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ВТОРА ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛНА НАУЧНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА.

## НАДАРЕНИТЕ И ТАЛЕНТИРАНИТЕ КРЕАТОРИ НА ПРОГРЕСОТ



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Битола, 28 октомври 2020

ST KLIMENT OHRIDSKI UNIVERSITY – BITOLA  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION - BITOLA



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## **FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR GIFTED LEARNERS: OVERVIEW OF *LISTENING, READING, SPEAKING AND WRITING***

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### **Abstract**

Gifted students often demonstrate different academic, intellectual, social, and emotional abilities that differ from those of their peers. Being aware of their differences gifted children sometimes experience difficulties in social adjustment, therefore they need a different approach in education. The educator is one of the most significant factors not only in identifying gifted learners but also for stimulating the maximization of their potential. Many gifted learners possess exceptional verbal skills, they are interested in reading at an early age, and acquire a richer vocabulary in their mother tongue, hence they deserve an optimal learning environment in order to develop their abilities and talents. The paper presents an overview of the four language skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing in foreign language learning for gifted students.

**Keywords:** gifted learners, foreign language teaching, language skills

### **Introduction**

A talentless society is like an aimless wandering mass of people lacking direction, knowledge and strength. Competence, creativity and curiosity have always been powerful factors in the progress of every nation and its survival over the centuries. When society makes not much of an effort to recognize, support and develop its gifted children and young learners, it leads to slow and permanent losses of the chances of its future development. Gifted learners are energetic and able to bring change, modernity, new technologies and science in everyday life, i.e. they are those who are prosocial but not destructive leaders of society.

But what exactly is being *gifted* or *talented*? There are many theories about the nature of giftedness, which differ in ideas about what characteristics are distinctive for children with high abilities, which is the leading factor in their development - inheritance or learning along with the environmental impact, and how life skills of such person can be improved. Defining the term *talent* and *giftedness* has been avoided and neglected by the theorist lately. They rely solely on certain factors, such as according to achievement of high goals or grades. According to Bainbridge it has been claimed that gifted children can show high IQ, be exceptionally talented, can be but not always a high-achievers, have a potential to achieve and excel and last but not the least to express heightened sensitivity (Bainbridge, 2009). In fact, the only sure marker that one is capable and competent is precisely the success of a given and performed activity.

The issue of early identification of the gifted, support of and from their families and special trainings for the full realization of their capabilities still remains as unresolved issue in Macedonia.

### **Characteristics of gifted children**

The characteristics of the gifted children has been argued as well, so disagreements in the definitions of giftedness also lead to disputes about the criteria for evaluating the gifted at an early age. Today, most school psychologists rely on intelligence testing to assess adolescents' overall giftedness.

The National Association of Gifted Children in the United States (<https://www.nagc.org>) emphasizes the use of complex and high-reliability methodologies applied to a variety of sources (parents, teachers, educators, child care professionals, etc.). The child should be monitored for a long time and in different situations (at home, in self-study, in class, extracurricular activities, etc.).



In assessing giftedness, it is necessary to take into account some of the psycho-social, cognitive and linguistic characteristics of the gifted, which are detected in the early age. David Palmer (Palmer, 2011 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/gifted-kids/201105/is-your-child-gifted-what-look-why-you-should-know>) outlines the following characteristics of the gifted in the following areas:

**1. Language skills**

- rich vocabulary and ability to learn new words with ease;
- fast speech; early developed speech unusual for the age,
- use of complex concepts and correctly constructed grammatical sentences;
- learning to read before school age;
- constant interest and asking questions about everything they have seen and heard, also waiting for detailed explanations;
- ability to understand multifaceted and ambiguous statements at an early age;
- skills to engage in adult conversation and understand the nuances of speech;
- ability to change the tone and style of speaking to different communication partners (for example, to speak "children" with the younger ones and to use complex concepts with adults);

**2. Learning ability**

- can learn quickly and effectively without much effort;
- they tend to be highly concentrated and focused on interests and are constantly seeking information about the objects of interest (e.g. animals, biology, space, etc.);
- ask questions that show insight and a deep knowledge of the matter of interest;
- ability to hold large concept reserves;
- excellent and helpful memory;
- early development of motor skills requiring balance, coordination and movement (construction of lego, puzzles, etc.);
- creativity and originality in intellectual activity;
- they are drawn to discussions with older children or adults about topics of interest;
- know the characteristics of their cognitive styles and memorization well enough to put them into practice;
- the ability to concentrate on their interests for a long time;
- a belief that learning is fun and highly developed cognitive feelings;

**3. Emotional and behavioral traits**

- the intensity of emotional states experienced is greater than that of their peers;
- display of empathy towards other people's experiences;
- cheerfulness, vigor and constant state of search for news and exploration of the environment;
- the ability to think and speak quickly;
- clear leadership needs;
- the ability to communicate and connect with older children and adults;
- love to be alone and do their favorite activities or to dream, think, write, read, etc .;
- attraction to aesthetics and art.

