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**CONDITIONS FOR THE FORMATION OF THE COMMUNICATION AND SPEECH  
COMPETENCES OF THE STUDENTS AT THE TIME OF LITERARY DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE BULGARIAN SCHOOLS ABROAD**

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**УСЛОВИЯ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ КОММУНИКАТИВНЫХ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЙ  
УЧАЩИХСЯ В ПЕРИОД ОБУЧЕНИЯ ГРАМОТЕ В БОЛГАРСКИХ  
ШКОЛАХ ЗА РУБЕЖОМ**

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*Abstract.* The article presents the results of an online survey conducted with teachers and parents of students in a multicultural environment in a Bulgarian school abroad.

The purpose of the study is to determine the conditions for the formation of the communication and speech competencies of students in the period of literacy development in schools located outside Bulgaria, where the Bulgarian language is taught.

*Аннотация.* Статья представляет результаты онлайн–опроса, проведенного с учителями и родителями учеников в мультикультурной среде в условиях болгарской школы за рубежом.

Целью исследования является определение условий формирования коммуникативных компетенций учащихся в период обучения грамоте в школах, где обучение на болгарском языке проводится в школах за пределами Болгарии.

*Keywords:* multicultural environment, Bulgarian school abroad, teacher surveys, parent surveys, literacy, communication and speech skills.

*Ключевые слова:* мультикультурная среда, болгарская школа за рубежом, вопросник для учителей, вопросник для родителей, обучение грамоте, коммуникативные компетенции.

*Introduction*

One of the main challenges Bulgarians living abroad are facing, is the learning of Bulgarian language by their children. The conditions for educating Bulgarians abroad have a number of specificities, arising from the environment, where this process takes place. Teachers say that in one class they teach children with different levels of proficiency in Bulgarian — a child born in Bulgaria and a child born abroad; a child, with Bulgarian parents and a child of mixed marriage; Bulgarian child with Turkish self-consciousness and a Bulgarian child, adopted by foreigners; a child attending a preschool group, and a child who crosses the threshold of the classroom for the

first time. This determines the specifics of the first grade literacy development period. At the same time, in different countries the interference impacts of the official languages have a different influence on the proficiency in Bulgarian language and are related to the characteristic difficulties in mastering the processes of reading and writing in the first grade.

In the period March–April 2018, surveys were carried out to establish the teachers' pedagogical competencies in the initial stage of the primary education related to the specifics of literacy development in a multicultural environment and on the value orientation factors (opinion and position) of parents on the need for literacy.

As part of the survey were used questionnaires drawn up by the author with the support of the research leader — Prof. Neli Ivanova, Dr. Habil and Prof. Siyka Chavdarova-Kostova, Dr. Habil — lecturers at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The surveys are partially standardized, of mixed type with built-in rating scales. The Teacher Survey includes 34 questions and the Parent Survey — 30 questions, suggesting both open-text and closed answers. They are distributed online — via Facebook pages and emails of Bulgarian schools abroad. Questionnaires were sent to 68 Bulgarian schools abroad.

Questionnaires were filled in by 10 teachers and 31 parents. Both questionnaires are provided with a rating scale to identify the reasons for the children's difficulties throughout the literacy development period. Considering the fact that a one-dimensional construct is measured for both groups of respondents, the resulting coefficient Alpha of Cronbach is 0.83, which demonstrates the high accuracy of the scale.

#### *Specifics of the major parameters of the profile of the Bulgarian teacher abroad*

The major parameters of the profile of the Bulgarian teacher abroad are based on the data obtained from the survey.

The questionnaire was completed by 10 teachers teaching in Bulgarian schools abroad. All respondents are women. The majority of respondents are 41 to 50 years of age — 6 (60%). 4 (40%) of the respondents are aged 31 to 40 years.

The majority of respondents teach in unified Bulgarian schools abroad — 7 (70%). Three teachers teach in primary schools.

With regard to the “pedagogical experience” indicator, the distribution of respondents is as follows: the teachers having pedagogical experience below 5 years are 4 (40%); the respondents having pedagogical experience from 5 to 9 years are the same number; one respondent has a pedagogical experience of 10 to 19 years; one has a pedagogical experience of more than 20 years.

