



Journal Homepage: [www.journalijar.com](http://www.journalijar.com)  
**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)**

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/22896  
DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/22896>



**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES REGARDING THEIR COMPETENCIES FOR WORKING  
WITH GIFTED CHILDREN**

**Gabriela Durchevska Georgieva<sup>1</sup>, Vesna Horvatovikj<sup>2</sup> and Sanja Aleksoska<sup>3</sup>**

1. Advisor Bureau for Development of Education.
2. Associate Professor Faculty of Education "St. Kliment Ohridski".
3. Preschool Educator Public Preschool Institution EC "13 Noemvri".

**Manuscript Info**

**Manuscript History**

Received: 19 December 2025  
Final Accepted: 20 January 2026  
Published: February 2026

**Key words:-**

attitudes, competencies, gifted children,  
preschool years, preschool educators,  
professional development

**Abstract**

Early identification of giftedness and timely support during the preschool years are essential for developing individualized educational strategies and for enabling children to realize their full potential. The aim of this study is to examine the attitudes of preschool educators in the Republic of North Macedonia toward their competencies for working with gifted children, their perceptions of professional support, and their need for continuous training. The study included a sample of 132 preschool educators and used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of their attitudes and practices. The results indicate that educators recognize the importance of their role in identifying and nurturing gifted children, while also emphasizing the substantial need for specialized training, mentoring support, and the systematic development of professional competencies. The findings suggest that continuous professional development directly strengthens educators' ability to create stimulating, individualized, and differentiated learning environments for gifted children. These results have important practical implications for the design of educational policies and training programs to improve the quality of preschool education for gifted children.

"© 2026 by the Author(s). Published by IJAR under CC BY 4.0. Unrestricted use allowed with credit to the author."

**Introduction:-**

Early childhood is a critical period for laying the foundations of children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. During this sensitive stage, timely recognition and appropriate stimulation of each child's unique potential, including giftedness, are essential for overall development. Gagné (2009) defines giftedness as an undeveloped natural ability that, through the interaction of intrapersonal, environmental, and developmental catalysts, can lead to the emergence of highly developed competencies.

**Corresponding Author:-** Gabriela Durchevska Georgieva  
**Address:-** Advisor Bureau for Development of Education.

Renzulli (1978), in contrast, emphasizes that giftedness results from the interaction of above-average ability, task commitment, and creativity, making early identification a key factor in fostering these potentials. In this context, Hertzog (2024) notes that current global trends in education are moving toward a holistic approach that emphasizes the early identification not only of academic giftedness, but also of creative and leadership potential in the earliest years of life. Accordingly, preschool educators, as direct practitioners in early childhood education and care, play a crucial role in recognizing early signs of giftedness and in providing a stimulating, individualized, and differentiated educational environment. Vygotsky (1978) highlights the importance of social interaction and adult guidance in child development, while Tomlinson (2001) stresses that a differentiated approach enables each child to develop in accordance with their abilities and individual needs. Building on these theoretical perspectives and contemporary educational trends that emphasize early identification and support of giftedness, it is important to examine how preschool educators perceive their own competencies in this area. In particular, attention should be given to their perceptions of professional support and their needs for further professional development when working with gifted children.

Empirical studies show that educators' attitudes and perceptions directly influence their ability to identify and effectively support gifted children (Callahan & Müller, 2023; Gubbins & Haeck, 2024). Contemporary conceptions of giftedness also emphasize the need for an integrated and comprehensive approach from the earliest stages of development (Subotnik et al., 2025). Similar challenges related to educators' competencies have been identified in other international educational contexts, making this topic relevant beyond national boundaries. Professional development through structured training, mentoring support, and continuous learning significantly increases educators' ability to recognize and support gifted children (Li & Wong, 2023). However, empirical evidence indicates that insufficient systemic support and limited access to specialized training often hinder effective practice. Although international research highlights educators' role in early identification, there is still insufficient empirical data in the Republic of North Macedonia on educators' self-perceived competence and readiness for differentiated practice. This paper contributes to the scientific literature by presenting data on educators' attitudes and competencies in a context that has so far been underexplored. The aim of this study is to examine educators' attitudes toward their competencies, their perceptions of professional support, and their need for continuous professional development.

