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Teaching gifted students through authentic instruction: Reflections from the EFL teachers

Gülçin Mutlu¹

Abstract

The review of literature highlighted that gifted students may gain a lot from authentic instruction in that this methodology may serve well to their needs for inquiry, meaning-making and higher level thinking. Therefore, this qualitative study realized in a phenomenological design aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the EFL teachers' ways of integrating authentic pedagogy into their teaching situations with gifted students. Thus, part of the aim of this study is to investigate how foreign language teaching and gifted education could be linked to one another and in this way it also aims to propose an interdisciplinary focus of research. The participants were six EFL teachers that were sampled from those teaching gifted language learners at Science and Arts Centers (BILSEMs) in one geographical region of Turkey and asked to share their experiences about the implementation of authentic instruction in their gifted classrooms. The results showed that the EFL teachers mostly followed the firmly established standards of the authentic instruction in the literature and they believed that authentic instructional practices enhance gifted learners' learning and intellectual capacities. However, there were some problems or barriers such as class size and time constraints against the better implementation of authentic instruction in their gifted EFL classrooms as reported by these teachers.

Keywords: Gifted education; gifted students; authentic instruction; teaching English as a foreign language; gifted language learners.

Introduction

Although authentic instruction is a recent term that has gained popularity with the work of Newmann, Marks and Gamoran (1996) on a school restructuring project, this term is not in deed new one in the literature. However, the notion has gained a new name though it basically expands the perspectives in constructivist and student-centered approach. In this sense, it would be meaningful to talk about the evolvement of authentic instruction from Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky into Newmann and his colleagues' recent conceptualization (Cholowinski, 2009; Dennis, 2005 & Splitter, 2009). According to Newmann and others' (1996) definition, authentic instruction is a type of instruction which encompasses some combination of four main conditions in which a) students are invited to demonstrate a substantive conversation level and b) to use their higher order thinking skills, c) exhibit deep knowledge and last d) experience a connection between classroom work and the world outside the classroom.

¹ Dr., Necmettin Erbakan University, School of Foreign Languages, gmutlu@konya.edu.tr

Authentic Classroom Instruction

Newmann and his colleagues (1996) derived four standards out of the three main criteria suggested for the authentic intellectual achievement, which are *higher order thinking*, *substantive conversation*, *deep knowledge* and *connection to the world beyond the classroom*. An earlier source compiled by Newmann and Wehlage (1993) possesses one extra standard, which is *social support for student achievement*. Instruction centering on higher order thinking invites students to manipulate information so as to arrive at its meaning and at some conclusions by synthesizing, generalizing, hypothesizing or explaining. Instruction centering on lower-order thinking, on the other hand, invites students to receive and recite information mostly through repetition (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993 & Newmann et al., 1996).

Instruction including high-level substantive conversation involves students to interact with the teacher or their peers so that they develop “improved and shared understanding” of ideas and meanings (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993 & Newmann, et al., 1996, p. 289). Students are invited to distinguish, solve problems, argue, explore explanations and seek for connections so that they could develop complex, in-depth understandings rather than just being asked to learn the surface meaning when the knowledge is shallow (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993 & Newmann, et al., 1996). Instruction is thought to be linked to the real world (and thus authentic) when students are encouraged to deal with real-world public problems and to make use of their own experiences. Finally, teacher instruction involving high expectations, respect and encouragement of all students rate high on the standard of social support for student achievement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993).

Authentic Classroom Instruction and Gifted Education

Stephens and Karnes (2016) see authenticity as a crucial aspect of teaching all students not only to those that are highly-able for learning. However, they further emphasize that the idea of authenticity and the implementation of authentic activities are well suited to gifted learners because of their interests in inquiry and open-endedness. Similarly, Tomlinson (2005) in fact implied authentic instruction while she was defining the characteristics of good curriculum and instruction for gifted learners by saying “Good curriculum and instruction for gifted learners begins with good curriculum and instruction- that is, curriculum and instruction that is meaning-making, rich and high level (p. 160).” Thus, when any instruction includes meaning-making, rich and high-level content and thinking, this type of an instruction may be referred to what is called as authentic instruction. In addition, Tomlinson (2005) mentioned that gifted learners needed a more challenging instruction compared to their less advanced peers because of their high intellectual capacities. Therefore, authentic instruction and gifted education are connected to one another due to the fact that the basic principles of authentic principles may work well with the needs and expectations of gifted learners. Accordingly, authentic instruction appears to offer a lot to the gifted learners and their ways of learning.