In terms of the type of settlement, where the school is located and where they teach, the distribution of teachers is as follows: 7 (70%) teach at a regional center; 1 (10%) — in a municipal center and 2 (20%) — in the capital. The territorial distribution of the respondents to the survey is as follows: Italy — Naples (3 respondents); Milan (1 respondent); Rimini (1 respondent); Cyprus — Nicosia (1 respondent); Crete — Hannah (1 respondent); Hungary – Budapest (1 respondent); Switzerland – Basel (1 respondent); Belgium – Antwerp (1 respondent).

All respondents have completed higher education. Only 2 (20%) of teachers who teach at the initial stage, have studied primary school pedagogy. 4 (40%) of the respondents have graduated philology majors. The same number of teachers — 4 (40%) are graduates of other majors. 5 (50%) of the respondents have acquired a Vocational Qualification Degree (VQD). Of these, 2 teachers hold a V VQD; 1 — III VQD; 1 — II VQD and 1 — I VQD. The majority of teachers — 7 (70%) have not participated in training courses related to multicultural education. On the question regarding their satisfaction of participating in such qualification courses, 4 respondents indicate that

these courses are useful in their practice. 2 teachers choose the answer "absolutely yes" and 2 teachers — "rather yes."

Conclusion: The respondents from Italy predominate. Based on the questions related to the qualification and continuing education of teachers, it can be concluded that there are no specialists who have completed primary school pedagogy. There are insufficient opportunities for training pedagogical specialists. Teachers are not sufficiently prepared to work in a multicultural environment. Most of them have not participated in training courses related to Bulgarian language and literature teaching in a multicultural environment.

*Profile of the Bulgarian parent abroad as a partner in the different forms  
of pedagogical interaction*

The profile of the Bulgarian parent abroad as a partner in the different forms of pedagogical interaction is based on the data obtained from the survey.

The questionnaire was completed by 31 parents of first-grade students in a multicultural environment. By gender, the distribution of respondents is as follows: 19.35% men and 80.65% women. 30 (96.77%) of the respondents filled out the online survey as a parent, and 1 (3.23%) — in another capacity — "grandmother".

The majority of the respondents are aged 31 to 40 — 17 (54.84%); 11 (35.48%) are aged 41 to 50 years; 2 (6.45%) are aged 25 to 30 years; 1 (3.23%) — 51 to 60 years.

The majority of respondents have graduated higher education — 20 (64.52%). 11 (35.48%) of the survey respondents have completed secondary education.

With regards the type of settlement where the respondents live, the distribution is: 13 (41.94%) — in a big city; 10 (32.26%) — in the capital and 8 (25.81%) — in a small town. The territorial distribution of respondents to the survey was as follows: Italy (61.29%) — Rome (7 respondents), Naples (8 respondents), Milan (1 respondent), Rimini (1 respondent), Teramo (1 respondent), Pescara (1 respondent); Spain (16.13%) — Vitoria Gasteiz (4 respondents), Madrid (1 respondent); the United Kingdom (6.45%) — Brighton (2 respondents); Hungary (3.23%) — Budapest (1 respondent); Czech Republic (3.23%) — Brno (1 respondent); Cyprus (3.23%) — Nicosia (1 respondent); Belgium (3.23%) — Hasselt (1 respondent); the United States (3.23%) — Seattle (1 respondent).

The majority of the respondents — 26 (83.87%), are working abroad; 3 respondents (9.68%) are housewives; 1 respondent (3.23%) has the status of a short-term unemployed — jobseeker and 1 (3.23%) — long-term unemployed — jobseeker.

All respondents identify themselves as Bulgarians. As mother tongue 30 (96.77%) of the respondents point out the Bulgarian language and 1 (3.23%) — Italian. The majority of the respondents — 26 (83.87%) indicate that they are Christians; 3 (9.68%) define themselves as Muslims; 1 (3.23%) indicates that they believe in good.