**The research questions addressed in this study are:**

1. How do educators assess their own competence for working with gifted children?
2. What are their perceptions of available professional support and specialized training?
3. Which aspects of professional development are considered priorities for improving support for gifted children?

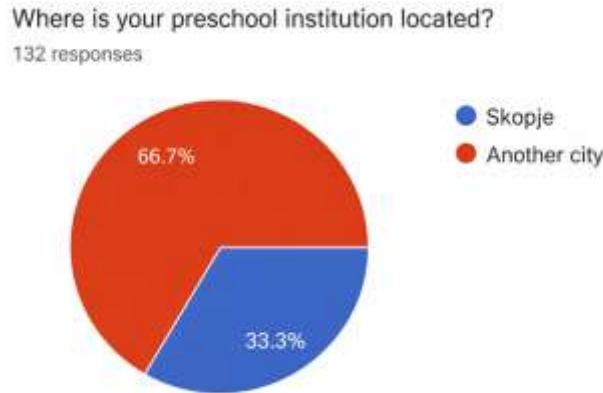
**Research Methodology:-**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research to gain a comprehensive understanding of educators' attitudes and perceptions toward working with gifted children. The quantitative component was conducted using a standardized survey administered to 132 preschool educators. The sample was selected using convenience sampling, including educators from several preschool institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia. The survey collected data on educators' self-perceived competence, the professional support available to them, and their need for continuous training. The response rate was 82%, indicating a high level of participation among the invited educators. Data collection was carried out between March and May 2024. The data show that 33.3% of the surveyed educators work in preschool institutions in the city of Skopje, while 66.7% work in preschool institutions in other cities in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The qualitative component included semi-structured interviews with 12 educators selected from survey participants to gain deeper insight into their practical experiences. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions addressing educators' experiences in identifying gifted children, the challenges they encounter in providing differentiated support, and their perceptions of the professional support available to them. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was conducted in a confidential setting. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to taking part in the research. The survey was completed anonymously, and interview data were confidentially recorded and used exclusively for research purposes. All collected data were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers in order to ensure the protection of participants' privacy and confidentiality.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enables the identification of general trends and dominant attitudes from survey data while providing a deeper understanding of individual experiences, perceptions, and challenges through interviews. This methodological approach offers a comprehensive overview of the research problem and provides a solid basis for formulating relevant educational policies and designing effective professional development and support programs for educators working with gifted children.

**Graph 1. Location of the preschool institution (N=132)**



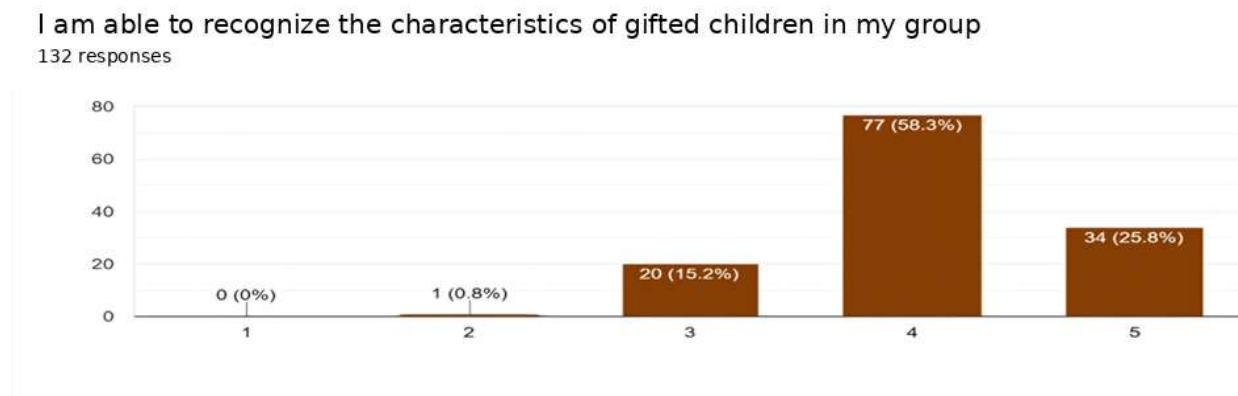
**Table 1. Location of the preschool institution**

