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DOI: 10.2478/seeur-2026-0007

TEACHING STUDENTS WITH HIGH ABILITIES FROM A MOTIVATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Identifying students with high abilities and talents remains an ongoing challenge in education systems, including in Kosovo. Although international literature emphasizes the importance of early identification and the development of potential through cooperation between social and institutional actors, in practice traditional approaches based mainly on academic performance and standardized testing continue to dominate.

This study aims to analyze the challenges involved in identifying talented students, with particular emphasis on the role of teachers and school–family partnerships in primary education in Kosovo. The findings show that teachers are often not sufficiently prepared for the professional identification of students’ talents, and their assessments may be influenced by subjective perceptions. In addition, cooperation between schools and families is limited, and parents are often reluctant to express their views regarding their children's abilities and interests.

The study highlights the need to develop contemporary strategies, provide professional training, and strengthen school–family partnerships in order to enable a more comprehensive and equitable identification of students with extraordinary potential.

Keywords: identification, learners, high abilities, talent, school–family partnership, teachers, parents

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and education have evolved and changed over time. Comprehensive social development, socio-economic changes, and technological expansion are among the main factors that have brought substantial changes to the field of education at all levels. In addition, new teaching methods, forms, and methodologies are continually being sought, as in modern times the internet increasingly challenges traditional schooling. Teaching now operates alongside rapidly advancing technology, and teachers are challenged to make school more engaging and attractive for students. (Nur Fauzani Razali, N.F. & Nasri, N.M., 2023)

This challenge becomes even greater when working with students with high abilities and talents, who require a much more professional approach during the learning process in order to maintain their attention and interest in learning. The best teaching practices are expected to be applied to this category of students in Kosovo, as well as in other democratic countries where the Salamanca Declaration and other international declarations defining the framework for the implementation of human rights are recognized. However, in Kosovo there remains a gap between these expectations and the actual needs for a different educational approach to this group of students. In general, there is a deficit in terms of legal infrastructure as well as adequate preparation of teachers for the new approaches required for the implementation of differentiated instruction. (MASHTI , 2019)(United Nations, 1994)

This approach forms part of inclusive education, which has begun to be implemented relatively recently in Kosovo. It aims to promote forms of support for students with high abilities and talents in academic, creative, and artistic fields, as foreseen in the MEST Implementation Plan drafted following the adoption of the Administrative Instruction. (MASHT, 2019)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies show that the key to the successful implementation of effective teaching for students with high abilities and talents is their identification as early as possible. (Brody, L. E., & Mills, C. J. (2005))

For this purpose, it is necessary to recognize circumstances outside the school environment that can support teachers and contribute to greater efficiency and better outcomes for these students.

One of the areas that has been studied in relation to students with high abilities is the economic background of their families. Evidence from practice suggests that children from families with higher economic status tend to be identified earlier as students with high abilities and talents than those who possess the same characteristics but come from families with lower economic status. The latter may even remain unidentified at any stage of their education as students with high abilities. However, social status does not determine their achievements, as research has shown that they can achieve similar levels of success when they are given equal learning opportunities, regardless of their families' economic status. In addition, demographic factors are also important, such as whether parents live in rural or urban areas and what their educational background is. (Miller, R., & Gentry, M., 2010)

Other studies have examined gender differences to determine whether boys or girls identified as students with high abilities and talents are more numerous. (Cook, 2018)

EXCEPTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, TYPES, AND SCALES

The scientist Howard Gardner, in his theory of multiple intelligence, argues that humans possess different types of intelligence rather than a single form of intelligence, as was previously assumed. Gardner identified eight types of intelligence: linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, and spatial intelligence.

Based on psychometrics, or the scientific measurement of intelligence, levels of intelligence are commonly classified as follows: high intelligence, crystallized intelligence, brilliant, superior, or maximum intelligence (over 150 IQ); intelligence within the 130–150 IQ range; optimal intelligence (IQ 90–110); and average intelligence (IQ 70–90), among others.