Related Research

The recent surge of interest on authentic instruction has led some scholars to probe deep into this concept in order to better understand the characteristics of such type of an instruction so as to maximize student benefits. In this respect, there is a growing body of research on authentic instruction in terms of several subject matters; however, the application of authentic instruction into the foreign language teaching arena is scarce. Before leading the discussion to the authentic instruction in foreign language teaching in gifted student classrooms, it would be wise to give some information on research with regard to authentic instruction as it relates to other content areas and subject matters.

Newmann and his colleagues (1995, 1996) conducted a five-year study on school restructuring which was funded by the US Department of Education. They visited numerous significantly restructured public schools according to four main criteria, student learning, authentic pedagogy, school organizational capacity and external support across the country. They observed these

classrooms for the extent of authentic instruction and thus intellectual quality of students' performance. As a result of their study, they proposed that school restructuring aiming at authentic pedagogy indeed improved student learning. Following Newmann and his colleagues' (1996) work, several attempts have been made to investigate the presence of authentic instruction in the classrooms. Dennis (2005) observed the classes of five high school math or science teachers belonging to the three different school settings. These teachers reported to have a high interest in employing authentic instruction in their classrooms, and that they took part in a teacher development program called Authentic Teaching Alliance (ATA) that was aimed at developing an understanding and practice in the use of authentic instruction. Dennis (2005) has sought to examine the extent of using the characteristics of authentic instruction in the classroom. In her quantitative inquiry, she used the observation instrument Newmann and others (1996) developed on which the set of standards for authentic instruction as determined by Newmann and his colleagues (1996) are rated for each teacher. In this sense, the study investigates the compliance between the standards and the actual classroom practices named to be authentic by the teachers themselves. By doing this, the researcher also looks at the impact of the ATA on the teachers' instructional practices. A similar type of study conducted by Petrella (2000) who again attempted to identify the extent to which Newmann and others' (1996) standards for authentic instruction have been employed. As differently from the earlier research, Petrella (2000) made use of three different grade levels within the same school. The data from both studies indicated that although it is not at a high degree, authentic instruction is implemented by the teachers at a moderate degree, which is a finding supporting the results of Newmann and others' (1996) school restructuring study. Which is common the both studies was the selection of science classes as the subject matter, and conducting interviews to validate classroom observations. Newmann and others (1996) investigated math and social sciences classes in their study. In this regard, one cannot disregard the scarcity of subject areas included in the studies. This need was, however, responded by Sisserson (2002) who investigated the writing instruction in public schools. Instead of observing how teachers' classroom practices fit into the authentic instruction standards, Sisserson (2002) compared the instructional practices of five language-art teachers (i.e. teaching English as the first language) who have attended the Chicago Annenberg Research Project and found to be presenting writing assignments that were high with regard to their authentic intellectual achievement (AIA) standards. However, though the teachers bear similarities in their ability for the preparation of high AIA quality assignments, some of the teachers receive assignments of high AIA, while some teachers of low AIA. She though perhaps such a difference relates to teachers ways of using authentic instructional practices in the writing course. In this sense, she wanted to make a connection between authentic assessment and authentic instruction, the two measures of Newmann and others' (1996) authentic pedagogy. As is clear from the studies, the implementation of authentic instruction in other subject areas is scarce. There is only one study to date that has attempted to investigate authentic instruction in relation to foreign language learning. In their quantitative inquiry, Roelofs and Terwel (1999) examined the extent to which teachers of English used teaching strategies to foster authentic learning. The data from the student questionnaires revealed that the English classes were characterized as being inauthentic lacking such characteristics as classroom and real life connection and student initiation. In this sense, their study followed a quantitative design by eliciting the students' perceptions. Therefore, there is also a need for further in-depth qualitative exploration into teachers' themselves experiences in order to understand the teaching strategies enhancing authentic instruction.