Category / Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Skopje	44	33.3
Other cities	88	66.7
Total	132	100

**Note.** Percentages are calculated from N = 132 respondents; totals may vary slightly due to rounding.

**Results and Discussion:-**

**Graph 2. Recognition of characteristics of gifted children (N = 132)**



**Table 2. Recognition of characteristics of gifted children**

Category / Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1 – Strongly disagree / unable	0	0.0
2 – Low confidence	1	0.8
3 – Unsure	20	15.2
4 – Partially confident	77	58.3
5 – Fully confident	34	25.8
Total	132	100

**Note.** Percentages are calculated from N = 132 respondents. Percentages may not total exactly 100 due to rounding.

The analysis of the data on educators' ability to identify giftedness reveals a notable gap between professional awareness and practical confidence. The results show that 25.8% of respondents are fully confident in their ability to recognize the characteristics of gifted children, while the largest proportion, 58.3%, reports only partial confidence. These findings suggest a relatively high level of self-perceived competence, yet indicate that most educators experience some degree of uncertainty in everyday practice. This partial confidence is consistent with recent research by Pfeiffer & Shaughnessy (2024), which emphasizes that, in the absence of clearly defined national protocols and access to modern diagnostic tools, practitioners often have to rely on intuition rather than scientifically grounded identification criteria. Such an approach increases the risk of overlooking specific forms of giftedness, especially in children whose talents are expressed not through traditional academic achievement, but through creativity or leadership.

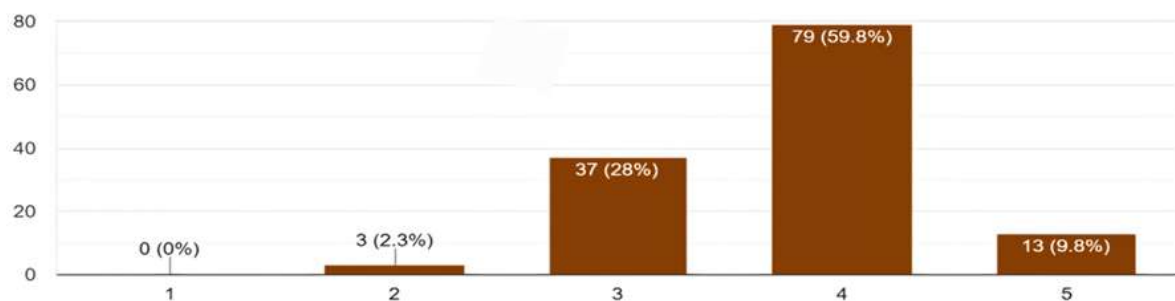
This uncertainty was further corroborated during the qualitative interviews. One participant noted: *"I often intuitively sense that a certain child is advancing much faster than their peers, but I feel hesitant to formally identify them as gifted without a standardized tool or confirmation from a specialist."* Furthermore, the fact that 15.2% of respondents are unsure of their ability and 0.8% are unable to assess it, confirms the need for the systematic development of professional competencies. These results are consistent with international findings reported by Callahan & Müller (2023), who note that early childhood educators face distinctive challenges when applying differentiated approaches to the developmental characteristics and talents of gifted children.

Uncertainty in self-perception directly affects the quality of early identification and, consequently, the possibility of timely individualization of the educational process. These findings highlight the need for specialized training, continuous mentoring and access to professional literature to transform partial confidence into stable professional competence and enable every gifted child to reach their full potential.

