

## **Poor Progress of Junior Teenagers in Foreign Language: Signs, Causes, Approaches to Prevention**

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**Abstract:** This study deals with investigation of the problem of school poor progress in Foreign languages on the whole and specificity of the present problem in teaching pupils of 10-12 years old. The topicality of the subject is determined by the existing conflict between the demand of contemporary society for the level of linguistic erudition of its nationals and actual position of affairs with schoolchildren trained in Foreign languages.

**Key words:** Foreign languages, school, junior teenagers, causes and signs of poor progress, psychoeducational conditions of preventing poor progress

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Ability to speaking another language and cross-cultural communication is at present one of the conditions of professional competitiveness of a personality. Speaking at least one Foreign language has long, since become a norm for nationals of majority of developed states. Entry of Russia to the world community is conducive to the fact that the presence of skills in Foreign language communication gives priority to a man already at the stage of education both secondary and higher education. But knowledge of a Foreign language in his teens allows a schoolchild to acquire extra information about the world and people inhabiting it, promotes his getting into cross-cultural contact, assists a teenager in participating in international contests and educational projects. Thus, the Foreign language is becoming not only a target but also means of study and self-education of schoolchildren.

However, it should be noted that the actual level of teenagers' knowing Foreign languages often turns out to be far from meeting requirements of the contemporary society. Moreover, for different reasons many schoolchildren already at their early teen age become slowly progressing and backward pupils on the subject "Foreign language". At the following stages of Foreign language learning a number of pupils with poor grades in this subject only increases.

Raising demands for the level of general education exacerbates the problem of school poor progress. It is observed a tendency to complicating school curriculums. At the same time, the real learning potentials of schoolchildren in the process of education are not taken into account, it runs counter to physiological needs and

peculiarities of mental development of children (Drobinskaya, 1999). As a result, a number of pupils having difficulties in education is growing (Monina and Panasyuk, 2003).

All above-mentioned factors determine the topicality of studying of the suggested problem of investigation and looking for ways of its solution.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The principal methods of the present investigation are: the analysis of philosophical, sociological, medical, psychological, teaching and methodological literature and researches covering different aspects of the problem under study, examination of school documentation, survey by questionnaire of the teachers of the Foreign language (260 respondents) and youngsters (500 schoolchildren), participant observation of schoolchildren in teaching and educational process and interviews with teachers and schoolchildren.

For the purpose of obtaining more complete information about state of matters in the sphere of teaching junior teenagers Foreign languages, we have analyzed literature devoted to different aspects of the studied problem from the field of philosophy, sociology, medicine, psychology, education and methodology and have also initiated empirical research. The principal methods of the present research are: study of school documentation, survey of teachers of Foreign languages and junior teenagers by questionnaire, participant observation of the pupils in teaching and educational process and interviews with the teachers and schoolchildren. In survey 500 early teenagers took part. These were the schoolchildren of 5-6 forms from eight

comprehensive secondary schools in three different towns (Russia, the Republic of Tatarstan). Among the participants in survey by questionnaire there were 260 teachers of Foreign languages from 55 comprehensive secondary schools in ten towns (Russia, the Republic of Tatarstan and the Republic of Chuvashia). The teachers questioned by us teach 7956 early teenagers, 1415 of whom (>17%) are characterized to be as weak or very poor progressing in Foreign language.

To solve the problems raised in the research work, the following theoretical research methods have been applied, in particular: the analysis of philosophical, sociological, medical, psychological, teaching and methodological literature and research works on different aspects of the problem under study and also the analysis of the work experience of the teachers of Foreign languages on preventing poor progress in practice of comprehensive secondary schools.

## RESULTS

As a result of investigation carried out, we spotted the groups of reasons of poor progress of junior teenagers in Foreign languages, specific factors having negative influence on learning efficiency of Foreign languages under conditions of a town, distinguished the signs of poor progress of earlier teenagers in a Foreign language.

