead to another problem in deciding the best teaching way in foreign language teaching. Although many approaches, methods or models are recommended, gifted learners' nature makes it impossible for the teacher in the classroom to select the best way or create a lesson plan that appeals to each of them. Consequently, only alternative activities which are based on different approaches and methods can be suggested by the specialist to the teachers to be combined according to gifted learners' needs and natures.

1.2 Purpose of the study

In order to design an appropriate lesson plan for gifted learners in foreign language learning, teachers need to know about the nature of these learners and the approaches that are recommended by the specialist. This study aims to review the literature to identify some specific characteristic features of the gifted learners that will assist the teachers while adopting the best method for their gifted learners in EFL classrooms. Furthermore, a lesson plan framework designed in line with gifted students' nature and recommended approaches that meet their needs is suggested. This lesson plan is derived from the implemented syllabus in Turkey and accommodates a blended model of recommended approaches.

1.3 Significance of the study

Many countries accepted a national curriculum or syllabus in foreign language learning whereas; different variables can make them ineffective. Learners' learning background and intelligence are the main factors that affect the functionality of the syllabus. To solve this problem, teachers try to adapt their lesson plans according to their students' aptitudes. Teachers face this problem both with the learners who have learning difficulties and on the contrary with the learners who learn rapidly. Hence, this study suggests an adapted lesson plan framework which enhances the complexity of the standard functions, skills and activities in the existing syllabus by blending in the recommended methods and models.

1.4 Research questions

The complicated nature of the gifted learners requires an eclectic approach in order to provide a satisfying lesson plan for the gifted learners in an EFL classroom. By taking these learners' superior abilities into consideration such as learning rapidly and thinking creatively, complexity should be promoted as a teaching tool. For instance, in order to increase the complexity of the lesson plan, complex parts of the recommended methods or models can be integrated into it with an eclectic view. However, it takes more than just combining some process-based and complex parts of the methods or models. It involves an extensive study about what it means to teach gifted learners well and how to blend the essential parts of the various methods (Renzulli, 1988). Thus, 'How the present lesson plan framework of the Ministry of Education can be transformed into a challenging one for gifted learners?' is the research question behind this study.

1.5 Limitations

There are many studies which have been done for about a hundred year in the field of gifted education. All specialists debate the psychological and educational aspects of being gifted as a child or adult. In this process, they try to describe their target group considering all aspects of gifted people's characters. It can be easily noticed that these definitions are ambiguous. They all discuss the different components of the matter, so researchers who want to analyse the subject has difficulty in understanding and following the flow of the studies. Another drawback is the limited studies about foreign language learning in gifted education. While the experts have not yet reached a consensus about who is gifted, it is compulsive to design a course that meets their need and enhances their skills.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Who is gifted?

Learners come to the learning environment with many variables that affect the success of the learning process such as readiness, age, social background and intelligence. All variables can be defined precisely by the teacher to determine the beginning point of the class except for intelligence. Defining intelligence or identifying the gifted learners early or in time is not a simple task for the teachers and for this reason they cannot be given appropriate instruction (Ozcan & Kaya, 2016). It is not a simple effort also for a specialist to make a definition to the "giftedness". Many definitions can be found when searching the relevant articles. For instance, Renzulli (1984) presents that definition as:' Gifted behaviour consists of behaviours that reflect an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits - these clusters being above average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance". Tannenbaum (1986)'s definition suggests that gifted learners are the people who can reach the potential ability of the adults. Feldhusen & Hoover (1986) offers this definition: "Our composite conception of giftedness then includes (a) general intellectual ability, (b) positive self-concept, (c) achievement motivation, and (d) talent". Gagné (1995) states that 'Feldhusen & Hoover (1986)'s definition is unique in that talent is described as a component of giftedness.' Gagné (1995) tries to separate these two terms 'gifted' and 'talented'. Therefore, lots of definition which was suggested by many specialists can be found in Gagné (1995)'s work. However, the versatility and uncertainty in the definitions of these terms make it difficult to defence the acceptability of these concepts (Gagné, F., 1995). Another controversial issue about the definition of the 'gifted 'term is the usage of exaggerated words such as extremely, extraordinary, exceptionally, and so on. According to Gagné (1995), these words give the wrong idea about the nature of gifted and talented learners. As a result, it seems inconvenient to describe gifted learners clearly. It is only possible to make some

conclusions about their facilities which seems to be reached a consensus by specialists in this field because as Bines (1991) stated there is neither an operational definition of giftedness nor a reliable method for identifying gifted learners after more than a hundred years of research.