Given the above account, it appears that researchers mostly worked on either science or social studies classrooms. The subject areas studied in relation to authentic pedagogy are limited. Therefore, the purpose of current study is to extend the idea of authentic instruction to the arena of foreign language teaching and learning and also to gifted education. With the exception of the studies above, which were conducted with native English speakers mostly in science classes, little is known about how authentic instruction is incorporated and implemented in other subject areas or in interdisciplinary areas. In order to better understand the nature of authentic instruction and

relevant instructional practices and processes and also conducive conditions for it, further investigation into authentic instruction in different subject areas and also in different settings is needed. In this regard, Turkey where no earlier research has been dated investigating the concept of authentic instruction for gifted education, would be a new and different research setting. In talking more about this gap at the local level, one can observe that the idea of authentic instruction is rarely discussed in Turkish education cycles, though the current mandated curriculum is based on constructivism, and there are problems with its implementation especially in relation to the teaching of special and gifted students. It is a known fact that teaching strategies for gifted learners are in fact also good for all learners and have the capacity to enhance learning in all types of conditions (Tomlinson, 2005). Thus, investigation into authentic instruction conducted with any type of learners would add to our understanding of different and non-traditional teaching methodologies that most students could benefit.

Authentic instruction is viewed as an overwhelming undertaking requiring transformations both in the styles of teachers and schools, especially for those accustomed to traditional teaching approaches (Dennis, 2005). Moreover, Knapp and Shields (1995) mention that teachers may be reluctant to perform authentic instructional practices due to some obstacles they face in their everyday teaching. Thus, investigation into the barriers and obstacles for teachers to implement authentic instructional practices is also needed especially in relation to the gifted classrooms.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of English as foreign language (EFL) teachers in relation to the characteristics and dimensions of authentic instruction they implement in their classrooms with gifted students. Part of the aim of this research is to investigate how English teachers incorporate characteristics of authentic instruction in their teaching for the gifted language learners. The study also examines conditions conducive to authentic teacher practices in class and obstacles against the implementation and practice of authentic instruction as reported by the teachers. Thus, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do English (EFL) teachers incorporate characteristics of authentic instruction in their classroom teaching to the gifted language learners?
2. What conditions are conducive and obstacles to the implementation of authentic instruction in the foreign language classroom composed of gifted language learners according to the teachers' perceptions?

Method

Site or Population Selection

Sampling was performed in two phases. Central Anatolia geographical region of Turkey as research site was determined through convenience sampling. Second, there was criterion-sampling in that the teachers were selected because (they reported that) they have been implementing authentic instruction and real-life practices in their classrooms with gifted students. Hence, the participants were conveniently selected from six English language teachers working with gifted students in several cities in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey. Three female and three male teachers aged between 30 and 42 years old attended this qualitative study. The participant teachers were offering courses at BILSEMs. BILSEMs were state-affiliated course centers that were accepting students based on several intellectual test scores. Only those with acceptable scores (from now on called *the gifted*) could be admitted to the programs offered to the gifted students in these centers.

Data Collection Methods and Procedure

This research was designed as a qualitative study realized in phenomenological investigation. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth phenomenological interviews. The choice of phenomenological interviews with their main focus being the “experienced meanings of the subjects’ life world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 53) corresponds to the purpose of this study. *Interviews with Teachers* were open-ended and centered on eliciting the perceptions of teachers in terms of the research problems. The questions included in the interview schedule (see Appendix A) particularly designed for this study were developed in the light of the literature on authentic instruction (questions regarding real world relevance, a focus on a prior knowledge base and meaningful inquiry etc.). On the validity of instrumentation, an expert’s opinion was requested in that the interview schedule was checked by this external scholar, based on his suggestions and comments, relevant changes and adjustments were performed. Interviews were also conducted at the BILSEMs where the teachers were working and were recorded. Prior to the main study, pilot studies were performed with the two EFL teachers to see the applicability of the questions. The interviews took approximately one hour.