**Gifted learners and foreign language learning**

The development of the language skills among children starts passively, such as they take part in the communication beginning by listening only, which further on results in imitating sounds, words, etc., and repeating them. After the repetition and comprehension, they are expected to develop the speaking skill. Listening and speaking as language skills are both considered to be attained easier due to the fact that they are acquired naturally and spontaneously. Further on at some stage in their school age children encounter the remaining two skills i.e. the reading and the writing, for which a specific teaching methodology is inevitably required. Since the First Language Acquisition is a natural process supported by practice, the process of learning a foreign language teaching begins according to the same order i.e. acquiring listening and speaking, followed by reading and writing. Listening comprehension as a starting point in the process of Second Language Acquisition demands an effort,

equally challenging with the other three skills. Considering the fact that gifted learners perform, acquire and learn differently i.e. much earlier than their peers, therefore they need a different approach to language learning. The models that the learners are exposed to need to be of a highest quality due to the fact that learners have the unique ability not only for their verbal competences and thinking development, but they are quite skillful and capable to imitate at the phonetic and phonological levels. Due to the fact that motivation is a significant factor for success, a foreign language learner (gifted or not) needs to experience a sense of accomplishment. Since the gifted learners present their learning progress in a rapid way, an advanced level of content is required for gifted and talented individuals and the teaching process must be prepared and expedited to be able to satisfy their needs (Al-Khasawneh & Al-Omari, 2015; Ozcan & Katlav, 2016).

### **Listening/ Listening comprehension**

Despite the fact that gifted students are quick learners and pick up new skills easily and without much needed repetition, yet they still need to be introduced to new concepts and often need to be provided with direct instruction. Prior to the listening process itself, an important stage are the preparatory activities in which interest in listening among the learners is awoken along with the knowledge about the topic to be listened to. According to the High Potential and Gifted Policy from the Department of Education of New South Wales<sup>1</sup> when planning the development of the listening and speaking skills for gifted it is important to consider that many of these students are communicating informally and developing an emerging awareness of the purpose of spoken language. They are demonstrating active listening skills and ask relevant questions. It is the perfect time to further develop questioning skills using higher-order question stems. Posing provocative questions leads students toward a deeper analysis. Other adjustments include asking students to find a connection between usually unrelated ideas and using the ‘what if...?’ question to stimulate thinking.

In order to gain quality of the listening comprehension and turn it into more stimulating matter, it is important to indicate (the learners) the purpose of the activity. In order to ensure the purpose of even before this activity has begun, it is essential to assign a task that the learners will be able to complete only by listening. As an example of such exercises are answering multiple-choice questions, listing things they mention, performing actions that are mentioned etc. This will allow focused listening that involves “ignoring” i.e. missing out stuffs that are not the purpose of listening and concentrating on what matters. The sound recordings used in the activities should be clear enough for children to understand, easily to get familiar with, and interesting and appropriate to the language level. Listening comprehension is associated with exposure to foreign language outside of school, especially for gifted children. In such situations, the teacher can play an important role: for example, he or she can instruct parents in different ways of encouraging the child to learn, and can include elements in the teaching that the learner encounters outside the classroom (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2019).

### **Speaking**

Young learners (gifted or not) often tend to participate in communication skills in a foreign language depending on how well they know the language. Since the speaking is a reproductive skill and requires verbal expression, learners who have acquired high level are able and willing to express their knowledge, feelings, opinions or observations through speech. Therefore, modeling effective communication, not just individually or teacher-student mode, is necessary, which would also provide multiple opportunities for exercising previously gained and the newly acquired knowledge. Gifted students would be pleased and encouraged to speak out because they are able to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue. Those learners constantly compete and intercommunicate during class because they have developed a speaking skill, so it is important to provide them with activities in which they can demonstrate their competences (Winebrenner, 2016). This might be the best opportunity to introduce cooperative learning where listening and discussions as two essential communication skills will be practiced. Linda Winfree<sup>2</sup> suggest that the simplest method for incorporating cooperative learning is to seat students in power pairs, based on achievement levels, classroom data or student interests, where the teacher

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<sup>1</sup> [https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/english/ES1S3/speaking-and-listening#tabs\\_12739256930](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/english/ES1S3/speaking-and-listening#tabs_12739256930)

<sup>2</sup> <https://study.com/academy/lesson/teaching-communication-skills-to-gifted-students.html>

teaches students how to share and listen to ideas. Another activity is certainly a direct conversation with a native speaker of the language they learn. Stories as well have shown to be an appropriate material for learning a foreign language. Most commonly used materials are the traditional stories that are familiar to children from their native language. In such cases, the content is well known to all learners, only that the characters, objects and events are provided with new labels. Gifted learners can describe the main character's physical appearance, characteristics and psychic traits, change the ending of a story and introduce new characters. Recent researches have shown that children are also increasingly interested in science fiction stories. Those stories take children to the world of imagination, thereby satisfying their curiosity (Vrhovac, 2019).