Conclusion: Just like with the survey conducted with teachers teaching in Bulgarian schools abroad, the respondents from Italy are most numerous. All respondents identify themselves as Bulgarians. Christians predominate. As their mother tongue, all respondents, except for 1, point out the Bulgarian language.

Evident from Table 1, the majority of respondents believe that the difficulties of the students in a multicultural environment during the first-grade literacy development period are mainly caused by: the absence of interest on the parents' side and the lack of effective parental control; the inability of parents to support their children in their preparation for school; the difficulties in communicating due to the insufficient knowledge of Bulgarian language and the complexity of the curriculum.

*Pedagogical conditions for literacy development in Bulgarian schools abroad*

*Reasons for the difficulties of the Bulgarian children abroad in the period of literacy development*

Table 1.

ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO THE CAUSES FOR THE STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT DURING THE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT PERIOD

<i>Reasons for the difficulties of the students in a multicultural environment in the period of literacy development through the eyes of their parents</i>	<i>low -&gt; high</i>				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Difficulties of the students in the multicultural environment are caused by the peculiarities of their psycho-physiological development.	20%	30%	20%	0%	30%
Lack of motivation for learning.	30%	10%	20%	20%	20%
Difficulties in communication caused by the insufficient knowledge of Bulgarian language.	0%	0%	50%	30%	20%
Complexity of the learning materials.	20%	0%	30%	30%	20%
Financial difficulties of the family.	30%	10%	20%	10%	0%
Lack of interest by the parents and lack of effective parental control.	20%	10%	10%	30%	30%
Inability of parents to support their children in their preparation for school.	20%	20%	10%	30%	20%

Table 2.

ANALYSIS OF PARENTS' RESPONSES REGARDING THE CAUSES FOR THE STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT DURING THE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT PERIOD

<i>Reasons for the difficulties of the students in a multicultural environment in the period of literacy development through the eyes of their parents</i>	<i>low -&gt; high</i>				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
They are still young and should not study as much, they need to play.	70,97%	9,68%	16,13%	0,00%	3,23%
They should not go to school – it does not help them in life and studying is useless.	77,42%	6,45%	12,90%	0,00%	3,23%
They speak their mother tongue well enough as a prerequisite for facing their daily tasks.	58,06%	12,90%	12,90%	9,68%	6,45%
Textbooks are not easy to understand and the content is complex.	38,71%	29,03%	25,81%	3,23%	3,23%
We do not have sufficient financial resources to provide them with the required learning tools and aids.	74,19%	12,90%	0,00%	6,45%	6,45%
Teachers are not interested in our children.	77,42%	3,23%	19,35%	0,00%	0,00%
Teachers are incompetent.	70,97%	16,13%	9,68%	3,23%	0,00%

Evident from Table 2, the majority of respondents believe that all of the above mentioned causes of the difficulties of the students in a multicultural environment influence the learning outcomes in the literacy development period at a significantly low level. The most influential reasons are related to the level of knowledge of the Bulgarian language, the insufficient financial means and the incomprehensibility of the textbooks and the complex educational content. Despite the lack of qualifications of most teachers, parents abroad have great confidence in them.

A common reason for the difficulties in the literacy development process, pointed out by both teachers and parents — respondents, is the insufficient knowledge of the Bulgarian language. According to N. Ivanova, "The low level of proficiency in the official Bulgarian language by bilingual children is one of the reasons for the problems and difficulties in the process of education for both students and teachers" [1]. This implies an improvement in the methodical approach of the teacher towards the expansion of the students' vocabulary and overcoming of the interference influences from the language, in which their basic education abroad is performed.

*Specifics of the methodology for teaching Bulgarian as a second language  
in a Bulgarian school abroad*

When questioned whether they use bilingual methodology in their practice, 5 (50%) of the respondents respond "rather no"; 4 (40%) — "definitely yes" and 10% — "rather yes". The majority of respondents indicate that the bilingual methodology is rather useful in teaching Bulgarian language and literature in a multicultural environment — 5 (50%); 3 (30%) indicate the answer "definitely yes" and 2 (20%) — "rather no". On the facultative question requiring respondents to describe how they use bilingual methodology in their practice, 6 (60%) of teachers do not respond. The other respondents indicate that they bring examples from the official language of the country where the Bulgarian school is located; explain the meaning of words by examples from the language of the country, in which they live; translate words and study parallel themes and concepts in two or more languages.