There is a narrow boundary between the concepts of giftedness, talent, and high IQ. Thus, the concept of “giftedness” corresponds to competence that is significantly above average in one or more areas of ability, while the concept of “talent” refers to performance that is significantly above average in one or more areas of human performance. (Gagné, 1985). High IQ refers to a level of general intelligence measured through standardized intelligence tests, where typically a score of 130 or more (two standard deviations above the mean) is considered indicative of very superior intelligence. (Neisser, U. Boodoo, G. Bouchard Jr, Th. Boykin, A.W. Brody, N. Ceci, S. Halpern, D. Loehlin, J. Perloff, R. Sternberg, R. Urbina, S., 1996).

According to the Atomi Institute, an institution recognized by international organizations that deals with the testing and identification of children with extraordinary abilities and talents in Kosovo, 47 children were selected as “atomists” in 2024, with their intelligence levels measured between 147 and 152 IQ.

So far, the ATOMI Project has identified a total of 286 atomists across Kosovo, aged 13–23, including participants from both genders and from almost all municipalities and communities in the country.

The implementation of inclusive education has generally faced a number of difficulties in Kosovo, including the limited attention that the media gives to topics of this kind. However, it has been observed that when the media reports cases related to difficulties in inclusive education, these issues are often reviewed and addressed more quickly. Despite this, the understanding and implementation of inclusive education remain challenging in Kosovo even after more than ten years since preparations began for integrating this concept into the regular education system. (Osmankaq, S.G & Maloku, F., 2024) (Haug, 2016)

Through this study, the aim is to understand a specific dimension—namely, the extent to which motivational perspectives are applied in schools in identifying and developing students with high abilities and talents. (Rapp, A.C. & Corral-Granados, A., 2021)

THEORETICAL DISPUTE - EDUCATION IN KOSOVO

Kosovo (a country with approximately 1.6 million inhabitants) has nearly 250,000 students attending classes in grades 1–9. Kosovo implements an education system based on the models of developed European countries and organized into five cycles of education: pre-school education; primary education (grades 1–5); lower secondary education (grades 6–9); upper secondary education (grades 10–12); and higher or university education.

All levels of education have been significantly affected by the consequences of the 1998–1999 war, and even more than two decades later Kosovo continues its efforts to improve

the education system with the aim of building a comprehensive and effective system of education.

Kosovo continues to perform with unsatisfactory results in the international PISA assessment. Since 2015, students from Kosovo have consistently ranked among the lowest-performing participants in the countries where these assessments are conducted. In Kosovo there has been some reluctance to fully accept the results of these assessments as entirely representative, as there are views that students are not sufficiently prepared to take the test seriously. Since students are regularly reminded that they will not be graded on these tests, they may not always demonstrate their full potential.

On the other hand, the quality of education in Kosovo has been consistently criticized, particularly following the weak results in the international PISA assessment. Since 2015, the Ministry of Education has developed a Quality Assurance Strategy based on four main objectives: (1) building effective mechanisms for quality assurance; (2) advancing development planning at the school level; (3) strengthening capacity for quality assurance at all levels of the education system; and (4) raising awareness among stakeholders regarding their responsibilities for quality assurance in education. Education strategies are generally designed for four-year periods and are reviewed and improved on an annual basis.

Meanwhile, continuous efforts have been made to reform the education system, including increasing the education budget and revising education policies.

The key terms in the official documents of the Ministry of Education in Kosovo are quality, inclusiveness, and equality. However, achieving these goals within the education system has faced several challenges, beginning from the earliest level of education, namely pre-school education. Kosovo has so far experienced a relatively low level of inclusion in early childhood education. An increase in the number of children attending this level has been observed mainly after the licensing of a larger number of private institutions, as there is a shortage of public institutions compared to the existing demand.

In recent years, however, there has been a satisfactory increase in attendance in the pre-primary class (grade 0), where the inclusion rate is now approaching 100%. Nevertheless, progress in achieving the goals related to the education of children from marginalized groups and children with special educational needs has been slower.

