

## An Investigation into Teaching English to Gifted Individuals: Giving Voice to Turkish EFL Teachers <sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Foreign language learning process of gifted individuals plays a critical role in both their self-development and academic life. However, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers may encounter various challenges while teaching to gifted individuals. The purpose of the present research is to reveal the opinions of EFL teachers in Science and Art Centers (SACs) on the challenges they encounter in teaching English, find out possible sources for these difficulties, and their solutions and recommendations. In total, 21 EFL teachers working in different SACs in Türkiye participated in the study. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview based on three main themes: a) the challenges the participants have faced, b) the participants' views on the source of these problems, and c) their suggested strategies to cope with the mentioned challenges. Content analysis was carried out to analyze the data. The qualitative findings demonstrated that the EFL teachers experienced similar challenges including the lack of an established curriculum, insufficient educational technological equipments and appropriate materials for language teaching, having students with different levels of English proficiency in the same groups, and having long working hours.

**Keywords:** science and art centre, gifted individuals, giftedness, English as a foreign language (EFL), Turkish EFL teachers

**Üstün Yetenekli Bireylere İngilizce Öğretme Üzerine Bir Araştırma: Söz Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğreten Öğretmenlerin**

### Özet (Türkçe)

Üstün yetenekli bireylerin yabancı dil öğrenme süreci, bu bireylerin hem kişisel gelişimlerinde hem de akademik yaşamlarında kritik bir rol oynamaktadır. Ancak EFL (Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce) öğretmenleri üstün yetenekli bireylere eğitim verirken çeşitli zorluklarla karşılaşabilirler. Bu araştırmanın amacı, Bilim ve Sanat Merkezlerindeki (BİLSEM) İngilizce öğretmenlerinin İngilizce öğretiminde karşılaştıkları zorluklara ilişkin görüşlerini ortaya çıkarmak, bu güçlüklerin olası kaynaklarını, çözümlerini ve önerilerini ortaya koymaktır. Araştırmaya Türkiye'de farklı BİLSEM'lerde görev yapan toplam 21 İngilizce öğretmeni katılmıştır. Veriler, üç ana tema temelinde yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır: a) katılımcıların karşılaştıkları zorluklar, b) katılımcıların bu sorunların kaynağına ilişkin görüşleri ve c) bahsedilen zorluklarla başa çıkmak için önerdikleri stratejiler. Verilerin analizi için içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Niteliksel bulgular, katılımcı İngilizce öğretmenlerinin, yerleşik bir müfredatın olmaması, dil öğretimi için yetersiz teknolojik araçlar ve materyaller, aynı gruplarda farklı İngilizce yeterlilik seviyelerine sahip öğrencilerin olması ve uzun çalışma saatleri gibi benzer zorluklar yaşadıklarını göstermiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** bilim ve sanat merkezi, üstün yetenekli öğrenciler, üstün yetenekliler, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretimi, Türk İngilizce öğretmenleri

### Introduction

Academically gifted learners are traditionally described as individuals whose intelligence score is considerably high when compared to those with average scores so their performance in their schools is superior to their peers (Assouline & Whiteman, 2010; Godor, 2019; Neihart, 1998; Pfeiffer & Blei, 2008; Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008; Worrell et. al., 2019). 'Gifted' or 'talented' terms have been used as synonyms to refer to the individuals who have higher cognitive abilities and performances when compared to their peers (Breedlove, 2021; Chan, 2015; Maker & Pease, 2021). Alfred Binet was the first psychologist who attempted to measure the intelligence by using a test in 1905. In a traditional approach, identifying giftedness was fixed to only an intelligence quotient (IQ) score in those years (Passet, 2015). With the contribution of other scientists such as Goddard and Terman during the early twentieth century, the attention was taken to a wide range of talent or ability areas that gifted individuals are supposed to display high performance and promoted the multi-dimensional

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approach (Gardner, 1983) in definition and identification process of giftedness (Neihart, 1998; Pfeiffer & Blei, 2008; Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008). Therefore, measuring individuals' talents or performances from many perspectives has become the main reason for the problems in identifying gifted individuals (Okan & Işpınar, 2009). The first formal definition of giftedness based on this point of view was provided in the Marland Report (Marland, 1972, p. 5) as the following: "*Children who perform well in one or more of these six areas, including general mental ability, special ability in a certain academic field, creative and productive thinking, leadership ability, talent in visual performing arts, and psychomotor ability*".