In the issue of conducted investigation, we have determined that in the conditions of a town there are specific factors that have a negative influence on successfulness of teaching Foreign languages. To such factors one may refer:

- Absence of natural verbal environment
- Mismatch of the beginning of teaching to Foreign language with proper sensitive period
- Unfulfilled need in permanent company and tutor who devotes individual attention to each pupil as it is practically impossible for an early teenager to learn and have a grasp of the subject without assistance
- Psychological barrier in Foreign language acquisition and its use in practice
- Interlanguage interference, negative influence of the native language
- Peculiarities of the target language system, mismatch of its logic with the logic of the native language

The analysis of empirical data allowed us to single out the signs of poor progress of the early teenagers in Foreign languages:

- Lack of knowledge of basic vocabulary; lack of understanding of questions; lack of skill to make up a phrase
- Thinking over the simplest phrases as a sign of lack of automatism
- Lack of skill to use learnt material in new situation
- Instability of the results as a consequence of insufficient being conscious in actions
- Doing exercises at random, without applying rules
- Inactivity at a lesson
- Distraction, tendency to change topics of conversation, constant speaking the native language

The most important result of investigation, we think is identifying the following psychoeducational conditions of preventing poor progress of junior teenagers in Foreign language.

**Psychological conditions:** Being aware and taking into account by a teacher of the age peculiarities of junior adolescents; being aware and taking into account of individual typological features of nervous system of the pupils, specificity of mental activity of schoolchildren of opposite sexes; taking into account of leading activity of junior teenagers; correcting insufficiently developed psychological processes; creating friendly atmosphere in learning group and normalizing interpersonal relations of pupils; assisting with reduction of school uneasiness of junior teenagers; forming positive academic motivation and self-acceptance of schoolchildren.

**Educational conditions:** Self-educating and self-developing of a teacher of Foreign language; drawing the parents to co-operate; being aware and taking into account by a teacher of state of health of pupils; drawing the school specialists to assist (supervising teacher, social educator, doctor, psychologist, logopedist, teacher of a school subject); being aware and taking into account by a teacher of individual gaps in pupils' knowledge, abilities and skills; forming general educational abilities and skills and also being aware and taking into account difficulties relating to specificity of learning a Foreign language, signs of poor progress on the subject; typologization of schoolchildren according to the causes of arising the difficulties in education.

## DISCUSSION

In the process of interpretation of the received data the researcher comes to conclusion about difficult and complex character of the reasons of poor progress about contradictoriness of notions of teachers about these reasons and necessity of realization of complex approach to solution of the problem of school poor progress of

teenagers in a Foreign language including joining of efforts of both a teacher and other school specialists.

**The history of the problem:** The problem of poor school progress is not new for pedagogic science including the Russian one. I.A. Arnyanov, P.P. Blonsky, L.S. Vygotsky studied slowly progressing pupil in the context of his integral biosocial development. M.A. Helmont, M.A. Danilov, E.I. Monoszon, S.M. Rives considered poor progress as the consequence of deficiency of teaching process and stressed the importance of the level of teaching skills. The studies of L.S. Slavina were devoted to determining psychological causes of poor progress appearance and were grounds to single out individual types of weak pupils.

Yu.K. Babansky, L.I. Bozhovich and other scholars gave special attention to personality of a pupil, his being formed as a subject of teaching and education. With the aim of preventing and overcoming poor progress the scholars also tackled the problem of optimizing the teaching and educational process in school.

P.P. Borisov, Z.I. Kalmykova, M.V. Matyukhin marked the influence of individual and typical and age peculiarities of personalities of children first and foremost in violation of major components of psychological structure of educational activity motivational, target, operational.

Beginning with the 90s of XX century, the problem of poor school progress of children turned to have been studied by researchers in complex that is in terms of its pedagogical, medical, psychological and social aspects (D. Baboi, M.M. Bezrukh, etc.).

In judgment of Museridze (1969) and Atlaskina (2000) decrease in academic performance in comparison with previous academic years is observed to the most extent in forms V-VI of secondary school that corresponds to early teen age of the pupils (10-12 years). It happens in connection with great number of objective and subjective reasons. At the same time, owing to many psychophysiological features of teenagers distinguished by such psychologists as Bozhovich (1979), Elkonin (1974), Zenkovsky (1995), this age is considered to be sensitive to educational intervention to preventative and remedial effects that is verified by home and Foreign studies for example by Zuckerman (2000) and Lipsitz (1980).