At the same time, work with students with high abilities and talents, particularly in terms of their identification and development, remains insufficiently developed and requires greater attention. The significant and rapid achievements of former pupils and students from Kosovo in more developed countries have further intensified this debate. The successes achieved abroad by students from Kosovo highlight the need to examine the factors that may have limited the development of these same students during their earlier education in Kosovo.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What level of preparation do teachers have for applying motivational approaches when teaching students with high abilities and talents?
- To what extent do schools work to identify students with high abilities and talents, and are these students given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their abilities during their schooling?

Supporting Questions

- How are students with high abilities and talents identified in schools?
- What is the level of school–family cooperation in identifying students from this group?
- Why is the number of identified students with high abilities and talents relatively small in Kosovo?

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to identify perspectives that may contribute to the early identification of students with high abilities and talents. To explore this issue, it is first necessary to examine the approaches that teachers use during the learning process with these students, whom they sometimes refer to as “smart learners.”

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. , 2017) argues that optimal motivation develops when three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy; competence; relatedness. When these needs are supported by the school environment, students exhibit higher intrinsic motivation, greater engagement, and better performance. (Ryan, R. et.al. 2017) .

In modern teaching, the school should be understood as a heterogeneous environment shaped by diverse circumstances and student backgrounds. Considering this diversity, teachers and parents share the primary responsibility for building a partnership that benefits each child and society as a whole.

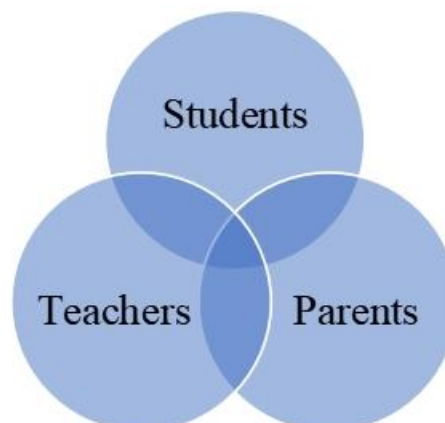
The research methods used in this study are qualitative and quantitative. (Kumar, 2014)

The research population includes teachers and parents in Kosovo. The samples were selected randomly. Forty teachers were interviewed through structured written interviews, three school coordinators were interviewed using the same method, and fifty parents participated through survey questionnaires conducted in different municipalities in Kosovo. Participants were guaranteed anonymity.

DATA ANALYTICS

There is a perception that the number of students with high abilities and talents (HIED) may in fact be higher, but that very little work is done in schools to identify them.

Fig. Factors in partnership: Each of them closely intertwines in the learning process, almost equally



In a survey conducted with parents, it appears that one in four parents believes that their child has talent in a particular field, but that teachers do not provide children with sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their talent. Each of the parents also stated that they have never attempted to present their children's teachers with the perspective of a different approach toward their children.

"I think that some teachers do not try at all to discover talents in children. They are simply in a hurry to evaluate, and this is exactly where the neglect of the subject by the students begins. This is what happened to my child, even though I had noticed that he had talent in that field, mathematics." (mother of a student in the 7th grade)

There is also a perception among parents that teachers tend to overlook parents' opinions when it comes to their children's abilities and talents. According to parents' perceptions, teachers often assume that parents are subjective in their assessments. As a result, many parents are reluctant to express their views to teachers on this matter.

"I was convinced that my children had very expressive talents, each in different fields, one in mathematics and the other in art. I identified their talents by continuously supporting them through working with them, observation, and by developing their interests through various activities such as courses, summer schools, and art schools. On the other hand, teachers have not taken any steps to identify or develop their talent." (father of two students, one 16 and the other 12 years old)

CHALLENGING TEACHING

Meanwhile, in three interviews with school coordinators, who also do the internal evaluation of teachers by assisting in classes, at least one of them states that there have been cases when the teacher has not been able to identify a potentially highly intelligent student, although the latter was able to give answers without stopping to every question of the teacher throughout the lesson. According to her, the teacher did not take any steps to change the teaching approach to this student, although while completing the three written tasks he completed them in less than four minutes, while the other majority needed over 15 minutes to complete the same tasks. According to her, the teacher in question was asked if she attended any additional training or training for the identification of HIED and her answer was negative. School coordinators and teachers affirm the lack of additional professional preparations, which institutions should provide as support for continuous training and development of teachers.