2.2 The nature of giftedness

As Glass (2004) reported, one crucial component of gifted development is cognition. Cognition is described in gifted learners as 'comprising curiosity, attention and superior memory' by Lewis & Michalson (1985). Saricam & Ogurlu (2015) stated that gifted learners vary from others in their high level of metacognitive awareness and low level of math anxiety. Gifted learners also differ from others in their motivation, independence and language ability (Winner, 1996). They can use extended words and complicated grammar structures even when they are very young (Glass, 2004) Similarly, Piirto (1999) exemplifies the special facilities of gifted learners related with language learning like being capable of communication, organization in writing and speaking, accepting different perspectives, being original and creative and also being susceptible to the social and moral matters. Baldwin (1994) explains the gifted learners as those who are born with the facility of learning ideas and concepts faster that seems precious by society both in children and adults. The Marland (1971) asserts that intellectual aptitude, innovational thinking, leadership competence, interest in art and psychomotor talent are the prominent facilities of gifted learners. In conclusion, all definitions and statements demonstrate one aspect of the characteristics of gifted learners that shape the idea of giftedness in teachers' mind.

2.3 How to teach English to gifted learners?

Among the studies which have been done in gifted education, studies about foreign language learning are somewhat limited (Yildirim& Akcayoglu, 2015). On the other hand, there are various models developed by the specialists about gifted education which assist teachers in understanding the separation in the field and how to design the appropriate syllabus and lesson plan considering the diverse characteristics of gifted learners. These models can be applied to all content areas including language learning and have K-12 applicability. They can be implemented both inside and outside the classroom setting or utilised in both individual study and group work. They put all individualised facilities for gifted learners together (VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007).

Some of these models are analysed in this study to determine the typical sides of the models. VanTassel-Baska & Brown (2007) unfolds some of these models as follows. The first model, The Stanley Model of Talent Identification and Development aims to improve individual development in the lifetime. The main principles of this model are using challenging verbal and mathematical tests while identifying the learners, promoting educational improvement by using subject matter acceleration, organising fast-paced classes and a flexible curriculum. Next model is The Renzulli Schoolwide Enrichment Triad model. In this model, selected learners are tested to determine their interest and learning styles, and the regular curriculum is adapted to their learning pace by excluding the learned parts. Enrichment triad model also provide Type I, Type 2 and Type 3 sorts of improvement experiences consist of the audio-visual material usage to present original, appealing opinions and viewpoints not contained in common curriculum; first-hand experiences require searching and creative production. The Purdue Three-Stage Enrichment Model for Elementary Gifted Learners and the Purdue Secondary Model for Gifted and Talented Youth are other models. Three stages represent the steps that incorporate the improvement of divergent and convergent thinking skills, creative problem solving and self-governing study skills. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Modal which defined the eight kinds of intelligence as verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, musical, rhythmic, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic is

one of these models. Finally, in Stenberg's Triarchic Componential Model, three components describe the subconscious processes used in thinking. The administrative process component acts for arrangements, decisions and controlling achievements. The performance component represents the directing problem-solving strategies. The knowledge- acquisition component stands for gathering the knowledge, remembering and transferring new information. The interaction between the learner and environment improves the cognitive development.

The influence of Piaget and Bloom can be seen in these models. Their studies affected many studies on gifted and disabled learners. The Piageterian theory is the basis of the Plowden Report (1966) which supports individual learning, process-based evaluation, flexible teacher-led curriculum and learning by exploration. The child is in the center of the education system, and environment nurtures the development (Gillard, 2017).

Each of these models and reports has similar perceptions behind them that is to be considered as a base while designing an appropriate syllabus in foreign language learning. Accepting a challenging syllabus to increase the complexity is the first concept to supply beneficial practices that encourage gifted learners. On the contrary, school provokes some problems instead of fostering learners. To eliminate the drawbacks, teachers are prepared sophisticatedly to be ready to create a 'standards-plus' themes (Glass, 2004). Considering the Krashen (1985)'s i+1 theory, learning environment and materials should be enriched to assist language acquisition. Various challenging, authentic materials can be added to break the monotonic atmosphere of the learning environment (Tai & Chen, 2015). Intellectual challenge promotes self-reliance. Arranging a series of activities that allow gifted learners to use their capacity entirely is the crucial point of success (Glass, 2004). Compare and contrast activities with Venn Diagram, categorisation for complex thinking skills, creative thinking skill of fluency, creating a cinquain poem and discussion sessions can be counted among the activities that nourish the course (McKeone, Caruso, Bettle, Chase, Bryson, Schneider & Rule 2015).

