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**МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ/METHODOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

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**ARE STUDENTS READY TO WORK WITH GIFTED CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES?**

Research article

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**Abstract**

The introduction of inclusive learning in Russia brought up the question of teachers' readiness to work with students with special needs, including those gifted. The components constituting this readiness, as well as its levels, are the subject of extensive pedagogical research both inside and outside of Russia. Various scholars attempted to define major components of a teachers' readiness and identify the most important personal traits affecting it, but the amount of such components and qualities, as well as their interrelation, remains unclear.

Goal: to define components of a teachers' readiness to work with gifted children with disabilities and establish the interrelation of these components in students with various Education-related majors.

Methodology: diagnostic questionnaires measuring the teachers' readiness towards working with gifted students, test "Polysemantic words", methods of descriptive statistics, Student's t-distribution for assessing the statistical significance of the differences and Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ).

Authors summarize the existing scholarship on the problem to define the major components — emotional and pragmatic — of a teachers' readiness to work with "twice exceptional" children. The empirical part of the study shows that participants in all three undergraduate programs are willing to work with children with special needs, however, the levels of their practical preparedness vary depending on the program and year of study. Students in Educational Psychology, General Education and Special Education programs demonstrated different results in promptness and effectiveness of creative thinking.

**Keywords:** teacher' readiness, gifted children, children with disability, defectology students, psychology students, teacher students.

**ГОТОВЫ ЛИ СТУДЕНТЫ РАБОТАТЬ С ОДАРЕННЫМИ ДЕТЬМИ-ИНВАЛИДАМИ?**

Научная статья

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**Аннотация**

Активное внедрение инклюзивного обучения в России поставило вопрос о готовности учителей к работе со школьниками с особыми потребностями, в том числе одаренными. Основные компоненты готовности, а также ее уровни являются предметом обширных педагогических исследований как в России, так и за ее пределами. Различные ученые пытались определить основные компоненты готовности учителей и выявить наиболее важные личностные черты, влияющие на нее, но количество таких компонентов и качеств, а также их взаимосвязь остаются весьма размытыми.

Цель данного исследования: определить компоненты готовности педагогов к работе с одаренными детьми-инвалидами и установить взаимосвязь этих компонентов у студентов различных специальностей и направлений подготовки, связанными с образованием.

Методология: диагностические анкеты, измеряющие готовность педагогов к работе с одаренными учащимися, тест «Многосмысленные слова», методы описательной статистики, t-распределение Стьюдента для оценки статистической значимости различий и коэффициент корреляции Пирсона ( $r$ ).

Автор постарался обобщить существующие подходы к оценке готовности и проблемы, связанные с ее оценкой, чтобы определить основные компоненты — эмоциональные и прагматические - готовности учителей работать с «дважды исключительными» детьми. Эмпирическое исследование показало, что испытуемые всех трех программ бакалавриата, принимавшие участие в исследовании, готовы работать с детьми с особыми потребностями, однако уровни их практической подготовленности варьируются в зависимости от программы и года обучения. Студенты программ «Педагогическая психология», «Общая педагогика» и «Специальное образование» показали разные результаты по оперативности и эффективности творческого мышления.

**Ключевые слова:** готовность учителя, одаренные дети, дети с ограниченными возможностями, студенты-дефектологи, студенты-психологи, студенты-будущие педагоги.

**Introduction**

Development of children's abilities and talents is one of the primary objectives recognized by the contemporary education system. This objective is emphasized over and over in the pedagogical scholarship of the recent decades [5], [12], [14], [19].

However, giftedness is usually associated with exceeding the developmental norm, and is rarely considered in regard to the children with disabilities or developmental disorders, even though it has long been known that these children can be gifted as well. To refer to this cohort of children in this research, we have adopted the term “twice exceptional”, first offered by J.J. Gallagher [3] to describe gifted children with disabilities and/or developmental delays. While education scholars agree that these children would benefit from an appropriate psychological and pedagogical support system, the specifics of such a system remain a pending issue [1], [3], [4], [10]. The reasons for that are multiple and range from difficulties with identifying children as twice exceptional to the lack of target training for teachers and support staff.

Twice exceptional children often demonstrate a set of traits which make it harder for their giftedness to manifest itself and be noticed. Among those traits are the lack of independence, high reliance on adults and limited social experience due to the limited social contacts. Because of one or several of these traits, the familiarization with the outside world for these children often goes along with fear and anxiety, which makes their giftedness harder to notice [4]. Furthermore, parents and teachers alike tend to fixate on disability or “the defect” and because of that are more likely to ignore abilities demonstrated by the same child. I.S. Kladova suggests defining twice exceptional children as those “who have proven to the medical and educational specialists to surpass other children of their age and diagnosis in intellectual and/or creative development” [9, P. 57]. Taken the difficulty of identifying and developing the giftedness in twice exceptional children, I.S. Kladova concludes that target trainings for teachers who work with them become even more necessary.