## **Reading**

Reading effectively in a foreign language is considered as quite stimulating to many learners. In order for a person to learn to read, he or she should first of all attain pre-reading skills of developing speech, to develop sound sensitivity, adopt written symbols, parse words into sound, transmit speech into written text, and be able to encode and decode meaning (Pavlicević-Franić, 2005). Gifted and advanced readers are a virtue and individuals that are advanced in intellectual and linguistic abilities, which are capable to read easily, fast and possess incredible comprehension skills. Gifted readers also are passionate about what they read and they do not find reading solely as a manner of interpreting symbols into meanings but an urge to explore, fantasize and connect concepts and ideas. Gifted and found to be extremely verbal and use advanced language and vocabulary. They also may excel in many areas of reading and language arts, such as creative writing, literary analysis, oral communication, linguistic and vocabulary development, critical and creative reading, and foreign language (VanTassel-Baska, 1994).

In order to identify advanced readers in the classroom, attention should be paid to learners who understand the texts, use the proper vocabulary, require less practice in acquiring reading skills at a level of two years or more above their grade. They also creatively connect what they read, ask questions, think, discuss, and come up with new ideas based on what they read. Gifted learners already acquire the vocabulary and skills they should develop in a particular class, and they need to be given the opportunity to work on advanced texts in order to demonstrate their competencies. Those learners have highly developed reading skills and therefore they process and understand the learning content intended for older learners. Practicing reading to such children must be differentiated from the program appropriate to the learners of their class, using materials with more complex and demanding style containing more demanding stylistic figures such as allegory, metaphor, parable, and require the reader to apply creative and critical thinking (Winebrenner, 2016). Gifted readers should be offered the opportunity to summarize the work that relates to reading skills, to allow them to read texts of their choice while the class learns a skill or leads a discussion in which they do not have to participate. Gifted learners need exercises that stimulate higher levels of reading skill and enable the recognizing the internal structure of the text and discourse (Crkvenčić, 2018). This is accomplished by the proper selection of conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns and articles used in Introducing and practicing with cloze test (fill in the gaps) could be a good opportunity for exercising and excelling a proper usage of certain grammatical categories.

Teachers should pay special attention towards the reading tasks given to gifted because the texts intended for average learners but given to gifted learners are not considered as challenge, so they lose their motivation and get bored with the lesson. Such learners need to be introduced with reading materials in areas of particular interest to them, for example, some learners will be interested in geography, history, music, sports etc.

## **Writing**

Reading and writing are skills that are affect to one another, and according to many research it is believed that when a child, gifted or not, reads extensively they become excel in writing. Due to the particularly well-developed writing skills, learners who gain excellent grade in writing still require differentiation of general writing exercises and writing concisely. According to Joyce VanTassel-Baska A writing program for high ability learners should emphasize the development of skills in expository and persuasive writing, focusing the writing process on draft development, revision, and editing, and developing ideas and arguments on current issues. Gifted students also need experience in writing in other forms such as narrative and informative, using appropriate models for development. For older students, copying the style of favorite authors would be a useful exercise to gain control

over written forms<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, gifted learners also write songs, plays, e-mail to a well-known writer describing a work of art, paintings, sculptures, photographs, find interesting cities or maps in foreign speaking countries in an atlas or map.

Learners who write great and who enjoy writing should be given the opportunity to reach an audience that includes other people besides their classmates. By publishing papers in a school newspaper, gifted learners receive acknowledgment of the quality of their work and an incentive to continue their efforts (Winebrenner, 2016).

## Conclusion

Giftedness is defined as a set of individuality, creativity and above average ability of a learner that exceeds the teacher's expectations. Being a gifted child or learner is based on genetic inheritance, supportive environment and intelligence. However, being gifted but not identified in a timely manner by an educational institution may be of a great loss. Besides being timely identified, a gifted child needs to be differentiated and advised about the areas of its exceptional ability in order to receive utmost development by being introduced with and led through an appropriate curriculum. Even if learners are gifted and talented in different fields, they need supportive teaching strategies to bring out the potential in their skills, talents, and abilities. Like all children, gifted and talented ones have strengths as well as weaknesses, therefore the parents should not expect them to present excellence in absolutely each subject. When teaching foreign language to gifted learners, it is important to provide a variety of incentives that will encourage the learning process, offer adequate play and learning materials, exercises as much as possible, and not separate them from the rest of the class. Furthermore, motivation is essential for resulting with success. In order to motivate them, a teacher should listen to and follow their interests and needs, and provide an encouraging atmosphere that would be an asset for each learner in class. Being surrounded with gifted individuals is a "gift" to the teacher because they can change the world, therefore in order to help them be successful and become the best version of themselves it is important to advocate for them as a parent, educator, teacher, and help them develop their competencies and overcome the obstacles they face in their path.

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