Only one in ten teachers interviewed stated that they have attended any training offered by institutions, regarding professional approaches that help identify and treat students with exceptional intelligence, talent and talents.

The teacher who attended the training works in the lower secondary cycle of education, in the subject of music. The training attended was with separate modules, lasting three months. She states that the training has been among the best she has followed during her long period of 18 years in teaching. The group of teachers interviewed had work experience from 6 to 19 years and belong to the primary and lower secondary cycle of pre-university education in Kosovo.

Only 20% of teachers state that during their experience, there have been cases when the parents of students have expressed the opinion that their child has talent or talent in a certain

field. All those who gave positive answers were subject teachers. Their class-level colleagues have given opposite answers.

Only 32% of teachers claim that during their experience they have noticed students with expectations, or talents in certain areas. They state that their opportunities are limited to do much for these students.

When asked how she acts when she notices that one of the students has more talent or talent than others in a subject, one of the teachers of the primary cycle (1-5), answers: "I engage them to help other classmates, or I give them additional tasks."

A different answer is given to the same question by a teacher from the Subject: English Language.

"When I noticed the student's increased talent in my subject, I encouraged him to participate in extracurricular activities, because that is my possibilities." In this question, 91% of teachers gave similar answers. who are part of the group that had observed students with different tendencies throughout their experience as teachers. Public pre-university education in Kosovo counts nearly 25 thousand teachers.

DISCUSSING THE RESULTS

The challenges involved in identifying students with high abilities and talents are considered diverse. Different countries around the world are increasingly researching the most effective ways and methods for identifying these students.

The belief that talented students are those who perform best on all tests still dominates, while there are relatively few attempts to support their development through both internal and external motivation.

Studies provide credible evidence suggesting that intelligence and abilities can be developed through the combined efforts and perseverance of social and institutional factors.

Albanian society has, at times, placed increasing emphasis on identifying students with high abilities and talents as early as possible, recognizing the importance that early identification can have for individual and societal development. This perspective is also based on the understanding that many children around the world are never identified for who they truly are and therefore never have the opportunity to develop their potential. (Ishak, N.M., & Bakar, A.Y.A, 2017)

Meanwhile, studies indicate that there is still limited research on students with high abilities and talents, including in Kosovo. Therefore, this paper seeks to contribute modestly to this field by highlighting that, among the many challenges in identifying these students, there is often rigidity in the partnership between schools and families, particularly between teachers and parents, in achieving this goal. (Reynen, K. Round, P. & Subban, P., 2023)

The school–family partnership occupies an important place in contemporary education. This partnership should be strengthened for the benefit of students, education, and society as a whole. School–family partnership refers to the exchange of information, shared responsibility in educational processes, and the evaluation and improvement of these processes across both environments. (Deva-Zuna, A. Potera,I & Mehmeti, S., 2024)

Other studies emphasize the dominant role of teachers in identifying students in this category. Findings from previous research, which suggest that teachers' evaluations may sometimes be influenced by personal beliefs about talent, are also reflected in this study. In

some cases, teachers claimed that they were the ones who first noticed a student's talent in a particular field rather than acknowledging the observations previously expressed by parents. (Miranda, L. Araujo, A.M. & Almeida, L.S., 2013)

CONCLUSION

This research highlights that traditional teaching approaches are still widely present, rather than contemporary teaching approaches that respond to the evolving developmental needs of students. Based on the data presented above, it appears that teachers in Kosovo are not sufficiently prepared to identify students with high abilities and talents. On the other hand, schools are not always open to receiving support from parents regarding teachers' perspectives toward children who learn more quickly.