In this connection, it is junior teen age to be the most important to prevent poor progress including Foreign language. Solution this problem, in the first place, supposes cause isolation of poor progress, its signs and ways of its prevention. Vergeles and Matveyeva (2000),

Monina and Panasyuk (2003) point out, however, considerable variation of views on the problem of the subjects of the educational process: teachers, schoolchildren, parents and psychologists.

The analysis of the researches on this topic shows that though on the whole, the problem of poor progress of the pupils of comprehensive secondary school has been considered by many educators and psychologists already for decades, poor progress of schoolchildren in Foreign language became an object of special investigations only in the end of XX century (Gorokhova, 1998; Ismailova, 2000; Gubareva, 2001) and it has not been sufficiently studied so far.

**About the notion of poor progress:** The presence in literature on the problem of poor school progress of such notions as school hardship, poor progress, school deadadaptation, condition the necessity of their differentiation.

The school hardships are meant by scholars to be the complex of difficulties at school a child can have in connection with systematic training at school (Dubrovinskaya *et al.*, 2000). These problems can lead to expressed functional exertion, health decline, disorder of psychosocial adjustment and also to lowering of successfulness of education. The difficulties at school that have not been discovered in time result in poor progress.

The poor progress is understood as a situation in which the behavior and the results do not correspond to educational and didactic requirements of school. In practice, speaking about poor progress one means failing grades in a subject (or in all subjects at once) of the term or school year. Systematic poor progress leads to pedagogical neglect which is understood as the complex of negative traits of the personality that are contrary to school and society (Pidkasisty, 1996).

School failure may provoke appearance of school deadadaptation that is such state of the pupils when they failure to master training program, meet with difficulties by interaction with peers and teachers (Zavadenko, 2000).

In defining the notion "school failure in Foreign language", we rely on an intergraded definition of the notion "poor progress" given by Bychkova (2004) in which she considers poor progress as the result of the educational process and personal characteristic of the very pupil. Hence, it follows that failure of schoolchildren in the subject "Foreign language" is the result of the process of teaching Foreign language that is characterized by poorer level of teenagers' mastering educational content as compared to contemplated curriculum, the level

of mastering by teenagers of educational content that is manifested in the resultant complex total unpreparedness of the pupils for certain educational period of time and in appearance of lack of general standards of behavior.

**The causes of poor progress at school:** The variety of causes of academic failure urged certain researchers to make a number of attempts to classify them (Pidkasisty, 1996; Dolto, 1997; Morina and Panasyuk, 2003). The most detailed is in our opinion, the classification suggested by Borisov (1980) that unifies the causes of poor progress at school in four ranges of issues: psychological, physiological, social and living and educational causes. For successful solution of the problem of preventing poor progress, it is needed the complex analysis of its causes in each concrete case.

Many of these causes bear a derived character and therefore, may be removed on the assumption of change of upbringing teenagers in family, rise of the level of educational work of teachers and positive change of the teenager's environment. Taking this classification as a principle allowed us to consider the causes of poor progress of junior teenagers more detailed and to supplement it where it is necessary with new content.

To psychological cases of school failure of the junior teenagers one refers the lack of developing their attention, memory, thinking; mental retardation; insufficient accounting by the teacher in organization of educational process of the key channel of perceiving by teenagers the information (visual, acoustic, kinesthetic and also logical); increased level of anxiety of junior teenagers supported by inadequate application by the teachers of some techniques of teaching, according to the research of Gizatullina and Yakhina (2014); presence of conflicts between separate schoolchildren and other participants of educational process; inadequacy of self-acceptance and insufficient formation of academic motivation of pupils.

Physiological causes of poor progress are ill health of children and teenagers; left-handedness of some part of schoolchildren; minimal brain dysfunction; inadequate use by junior teenagers of their individual-typological features, primarily such as strength and mobility of nervous system.

To the group of social reasons for poor progress of the pupils of junior teen age one refers disadvantaged family, absence of psychological contact with parents, low-income family, parental alcoholism and preponderance of mass media, first and foremost, television and the internet.

