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Preparing Future Educational Psychologists for Tutoring Support of Gifted Children

Abstract

Introduction. The study focuses on identifying the actual level of tutoring competencies formed among psychology students for working with gifted children, and on substantiating the feasibility of their purposeful development within university-level professional training. *Methodology and Methods.* At the theoretical level, an analytical review of domestic and foreign psychological and pedagogical literature on giftedness, tutoring, and professional training of educational psychologists was conducted. The empirical basis consisted of a pilot survey of 37 third-year students enrolled in a Pedagogy and Psychology program at a University. The questionnaire comprised four closed-ended items diagnosing awareness of tutoring support, understanding of gifted children's needs, self-assessment of professional readiness, and attitudes toward the necessity of specialized training. *Results.* A clear contradiction was recorded between students' intuitive understanding of the specific characteristics of gifted children and their actual unreadiness to apply tutoring technologies in practice. The overwhelming majority of respondents rated the existing training program as insufficiently ensuring the formation of the relevant competencies. *Scientific Novelty.* The theoretical foundations of tutoring support for gifted children have been systematized and analyzed for the first time within the context of professional training of educational psychologists. *Practical Significance.* The findings provide a rationale for the purposeful incorporation of tutoring competencies into professional training content and may be applied in designing specialized courses and programs aimed at building readiness among future educational psychologists for working with gifted children within higher professional education.

Keywords: gifted children, tutoring support, future educational psychologist, professional training.

Introduction. In the psycho-pedagogical tradition, “giftedness” is understood as a complex, dynamic property of the psyche that takes shape over the course of an individual's life and reflects their capacity to attain outstanding outcomes in one or several fields of activity relative to the general population (Kuznetsova, 2024). Renzulli's (2021) Three-Ring Model posits that giftedness emerges at the convergence of three interrelated clusters: intellectual ability exceeding the average, sustained motivational engagement with tasks, and a high level of creative thinking (Renzulli, 2023). Gardner (1993) expands this framework considerably by proposing the theory of multiple intelligences,

which holds that outstanding abilities are not confined to academic performance but may be expressed across musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and other dimensions of human activity.

A theoretically significant feature of gifted children's development is its pronounced asynchrony, a pattern elaborated in Silverman's scholarship (Silverman, 1993). The core of this phenomenon consists of the fact that intellectual advancement in gifted children substantially outpaces their emotional maturation and social development. This imbalance generates acute intrapersonal tensions: a child may demonstrate remarkable success in solving cognitively

demanding problems while simultaneously struggling with peer relations, the regulation of emotional states, and the demands of social adjustment. Empirical research further highlights the characteristic combination of heightened emotional sensitivity, perfectionistic strivings, existential preoccupations, and a chronic experience of difference from age-mates in this population (Delgado-Valencia, 2025). Taken together, these features position gifted children not as a privileged, self-sufficient group - as common stereotypes suggest - but as a psychologically vulnerable category requiring purposeful specialist intervention.

The distinctive developmental profile described above creates a fundamental mismatch with the logic of conventional mass schooling. When curricula are standardized, the instructional pace is oriented toward the average student, and reproductive modes of teaching predominate, gifted learners are subjected to chronic intellectual understimulation, experience progressive erosion of academic motivation, and, in a range of cases, develop concealed forms of maladaptive behavior. Scholarly evidence demonstrates that a considerable share of such students face a condition aptly described as “invisible giftedness,” a state in which their capabilities remain largely unrealized owing to an inadequate fit between the educational setting and their genuine developmental needs (Baccassino & Pinnelli, 2023; Renzulli, 2023). Compounding this is the paradox of overabundance: when the range of a child’s interests and talents is exceptionally broad, this very breadth may complicate rather than facilitate the construction of a coherent educational trajectory and the formation of a stable professional self-concept. These converging challenges make a compelling case for individualized, specialized forms of psychopedagogical accompaniment that can adapt the educational environment to the unique profile of each gifted learner and create conditions for their holistic personal growth.