The majority of respondents indicate that the existing literacy models are rather inadequate to the specifics of working in a multicultural environment — 4 (40%); two (20%) of the respondents indicated "rather yes". 1 (10%) of the interviewed teachers responded "definitely not" and just as many are of the diametrically opposed opinion — "definitely yes". The findings that 2 (20%) of the respondents are unaware of the existing literacy models in multicultural environments is concerning.

To the question of which of the determinants should be taken into account in the development of a model of literacy in a multicultural environment in the first grade — the methodological ideas in Bulgarian language and literature education at the initial stage of basic education; the age profile and the specificity of the development of the first graders and/or the socio-cultural characteristics of the family environment of the children, the majority of the respondents — 8 (80%) — indicate "all three determinants"; 1 (10%) — the socio-cultural characteristics of the family environment; methodical ideas — 1 (10%).

With regards as to whether textbooks and teaching aids in Bulgarian language and literature for first graders need to be adapted to the socio-cultural specifics of the students, the respondents gave the following answers:

Table 3.

ASSESSMENT OF TEXTBOOKS AND SCHOOLBOOKS IN BULGARIAN ACCORDING  
 TO THE SOCIO-CULTURAL SPECIFICS OF THE STUDENTS

<i>Need to align the textbooks and learning aids in Bulgarian language with the socio-cultural specifics of students</i>	<i>Definitely yes</i>	<i>Rather yes</i>	<i>Rather no</i>	<i>Definitely no</i>
Upon the selection of textbooks and learning aids, I take into consideration the needs of the students in a multicultural environment.	60%	30%	0%	10%
The proposed textbooks and learning aids for the first grade address the specific socio-cultural peculiarities of the students from ethnic minorities.	20%	10%	60%	10%
The volume of the learning material in the textbooks and learning aids may be taught and learned by the students.	20%	40%	40%	0%
The level of difficulty of the exercises for practice purposes is aligned with the difficulties first-graders are facing.	10%	60%	20%	10%
The exercises proposed in the textbooks are aimed at overcoming the interference of the mother tongue, where it is other than Bulgarian.	10%	30%	50%	10%
The textbooks and learning aids form confidence in the students that all ethnic groups in Bulgaria live in mutual respect and tolerance towards ethnic and cultural and religious differences.	30%	50%	10%	10%
The textbooks and learning aids generate interests for learning about the ethnic and cultural differences in Bulgaria.	30%	40%	20%	10%

Comments: The majority of respondents are convinced that upon assessing the textbooks and teaching aids in Bulgarian language and literature for the first grade, they take into account the needs of the students in a multicultural environment. However, six (60%) of them are of the opinion that the proposed first-grade textbooks and teaching aids meet the specific socio-cultural characteristics of the ethnic minority students. In terms of the volume of learning material in textbooks and teaching aids and whether it can be taught and learned by the students, teachers' opinions are not unequivocal — 4% (40%) say "rather yes", just as many choose the answer "rather no" and 2 (20%) — "definitely yes". The predominate opinion among the respondents is that the difficulty of the exercises is consistent with the difficulties faced by first-grade students (6 (60%) choose the answer "rather yes"). However, 5 (50%) of the respondents point out that the tasks proposed in the textbooks are rather not aimed at overcoming the interference in the mother tongue, when it not Bulgarian. Most respondents believe that textbooks and teaching aids tend to form the students' belief that all ethnic groups in Bulgaria live in mutual respect and tolerance towards their ethno-cultural and religious differences (50% of the respondents). According to 4 (40%) of the interviewed teachers, textbooks and teaching aids tend to generate an interest in the students to explore the ethno-cultural differences in Bulgaria.

The survey also examines the extent to which teachers work additionally with children from ethnic minorities and/or children, whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian.

- The main part of the respondents point to the answer "definitely yes" — 9 (90%) to the question whether they adapt the lessons to the socio-cultural needs of the first-graders; 10% answered "rather no".