When the historical background of educating these individuals is considered, it can be seen that there have been various attempts to develop an education model for gifted individuals within the educational programs in some countries such as *The Talent Search Model* pioneered by Julian C. Stanley at John Hopkins University in 1972 and *The School Enrichment Model (SEM)* developed in the mid-1970s by Joseph Renzulli at the University of Connecticut (Chan, 2015). Although the issue has critical significance and has been studied throughout history, research concerning to what extent special programs for the education of gifted individuals have become effective is not crystal clear and does not seem to reach a consensus among the educators and researchers in the field (Borland, 2005; Cramond, 2010; Delcourt et al., 2007; Robinson, 2008). However, educating gifted individuals has taken the attention of many scholars and researchers during the last decades and considerable importance has been attached to teaching these "gifted" students effectively. As stated by Chan (2015, p. 158), "gifted children and youth, because of their precocity, intensity, and complexity, require differentiation in curriculum and teaching to help them to develop their full potential", and gifted students need to regulate and develop their potential for high achievement and creative thinking (Folsom, 2005; McCoach & Siegle, 2003; Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000, Ronksley-Pavia & Neumann, 2020). To maximize the potential of gifted individuals, some researchers (Aquirre & Hernandez, 2021; Bain et al., 2010; Ninkov, 2021; Van Tassel-Bask et al., 2002) have underlined the crucial importance of implementing a special program for gifted individuals. In addition, Yıldırım and Akçayoglu (2015) emphasized the lack of an established curriculum in SACs in Türkiye.

In terms of Turkish historical development, historically, the implementation of enriched educational programs for gifted students goes back to the Ottoman Empire period with the presence of Enderun Schools (Şahin, 2016). The children were chosen elaborately and trained specially to be raised as sophisticated statesmen during those days. In modern times, as a next attempt to educate gifted children, Ankara Science School was founded, and 23 students started to study for the first time in 1964. The main aim was to provide a special education with a special program especially in the field of Science and Mathematics (Yıldırım & Akçayoglu, 2013). In this respect, SACs are the main institutions in Türkiye that create a response to the needs and expectations of these gifted individuals and aim to make them aware of their talents and discover their potentials, foster their skills and assist them for their future progress, and as the final step the first modern SAC was founded in Ankara in 1995. Today, there are 225 SACs spread through every city in Türkiye (Ministry of National Education-MoNE, 2021). However, as Renzulli (2002) emphasizes, the education of gifted individuals through within-classroom differentiation by providing some challenging tasks for gifted students based on traditional learning environments cannot be expected to maximize their potential or contribute to their intellectual or emotional development.

In the identification and placement process of gifted students within SACs in Türkiye, children from the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> grades join a group memory test at the first step, and the ones who get a pre-determined score gain the right to take the individual intelligence test as a second step. In the second stage, students attend the intelligence test individually according to the field they apply and the ones who score 130 or higher in Assis Intelligent Scale for Children are accepted to the institution to receive education. These students can apply for the exams within three fields; General Talent, Music or Art. Students who receive education in SACs continue studying at their public or private schools and join the centers once or twice a day according to their weekly schedule. They can start studying in SACs at the second, third or fourth grades and continue their education until they graduate from high school. They are involved in a five-staged program that consists of orientation, supportive education, recognizing the individual abilities, developing special abilities and project production. The students are supposed to take part in the classes regularly and accomplish the tasks to be able to pass to the next stage.