**Graph 3. Educators' knowledge of models and theories of giftedness (N=132)**

I am able to adapt existing activities to meet the specific needs of gifted children (differentiation)

132 responses



**Table 3. Educators’ knowledge of models and theories of giftedness**

Category / Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1 – Strongly disagree / unable	0	0.0
2 – Low confidence	3	2.3
3 – Unsure	37	28.0
4 – Partially confident	79	59.8
5 – Fully confident	13	9.8
Total	132	100

**Note.** Percentages are calculated from N = 132 respondents. Percentages may not total exactly 100 due to rounding.

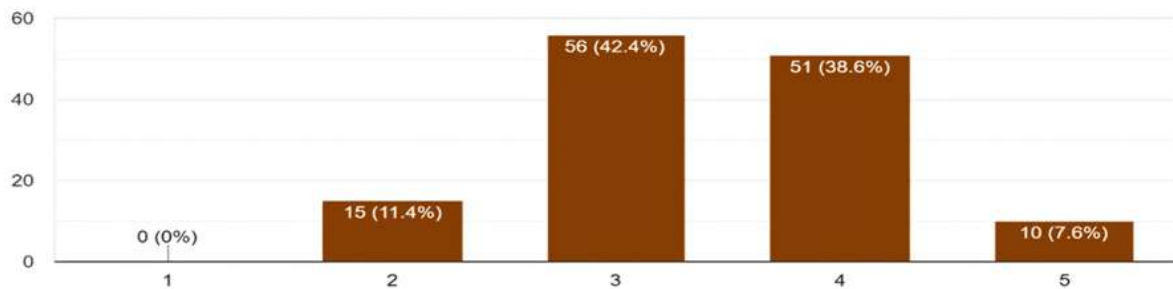
The data were obtained from a self-assessment scale on which educators evaluated their theoretical knowledge of various models and theories of giftedness. The analysis shows that 9.8% of respondents are fully confident in their knowledge, while the largest proportion, 59.8%, reports partial confidence. In addition, 28% of educators remain unsure of their level of knowledge, while 2.3% indicate low confidence.

These findings suggest that although many educators perceive themselves as having some theoretical understanding, a considerable proportion still experience uncertainty about their knowledge of models and theories of giftedness. These results indicate the to systematically improve educators' theoretical preparedness through continuous professional development. Such a substantial proportion of educators with limited theoretical understanding may negatively affect their ability to translate theory into practice and to develop individualized strategies for supporting gifted children (Gubbins & Haeck, 2024; Subotnik et al., 2025). These findings underscore the importance of continuous training and professional development, with a particular focus on strengthening theoretical foundations in giftedness.

**Graph 4: Educators’ preparedness for working with gifted children based on their pedagogical education (N = 132)**

My pedagogical education adequately prepared me to work with gifted children

132 responses



**Table 4. Educators’ preparedness for working with gifted children based on their pedagogical education**

Category / Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1 – Very insufficient	0	0.0
2 – Insufficient	15	11.4
3 – Moderate	56	42.4
4 – Good	51	38.6
5 – Fully prepared	10	7.6
Total	132	100

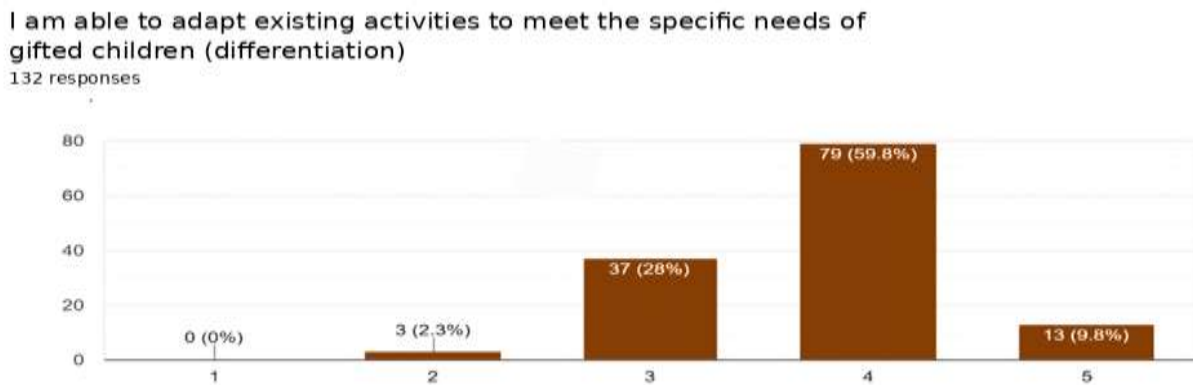
**Note.** Percentages are calculated from N = 132 respondents; totals may vary slightly due to rounding.