- When asked whether they work individually with ethnic minority students and/or children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian, the majority of the respondents answered "definitely yes" — 6 (60%); 2 (20%) — "rather yes"; 1 (10%) — "rather no."

- On the question whether they use all the possibilities for additional preparation in Bulgarian language and literature (compulsory selective subject, option subject, additional hours according to Ordinance 6 of 2016 for teaching Bulgarian language), the majority of the respondents indicate the answer "definitely yes" — 4 (40%); 4 (40%) — "rather yes"; 1 (10%) — "rather no"; 1 (10%) — "definitely not".

- When asked whether they provide additional literature and tasks for self-study of Bulgarian by the children at home, the majority of respondents indicate "definitely yes" — 7 (70%); 2 (20%) — "rather yes"; 1 (10%) — "rather no."

- On the question of whether they check the homework of the students, the majority of the respondents indicate the answer "definitely yes" — 7 (70%); 2 (20%) — "rather yes"; 1 (10%) — "rather no."

Conclusion: The majority of teachers have answered "definitely yes" and "rather yes" to all questions, which implies a high degree of preparedness of teachers to work with children in a multicultural environment.

The difficulties of teachers teaching in Bulgarian schools abroad according to the methodological requirements for literacy are mainly related to the insufficient knowledge of the Bulgarian language by the students. They have difficulties in selecting methods and tools to expand the students' vocabulary and to overcome the interference influences by the official language of the countries where they live and where the children are educated.

The majority of the respondents — 6 (60%), are trying to cooperate with the parents in the Bulgarian language and literature training. The remaining 4 (40%) state that they do not engage in any form of collaboration with parents to increase the learning outcomes in the process of literacy development of students in a multicultural environment. The optional question, asking the respondents to describe how they interact with the students' parents in a multicultural environment, was responded by all teachers who have previously said they were working with parents. The forms of cooperation include: proposals for work in a home environment; convincing the parents of the need for support and motivation to speak in Bulgarian in the family environment; receiving homework via email and helping and supervising the students' work; demonstration of methods and means of support in the family environment.

#### *Characteristics of the family environment*

All interviewed parents indicate that they communicate with their children at home. The topics they talk about are different. 26 (83.87%) said they were communicating with their children about everything they cared about. Some of the parents point out specific topics for conversation — about friendship, family, life events, everything about their child development, about the past, how to stay healthy and how to deal with problems.

In a family environment Bulgarians abroad speak with their children: only in Bulgarian — 14 (45,16%); in Bulgarian and in the language of the country where they live — 12 (38.71%); in

Bulgarian, in the language of the country in which they live, and in English — 3 (9,68%); only in the language of their country of residence — 2 (6.45%). The data shows that in a family environment almost every family speaks in Bulgarian, which is a prerequisite for stimulating the process of literacy development in the Bulgarian schools abroad.

The television channels children watch are: in more than one language (including Bulgarian) — 15 (48.39%); only in the foreign language — 8 (25.81%); only in Bulgarian — 7 (22.58%). One parent says they do not watch TV at home. As a result of the answers received about the language spoken in the family environment and the language of the television channels the child is watching, it can be concluded that a large number of the students communicate bilingually in their home environment.

With regards to the technology available to 7/8-year-old Bulgarians abroad, the distribution of parents' answers is as follows: all proposed answers (TV, phone/smartphone, tablet and laptop/computer) — 11 (35,48%); only TV — 5 (16,13%); TV and phone/smartphone — 5 (16.13%); TV, laptop/PC and tablet — 2 (6.45%); TV and tablet — 2 (6.45%); TV, phone/smartphone and tablet — 2 (6.45%); TV and computer/laptop — 1 (3.23%); TV, tablet and PC/laptop — 1 (3.23%); only phone/smartphone — 1 (3.23%). One parent states that they rarely use any such equipment at home, mainly for learning purposes.

The majority of respondents indicate that the digital technology has become available to their children when they were 4 to 6 years of age — 13 (41.94%); aged 2 to 4 years — 10 (32.26%); after 6 years of age — 6 (19.35%); 6 months to 2 years — 2 (6.45%).