On the other side of the coin, teachers, indispensably, are important role-takers in every process in education, and researchers, with this aim, have tried to unveil their perceptions on SACs and their self-efficacy level. In this vein, Dinçer (2019) aimed to the self-efficacy of the gifted teachers working in primary and secondary schools at Turkish state schools. Similarly, Akdağ and Şenol (2018) investigated the perception of being a teacher in a SAC via qualitative data from 13 teachers, and found that the teachers working in SACs were satisfied with having a prestigious job and opportunities that contributed to their professional skills and being free to design their courses and activities. In another study, Karaduman and Ceviz (2018) aimed to examine the hardships that SAC teachers have faced and the findings of the study indicated that the SAC teachers considered physical conditions or technological equipment of their institutions insufficient to create an effective learning environment. From a more specific context, Çetin and Doğan (2018) carried out a study to find out the problems of Maths teachers in SACs. The participants reported that the curriculum and activities designed for the education of gifted individuals needed to be revised and developed in order to create a response for a differentiated and enriched learning environment.

When the relevant literature is examined, it appears that most of the studies have handled the issue from a general perspective or within different disciplines (Ağaya & Sema, 2023; Akdağ & Şenol, 2018; Çetin & Doğan, 2018; Dinçer, 2009; Törün & Köksoy, 2023). However; the present study may yield significant findings to focus on teacher opinions on foreign language teaching programs in SACs in Türkiye. Thus, the current research aims to reveal opinions of Turkish EFL teachers about the challenges they have encountered in the process of teaching English in SACs, the sources of these difficulties, and their possible solutions. For this purpose, the present study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are the challenges that Turkish EFL teachers in SACs encounter in the English language teaching process in Türkiye?
- (2) What are the possible sources for these challenges according to the participating Turkish EFL teachers?
- (3) What are the possible suggestions to overcome these challenges according to the participating Turkish EFL teachers?

## **Method**

Write the entry here without changing the format and style The current study is descriptive in nature and adopts a qualitative research design. As Mack et al. (2005) express, “the strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions about the “human” side of an issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals” (p. 1). The data were gathered through a semi-structured interview protocol which included open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted personally online via Zoom program with the participation of volunteer teachers who wanted to contribute to the study. The interview was developed and conducted by the researchers.

The main dimensions and items of the instrument were determined after conducting an interview with the participation of six English teachers working in various SACs in Turkiye. Before developing the instrument, the teachers were requested to respond to a set of questions about the advantages and disadvantages of working at SACs, various challenges they have experienced ranging from the materials and equipment in the classes to the education program, and what they consider as solutions to these challenges. The researchers found out the dimensions that would be included in the instrument, identified the statements and developed the items. As the next step, to obtain expert opinion, one expert from the department of English language teaching and two experts from the Special Education department at a state university in Turkiye checked, guided, and edited the draft version of the questionnaire. In the last step, for piloting the instrument, three teachers were interviewed to find out whether there was any kind of ambiguity or unclear items to edit. The final version of the data collection instrument consisted of nine open-ended items including following three themes: a) the challenges EFL teachers encounter in the process of teaching English in SACs, b) the opinions of EFL teachers on the sources of these challenges, c) the possible solutions suggested by EFL teachers. During the interview, information regarding demographic data of the participants was also provided (e.g., sex, age, level of education, and years of experience in teaching in SACs).

As the study aims to gather data from different cities in Turkiye, the most practical and safest way to gather data from the participants all over the country was to carry out the interviews online. The volunteer teachers requested to join the interview personally in a convenient time for both of the sides. The instrument was constructed in English and the participants provided their responses in English for open-ended items in the interview along with the consent form as a statement that showed they took part in the study voluntarily. The reason behind the usage of the open-ended responded questionnaire was, as Dube (2020, p. 2) states, “open-ended questions do not limit users to one-or two-word answers. Instead, they have multiple potential responses and they often give room for further probing by the moderator which is appropriate for the design of the study.”