Self-directed learning is another concept behind the models. While non-gifted students prefer teacher oriented education and repetition, high-achieving learners can get bored with standardised instructions (Tai & Chen, 2015). Gifted learners should be offered occasions to let them be unique and work individually in their interest areas and varied models of subject-based and grade-based acceleration when they need for their education. They also should be provided with a chance to work with ability-like fellows (Rogers, 2007). The ability grouping modal underlines cooperation between the learners who share the similar aptitude levels to decline the interpersonal isolation. Besides, they have an awareness of their talents (Glass, 2004).

Consequently, all these approaches, methods, models and activities can contribute lesson plans for gifted learners that are produced by teachers in foreign language learning because each teacher has the responsibility of instructing gifted learners in his/her classes (Glass, 2004).

3. Conclusion

Designing a process-based eclectic lesson plan framework based on the implemented syllabus in Turkey for gifted learners is one of the aims of this study. After reviewing the literature about the nature of gifted learners and models that were developed for gifted education, a prototype lesson plan for EFL classes is designed according to their needs and characters. A part of 7th-grade syllabus implemented in Turkey is used as the source. Most of the concepts behind the models that were presented in the literature review part are integrated into the lesson plan in order to increase the challenge in the existing syllabus.

The lesson plan framework consists of five sessions. Before coming to the class, students are asked to watch some videos related to the topic to activate their readiness (CALL) (Tai & Chen, 2015). In the first session, before reading activity, as a warm-up, learners are asked questions about the topic to

make compare and contrast activities, and the meaning of the words is discussed (McKeone et al., 2015). Scanning and skimming techniques are used in this part to do an accelerated reading. So, students are asked only to catch the necessary information. In the second session, students work as a group (Rogers, 2007) and classroom atmosphere is essential (Tai & Chen, 2015). Students are asked to create a real-like environment which makes the class colourful, bright and enjoyable. (Peripheral Learning- Suggestopedia) They prepare an interview by looking at the example dialogue given them before (Inductive learning) and act it in the classroom while their performance is recorded (Micro Teaching). By this way, they will have a chance to watch themselves while speaking to correct the pronunciation and spelling mistakes. In the third session, they use their imagination to create something never seen before. For instance, in this lesson plan, they will create an alien and will think about the question "What would you ask the alien if you encountered it?" In the fourth session, students are asked to report something that they experienced and how they felt in a dialogue. In this lesson plan, they prepare a dialogue between the police and the person who saw the alien. In the last session, students are allowed to study by themselves by reporting the week as a diary (Intrapersonal).

The aim of increasing the complexity of the standard functions and skills in the syllabus to present a challenging lesson plan was achieved by adapting the original syllabus of the Ministry of Education for 7th grade in Turkey. The prototype lesson plan is presented in Table 1, and the original syllabus is presented in figure 1.

Table 1. Proposed Lesson Plan Framework for Gifted Learners

		Objective	Method	Duration	Materials	Target Vocabulary
Pre - Class		Ss will watch a video about space and planets to activate their readiness	CALL		A you-tube video	Evidence, explore, meteor, shower, moon, observe, orbit, planet, proof, rescue, satellite, solar system, space shuttle, surface, the universe
During Class	**Engage**	Ss will be able to make simple comparisons between planets	Question and Answer Ss will be asked some questions to engage them in the topic	5mins		Evidence, explore, meteor, shower, moon, observe, orbit, planet, proof, rescue, satellite, solar system, space shuttle, surface, the universe
	Study	Ss will be able to identify specific information in written material such as brochures, newspaper articles describing facts	Reading, scanning and skimming	15mins	A reading passage that gives short information about space, space shuttle and gravity	Travel, planet, explore, Earth, Moon, crew, gravity, orbiter, space shuttle, mission, force
	Activate 1 MYSTERIOUS EVENT PART 1	SS will be able to relate new information to visual concept	**Desuggestopedia** -Classroom set-up - Peripheral learning -Choose a new identity -Role play -Creative adaptation Group work Question and Answer Dialogue **Multiple Intelligences** -Spatial/ visual -Body/ kinesthetic -Interpersonal -Verbal / linguistic **Microteaching**	25mins	-Authentic materials -Materials that will help ss to create a farm atmosphere in classroom (like grass, plants in a pot, animal toys, sound effects) -Camera	Peasant, journalist, son, daughter, police officer, alien, sign, words used in a farm (for example: farm animals)