The graph presents educators' self-perceptions of whether their pedagogical education adequately prepared them to work with gifted children, based on 132 responses. The data show that the largest proportion of respondents, 42.4% or 56 educators, assessed their preparation as moderate. This finding points to basic theoretical preparation, but also to a lack of full confidence in addressing the specific challenges of working with gifted children in practice. This gap between theory and practice was a recurring theme in the qualitative data. During the interviews, educators frequently pointed out that their formal education was too theoretical. As one respondent stated: *"In our university studies, we learned that gifted children exist, but we were never shown concrete exercises or how to develop an individualized plan for them within a group of 25 children."*

Additionally, 38.6% of respondents, (51 educators), believe that their education provided good preparation, reflecting a positive, though not maximal, level of professional confidence. In contrast, 11.4% or 15 educators assessed their preparation as insufficient, while only 7.6% or 10 educators felt fully prepared. Importantly, none of the respondents rated their preparation as 'very insufficient.' This suggests that educators tend to avoid the extreme negative anchor, possibly due to social desirability, self-protective perceptions, or a recognition of at least partial theoretical grounding, even when they feel underprepared. These empirical data directly support the argument of Sánchez-Escobedo & Hollingworth (2025), who maintain that competencies for working with gifted children should become an integral part of mandatory coursework in teacher education programs. The authors emphasize that such content should not be optional or elective, but should instead be included in core study programs. The absence of this specific preparation during formal studies creates a long term competency gap and forces practitioners to rely on additional training that often serves only as an ad hoc solution.

The findings are fully consistent with previous international research (Gubbins & Haeck, 2024; Callahan & Müller, 2023), which shows that educators often possess basic, but insufficient knowledge and skills to provide effective support to gifted children. Studies by Li & Wong (2023) indicate that limited theoretical and practical preparation contributes to educators' feelings of inadequacy when responding to specific needs, which aligns with the very low percentage of fully prepared respondents in this study (7.6%). Similarly, Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell (2025) emphasize that high-quality support for gifted children requires continuous and specialized professional development that enables the application of advanced models and theories. The importance of systemic support and mentoring, highlighted in international literature, further underscores the need for ongoing professional development. The conclusions of this study confirm recommendations that only through the integration of theoretical preparation, practical training, and mentoring support can educators effectively identify, stimulate, and support gifted children from the earliest stages of preschool education.

**Graph 5: Educators' ability to differentiate activities for gifted children (N = 132)**



**Table 5. Educators' ability to differentiate activities for gifted children**

Category / Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1 – Strongly disagree	0	0.0
2 – Disagree	3	2.3
3 – Neutral	37	28.0

4 – Agree	79	59.8
5 – Strongly agree	13	9.8
Total	132	100

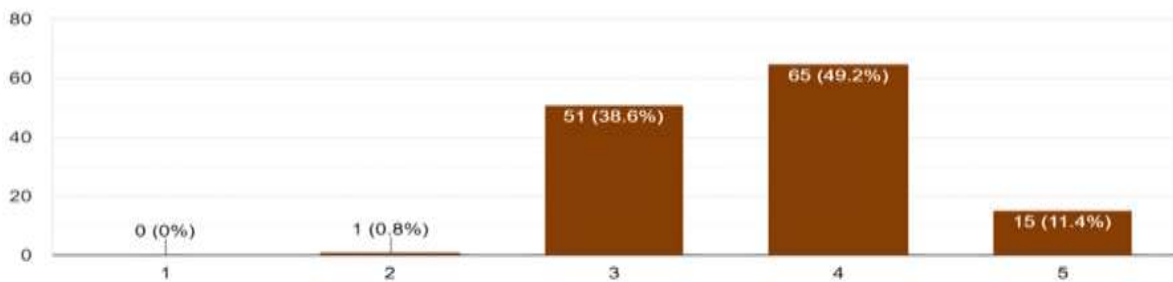
**Note.** Percentages are calculated from N = 132 respondents; totals may vary slightly due to rounding.