Tutoring support represents a principled pedagogical response to the challenges outlined above, differing from conventional instruction in its foundational orientation, its methodological

repertoire, and the qualitative character of the relationship it establishes with the learner (Zeng & Yung, 2025). As a recognized field of educational practice, tutoring has historical roots in the collegiate traditions of Oxford and Cambridge, where the tutor occupied the role of a personal academic mentor who guided students’ intellectual and character formation over extended periods. Within the contemporary pedagogical discourse, tutoring support is conceptualized as a distinctive form of educational activity whose defining purpose is the individualization of learning: it is oriented toward uncovering and cultivating the learner’s own educational motives and interests, identifying and mobilizing relevant resources for the construction of a personalized educational program, and progressively developing the learner’s capacity for autonomous design of their developmental pathway (Iuzzini-Seigel et al., 2022). What fundamentally distinguishes a tutor from a subject-matter teacher is a reorientation of professional focus: rather than transmitting a body of knowledge, the tutor accompanies the learner’s process of self-determination, creating conditions in which the student clarifies their own values, interests, and learning objectives.

In the context of work with gifted children, tutoring support acquires a distinctive content and functional profile (Phelp & Lewis, 2022). Its first function is to create conditions under which a child’s latent potential can be recognized and developed in cases where the standard school environment fails to furnish adequate opportunities for this. Its second function is navigational: the tutor assists the student in structuring goals, establishing a hierarchy of priorities, and designing a realistic, personalized plan for their attainment. Its third function concerns psychological safety: the tutor cultivates an interaction space in which the learner is free to experiment, to err, and to reflect without the burden of evaluative judgment, thereby fostering constructive social engagement and supporting integration into broader educational and community life.

The professional demands that tutoring support of gifted children places on the educational psychologist are considerable. Drawing on

expertise in psychodiagnostics, psychological counseling, and corrective-developmental intervention, the educational psychologist is positioned to recognize giftedness in its diverse and frequently atypical presentations and to provide targeted assistance with the personal, emotional, and relational difficulties that such children characteristically experience. The synthesis of psychological expertise with tutoring-oriented approaches yields a qualitatively enriched model of specialist support.

Yet an examination of current professional preparation programs for educational psychologists reveals that this integrated approach remains at the margins of existing curricula. Future educational psychologists typically encounter the topic of giftedness within general courses in developmental or educational psychology, and gain only limited exposure to tutoring within the framework of inclusive education content (Mara, 2023); a systematic program of preparation for integrated tutoring-psychological practice is, however, absent from the overwhelming majority of degree programs. The result is a demonstrable gap in the practical competence of graduates when they are called upon to work with gifted children within a tutoring framework. Bridging this gap through the purposeful integration of relevant competencies into university-level professional education thus constitutes an urgent problem - one that demands both rigorous theoretical grounding and the development of concrete, replicable pedagogical solutions.

Materials and Methods. Research Design. A quantitative descriptive approach was adopted as the methodological framework of this investigation, implemented through a cross-sectional survey design. This choice was guided by the core objective of the study: to obtain a reliable snapshot of the current professional preparedness of bachelor 's-level psychology students for tutoring-based work with gifted learners, without introducing experimental conditions or monitoring changes across time. Survey methodology was judged particularly well-suited to this purpose, as it allows the systematic collection of self-reported data on knowledge levels, attitudes, and perceived

competencies from a defined group of participants within a compact timeframe. The empirical component of the study was carried out over the course of a single academic semester at Abai Myrzakhmetov Kokshetau University, Kazakhstan.