## **Participants**

After the ethical committee report approval was taken from the university where the study was conducted, the data were collected from 21 voluntary English teachers working in different SACs. All the participants were full-time teachers in 15 different cities of Turkiye. Demographic features of the participants are presented in the Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic features of the participants

	Variables	N	%
Gender	Male	7	33.3
	Female	14	66.6
Level of Education	Bachelor's Degree	13	61.9
	Master's Degree	8	38.09
	Doctoral Degree	-	0
Number of experience in SAC	0 – 2 years	4	19.04
	2 – 5 years	7	33.3
	5 – 10 years	5	23.8
	10 years and above	5	23.8

When the demographic data are examined, it can be seen that female participants of the study constituted 66 % while the male participants were 33 % of the total sample. In terms of level of education, a higher percentage of the participants had a Bachelor's degree (61 %), and 38% had a Master's degree. None of the participants had a Ph.D. degree. When the experiences of the participants in teaching English in SACs are analyzed, there is no majority for a certain interval, but the highest percentage on experience belongs to the participants who have been working in SACs for 2 – 5 years (33 %). Finally, the participants have been working in the SACs in 15 different cities of Turkiye.

### **Data Collection**

All EFL teachers working in SACs in Turkiye were contacted via the official WhatsApp EFL teachers group in Turkiye, whose members are only EFL teachers working in SACs in different cities in Turkiye, and they were informed and encouraged to participate in the study. The volunteer teachers who responded positively to take part in the study were contacted personally and after they were informed about the study, a convenient time was defined for the online interviews. While conducting the interviews online, Zoom program was used in order to provide face to face contact and more concrete data. In this way, it would create a face-to face and visual interaction, re-watching the recorded videos and focusing on non-verbal behaviors of the participants during the data analysis process (Sheppard, 2020).

### **Data Analysis**

In a study, it is vital to scrutinize the trustworthiness of each phase of the analysis process, including the preparation, organization, and reporting of results (Elo et al., 2014). A qualitative content analysis approach was applied in the present study since there were textual data. Content analysis is defined as “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1968). In this study, analysis of the qualitative data was carried out by following four steps which are: Coding the data; finding out the codes, categories and themes; organizing the codes, categories and themes; and identifying and interpreting the findings (Eysenbach & Köhler, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The ultimate aim was to find out common categories and thematic elements throughout the research. Thus, as the first step, the responses of the participants were transcribed via the Sonix application. After that, the transcribed data were examined several times and similar statements were categorized and coded. In the coding step, the common and emerging answers based on the three themes were found out and the frequencies of the concepts were analyzed. The most common responses were illustrated by tables.

In order to strengthen the reliability of the content analysis, *stability*, *reproducibility*, and *accuracy* factors were taken into consideration (Palmquist, 2012). With the aim of ensuring stability and accuracy, another researcher in the same university was consulted as a second coder. After two researchers examined the data independently, they discussed on the findings and reached a consensus. Inter-coder reliability was calculated via the formula  $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{total number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}}$  (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and found to be .82, which was considered as satisfying according to Trumbull (2005, as cited in Tailor, p.121, 2005). In terms of reproducibility and accuracy factor, the data were examined in different times by the researcher. Furthermore, while presenting the findings in the results section, direct quotations that belong to the participants were shared to illustrate the emerging themes and establish the credibility of qualitative data.