The data show that educators are generally confident in their ability to adapt existing activities to the specific needs of gifted children. Specifically, 9.8% of respondents strongly agree and 59.8% agree with this statement, indicating that the majority of educators (70%), perceive themselves as having this competence. At the same time, 28% of educators adopt a neutral stance, suggesting uncertainty or a need for additional clarification and practical experience in applying differentiation. A small percentage, 2.3%, disagrees that they can adapt activities, citing individual weaknesses or a lack of support and knowledge.

These results suggest a relatively strong level of practical differentiation skills, while at the same time highlighting the need for additional training, professional seminars, and practical examples to strengthen the implementation of differentiation in everyday educational work. Aligning theoretical knowledge with practical application is essential for effectively supporting gifted children and for developing individualized strategies.

**Graph 6: Educators’ competence in creating a stimulating and inclusive environment for gifted children (N = 132)**

**I feel competent to create a stimulating and inclusive environment for gifted children**  
132 responses



**Table 6. Educators’ competence in creating a stimulating and inclusive environment for gifted children**

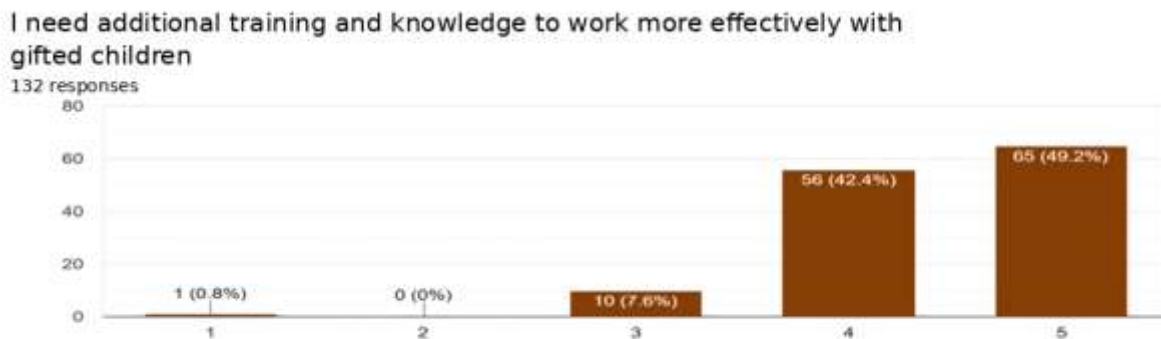
Category / Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1 – Strongly disagree	0	0.0
2 – Disagree	1	0.8
3 – Neutral	51	38.6
4 – Agree	65	49.2
5 – Strongly agree	15	11.4
Total	132	100

**Note.** Percentages are calculated from N = 132 respondents; totals may vary slightly due to rounding.

A majority of educators (49.2%) agree that they can create a stimulating environment for gifted children; 38.6% remain neutral; 11.4% strongly agree; and 0.8% disagree. The results indicate a certain level of competence, but they also demonstrate the need for additional support and practical training to strengthen these skills. The analysis of data from Graphs 5 and 6 reveals an interesting discrepancy: although educators previously assessed their preparation as moderate, they report relatively high confidence in practical work. As many as 70% of respondents state that they can successfully adapt activities, while 60% consider themselves capable of creating a stimulating environment for gifted children.