Participants. The study drew its participants from the undergraduate student cohort of the bachelor's program 6B01101 Pedagogy and Psychology at Abai Myrzakhmetov Kokshetau University. To guarantee that every participant brought a reasonably uniform and professionally relevant background to the survey, a purposive selection procedure was employed rather than random sampling. Three criteria had to be satisfied for a student to be eligible for inclusion: first, active registration in the third year of the 6B01101 Pedagogy and Psychology degree; second, prior successful completion of the professional-cycle modules addressing the psycho-pedagogical basis of work with heterogeneous student groups; and third, documented completion of a field-based teaching practicum within the program. Students at other stages of the degree were not recruited. Those in their first and second years lacked the depth of subject-specific training necessary for a meaningful self-evaluation of the issues examined in the study. Students in their final, fourth year were undergoing graduation procedures and extended off-campus professional internships, circumstances that both constrained their availability and made direct comparison with the target cohort methodologically inappropriate. After applying these criteria, the study group comprised 37 participants, all drawn from the third year of the program. This number was judged adequate to yield findings representative of the defined population.

Data collection instrument. The primary instrument developed for this study was an original questionnaire constructed specifically to address the research questions. It contained four items with closed response sets, where each item offered four answer choices calibrated on a Likert-type rating scale (Tanujaya et al., 2022). The Likert format was preferred over a simple yes/no structure because it captures degrees

of opinion rather than dichotomous positions, thereby generating richer, more differentiated data about participants' self-perceptions.

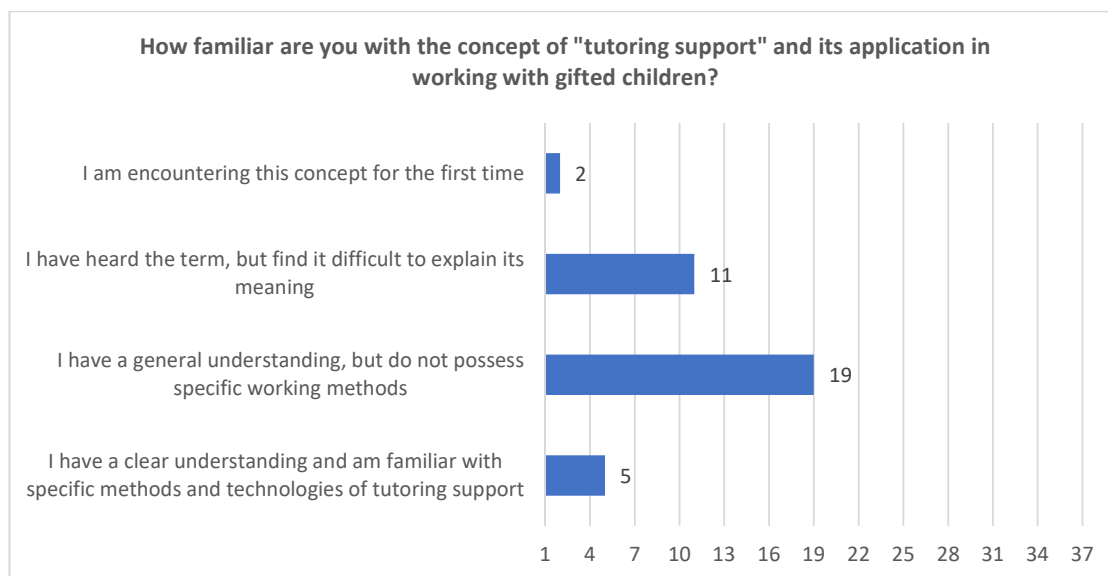
The four items were each designed to illuminate a separate facet of the problem. Item 1 gauged how well respondents understood the concept of tutoring support conceptually and whether they could identify the concrete techniques and tools used in tutoring practice with gifted students. Item 2 probed the extent to which students recognized the distinctive psychopedagogical requirements of gifted children and appreciated why a standard pedagogical approach may be inadequate for this group. Item 3 invited participants to rate, from their own perspective, how thoroughly their current degree program had equipped them to carry out tutoring support activities with gifted learners. Item 4 captured students' stance on whether a dedicated, standalone course on this topic should be incorporated into the educational psychologist preparation curriculum. To establish the content validity of the instrument, each item's wording was mapped against the theoretical constructs underpinning the study, and the resulting draft was submitted to a panel of subject-matter experts in educational psychology and pedagogy for independent review. The expert panel confirmed the adequacy of the items, and no substantive revisions to content were deemed necessary before administration.