Data Analysis Procedures

The transcribed data were analyzed by means of content analysis. Following the transcription of the interviews, the researcher read the transcribed data carefully in order to determine meaningful recurring topics. These recurring topics were then labeled by conceptual codes depending on their similarities and differences. Then, themes were inductively generated out of these assigned codes. Opinions of a peer who was experienced in qualitative research were sought as a check for the trustworthiness of emerging codes and themes.

Trustworthiness

Verification procedures based on the discussion on validity issues are presented in the following: *Peer debriefing* refers to the use of an external look on the data and research process (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This process is instrumental for credibility (internal validity) purposes. Peer debriefing for this current study took place in two phases. Informal discussions with an experienced peer, that is, *peer examination* in qualitative research design was performed to find alternative explanations for the emerging codes and themes and overall interpretation of the data. Secondly, *an expert opinion* was consulted in that the interview schedule was checked by this external scholar, based on his suggestions and comments, relevant changes and adjustments were performed. Another procedure in achieving credibility (internal validity) was *Members’ check* procedure which is based on the assumption that participants serve as arbiters (Smith & Geoffrey, 1968, as cited in LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Thus, the transcriptions of the interviews were taken to the participants of the study (i.e. the teachers of English) in order to correct researcher’s misinterpretations and misperceptions. *Rich and thick descriptions* of the setting, participants and data collection procedures were provided. This procedure was thought to be useful in achieving transferability (external validity) in that “adequate comparisons with other samples” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 279) might be performed with the help of the broad descriptions of the characteristics of the sample, setting and processes of this study. Moreover, structured interview forms were used; hence, it was assumed that other studies might gain a better understanding of the content of the data gathering methods.

Results and Discussion

Given the perceptions of EFL teachers in relation to the forms of authentic instruction they perform in gifted classrooms (RQ1), the results indicate that there are six main dimensions of the authentic instruction these teachers have been implementing in their classrooms. These dimensions were labeled as a) *real world relevance*, b) *a care for students in the teaching process*, c) *higher-level thinking*, d) *teacher as a guide*, e) *meaningful inquiry and interchange* and finally f) *student pre-knowledge for knowledge*

construction. The results indicated one other miscellaneous category called *other priorities for authentic instruction* that shows other necessary conditions for or characteristics of the authentic instruction according to the reportings of teachers included in the study. Several sub-themes also emerged out of the qualitative data. For instance, real world relevance further encompassed *out-side class application of the classroom work*, *connections to the real world outside the classroom* and *utilization of real-life materials*. The theme, forms of inquiry and interchange, for example, also included such lower-level themes as elaborated communication and substantive communication. For the purposes of RQ2, two main themes named as *advantages* and *obstacles* emerged as a result of inductive coding. Below the data relevant to the each form of authentic instruction were presented separately with the examples given with the pseudo names of the study participants.

Real World Relevance

The need for the classroom instruction to be connected to the real world has been emphasized by the interviewees. Among the real world applications most importantly mentioned are students' experiencing what has been covered in the classroom in the real life, the use of materials from the real life and the need for out-of-class (i.e. real life) working for the classroom responsibilities. This theme is also corroborated with the work of Newmann et al. (1996) which incorporates "Value Beyond the Classroom" as one of the standards for authentic instruction. This standard refers to the idea that instruction is thought to be linked to the real world (and thus authentic) when students are encouraged to deal with real-world public problems and to make use of their own experiences. For example, when Teacher Zeynep says that for a book activity, students have been assigned to behave like the character in the book, it is understood that students make use of their own experiences so as to understand the character, and thus perhaps the main idea of the story. They, moreover, transfer what they have covered in the classroom to their own (real) lives. It was also when Teacher Elif mentioned taking her students outside the class to practice the present continuous tense, in this way, she attempted to show students the real life application of the grammatical pattern covered in the class.