This high level of self-perception is important because it reflects educators' willingness to experiment in the classroom. It also aligns with the recent concept of 'inclusive excellence' (Kwan & Lau, 2025), which redefines differentiation not merely as extra work for a small number of talented children, but as a tool for raising the quality of learning for the entire group. By introducing higher-level cognitive challenges, educators create an environment in which every child can develop their potential to the fullest. However, the data also require careful interpretation. The fact that a substantial proportion of educators, between 28% and 39%, remain neutral suggests a level of uncertainty that should not be overlooked. This gray zone indicates that many practitioners lack concrete tools and mentoring guidance. Rather than only general training, educators need clear examples and strategies that can be applied immediately in daily practice. Without such practical support, there is a risk that differentiation will remain largely theoretical with little impact on the development of gifted children.

**Graph 7: Need for additional training and knowledge for more effective work with gifted children (N = 132)**



**Table 7. Need for additional training and knowledge for more effective work with gifted children**

Category / Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1 – Strongly disagree	1	0.8
2 – Disagree	0	0.0
3 – Neutral	10	7.6
4 – Agree	56	42.4
5 – Strongly agree	65	49.2
Total	132	100

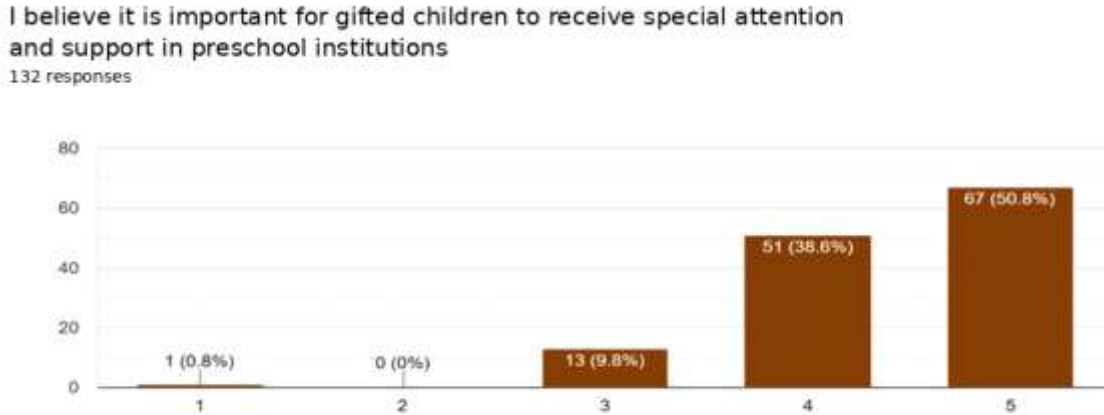
**Note.** Percentages are calculated from N = 132 respondents; totals may vary slightly due to rounding.

The results show that a large proportion of educators recognize the need for additional training and knowledge in order to work more effectively with gifted children. Specifically, 49.2% fully agree and 42.4% agree with this statement, meaning that 91% of respondents express this need. Only 8% are neutral, while 1% believe that additional knowledge is unnecessary. These data clearly indicate a high level of awareness among educators of the importance of continuous professional education and competency development for work with gifted children.

The demand for practical rather than purely theoretical training was a dominant theme in the discussions. One educator emphasized: *"We don't just need lectures with definitions. We need workshops where we can see practical examples of differentiation that are actually feasible in our daily classroom environment."*

A striking 91% of educators report a need for additional training, highlighting strong awareness of the importance of continuous professional development. Priority areas include differentiated instruction, identification and support of diverse gifted profiles, application of theoretical models in practice, mentoring, collaboration with specialists, and practical case-based workshops. Addressing these needs can guide policymakers in designing targeted programs that enhance educators' skills and confidence in supporting gifted children.

**Graph 8: Importance of special support and attention for gifted children (N = 132)**



**Table 8. Importance of special support and attention for gifted children**

Category / Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1 – Strongly disagree	1	0.8
2 – Disagree	0	0.0
3 – Neutral	13	9.8
4 – Agree	51	38.6
5 – Strongly agree	67	50.8
Total	132	100

Note. Percentages are calculated from N = 132 respondents; totals may vary slightly due to rounding.