The trainings aiming to prepare teachers and students of pedagogical universities to successfully work with gifted children have been the object of scholarly research among both, Russian and Western authors [8], [13], [15], [17]. These authors focus on differences between being prepared vs. being ready, the structure and components of this readiness, basic knowledge, skills, and personal qualities needed to perform such work. All scholars define two components of a teachers’ readiness, motivational (emotional and evaluative) and pragmatic, and highlight the importance of such personal qualities as creativity and originality, the ability to think outside the box [2], [6], [7].

A similar approach has been taken by the Western scholars. Factor analysis performed by S. Skočić Mihić, D. Lončarić, N. Bažon shows two groups of variables — cognitive and emotional ones [18]. The group of cognitive variables includes knowledge of educational methods, techniques, and strategies, while the emotional one is related to the emotional attitude to work with children with special needs. The scholars work with 218 teachers and find out that most of them are not emotionally ready to work with students with disabilities, and only moderately ready to work with gifted students. Their cognitive preparedness is deemed as “satisfactory” for the first and “moderately” for the second cohort of students. The authors recommend additional trainings for teachers and students at pedagogical universities to better equip them for working with gifted students [18]. While target trainings are necessary, it is not clear how they shall be modeled and what they shall include, since no research has been done thus far on how students in Education programs develop cognitive and emotional readiness for such work, or how these components affect each other.

### Research methods and principles

To assess the cognitive and emotional readiness in students at a pedagogical university, the authors offered that the participants fill out several questionnaires: a test to define teacher’s aptitude for working with gifted students [5], a test to evaluate teacher’s readiness to work with gifted students [16], and the test called “Polysemantic words” [11].

All 180 participants were the students at Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University, studying in Special Education, General Education, and Educational Psychology undergraduate programs, ages 19-23, primarily female, which corresponds with the general population of teachers working in special education in Russia.

All the collected data were analyzed statistically, using descriptive statistics, Student’s t-distribution for assessing the statistical significance of the differences and Pearson’s correlation coefficient ( $r$ ).

### Main results

The results of the paired comparison are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Components of students’ emotional and cognitive readiness to work with twice exceptional children

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Program	Emotional component	Pragmatic (cognitive) component	Prompt creative thinking	Creative efficiency
Special Education	1,417	2,164**	0,113	-1,764*
Educational Psychology	1,271	2,817***	-1,783*	1,796*
1 - 2 year	1,294	-0,923	-1,188	-0,553
1 - 3 year	1,943*	-2,164**	-1,201	-1,988**
1 - 4 year	1,245	0,931	1,621*	2,326**
2 - 3 year	1,136	-1,596*	0,243	-0,708
2 - 4 year	1,074	2,581***	0,967	2,015**
3 - 4 year	-0,218	2,570***	0,001	2,285**

Note: \* - statistical significance  $p \leq 0,1$ ; \*\* - statistical significance  $p \leq 0,05$ ; \*\*\* - statistical significance  $p \leq 0,01$

Our comparison of the emotional component demonstrated by students in Special Education, Education, and Educational Psychology programs did not show statistically significant differences between these groups ( $t=1,417$ ,  $p\leq 0,1$ ;  $t=1,271$ ,  $p\leq 0,1$ ). All three cohorts of students show aptitude towards working with children with special needs and readiness to accept these children as gifted. However, students in Special Education program did show significant statistical differences in cognitive component: their knowledge of developmental disorders and appropriate methods and techniques by far exceeded that of students in General Education ( $t=2,164$ ,  $p\leq 0,01$ ) and Educational Psychology programs ( $t=2,817$ ,  $p\leq 0,01$ ).

The assessment of the promptness of creative thinking showed no significant differences between students in Special Education and General Education ( $t=0,113$ ,  $p\leq 0,1$ ), while those in Educational Psychology programs demonstrated much higher results ( $t=-1,783$ ,  $p\leq 0,1$ ). At the same time in terms of creative effectiveness, students in Special Education were ahead of their Educational Psychology counterparts ( $t=1,796$ ,  $p\leq 0,1$ ), although still conceded to those in General Education ( $t=-1,764$ ,  $p\leq 0,1$ ).

Our analysis of how the components develop from first to the fourth year of study among the students in the Special Education program showed the following results: statistically significant differences in emotional component appeared between students in their first and third year ( $t=1,943$ ,  $p\leq 0,1$ ); third-year students showed significantly higher developed cognitive component compared to the students in the first- ( $t=-2,164$ ,  $p\leq 0,05$ ) and second-year ( $t=-1,596$ ,  $p\leq 0,1$ ); remarkably, seniors conceded to sophomores and juniors in creative efficiency ( $t=2,5841$ ,  $p\leq 0,01$  and  $t=2,570$ ,  $p\leq 0,01$ , accordingly).

In terms of creative thinking promptness, only first-year students showed significant statistical differences compared to the fourth year ( $t=1,621$ ,  $p\leq 0,1$ ). No significant differences were found for the second- and third-year students.