A Care for Students in the Teaching Process

It has been revealed by the interviewees that students' choices, students' interest and motivation in the activities, tasks and their needs, individual differences among the students, students' involvement and engagement in the classroom processes are important characteristics that need to be considered in the implementation of authentic instruction in gifted classrooms. Teacher Zeynep, for instance, sees authentic activities as a way to students' involvement in the class by saying:

"Authentic activities are the most liable because students are mostly involved and engaged with them. You need to keep these special students engaged in your class and while doing this authentic and real-life teaching approach helps me a lot. Authentic activities give these gifted students some chances to be engaged while some individual, pre-dispositional and motivational factors related to them are also cared for."

Higher-level Thinking

Expectations of successful products and work from the gifted students are among the important characteristic of authentic instruction. Teacher Zeynep expects her students to demonstrate a high level of word choice through whatever project they do and he associates his classroom with intellectually challenged environment. To satisfy these high-level expectations and survive in the intellectually challenged environment, her students should exhibit a high-level of thinking. This idea supported by Teacher Zeynep is also included among the standards of authentic instruction proposed by Newmann and his friends (1996) who have proposed students should not recite and repeat the information, they should manipulate it using their intellects. Likewise, other participant Teacher Mehmet expects his students to manipulate the information he covered up in the class

about the mechanics and key characteristics of persuasive writing and reflect and show this manipulation with the production of a classroom project.

Meaningful Inquiry and Interchange

Another participant, Teacher Ali mentions that students are engaged in peer discussion, peer questioning and ask for peer assistance so as to arrive at an in-depth understanding of a topic or a task. This form of elaborated communication has been also proposed by Newmann and his colleagues (1996) within the standards of authentic intellectual achievement. Teacher Selin, another EFL teacher, mentions a similar form of inquiry and interchange by saying:

“My students take part in a dialogue and conversation which is meaningful in that students listen to, communicate and discuss with their peers and me and elaborate on their peers’ ideas in order to arrive at a better understanding of the content, topics and classroom work and processes.”

Consistent with Teacher Selin’s idea, Newmann and his colleagues (1996) include the standard of “substantive conversation” among the standards of authentic instruction.

Teacher as a Guide

The interviewees often assigned some major roles to themselves as EFL teachers for the authentic instruction to take place in their gifted classrooms. That is, the teachers may behave as a source, as a guide and as a facilitator of students’ learning. Teacher autonomy was another characteristic of the authentic classroom instruction mentioned by the participants. For example, Teacher Mehmet says:

“Teachers should make their own decisions about the content to be covered and this in turn calls for autonomous behavior on the part of the teacher. They should be flexible in determining the topic of the day depending on their students’ needs and expectations. Moreover, gifted learners may need some freedom and flexibility irrespective of the units determined in the syllabus. I believe it is the teachers’ own autonomous behaviors related to task choice or task order that will enhance the learning of gifted language learners.”

The term of autonomous teacher was also apparent in Teacher Elif’s reportings as she expressed as in the following:

“It should be left to the teachers themselves to change, add and skip the things they do not want to cover in the class for the authentic instruction to take place. Only when the teachers are autonomous, they can grow more autonomous and self-directed learners.”

Student Pre-knowledge for Knowledge Construction

It has been revealed by the interview data that the students’ prior knowledge and prior understandings about the topics forms the basis for them to construct the knowledge to be offered next. Teacher Nazmi indicates this idea by mentioning that at the beginning of a unit, he attempts to get to know what the students already know. Likewise, Newmann and his friends (1996), the leading figures of the concept of authentic pedagogy and instruction emphasize the importance of “prior knowledge base” for authentic intellectual achievement.

Other Priorities for Authentic Instruction

The analysis of the interview data showed that the participant EFL teachers consider some situations as vital for authentic instruction to be implemented. These are revealed as student-centeredness, a focus on learning, flexibility, respect for others, integration of all language skills and a comfortable classroom environment. These characteristics seem to derive from some contemporary approaches to language teaching and education in general. Communicative approach to language teaching and constructivist understanding are all based on the idea of learner-

directedness, which also brings about the other characteristics that the interviewees also indicated as crucial for authentic instruction.