At the same time, parents are often reluctant to share their views with teachers about their children's abilities and talents, particularly during the primary education stage. A significant proportion of parents (one in four) believe that their child has talent in a particular field. However, most of them do not discuss this with teachers due to several factors: the perception that their opinions are ignored; the belief that teachers consider parents' assessments to be subjective; and the lack of a culture of school–family cooperation. This situation reflects the absence of a functional partnership and professional dialogue between schools and parents in identifying talent.

On the other hand, only 32% of teachers report that they have noticed students with high abilities or talents. The example provided by the school coordinator shows that even when clear indicators are present (e.g., very rapid completion of tasks and consistently correct responses), differentiated pedagogical intervention is often missing. The study shows that in most cases teachers' responses are limited to assigning additional tasks, encouraging students to help other classmates, or directing them toward extracurricular activities. This suggests that identification remains largely intuitive rather than professional or institutional.

The study also indicates a significant lack of professional preparation among teachers for identifying students with high abilities and talents. Only one in ten teachers has attended training related to the identification and support of such students. Teachers and coordinators themselves acknowledge the lack of institutional support for professional development, although training programs are highly valued when they are offered. Overall, the analysis indicates that there is significant underidentified potential among students with high abilities and talents in public pre-university schools in Kosovo. This situation appears to be related to the lack of professional training, the absence of institutional protocols, and limited cooperation between schools and parents. Current interventions remain sporadic, intuitive, and limited, which does not allow for the full development of these students' potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational institutions should develop and provide regular training programs for teachers regarding the identification of students with high abilities and talents, the use of contemporary teaching methods and differentiated learning, as well as new pedagogical strategies for developing the potential of these students in the learning process. These trainings should form part of the continuous professional development of teachers.

Educational institutions should also design clear guidelines and procedures for the early identification of students with high abilities and talents. These mechanisms should include the use of evaluation instruments, systematic observation of student performance, as well as the involvement of professional teams within schools (psychologists, pedagogues, and support

teachers). At the same time, schools and teachers should apply more differentiated teaching approaches, creating opportunities for students with higher potential to develop their abilities through academically challenging activities, research and creative projects, as well as enriched curricular content and developmental activities within the classroom. Schools should also promote a more open culture of communication and cooperation with parents regarding the identification and development of students' talents.

This can be achieved through regular consultation meetings with parents, the involvement of parents in the process of observing and identifying children's potential, as well as the creation of professional dialogue mechanisms between teachers and parents. Further studies are recommended on methods and strategies for more accurately identifying the number of students with high abilities and talents within the education system, analyzing the most effective pedagogical practices for their development, as well as assessing the impact of professional teacher training in this area.

Additional research is also recommended to examine the factors that hinder or support the education system in Kosovo in identifying students with high abilities and talents. Another issue that requires investigation is the reluctance of parents to openly express their views regarding their children's talents and abilities at school. Finally, further research is needed on the methods, forms, and strategies through which teachers could more effectively identify these students.

Study limitations

The results of this study should be interpreted with some limitations in mind. The study focused primarily on teachers' and parents' perceptions of the identification of children with high intelligence, giftedness, and talent. As a result, the findings reflect the experiences and attitudes of these groups, without directly including the perspectives of the students themselves or other support professionals. Furthermore, the results indicate that teachers' assessments may be influenced by personal perceptions and beliefs about talent. This represents a potential limitation, as the identification of gifted and talented students may be influenced by subjective judgments and not always by fully standardized criteria.

Another limiting characteristic is the fact that the study has treated the school-family partnership as an important factor in the identification of talents, but has not analyzed in detail other institutional, social, and cultural factors that may influence this process. Consequently, the results provide a partial picture of the variety of factors that influence the identification of children with high intelligence, gifts and talents. Therefore, since the identification of children with high intelligence, gifts and talents is a complex and multidimensional process, the results of this study cannot explain all the challenges associated with the detection and support of this category of students.

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