First-year students also showed lower levels of creative productivity and efficiency compared to the third-year students ( $t=-1,988$ ,  $p\leq 0,05$ ), but were ahead of their fourth-year counterparts ( $t=2,326$ ,  $p\leq 0,05$ ). By this parameter, senior students also conceded to sophomores ( $t=2,015$ ,  $p\leq 0,05$ ), and juniors ( $t=2,285$ ,  $p\leq 0,05$ ).

Our analysis did not show significant correlations between the characteristics. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - Correlation coefficients between difference components indicating students' readiness to work with children with special needs

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	aptitude	readiness	prompt thinking	Creative efficiency
Aptitude	1	-0,108	0,061	0,146
Readiness	-0,108	1	0,110	0,131
Prompt thinking	0,061	0,110	1	-0,063
Creative efficiency	0,146	0,131	-0,063	1

## Discussion

All participants demonstrated a high level of emotional readiness, which is necessary to identify and accept a child with special needs as gifted. This suggests that the issue of emotional readiness is covered in their educational program sufficiently. It is also possible that the results reflect the general humanistic inclination of students who choose these majors.

The highest level performed by the students in Special Education programs is expected, since many of their classes are aimed at developing professional skills for working with children with special needs and providing them with help and support necessary for developing a child's intellect and creative potential. However, the authors originally expected to find no statistical differences between students in Special Education and those in Educational Psychology, since the latter cohort is also being trained to work with people with disabilities, special education needs, and/or developmental delays. Situations with students majoring in General Education were the same. The authors explain these results by the fact that students in the last two groups are, in general, not familiar with the ways the education process is organized in institutions of special education.

The levels of creative thinking shown by the participants also allows for several hypotheses. The lower level of creative productiveness shown by the students in General Education and Special Education programs indicates that these students are more inclined to look for ready-made decisions and familiar techniques, which might suggest their more general conservativeness and restraint. It is likely that both groups react this way because compared to the Educational Psychology, their future job has more regulations, restrictions and demands to ensure achieving very specific educational results.

In terms of creative productiveness, the highest results were performed by the students majoring in General Education, which can be explained by their higher breadth of their program, which prompts the students to explore adjacent fields of study instead of specializing on one subject. By the same logic, the lower results of the students in Special Education can be explained by their professional specialization and the focus on working with children with developmental disorders. However, these students still show better results than those in Educational Psychology, which means that their ability of generating unorthodox and creatively different ideas is relatively high.

While analyzing students' readiness across different years of study, we conclude that the first-year students showed the highest level of motivation. The authors attribute this raise in motivation to the characteristics typical for this cohort, namely, being emotional about their new status, general excitement about being in college, and a desire to help everybody. The authors initially hypothesized that the pragmatic (cognitive) component will increase from the first to the fourth year, since it is closely connected with gaining necessary knowledge and skills. However, this hypothesis was proven wrong, as statistically significant

differences have been found only between first- and second-year students in comparison with the third-year ones. Seniors demonstrated a sharp decline in parameters associated with the cognitive preparedness. This decline in readiness level is a worrisome tendency from both, a theoretical and practical perspective. The most likely explanation for it is the recent change in educational standards, due to which the educational track for the seniors looks significantly different from that taken by the current freshmen. Furthermore, the subjective decline in cognitive readiness among the seniors can be explained by a more adequate professional self-evaluation or disappointment in the chosen profession, which are not rare among the college graduates.

Regarding the promptness of creative thinking across the students in all years of study, only the first-year students showed significant difference from other cohort, with the third-year students demonstrating the highest results in this parameter. Junior students come up with significantly fewer ideas than freshmen, but the quality of their ideas is incomparably higher — they are deeper, better thought through and much more original. Data comparisons suggest that the students in Special Education start demonstrating basic preparedness towards working with children with special needs by the end of the third semester of study.

Correlation analysis of various parameters of students' readiness to work with twice exceptional children did not show significant correlations, which suggests the independence of the variables in question. Consequently, to better prepare students in all three majors for working with children with disabilities and/or special needs, as well as gifted — twice exceptional — children, some modifications are required in all three directions: supporting and strengthening students' motivation for working with children with special needs; providing them with more possibilities to gain professional experience in this area; encouraging a students' creativeness and creative thinking.

### Conclusion

The analysis of existing scholarship shows that the most important components of a teachers' readiness towards working with twice exceptional children are defined as emotional and cognitive (pragmatic). Creative thinking appears to be the most crucial personal trait for this kind of work. Consequently, our study analyzed the development of these parameters (cognitive and emotional preparedness, as well as promptness and productiveness of the creative thinking) in undergraduate students majoring in Special Education, General Education and Educational Psychology. The study has established a high level of emotional preparedness showed by all participants, combined with the varying results in other parameters. Our data allow for conclusions on possible ways of improving the students' preparedness towards working with twice exceptional children. The scope of this research can be further expanded by both, experimental validation of the proposed hypotheses, and increasing the size of the student sample.

### Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

### Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

### Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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