Data collection procedure. The survey was administered in person during regular timetabled teaching sessions at Abai Myrzakhmetov Kokshetau University, using printed questionnaire forms. An in-class, synchronous format was deliberately chosen to ensure uniform conditions for all respondents and to achieve the highest possible completion rate. At the outset of each session, a standardized introduction was delivered to participants, covering the purpose of the study, an explanation of how to interpret and complete the rating scale, and clarification of what would happen with the collected data. Students were made explicitly aware that taking part was a matter of personal choice and that opting out would have no bearing on their academic standing or standing within

the program. To protect participant privacy, questionnaires were completed anonymously: no names or identifying codes were recorded on the forms, and at no point in the analytical process were responses traceable to individual students. These procedural safeguards were put in place to reduce the likelihood of socially desirable responding and to encourage frank, unguarded answers. Every student present at the survey sessions submitted a fully completed questionnaire, producing a completion rate of 100% across the sample of 37 participants. No responses required exclusion on grounds of incompleteness or internal inconsistency.

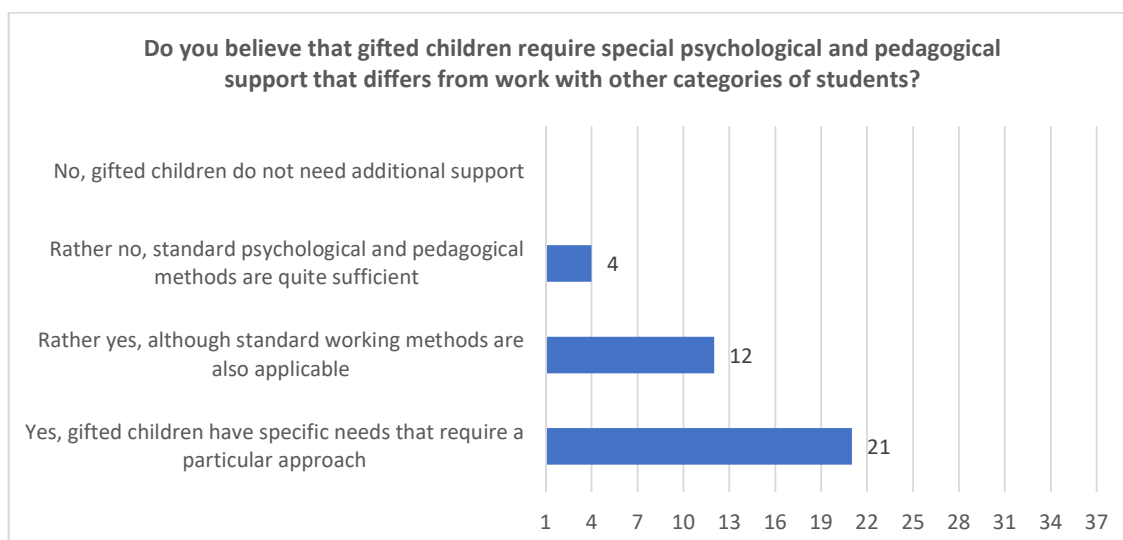
Data analysis. All questionnaire responses were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. For each item, both the raw count and the corresponding proportion (expressed as a percentage of the total sample) of respondents selecting each answer option were computed. These distributions were then displayed in horizontal bar charts (Figures 1–4) to provide a transparent visual representation of how opinion and self-assessment were spread across the response continuum for every question. The analytical emphasis was placed on two levels: first, identifying the prevailing response pattern within each item; and second, examining the coherence of patterns across all four items - specifically, whether the levels of conceptual knowledge (Item 1), recognition of student needs (Item 2), self-rated readiness (Item 3), and demand for specialized training (Item 4) told a consistent story about the state of professional preparation. All interpretations were grounded in the theoretical framework developed in the introductory section of the article, and the overarching analytical goal was to map out the nature and scope of deficiencies in existing degree programs with respect to equipping graduates for tutoring-oriented work with gifted children. Given the exploratory, descriptive character of the research design and the deliberate (non-random) composition of the sample, no inferential statistical tests were applied to the data.