## Findings

### ***Research Question 1: Opinions of the participants about the challenges they face in English teaching process in SACs***

When the responses reflecting the challenges of the participants in English teaching processes in SACs were analyzed, it was clear that there were some common problems. The problems mentioned by the participants are illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Challenges encountered by Turkish EFL teachers in SACs

Question	Theme	Expressions from participants	<i>f</i>	%
1. What are the challenges that Turkish EFL teachers in SACs encounter in the English language teaching process in Turkiye?	Lack of infrastructure	Not having sufficient technological equipment (P1, P2, P4, P5, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P16, P17, P19, P20)	14	66.6
		Not having sufficient and appropriate materials (P1, P2, P4, P7, P8, P11, P14, P15, P18, P20, P21)	11	52.3
	Curriculum and program	Students with different proficiency levels in the same group (P2, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9, P11, P12, P13, P16, P17, P20, P21)	13	61.9
	Classroom management	Lack of an established curriculum (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P9, P12, P13, P14, P16, P17, P18, P20)	13	61.9
	Other	Classroom management problems (P14, P18)	2	9.5
		Inadequate class hours (P2, P4, P14, P17, P18, P21)	6	28.5
		Working in the evening and at the weekends (P1, P3, P5, P6, P11, P12, P18, P19, P20, P21)	10	47.6
		Parents' false beliefs about the SACs (P16, P20)	2	9.5

A high majority of the participants expressed their opinions about the insufficient technological tools (80.95 %), and having students who have different English proficiency levels in the same group as a challenge (66.66 %). They believe that in order to enhance four main skills and also the communicative competence of the gifted individuals, more technological equipment, more materials and class hours should be devoted to English language teaching. Furthermore, the participants highlighted the importance of making the learners exposed to the input as much as possible.

The participants reported that in order to foster the 21<sup>st</sup> skills of the gifted students, they have to update their materials or techniques and make the necessary revisions by taking the recent developments into consideration. The following statement can be given as an example on this theme:



*“There should be computers and headphones in English classroom or a language lab. Because, like all the other learning methods, while learning English our students should use digital tools. They should watch, listen, read, speak and play” (P10).*

Focusing on the sixth question in the questionnaire, *“Is it a burden for you to have students of different ages and levels in the same group? Do you have any problems in implementing the classroom activities?”* most of the participants (71.42 %) provided similar responses. One of the participants shared her opinion by using a nice metaphor about how having students who have different language proficiency levels in the same group can be a burden for her in designing and conducting the classroom activities:

*“Yes, as I mentioned before, when the gap is huge it is really difficult because we need to help them reach their potential by providing comprehensible input which is a bit beyond their level. Individualized plans are not easy, we need to cater them with the right food however, it is difficult to prepare this food and also not applicable within the same group” (P8).*

Another participant expressed his opinion on the issue as follows:

*“Yes. Because whenever we conducted an activity, a student would suffer and be discouraged if it was a little higher than their knowledge but some other students would get bored because it was lower than their level” (P3).*

Considering the responses for the seventh question; *“Is there a special English language curriculum for gifted students? Do you think that there should be? Why do you think so?”* it may be interesting that the participants do not share similar views. While most of them (61.90 %) underline the necessity of a fixed or established curriculum in gifted individuals' education, some (38.09 %) express their opinion based on the idea that they should be free in choosing and designing their activities or materials considering the needs or expectations of the students. One of the participant's statement is as in the following:

*“When I first started, yes I felt that need. But then I have understood the complexity of giftedness and I think it cannot be reduced to a single curriculum. However, a rich database is needed with updates supported by academicians” (P20).*

This response may be helpful to reflect the challenges and conflicting views about the implementations of gifted learners' education. It demonstrates that after teachers have experienced working in SACs and teaching gifted students, they may tend to change their minds or perceptions about the process.

Another concern raised by the participants (47.61 %) was the working hours and days in the SACs. Students join SAC classes one or two days in a week considering the appropriate time according to their school program and they generally have classes after 3 or 4 pm in SACs on weekdays. Moreover, nearly all the students who come to the centers from remote regions or towns prefer taking part in SAC classes on Saturdays as they cannot catch the classes because of the transportation problems or their weekly schedule in their schools on weekdays. As a result, based on the number of their classes, it becomes highly possible that teachers working in SACs have six to 12 classes on Saturdays starting from 9 am to 5 pm.