Pedagogical causes of school failure of junior teenagers are formalism in educational process; advanced curriculum, inadequacy of their requirements to real

educational abilities of pupils, their physiological needs and peculiarities of their mental development; super giftedness of some pupils (Merzon *et al.*, 2013); "syndrome of teacher's burnout".

Preconditions for poor progress in early teen age are such phenomena as effects of low learnability of schoolchildren insufficient for this stage of teaching, the level of development of abstract-logical thinking, formed by that age "learned helplessness" of many pupils being formed by this age, insufficiency of formation of their general educational abilities and skills, absence of accounting by educators in educational process of peculiarities of pupils' thinking (Biddulph, 2013).

In the conditions of a town, there exist specific factors that negatively affect successful teaching Foreign languages. To such factors one may refer:

- Absence of appropriate language environment
- Incompatibility of initial stage of learning a language with corresponding sensitive period
- Unmet need in constant company and a tutor individually attending to each pupil as it is practically impossible for junior teenager to learn and master the subject by himself
- Psychological barrier in Foreign language acquisition and its use in practice
- Interlingual interference, negative influence of native language
- Features of the structure of the studied Foreign language, incompatibility of its logics with logics of the native language

**The problem in the eyes of teachers and schoolchildren:**

Let us give a comparative analysis of the results of questionnaires of the teachers of Foreign languages and junior teenagers. The principal causes of arising of poor progress in Foreign languages determined by teachers, we have divided for convenience in three groups depending on frequency of choosing this reason by the teachers as essential.

Pupils' idleness (71.5% of the questioned); lack of language environment (61.5%); lack of parents' control of teenagers (60.7%); gaps in pupils' knowledge (47.6%); low level of educational motivation of poor progressing teenagers (41.1%).

Insufficient number of class periods assigned for learning a Foreign language at school (38.8%); ill health of schoolchildren (34.2%); negative attitude of poor progressing junior teenagers to studies (32.6%); pupils' hereditary traits and abilities and also schoolchildren congestion in learning groups (32.3% each); parents' ignorance of a corresponding Foreign language and as a

consequence, their inability to assist their children in learning (31.5%); unformed general junior teenagers' abilities and skills (26.1%); pupils' overload at school and establishments of post secondary training (23.4%).

Absence of succession in teaching schoolchildren, frequent change of teachers (20%); advanced curriculum and textbooks and such social phenomena as drug addiction and alcoholism among parents and teenagers (per 16.9%); deficiency in upbringing of pupils (15.7%); overworkload of teachers (12.6%); partial or full forfeit by the teenager of "position of a schoolchild" (7.3%) and insufficient account of age-specific and individual traits of pupils on the teacher's part (4.6%).

Some teachers pointed also to negative influence of some moments of organizational character on the level of school advancement of junior teenagers in Foreign language such as: absence of free textbooks (parents buy them not always in time) and affordable auxiliary literature, poor equipment of classrooms of Foreign languages with training facilities, non-coordinated efforts of the teachers, form masters and school direction in the work with poor progressing junior teenagers.

Survey of 500 junior teenagers by questionnaire shows that the pupils themselves enumerate the following reasons that hinder them to more successfully learn Foreign language:

- Pupils' fatigue as a result of their being engaged in post-secondary training (29.8% of questioned)
- Lack of their own attention (28%) and inability to remember verses and stories (27%)
- Fear to recite a lesson at the blackboard (25.8%)
- Their own laziness (22.6%) and difficulties in working on their own when necessary (21.2%)
- Lack of perseverance, high level of distraction (17 %)
- Lack of parents' and relatives' advice (16.6%)
- Tardiness inherent in teenager (15.6 %) and lack of time to fulfill home tasks (13.8 %)
- Poor memory (13.6%) and rapid onset of fatigue during lesson (12.4%)
- Too difficult subject "Foreign language" (10.6%) and absence of abilities to study it (10.4%)
- Being often ill and as a result, absence from classes (10.2 %)
- Negative attitude and faultfinding of teacher to teenager (6.4%), negative attitude of teenager to school (5.4%)
- Absence of appropriate environment in family to do home assignments when the parents and other relatives interfere in their doing (4.4%)

From the cited data, it is seen that the majority of junior teenagers views causes of their failure in Foreign

language, first of all, in themselves, in their psychological characteristics or practice in learning activity. From our point of view, it is caused with strong influence of competent adults (teachers, form masters, parents) on self-attitude of junior teenagers as independence of self-attitude is forming at this age.