Results. Based on the study conducted, the following results were obtained (Figures 1–4).

Figure 1*Students' awareness of the concept of tutoring support for gifted children*

The first question was aimed at identifying the degree of students' theoretical awareness of tutoring support. Only 5 respondents (13.5%) reported having a clear understanding of the concept under investigation and command of specific methods and technologies of tutoring practice. The largest share of participants, 19 individuals (51.4%), indicated having only a general understanding without command of specific working methods. Eleven students (29.7%) reported having encountered the term

but being unable to articulate its meaning, and 2 respondents (5.4%) came across the concept for the first time. Cumulatively, 35.1% of students are either unfamiliar with the concept of tutoring support or acquainted with it only nominally. The findings point to a deficit in theoretical preparation in the area under investigation: the overwhelming majority of prospective educational psychologists do not possess knowledge of tutoring sufficient for its practical application in future professional activity.

Figure 2*Students' perceptions of the need for psychological and pedagogical support for gifted children*

The second question was aimed at identifying students' understanding of the needs of gifted children in psycho-pedagogical support. Twenty-one respondents (56.8%) unequivocally confirmed that gifted children have specific needs requiring a specialized approach, while another 21 students leaned toward an affirmative answer while acknowledging the applicability of standard working methods as well. None of the respondents selected a categorically negative answer, and only 4

students (10.8%) expressed doubt regarding the necessity of specialized support. Despite the evident deficit in theoretical knowledge of tutoring recorded in the first question, students nonetheless intuitively recognize the particular vulnerability of gifted children and their need for individualized support. This points to the presence among respondents of a certain degree of professional sensitivity which, however, has yet to be reinforced by concrete instrumental knowledge.

Figure 3

Students' assessment of their readiness for tutoring support of gifted children within the current educational program

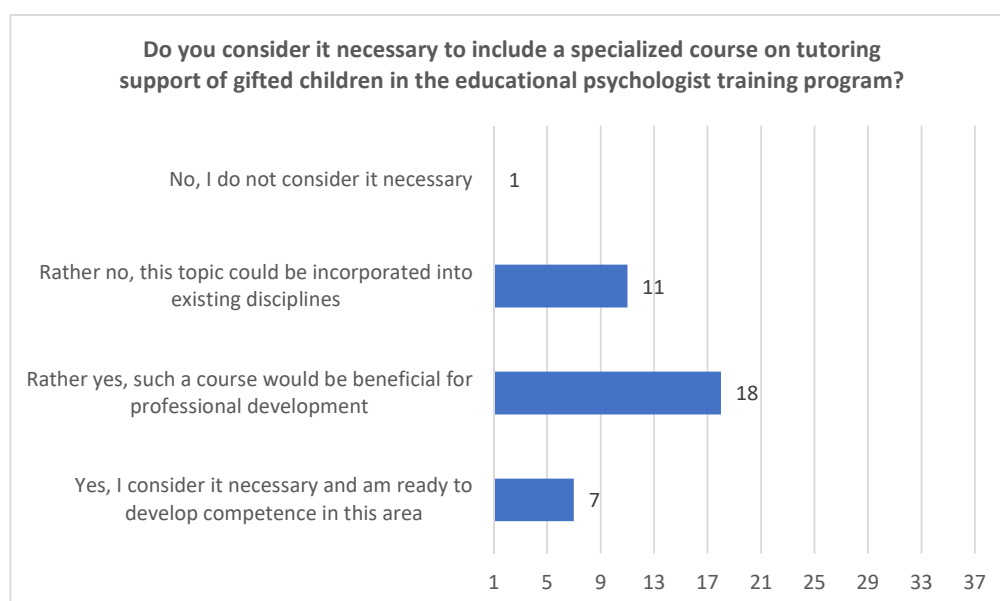


The third question made it possible to assess the subjectively perceived level of readiness formed in the course of professional training and presents the most significant picture in the context of the problem under investigation. Only 3 students (8.1%) rated their level of preparation as fully sufficient. Seven respondents (18.9%) indicated a sufficient level of foundational knowledge while noting the need to deepen the practical component. At the same time, the overwhelming majority - 23 individuals (62.2%) - acknowledged that the