Another challenge identified by three participants is that they may have some troubles in classroom management even if the number of the classes is fairly low. While gifted individuals differ from their peers in terms of cognitive and intellectual ability, they also have some personality traits with regard to their giftedness such as anxiety resulting from failure, stress resulting from high expectations, or social isolation resulting from a high level of awareness than their peers and as a result, lack of interaction with them. The utterance of one of the participants can be striking to demonstrate this situation:

*“Some of my students are quickly distracted. Moreover, if they have tantrums and get stressed easily, I have problems in dealing with them” (P 11).*

From a similar perspective, four participants stated that some of the students in the SACs display low motivation in participation or high motivation to be leaders in the groups and they have different social and emotional characteristics and needs. They are reported to be generally highly sensitive and have a high level of consciousness and sometimes they may lose the control in their reactions towards the others in some cases. This can be a hard situation for the teachers to notice and overcome during the classes. As an example that reflects this challenge, one of the participants responded as:

*“Most of my students are individuals with a leader spirit. They like to dominate others. They can't control their emotions. They sometimes experience tantrums. I have difficulty in classroom management” (P 11).*

### **Research Question 2: Views on the sources of the challenges**

**Table 3.** Sources of the challenges reflected by the participants

Question	Theme	Expressions from the Participants	f	%
2. What are the possible sources for these challenges according to the participating Turkish EFL teachers?	Educational Policy	Overall policy towards learning English (P1, P2, P4, P6, P8, P9, P13, P17, P18, P19)	10	47.6
		Lack of awareness that SACs should be supported (P5, P7, P15, P18)	4	19
	Administrators	Some unqualified administrators (P3, P5, P14, P18)	4	19
	Students & Parents	Parents' lack of knowledge on SACs (P6, P7, P11, P17)	4	19
		Implementations of administrators (P11, P13, P16, P19)	4	19
		Students not talented in learning languages (P9, P14, P19, P21)	3	14.2

Based on the responses of the participants, common opinions that reflect the sources of their challenges are presented in Table 3. Most of the problems identified by the participants in the previous section can be attributed to six main sources that can be seen in the Table 3. Problems such as not having enough classes, materials, and technological equipment were reported to have a relationship with the attitudes or implementations of the authorities. As a result, the most frequently expressed source of the problems was the overall policy towards teaching English (47.61 %). Some participants (28.57 %) did not express any opinion on the sources of the problems but provided some comments. As a response to the first question of

the instrument which addressed the disadvantages of working as an English teacher in SACs, one of the participants stated his opinion as:

*“Despite the superiors’ high expectations from SACS, you can find less support” (P1).*

This statement may be striking to show the discrepancy between the high expectations of the authorities and parents from SACs and the limited or insufficient support provided by them. Another participant expressed opinion on this point as:

*“Parental expectations from their children and SACs are so high that you can hardly ever meet them” (P3).*

Considering the mentioned problem which concerns the difficulty of carrying out the tasks with groups that involve students from different school types and different English proficiency levels, the school administrators have been regarded as responsible by the participants to neglect this problem, which can be seen in one of the participant’s statements:

*“At the beginning of the term, I wanted to organize the groups based on students’ English proficiency levels however, I learned that it wouldn’t be possible as the school administrators arranged students’ programs in SAC according to students’ and parents’ available time or requests” (P. 7).*

As reported in the findings, the students who study at private schools may have 10 to 15 English classes per week while the students who receive education in public schools have approximately three or four English classes in a week. This situation can be helpful to demonstrate the gap between these students’ proficiency levels in language classes in SACs. Except the presented sources for the mentioned problems by the participants, parents’ point of view towards the SACs and the teachers working in SACs seem to be another source. Considering the participants’ responses, sometimes the parents of the gifted individuals also may not be aware enough of the objectives and principles of the SACs. As stated by four of the participants, parents may conceive the SACs as courses or training centers that prepare the students for the examinations. As a result, they may not make sense of the objectives of the program or projects implemented in these centers. The following statement can be helpful to represent this situation and determine the source of the problem:

*“The biggest hardship for me is to make parents believe that SACs are not schools or private courses. As they expect a consolidation of the subjects that are taught at school” (P1).*

*“Also, some parents think that English courses at Sacs should be in line with their schools’ English curriculum” (P6).*

**Research Question 3: Suggested strategies to cope with the challenges**

Table 4. Strategies to cope with the challenges suggested by the participants

Question	Theme	Expressions from the Participants	f	%
3. What are the possible suggestions to overcome these challenges according to the participating Turkish EFL teachers?	Materials & Tools	Unique and rich materials for gifted students (P2, P3, P6, P8, P15, P17, P19)	7	33.3
		More budget for SACS for technologic tools and equipment (P1, P13, P16, P17, P20)	5	23.8
	Proficiency levels	Proficiency levels of the students should be identified (A proficiency exam) (P3, P5, P6, P11, P13, P19)	5	23.8
	Curriculum/Program	More classes for English per week (P4, P7, P10, P13)	4	19
	Other	Parents should be informed (P10, P16) Language talent to be identified as another field in SACS (P17, P21)	2	9.5

Findings in Table 4 show that the participants identified access to more effective and appropriate materials and technological aids as their priority need. It seems interesting that some participants (19.04 %) did not make any suggestions and some of them only gave a short comment about the case even if they reported the hardships they encountered. The most frequently mentioned suggestions were about the necessity of support from the authorities for appropriate materials, technological equipment, and more class hours. The participants also suggest administering a placement or proficiency test for the students who have just started studying at SACs so that they can be placed in appropriate groups according to their proficiency levels. There was also an emphasis on the different types of schools which play a key role in designing the weekly schedule and groups of the SACs. One of the participant's expressions can be given as an example:

*"... student groups should be formed according to their levels. At least, taking school types into account can be beneficial" (P13).*

In terms of providing solutions for the reported challenges, apart from the expectations from the administrators, three participants also shared suggestions that can be realized by the teachers. It was stated that teachers should always improve themselves professionally and pedagogically to follow and integrate the new methods or approaches into their classes. They should join training or seminars to have sophisticated knowledge about characteristics and learning tendencies of gifted individuals and learn about the ways of how to respond to the needs of those exceptional students. The quotation of one of the participants is as follows:

*"(Y)ou have to keep up with the new pedagogies to support intellectually gifted students. You gain a new vision and multidisciplinary perspective while working in SACs" (P16).*

Nine participants also stated that some students do not take part in the classroom activities actively as they do not have self-motivation or a special talent in learning foreign languages even if they have been identified as gifted. Based on the participants' statements, it can be

possible that another field, language talent in this context, within the SACs might be an alternative during the identification process of the individuals like music and art fields. The responses of the participants can be provided as examples to illustrate this opinion:

*“Upon identification of gifted, a foreign language can be evaluated in different category I guess, like art and music talents. Because it is not a subject like science, it is for communication and covers all subject areas to some degree. Also, bilingual classes may help. Learners from public and private schools should be formed separately” (P 18).*

*“Despite being smart, some students are not talented in learning foreign languages. So, it is hard to meet the expectations” (P 10).*

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

Education of gifted individuals has vital importance when their potential contributions to the nations in the future have been taken into account. The main institutions that may respond to the needs and requirements of gifted individuals' education are SACs in Turkiye. To help the gifted individuals, it is vital for them to have language proficiency and communicative skills in English as well as the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills such as creativeness, critical thinking, and project production. Thus, the present study was conducted to reveal the opinions of Turkish EFL teachers to enlighten the challenges they have come across and focus on their possible suggestions and strategies. The main concern of the current study is not to demonstrate the SACs in Turkiye as insufficient or unqualified centers, but to point out the existing challenges as a way to ameliorate the current conditions and provide contributions to the language teaching process of the gifted individuals. In this sense, it is believed that the most valuable and reliable information can be elicited from the practitioners who experience the process and thus gain the reflective knowledge.