This assumption to some extent is corroborated by the fact that most teachers of Foreign languages also point to importance of the pupils' characteristics for emergence of poor progress at school such as laziness, gaps in knowledge, low level of academic motivation, negative attitude to learning and so on. The majority of factors characterizing the organization of educational process and, thus, to considerable extent, dependent on the teacher and teaching staff proved to be at the very bottom of the list as gained the least number of choices.

Almost one third of the questioned educators (30.7%) are convinced that poor progress cannot be caused by insufficient proficiency of a teacher. At that a part of these educators single out some qualities of the teacher that cause poor progress among junior teenagers. We account this contradiction for the fact that a part of respondents understand the notion "the teacher's qualification" as the teacher's knowledge of a subject and organizational abilities only and underestimate the influence of features of personality centration and motivation of the educator, his knowledge of age-specific and individual and typological features of junior teenagers on pupils' progress.

Overwhelming majority of teachers (93%) do not agree with the statement that all poor progressing junior teenagers in Foreign language are equal that is indicative of teachers' attempting to look into the complex phenomenon of school failure. But, at the request to single out the main features of Foreign language failure of junior teenagers the educators, again, indicated not only to the signs of poor progress of junior teenagers but already known to the researchers the peculiarities of poor progressing school teenagers.

**The signs of poor progress:** The specificity of the subject "Foreign language" makes for the presence of a number of special difficulties of mastering it in terms of all aspects (phonetics, vocabulary, grammar) and kinds of speech activity (reading, writing, oral comprehension, dialogues and monologues).

According to our observations the junior teenagers' great difficulties in learning a Foreign language are caused by the following knowledge, abilities and skills:

- Pronouncing sounds, that are absent in native language

- Reading compound words
- Spelling
- Listening comprehension
- Recognizing a changed word form
- Verb conjugation, use negative and interrogative sentences
- Formation of plural of the nouns and also the degrees of comparison of the adjectives and adverbs
- Use of the possessive pronouns (instead of the word his ("one's") in the Russian language), substitution of the noun for an appropriate personal pronoun (negative affect of the native language)
- Making up a spontaneous dialogue in a suggested situation using cliché, learnt words for narrating
- Recognizing different tenses and their appropriate using according to the situation

The survey by questionnaire of junior teenagers has shown that in the process of learning Foreign language they meet the greater difficulties in correct spelling of compound words (38.6%), memorizing of educational texts (34.4%), using different tense forms of the verbs (32.6%), pronouncing certain sounds (30.6%), reading (24%). These data on the whole confirm the results obtained in the course of observation for junior teenagers at the lessons of Foreign language.

Relying on the data of questioning the teachers of Foreign language and also on the results of personal observations for schoolchildren and the opinions of other investigators, we have distinguished the following signs of poor progress of junior teenagers in Foreign languages:

- Ignorance of basic vocabulary; failure to understand questions; lack of skill to build a phrase
- Deliberation of the simplest phrases as the sign of absence of automatic speech performance
- Lack of skill to use the learnt material in a new situation
- Instability in results as the consequence of insufficient awareness of activity
- Doing exercises at random without following the rules
- Passivity at lesson
- Distraction, trying to change the topic of conversation, regular use of the native language

These signs are discovered by any teacher in the process of communication with the pupils junior teenagers with the help of participant observation and means of control.