topic of tutoring support for gifted children is virtually absent from their degree program, and a further 4 students (10.8%) reported a complete absence of the subject under investigation from their working curriculum. Cumulatively, 73% of respondents identify an insufficiency or complete absence of the relevant preparation, which clearly points to the nature of the deficit identified: the degree program does not ensure the formation of educational psychologists' readiness to work with gifted children within the framework of tutoring support.

Figure 4

Students' attitudes toward the need to introduce a specialized course on tutoring support of gifted children



The fourth question recorded students' attitudes toward the necessity of introducing a specialized course and predictably reflects the conclusions arising from the preceding responses. Seven respondents (18.9%) expressed unequivocal support for the inclusion of such a course in the degree program and indicated personal readiness to engage with this area. Eighteen students (48.6%) leaned toward an affirmative answer, acknowledging the professional value of such a course. Eleven individuals (29.7%) adopted a moderately skeptical position, holding that the topic could be integrated into existing disciplines, and only 1 respondent (2.7%) did not consider the introduction of such a course to be necessary. Cumulatively, 67.5% of students support the idea of specialized preparation, reflecting a demand on the part of prospective specialists themselves for the remediation of the identified deficit. Those students who selected the third response option do not deny the necessity of engaging with the subject under investigation but merely propose an alternative organizational format for its incorporation into the degree program.

Overall, the survey results demonstrate that prospective educational psychologists recognize the significance of the problem of

supporting gifted children and feel a need for the corresponding professional preparation, yet possess only fragmentary theoretical knowledge of tutoring and do not consider themselves ready to carry out this type of activity - thereby underscoring the necessity of developing specialized content for the preparation of educational psychologists for tutoring support of gifted children within the context of higher professional education.

Discussion. The picture emerging from the empirical data acquires additional depth when situated within the wider international discourse on how educational psychology programs address the theme of giftedness and tutoring-oriented professional practice. Comparing the present findings against a body of foreign scholarship reveals not merely isolated parallels but a consistent cross-national pattern - one that lends the identified problem both breadth and urgency. The low level of students' theoretical command of tutoring support for gifted children uncovered by the first survey item aligns closely with conclusions drawn in research conducted at Croatian teacher education institutions. Grassinger et al. (2010) and Mihić et al. (2019) demonstrated that pre-service teachers consistently scored markedly

lower on both cognitive knowledge and emotional readiness when working with gifted students compared to students with disabilities. The scholars attributed this asymmetry to a structural imbalance embedded in degree program curricula: whereas inclusive education for children with special educational needs occupies at least one compulsory module in most programs, giftedness-related content is confined to elective courses that not all students are required to take. The situation documented in the present study mirrors this pattern with striking fidelity: 73% of respondents evaluated their preparation for tutoring support of gifted children as either largely absent or wholly insufficient, which underscores that the problem transcends any single national educational tradition and reflects a systemic curricular gap reproduced across different countries.

A complementary angle of comparison is offered by the data from the second survey question, where an overwhelming 89.2% of respondents acknowledged the particular psycho-pedagogical needs of gifted children and the necessity of differentiated professional responses. This widespread recognition resonates with observations reported by Shabani et al. (2025) in their study of educational practitioners' orientation toward gifted students in the Kosovo school system. Those researchers noted that educators broadly perceive giftedness as a genuine professional concern and affirm the need for specialized conditions, yet institutional frameworks, legislative gaps, and the absence of practical instruments prevent this awareness from translating into purposeful professional conduct. The same tension surfaces in the present data: students intuitively grasp that gifted children constitute a distinct group requiring individualized support, yet lack both the conceptual vocabulary of tutoring and the practical toolkit to act on that understanding. This contradiction - sensitivity without operational capacity stands as one of the central findings of the study and simultaneously identifies the most productive point of intervention for curriculum designers.