The results of the present study indicated that the most frequently encountered problems of the English teachers working in SACs can be summarized as lack of English class hours per week, insufficient technological tools and language learning materials appropriate for gifted individuals, and having heterogeneous groups that involve students from different schools with different English proficiency levels. English teachers working in SACs in Turkiye have highlighted the importance of providing enough support, and the necessary facilities to be used in the education of gifted individuals who can be considered as the wealth of the nations. The findings of Çetin and Doğan (2018) show parallelism with the present study in terms of general issues. The reflections of the participants revealed that the curriculum and the activities designed for the education of gifted individuals by the MoNE in Turkiye were insufficient in drawing the attention of the students and meeting their needs in a differentiated and enriched learning environment. Also, the equipment and facilities in SACs were not at the desired level to enable them to carry out their activities in a more effective way, some parents did not have the necessary knowledge about the objectives of SACs and the teachers faced administrative troubles resulting from the management obscurity. Similarly, Karaduman and Ceviz (2018) indicated similar findings on the challenges SAC teachers faced, and stated that the physical conditions or technological equipment of their institutions are insufficient, and highlighted the difficulty of having students with different proficiency levels by underlining the huge gap between the proficiency of students from public

schools and private schools. The findings show consistency with the findings of the present study although the focused disciplines are different.

However, in a study conducted by Akdağ and Şenol (2018), it was found that having no established curriculum was stated as a favorable situation by the participant teachers and they considered this flexibility as an opportunity to design their teaching practices in accordance with the needs and interests of their students. In the current study however, a high majority (61.9 %) of the participants considered the lack of an established curriculum as a disadvantage.

All in all, the findings of the present research are considered significant as there has been no research in the related literature that enlightens EFL teachers' opinions in the language teaching process of gifted individuals in Türkiye. The study represents the current condition of the target group and provides contributions to the related literature by revealing the recent situation and drawing attention to the possible solutions. As the findings reflect the opinions of the practitioners who are at the coalface of the issue, the obtained results are considered to be valuable and reliable. However, it should be stated that the results of the study might not be generalized and further studies involving more participants are needed.

The findings of the present study can yield useful information for teachers, practitioners, and policy-makers to improve current pedagogies or implementations in gifted individuals' language learning process. Based on the responses of the participants, the researchers identified some suggestions and implications concerning the reported challenges of English language teachers working in SACs in Türkiye. As a response to the most frequently pointed need by the participants, SACs should be supplied with appropriate materials, technological equipment, and physical conditions should be ameliorated.

In order to create learning environments that can provide opportunities for gifted students to maximize their language learning potential, placement of the students into language classes in SACs should be carried out based on their scores in proficiency or placement tests at the beginning of the process. Also, more class hours should be devoted to English lesson depending on the students' program in SACs. Additionally, students' weekly program in SACs should be scheduled according to the dynamics of their talent area or language classes rather than the program in their regular schools. Finally, considering the physical conditions and facilities of the institutions, the numbers of students accepted to the institutions each year should be in accordance with the current physical conditions and number of classes.

From the teachers' dimension, as an attempt to improve their professional conditions, working hours and professional rights of the SAC teachers should be revised and necessary arrangements should be made in order to create standards in implementations. These teachers should also be supported to have the opportunities of attending seminars, courses, or training on the education of gifted individuals to add to their pedagogical and professional developments.

Last but not least, parents of the gifted students also have a key role in determining outcomes of the program in SACs. As an attempt to strengthen the program, parents should keep contacting the teachers and authorities of SACs and they should be informed about the objectives and principles of SACs through seminars or meetings. In this way, they can be

involved in the process more actively and this situation can provide necessary support for the education of their children and the institution as well.

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