During Class	**Activate 2 MYSTERIOUS EVENT PART 2**	SS will be able to relate new information to the visual concept Ss will be able to ask questions about facts and general truth Ss will be able to talk about past events, tell the time, days and dates Ss will be able to display a willingness to communicate with their group friends in English	**Desuggestopedia** -Classroom set-up - Peripheral learning -Choose a new identity -Roleplay -Creative adaptation Group work Question and Answer Dialogue **Multiple Intelligences** -Spatial/ visual -Body/ kinesthetic -Interpersonal -Verbal/linguistic **Microteaching**	35mins	Authentic materials that will help ss create an alien, a spaceship and a night atmosphere in the classroom. (Projector, cardboard, sound effects) Camera	**Words for space, spaceship, planets Adjectives: -Physical appearance -Personality**
	Activate 3 MYSTERIOUS EVENT PART 3	SS will be able to relate new information to the visual concept Ss will be able to ask questions about facts and general truth Ss will be able to talk about past events Ss will be able to display a willingness to communicate with their group friends in English Ss will be able to tell time, days and dates Ss will be able to tell people what they know	**Desuggestopedia** -Classroom set-up - Peripheral learning -Choose a new identity -Roleplay -Creative adaptation Group work Question and Answer Dialogue **Multiple Intelligences** -Spatial/ visual -Body/ kinesthetic -Interpersonal -Verbal / linguistic **Microteaching**	35mins	Authentic materials that will help ss to create the setting Camera	**Words for space, spaceship, planets Adjectives: -Physical appearance -Personality Words used to describe weather conditions**
	Activate 4 MYSTERIOUS EVENT	Ss will be able to write about past events	**Multiple Intelligences** -Intrapersonal	35mins	Pen and paper	

	PART 4	Ss will be able to tell people what they know	-Verbal/ linguistic **CALL**			
After class		Ss will watch their videos that teacher record them while acting in the classroom to realize pronunciation mistakes	**Microteaching** **CALL**		Records	

Figure 1. Original Syllabus of the Ministry of Education for 7th grade in Turkey

Unit/Theme	Communicative Functions and Skills	Suggested Lexis/Language Use	Suggested Text and Activity Types	Assessment
10 *Planets*	Making simple comparisons Telling the time, days and dates Talking about past events Telling people what we know Telling the time, days and dates **Listening** • Students will be able to generally identify the topic of discussion about popular science which is conducted slowly and clearly. **Spoken Interaction** • Students will be able to ask people questions about facts and general truths. **Spoken Production** • Students will be able to talk about general truths. **Reading** • Students will be able to identify specific information in simple written material such as brochures and short newspaper articles describing facts. **Writing** • Students will be able to give short, basic descriptions of general truths and facts. **Compensation Strategies** • Students will be able to relate new information to visual concepts. **Attitudes** • Students will be able to display a willingness to communicate with their peers in English.	evidence explore meteor shower, -s moon, -s observe orbit planet, -s proof rescue satellite, -s solar system, -s space shuttle, -s surface, -s universe What do you know about the solar system? What do you know about planets? — Jupiter is larger than Saturn. — Uranus is cooler than Saturn. Is there any water on the surface of Mars? When did scientists discover Pluto? In 2003, the Mars Exploration mission began. They discovered evidence of water.	**Texts** Children's Encyclopedia Diaries/Journal Entries Maps Posters Questionnaires **Activities** Cognates Labeling Listening Questions and Answers Reading Comprehension Questions Skimming and Scanning Speaking	Quiz or Exam (Units 7-10) **Project** • Students prepare a poster about NASA's Curiosity Project to Mars by using online resources. **Dossier** • Students complete and hand in the European Language Portfolio. Keep the portfolio at school or instruct students to bring it back the following year.

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