The most substantively proximate parallel to the concerns of the present investigation is

found in the work of Zinovyeva et al. (2021), who addressed the preparation of teacher-tutors for giftedness development within higher education contexts. Their analysis affirmed both the feasibility and the necessity of building a teacher's readiness for research-oriented tutoring support as a key mechanism for nurturing gifted children's potential, proposing authentic tutoring practice grounded in a reflective-activity approach as the principal organizational-pedagogical condition for achieving this goal. Against this backdrop, the present study's finding that 67.5% of respondents actively supported the introduction of a specialized course on tutoring support of gifted children takes on particular significance: it signals not merely an externally observed gap but a subjectively felt professional deficit, a demand articulated by the prospective specialists themselves. Critically, the third survey item makes clear that embedding giftedness content incidentally within existing disciplinary courses is insufficient; what is required is a coherently constructed preparatory program that integrates theoretical foundations, practice-based tutoring experience, and structured reflective mechanisms.

Synthesizing the present results with the evidence from comparative international research yields several conclusions of consequence for both theory and professional education practice. To begin with, the insufficient preparation of future educational psychologists for tutoring work with gifted learners is not a localized or context-specific anomaly: it is a transnational phenomenon reproduced - with remarkable consistency across educational systems at different levels of institutional development. Furthermore, an educator's recognition of the importance of the giftedness problem does not, in itself, constitute professional readiness; that readiness requires deliberate, sustained, and systematically structured preparation that goes well beyond general awareness. Finally, equipping an educational psychologist for tutoring support of gifted children demands purpose-built curricular content that weaves together psychodiagnostics competence, tutoring technologies, and reflective

professional practice - content that cannot be delivered adequately within the boundaries of conventional academic disciplines without their thorough reconceptualization. Taken together, these conclusions make a compelling case for designing and piloting a dedicated preparation model for future educational psychologists within the higher professional education system.

Conclusion. Demands for the individualization of learning and the growing acknowledgment - within both the research community and educational policy circles - of the specific psycho-pedagogical profile of gifted students have elevated the question of how to prepare educational psychologists for tutoring-oriented work to the status of a genuinely pressing professional and scientific concern. Despite this shift in discourse, the curricular response within university-level preparation programs has remained largely incommensurate with the scale of the challenge: the topic continues to occupy a marginal or absent position in most degree programs designed for future educational psychologists.

The investigation yielded a coherent and internally consistent picture. Future educational psychologists display a notably developed capacity for professional empathy toward the difficulties encountered by gifted children and intuitively recognize these students as a group requiring individualized, specialist attention. Yet this sensitivity remains unmatched by either a conceptual understanding of tutoring practice or the practical instruments needed to implement it. The roots of this contradiction lie

not in individual students' shortcomings but in the architecture of their degree programs, where content relating to tutoring support for gifted learners appears only in fragments if it appears at all. That comparable findings have been documented in studies conducted in Croatia, Kosovo, and Russia confirms that the problem is neither locally generated nor exceptional: it reflects a structural deficit replicated across diverse national educational systems and therefore calls for a response that is equally systematic in character. A point of genuine optimism, however, is that the majority of surveyed students went beyond simply noting the inadequacy of their current preparation: they actively declared a willingness to cultivate tutoring competencies. This motivational readiness constitutes a tangible resource upon which targeted curriculum development can build.

The trajectory of future inquiry emerging from this study points toward the design, theoretical grounding, and empirical testing of a dedicated preparation model for prospective educational psychologists - one specifically oriented toward tutoring support of gifted children within the higher professional education system. Such a model would need to integrate three mutually reinforcing components: practice-saturated disciplinary content, authentic experience of tutoring interaction with gifted learners, and a purposefully constructed reflective framework capable of ensuring that theoretical understanding is progressively consolidated into reliable, transferable professional skills.

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