Advantages and Obstacles to Authentic Instruction

The results showed that most interviewees mentioned *time constraints, teacher-centered approach, class size, heterogeneous ability groupings* as barriers to authentic teaching. It is meaningful to expect that time constraints and class size could create problems for any teaching approach to function effectively in classrooms. That is, these are the general problem situations in almost every type of classrooms and schools. However, it is not easy to assume that heterogeneous ability classrooms may always create problems for more authentic teaching practices to take place. Though there is a dominance of participant EFL teachers reporting negative ideas about the heterogeneous ability classrooms in relation to authentic instruction mostly due to the difficulty of managing authentic teaching with different level students at the same time, only two teachers reported neither positive nor negative opinions for heterogeneous ability classrooms. One of these teachers was Teacher Elif and heterogeneous ability grouping was not a kind of obstacle for her because she can teach through authentic ways in both homogeneous and heterogeneous ability grouping classrooms but the only thing that she should do is differentiating her teaching for different ability students in her classes. She mentions this as in the following:

“It does not matter for me to teach to the classes where all students are gifted or teaching to the classes where there are some gifted learners. In heterogeneous ability classrooms, I try to vary my teaching according to the needs and expectations of different ability group students. For gifted learners, for instance, I still teach the same thing or guide for the same task but I do it in a more challenging way. That is, I try to incorporate some degree of challenge or difficulty for the gifted learners so that I can activate their higher level thinking ability and problem solving skills.”

In line with the above results regarding heterogeneous and homogeneous ability groupings, the results from the literature regarding the effectiveness of these two types of grouping for the gifted students are inconclusive (Stepanek, 1999). It appears that both types of grouping have advantages and disadvantages in relation to teaching and learning procedures.

In addition to the obstacles reported more in relation to the physical and organizational problems in the classrooms above, flexible curriculum and flexibility in instructional practices permitted by the BİLSEMs (thus fostering some teacher autonomy) were often reported among the advantageous conditions to enhance authentic instruction in gifted classrooms. That is, teachers reported that they had more chance to implement authentic activities in their classrooms when they were not strictly directed to finish the curriculum as had been already decided by the outside authorities. One of the participants, Teacher Ahmet uttered this as follows:

“When I have more flexibility and freedom for my teaching in class, I feel myself more self-confident and autonomous. I have the freedom to decide my own design of a class and to achieve this I can find more creative ways of teaching like bringing real-life to the classroom situation. If I am directed and followed in every step, how can I find my own authentic capacity as a teacher?”

The idea of flexibility finds consistent evidence from the literature in that, according to Westberg and Archambault (1997), when teaching to gifted learners, teachers may perform some curricular adjustments and compose flexible instructional groups. Similarly, Baum, Cooper and Neu (2001) mentions differentiated curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students in which teachers act as facilitators and behave in flexible ways when modifying the ways that learners could access and receive information.

Limitations

As this study is a qualitative inquiry, the generalizability of the results would not be possible. Qualitative data were elicited from the perceptions of the EFL teachers included in this particular study thus extending the results beyond that specific sample is questionable. The observations or other tools were not used for triangulation purposes. Moreover, the study aimed at understanding only the perceptions of the teachers with regard to the characteristics of authentic instruction they implement in their language classrooms. The source for the data is limited to only the teachers in this sense. Student perceptions in relation to their teachers' use of authentic instruction may have provided a more integrated picture and serve to the triangulation of the results.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research and Practice