The average time the child uses such technology every day is: 2 hours — 10 (32.26%); 1 hour — 8 (25.81%); 3 hours — 6 (19.35%); 30 minutes — 6 (19.35%); 4 hours and more — 1 (3.26%).

There is a positive trend of parents trying to control the use of technology by their children. According to A. Georgieva, the use of digital technology is a factor in children's linguistic development. "Modern children have over-developed skills to process sensory information, mostly visual, which is processed by the subcortical nerve structures, and insufficient experience and skills to process linguistic information, which is abstract and is mainly processed in the cortex" [2]. In this regard, the author recommends limiting digital technology to stimulate the children's language development.

The majority of parents surveyed — 22 (70.97%) say they always find time to help their children with homework; 4 (12.90%) express desire, but say they have no time to do so; 4 (12.90%) say they help their children only when they need it; 1 (3.23%) — has the desire but does not know how.

The majority of respondents — 14 (45.16%) express the desire for their children to be given more reading literature at home; 9 (29,03%) cannot decide; 8 (25.81%) do not want the children to be overburdened with additional literature.

22 (70.97%) of the parents are of the opinion that additional Bulgarian language lessons should be organized for their children; 5 (16.13%) are against such activities; 4 (12.90%) cannot decide whether this would be beneficial.

22 (70.97%) would be very pleased to participate in additional Bulgarian language lessons organized by the school together with their children; 4 (12.90%) do not find their participation in the additional activities necessary; 2 (6.45%) cannot decide whether they would join; 2 (6.45%) would be involved if these activities are mandatory. One parent has indicated in the "other" option the name of the Bulgarian school abroad.

To the question "What would you like to be taken into account when working with your child as part of the literacy development process?" 13 (41.94%) of the respondents point to all three factors - the methodological requirements in the Bulgarian language and literature education in the



initial stage of the basic education, the age specifics and the specificity of the development of the first-graders and the ethnic, religious and linguistic specifics of the child; 11 (35.48%) indicate only the child's age and specifics of development; 5 (16,13%) — the methodological requirements in the Bulgarian language and literature education in the initial stage of the basic education; 1 (3.23%) — the ethnic, religious and linguistic specifics of the child. One parent points to the "other" option and adds "teaching in the form of a game".

The majority of respondents bring their children to a library every time they find the time to do it — 23 (74.19%), to the puppet theater — 24 (77.42%); to exhibitions — 25 (80.65%), to other cultural events contributing to mastering the Bulgarian language 29 (80.65%) and festivals 25 (93.55%). The most favored by parents abroad are the festivals, exhibitions and other cultural events that contribute to the mastery of the Bulgarian language. This is most likely due to the aspirations of our compatriots abroad to come together and communicate with one another, build local communities, in which they would be able to practice the language, culture, traditions and customs.

### *Conclusion*

The results of the survey conducted with teachers teaching in Bulgarian schools abroad are largely close to the results of a survey conducted between July and September 2017, aimed at establishing the pedagogical competences of teachers at the initial stage of the basic education degree with regards to the specifics of literacy development in a multicultural environment (for more details, refer to: Polihronov, D. 2017: p. 169-181).

The conclusions and recommendations that can be made are in two directions. The first covers the need for teachers to work with children in bilingual conditions. The second one outlines the need to create a model for working in a Bulgarian school abroad, aligned with the specifics of the work in a multicultural environment. This model should be based on: methodological ideas in Bulgarian language and literature education at the initial stage of basic education; the age characteristics and the specificity of the development of the first graders and the socio-cultural specifics of the family environment of the children.

Teachers teaching abroad, recognize the necessity of working with parents as a prerequisite for improving the learning outcomes. In addition, the data from the parent-student survey shows that each school has groups of parents aware of the need for education and ready to help their children in their preparation for school. It is important to find the right forms of interaction with the family, through which parents can play an active role in the educational process. This determines the need to develop and implement a technology stimulating the process of literacy development in the family environment as a prerequisite for increasing the knowledge of Bulgarian language and improving the results of the students taught in a multicultural environment in a Bulgarian school abroad.

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