

Precursors of socio-emotional well-being of gifted students

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Introduction and Aims

The literature on giftedness is characterized by multiple definitions and theoretical models. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) defines gifted individuals as those who "demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance within the top 10% of the population) in one or more domains, including academic, artistic, or motor fields". During childhood, giftedness may manifest in a more fluid and less structured manner compared to adulthood (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, Worrell, 2011). Research on gifted preschool children remains limited and primarily focuses on cognitive aspects. The few studies that examine the socio-emotional implications of giftedness yield mixed results. It is crucial to recognize signs of giftedness from an early age to place the child in an inclusive and stimulating educational environment that supports both well-being and school engagement (Peterson, 2009).

The aims of this study are:

- (1) To examine whether children identified as gifted based on their level of non-verbal intelligence also exhibit superior visuospatial memory abilities compared to typically developing peers.
- (2) To explore potential differences between gifted children and typically developing peers in socio-emotional competencies and difficulties, specifically in terms of internalizing, externalizing, and prosocial behaviors.

Method

Participants and Measures: The data analyzed were derived from a previous study involving 233 parents of children aged between 3 and 6 years. The present study compares 14 gifted preschool children (QI CPM $\geq 96^\circ$) with 14 typically developing children (QI CPM between the 39° and 56°) ages 4 to 6, assessing socio-emotional adjustment using the Strength and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman, 1997) completed by parents and visuospatial memory through the Test di Corsi from the Neuropsychological Assessment Battery for Developmental age (Bisiacchi et al, 2005). Differences between groups were analyzed using ANOVA.



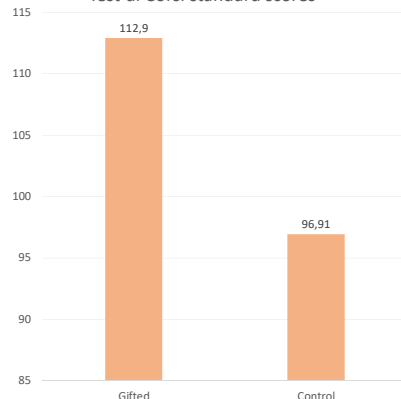
Results

(1) Regarding Visuospatial memory the gifted group showed a higher mean in terms of standard scores compared to the control group $F(1, 26) = 13.01, p = .001$.

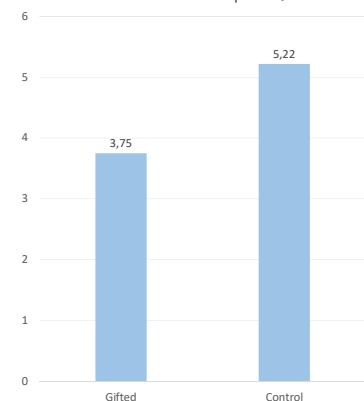
(2) Regarding the SDQ, the only significant result that emerged was in the peer relationship scale, $F(1, 19) = 9.71, p = .006$, with lower difficulties for the gifted group.



Test di Corsi standard scores

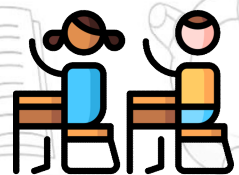


Peer relationship SDQ



Conclusions

The results indicate that, during the preschool years, gifted children demonstrate superior visuospatial memory and more positive peer relationships compared to their non-gifted peers. Although the literature on preschool-aged gifted children remains limited, the available studies suggest that, during this developmental stage, gifted children tend to display positive peer relationships, moderate levels of self-esteem, and fewer internalizing and externalizing problems compared to typically developing peers (Peyre et al., 2016; Papadopoulos, 2021). Difficulties may emerge later on, research conducted during adolescence indicates that gifted students report lower levels of subjective well-being, fewer positive experiences, and heightened negative emotions, such as sadness (Casino-García et al., 2019). Early identification of giftedness, before the start of primary school, can support parents in making informed decisions regarding the most appropriate educational setting to meet their child's needs to reduce the risk increasing difficulties in adaptation and satisfaction (Jackson & Peterson, 2003).



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