Reform movements and associated contemporary approaches towards education and learning require changes both in the educational content and processes. One of these process changes refers to the teachers' behaviors and their roles in the classrooms. Today's global trend in education requires teachers to behave in line with the aspects of authentic pedagogy which in fact has been affected and shaped by such educational phenomena as constructivism and student-centered teaching that the teachers are in fact more familiar with compared to the term authentic pedagogy. However, whether the teachers behave in accordance with the characteristics of authentic pedagogy or more broadly speaking constructivism in their teaching is not known. The investigation of teachers' behaviors regarding the use of authentic instruction in their classrooms helped us understand whether the teachers were really applying it in their teaching and if they did, what characteristics of authentic pedagogy they employed and were fond of performing in their real teaching situations. Perhaps the authentic pedagogy was not reflected very much in their teaching in spite of the fierce reform movements and mandated constructivist curricula and the special needs or expectations of the highly able learners in their classrooms. Though the evidence from numerous studies (Newmann et al., 1996; Onosko, 1990 & Petrella 2000) has supported the belief that authentic instruction improves student achievement, little has been known about the real picture of how it is implemented within the classrooms. Thus, this study added to our understanding about the real picture of the classrooms from the real perspectives of the major actors, teachers and from their in-depth analysis regarding their use of authentic instruction. Therefore, further research should examine how or to what degree authentic instruction is implemented in other type of classrooms or with other type of student profiles.

Given the gifted education, it was seen in this study that EFL teachers implemented most of the characteristics of authentic instruction as they were already mentioned above in the light of the theoretical literature on this terminology. However, there is a need for more evidence for the classroom applications of authentic pedagogy with gifted students. Thus, further studies should employ other data collection tools such as participant observations of the lessons, video-taped lessons or student interviews in order to provide a better picture of the authentic instructional practices taking place in the classrooms. It was also revealed that authentic instruction was an effective teaching methodology for the gifted students in that authentic teaching activities might answer the needs of most gifted learners such as challenge, meaning-making, engagement with real-life topics and problems, demand for creativity and a say for students in the teaching and learning process and higher level thinking. In this regard, future studies may investigate one particular dimension of authentic instruction such as the use of activities requiring higher-level thinking, the use of challenging tasks or the use of tasks analogous to real life in more experimental research design studies where these dimensions could function as treatments. Furthermore, it is a known fact that gifted learners are not always gifted in everything, that is, not in every subject or discipline area. They are often gifted in some particular areas. For this reason, teachers of gifted students should strive for emphasizing and developing the gifted students' best potential areas (Tomlinson, 2005). In this regard, the qualitative results showed that authentic classroom instruction may help the teachers to find out and emphasize the gifted's best potential performance areas due to the

most known advantage of bring real-life content (for teaching), and this content may be determined and offered to these gifted learners based on their potential likes and interests. Moreover, even under any conditions or their preferences for particular contents, these gifted learners may still need higher level thinking, challenge, meaning-focused teaching and an elaborated communication and interchange with their classmates to feed in their ascending intellectual demands (Tomlinson, Kaplan, Renzulli, Purcell, Leppien & Burns, 2002). Accordingly, the following summarizes some key points of authentic instruction that may serve well to the gifted learners and this summary is not particularly for the teaching of foreign languages and may be also applicable to the teaching of other disciplines to the gifted students.

- Effective authentic instruction should engage gifted students both affectively and cognitively.
- For an effective authentic instruction to take place, gifted students should always have a say in the teaching and learning process.
- Effective authentic instruction expects high-level products from the students as students are encouraged for high-level thinking, problem solving and creating meaningful and useful tools that will facilitate their learning.
- Effective authentic instruction relates to gifted students' own life experiences and lives. Tasks that are analogous to real-life should be always encouraged for classroom teaching and learning
- Effective authentic instruction should foster challenge for gifted learners because these learners already perform beyond their grade and age expectations and they need to face more challenge and difficulties to learn and utilize their best potentials.
- For effective authentic instruction to take place, teachers should assume the role of a facilitator or a guide rather than the provider and presenter of the curriculum or all information.
- Effective authentic instruction has a contradictory stance to the one-size-fits-all formula in that, like in real life, every individual has their own needs, wants and expectations. Thus, for effective authentic instruction to take place in a class, teachers should differentiate the materials, classroom procedures and methods in line with the needs and expectations of their gifted learners individually.