The results indicate that most educators recognize the importance of providing special support and attention to gifted children in preschool institutions. Specifically, 50.8% strongly agree and 38.6% agree with this statement, meaning that 90% of respondents consider such support important. Only 10% adopt a neutral stance, while just 1% believe it is unimportant. These data highlight educators' awareness of the need for an individualized approach and sustained support for the development of gifted children. These findings are consistent with the theoretical concepts of Renzulli (1978) and Gagné (2009), which emphasize that transforming natural abilities into developed competencies requires specific educational strategies and a stimulating environment. Contemporary research also confirms that pedagogical approaches that focus on gifted children directly enhance their motivation, creativity, and social skills (Kwan & Lau, 2025; Hertzog, 2024).

**Conclusion:-**

The study demonstrates that preschool educators in the Republic of North Macedonia recognize the critical importance of their role in identifying and supporting gifted children. However, a significant finding is that the majority of practitioners perceive their own competencies as moderate or insufficient. Despite their professional experience and high motivation to foster child development, there is a clear discrepancy between their awareness of gifted children's needs and their practical confidence in meeting those needs. The findings highlight the urgent necessity for systemic interventions. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, the following targeted recommendations are proposed:

- **Pre-service Education:** Teacher education programs must integrate mandatory, specialized courses focusing on the nature of giftedness, modern identification protocols for diverse gifted profiles, and the application of differentiated instruction.

- **In-service Professional Development:** Beyond theoretical seminars, educational authorities should provide continuous, practice-oriented training. This includes workshops and case-based learning that enable educators to apply theoretical models to real classroom scenarios.

- **Systematic Mentoring:** Establishing a formal mentoring structure is essential. Experienced educators should be empowered to guide their colleagues, providing practical feedback and professional support to identify and nurture early talent.

- **Policy Advocacy:** At the national level, there is a need for standardized protocols and diagnostic tools accessible to all preschool institutions. This will move identification from a matter of "intuition" to a scientifically grounded practice.

Overall, investment in professional development and robust systemic support will not only enhance individual educator competencies but also ensure a more inclusive and effective educational environment. These interventions are vital for enabling gifted children in the Republic of North Macedonia to reach their full potential, providing a sustainable framework for the future of early childhood education.

## References:-

1. Callahan, C. M., & Müller, L. M. (2023). Early identification and educational support for gifted learners in early childhood settings. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 46(2), 123–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01623532231154563>
2. Gagné, F. (2009). Building gifts into talents: Detailed overview of the DMGT 2.0. In B. MacFarlane & T. Stambaugh (Eds.), *Leading change in gifted education* (pp. 61–80). Prufrock Press.
3. Gubbins, E. J., & Haeck, C. (2024). Teachers' perceptions and beliefs about giftedness: Implications for identification and support. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 68(1), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862231190471>
4. Hertzog, N. B. (2024). *Early childhood gifted education: Global trends and future directions*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003184652>
5. Kwan, C. K., & Lau, T. (2025). Inclusive excellence: Pedagogical strategies for gifted students in early childhood. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 57(1), 12–29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-024-00388-x>
6. Li, H., & Wong, K. M. (2023). Professional development for early childhood teachers working with gifted children: Effects on instructional practices. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 51(4), 589–601. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01323-8>
7. Pfeiffer, S. I., & Shaughnessy, M. F. (2024). Current perspectives on the identification of gifted and talented youth. *Gifted Education International*, 40(2), 145–162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02614294231189912>
8. Renzulli, J. S. (1978). What makes giftedness? Reexamining a definition. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 60(3), 180–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172177806000315>
9. Sánchez-Escobedo, P., & Hollingworth, L. (2025). Teacher training and competency frameworks for high-ability students. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(1), 88–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2024.2234567>
10. Subotnik, R. F., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., & Worrell, F. C. (2025). Rethinking giftedness and talent development across the lifespan. *American Psychologist*, 80(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001234>
11. Tomlinson, C. A. (2001). *How to differentiate instruction in mixed-ability classrooms* (2nd ed.). ASCD.
12. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.