**Approaches to solving the problem:** The investigators offer different approaches to preventing and overcoming school failure among the pupils of early juvenile age. The

basis of the majority is realization of personality-centered paradigm of education, activity approach in education (Sibgatullina and Samsonova, 2013), account of individual traits of schoolchildren lagging behind education, formation of the habits of educational work, positive educational motivation, self-acceptance, creation of conditions for developing the teenagers' thinking and memorizing and for lowering the level of their school anxiety. The important is also recognized the creation for such schoolchildren of the situations of success in learning activity. In practice, most teachers working with weak junior teenagers follow one of the following lines:

- Use individual and differentiated approaches to teaching
- Reduce requirement for the poor progressing teenagers and the pupils lagging behind
- Find out and fill up the gaps in knowledge, abilities and skills in the process of remedial classes
- Combine these approaches

The mentioned measures, however, do not solve the problem and are temporary. The main reason of inefficiency of undertaken measures, we see in narrowness of the handled problem, absence of complex work program on prevention and elimination of school failure, insufficient support of the teachers in their work on psychoeducational investigations and scientific projects. Thus, one may differentiate the whole number of contradictions between:

- Requirements, imposed on the results of teaching the junior teenagers to Foreign language and actual level of knowledge, abilities and skills
- Need for knowing and accounting many individual psychological features of slow progressing pupils in the process of education and absence of optimal diagnostic methods for fulfilling this task being available to the teachers
- Factual causes of failure of individual pupils and teachers' notions of these causes

From our point of view, prevention of Foreign language failure of the junior teenagers is fulfilled effectively if only it is built on the basis of complex approach including combination of efforts of the educator, psychologist, parents, social pedagogue and school doctor according to specially worked out psychoeducational conditions. At that psychoeducational conditions are grounded on detection of the aggregate of causes of appearance of Foreign language failure of the junior teenagers; account of age

specifics of weak schoolchildren of early juvenile age, their personality individual characteristics and difficulties connected with peculiarities of their learning Foreign language.

We have distinguished the following psychoeducational conditions on prevention of Foreign language failure of the junior teenagers.

Psychological conditions: knowledge and account by the teacher of age peculiarities of the junior teenagers and account of individual and typological peculiarities of nervous system, specificity of mental activity of schoolchildren of different sexes, account of the key activity of the junior teenagers, correction of insufficiently developed psychological processes, creation of friendly atmosphere in the learning group and normalization of interpersonal relations of the pupils, assistance in school anxiety of the junior teenagers, formation of positive educational motivation and self-acceptance of schoolchildren.

Pedagogical conditions: self-education and self-development of the teacher of Foreign language, involvement of the parents in cooperation, knowledge and account by the teacher of the state of health of the pupils, involvement of school specialists' assistance (a form master, social educator, doctor, psychologist, speech therapist, specialist teachers), knowledge and account by the teacher of individual gaps in knowledge, abilities and skills of the pupils, formation of general educational abilities and skills and also knowledge and account of the difficulties connected with peculiarity of learning Foreign language and signs of poor progress in this subject, typologization of the pupils according to causes of arising difficulties in education.

### CONCLUSION

The suggested investigation systematizes the theoretical and empirical data on the studied topic and gives also background for realization of the complex approach to solution of the problem of poor school progress in earlier adolescence. It does not, however, settle all spectrum of questions connected with the problem under study. The further consideration of the problem of preventing poor progress in Foreign language, we believe to be reasonable in the following aspects:

- Identification of psychoeducational conditions of preventing poor progress of elder teenagers
- Program and content development of training students of Foreign languages department of teacher training universities for work on preventing poor progress of schoolchildren

- Program development of psychoeducational training of teachers of a Foreign language for work with poor progressing schoolchildren for its realization in terms of refresher courses

The suggested research systematizes the theoretical and empirical data on the subject under study and also gives background for realization of the complex approach to solving the problem of poor progress at school in Foreign language in early teen age. It, however, does not exhaust all spectrum of the questions concerning the considered problem. Further consideration of the problem of preventing school failure in Foreign language, we think to be reasonable in the following aspects:

- Detection of psychoeducational conditions of prevention of poor progress among the senior teenagers
- Development of the program and content of training the students of the departments of Foreign languages of teachers' training establishments for the work on prevention of poor progress of schoolchildren
- Development of the program of psychoeducational training the teachers for the work with weak schoolchildren for their realization in terms of refresher courses

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