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Appendix

Interview Schedule

Research Questions:

1. How do English (EFL) teachers incorporate characteristics of authentic instruction in their classroom teaching to the gifted language learners?
2. What conditions are conducive and obstacles to the implementation of authentic instruction in the foreign language classroom composed of gifted language learners according to the teachers' perceptions?

AN INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

School	Date and Time (start-stop)	Gülçin Mutlu
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INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is Gülçin Mutlu. I am here to talk to you about your instructional practices. I am interested in how teachers incorporate forms of authentic instruction within their gifted classrooms. My hope is to understand the nature of teacher instructional practices as they happen in a classroom of gifted learners. I hope findings from such an investigation may provide some insights for teacher education, teacher professional development activities and education of gifted students. Thus, I am really interested in your personal reflections about what you are doing in your classes, that is, about your teaching behaviors and activities.

* What you say to me is completely confidential. We do not pass on anything people tell us. We do not use names of individuals and school sites in anything we write.

* Are there any further questions I can answer?

* I'd like to tape our conversation. Is it OK with you? And you are free for the next hour and a half, right?

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Let's start with some questions about teaching at your school.

- 1a. How many hours a week do you teach in the school?
- 1b. How many hours a week do you teach in this class that is concerned with this research?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. Could you give me a quick sketch of what you usually do in one class time?

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTENT AND PROCESS

1. Could you describe the last sessions you did yesterday in your gifted class? Lesson goals, activities, materials, assessment, etc.
2. Which activities do you think were most useful and why?

PROMPT: What did you do? How did you teach?

What were your goals for this lesson?

What did the students do? How do you think they learnt?

What was the strength of this class?

What was the weakness of this class?

3. Could you briefly describe some of your favorite ways (techniques) to teach English in a class with gifted students?
4. Give me an example of one of your English classrooms with gifted learners you remember you did a good job of teaching?

PROMPT: What did you do? How did you teach?

What were your goals for this lesson?

What did the students do? How do you think they learnt?

What was the strength of this class?

What was the weakness of this class?

5. What are your opinions about connecting the English classroom with the gifted students' own life experiences?

PROMPT: How do you do that?

ALT Q1. What is the place of students' life experiences in their learning English? Do your students use personal experiences?

6. Do you think your gifted students make use of what they have learned in the English class outside of school? Do you have any indication of that? Are there such expectations in your teaching?

ALT Q2. How do the classroom and real life connect? Do you think they should?

7. Tell me about classroom interaction? How do the gifted participants in your classroom interact with one another?

PROMPT: Do your gifted students share their ideas with you and with their partners?

8. How do you think your gifted students learn? How do they understand new information/new meanings?

PROMPT: How do they process new information?

How do your students find the information they need?

9. How do your gifted students better understand a topic or a theme they are studying? How do you help them?
10. What is the place of gifted learners' prior knowledge in your teaching approach? How do you incorporate them into your teaching?
11. What do you think about a classroom environment where teacher is the main director of activities with students with little choices in the teaching-learning situation? Is your teaching similar to this, even sometimes?

ALT Q3. What do you think about teacher-directed instruction? If you use it how and when and how often.

PROMPT: The advantageous of it

The disadvantages of it

12. What do you think about the current curriculum you implement at BİLSEM? How do you see the use of authentic learning in the curriculum? Does it have sufficient focus, coverage and opportunities? Do you see curriculum as advantage or disadvantage for authenticity in the classroom?

PROMPT: What is the best thing about it?

What about the worst thing?

How you follow it? Exactly or sometimes doing the things in your own way?

13. How do you think your earlier university education background assist you in using authentic learning in your classroom teaching with the gifted?

PROMPT: What did you learn at the university that is really working for you right now?

What things you wished you had learnt at university in order to better implement your current curriculum for the gifted?

ALT Q4. In what ways your university education helps you to employ the current curriculum and relevant instructional practices?

14. In what types of conditions do you think you could better apply authentic learning in your teaching?

PROMPT: What conditions appear to be obstacles to authentic learning and why?