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PROFESSIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION OF SPECIALIZED SCHOOL STUDENTS: ANALYSIS OF MOTIVATIONAL AND SOCIO- PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of psychological and social factors influencing career choice among specialized school students. The complexity of professional self-determination is examined through the interaction of internal determinants (interests, inclinations, professional identity) and external factors (family influence, social environment, economic conditions). Empirical data obtained through the “Career Choice Motivation” socio-psychological questionnaire indicate the dominant role of intrinsic motivation, alongside the significant contribution of social influences. The study also identifies gender and regional differences, highlighting the socio-cultural conditioning of career decision-making. The findings emphasize the importance of improving career guidance systems by fostering personal interests, social support, and psychological resilience in students.

Keywords: career choice, professional self-determination, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, professional identity, social factors, gender differences, career guidance, students, psychological factors

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Introduction

At present, despite the ongoing implementation of the achievements of developed countries' education systems, the adoption of innovative pedagogical technologies, and the expansion of cooperation with higher education institutions, many adolescents in our society continue to experience difficulties in choosing a suitable profession. In the context of the rapidly transforming labor market, the insufficient integration between the education system and the labor market further complicates this issue. Therefore, providing effective psychological and pedagogical support to students in the process of career choice emerges as a pressing concern, since adolescence represents the stage at which an individual makes initial and significant career decisions. The modern world of professions is being rapidly reshaped under the influence of advances in information and communication technologies and changing societal demands. As a result, the traditional model based on mastering a single profession throughout one's lifetime is gradually losing its relevance. The emergence of new professions and the transformation of existing ones require young people to develop professional adaptability—that is, readiness to change careers multiple times throughout life [1].

Scientific research indicates that the process of professional self-determination constitutes a psychologically complex stage for students. During this period, young people often experience uncertainty, anxiety, and concern about the future. It is observed that not all students are prepared to make independent career choices, and this phenomenon occurs regardless of region or type of educational institution. Alongside external factors, internal psychological determinants—such as cognitive interests, value orientations, awareness of one's abilities, and social intelligence—play a crucial role in the formation of career decisions [1]. The complexity of professional self-determination can be explained by the internal conflicts characteristic of normative stages of personality development. During the process of identity formation, adolescents compare various social

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roles and opportunities, which naturally leads to uncertainty and emotional tension. In particular, young individuals with a high level of career indecision tend to experience greater psychological discomfort and dissatisfaction. This condition is often exacerbated by a low level of self-awareness and insufficient access to career-related information.

At the same time, the education system and psychological-pedagogical approaches interpret the individual as an active subject capable of independently determining their own life trajectory. However, in the modern information environment, the excessive abundance of options complicates decision-making for young people, giving rise to what is known as “choice paralysis.” According to self-determination theory, independent decision-making enhances intrinsic motivation; however, an overabundance of options may, conversely, increase hesitation and uncertainty. As a result, a fear of making the wrong career choice emerges among young people, negatively affecting their psychological well-being [2]. Therefore, the system of career guidance should not be limited to the provision of information alone but should also focus on developing students’ decision-making competencies. In particular, a comprehensive approach aimed at analyzing alternative options, setting priorities, and enhancing psychological resilience and self-awareness ensures the effectiveness of the career choice process.

Literature Review

In contemporary research, the process of students’ career choice is widely examined as a multifactorial psychological and social phenomenon. In particular, E.A. Danilova analyzed career choice motivation among school graduates and demonstrated that students’ professional choices are primarily based on personal interests, inclinations, and abilities. According to the findings, 60% of graduates had already determined their future profession, with most selected careers belonging to fields centered on social interaction [4]. These results are consistent

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with the findings of our study, which identified the leading role of Eastern cultural values and the family institution in career choice.

A.A.Onipko examined professional self-determination among secondary school students from a sociological perspective and emphasized the growing level of independent decision-making and self-confidence among youth [5]. Our findings similarly indicate an increasing predominance of personal opinion and autonomous choice among students of specialized schools. C.Blazquez and colleagues investigated factors influencing career choice using a discrete choice model and identified school type, gender, academic achievement, parental education level, and occupation as significant determinants. The study revealed clear gender differences, noting that boys tend to prefer STEM fields, whereas girls are more inclined toward humanities and social sciences [6]. Our research also confirms that parental influence, material factors, and the social status of a profession play a significant role in students' choices.

International studies place particular emphasis on the importance of career counseling services. Career counseling enables students to make informed decisions by taking into account their abilities and interests, thereby reducing the likelihood of incorrect choices [7]. In the research conducted by J.G.Maree, the influence of cultural factors—particularly gender roles—on young people's career choices is highlighted, noting that in some societies these factors may limit professional opportunities [8]. This phenomenon can also be partially observed in the context of Uzbekistan; however, contemporary social changes indicate a gradual reduction in gender-based constraints, as reflected in the increasing professional activity of women.

In the experience of the United States, school counselors play a key role as active agents in the career choice process. According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), they are qualified professionals who provide students with career guidance [9]. This approach is also relevant in the context of Uzbekistan, where the role of school psychologists has been developing in recent years;

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however, the career counseling system achieves greater effectiveness when implemented in cooperation with the family. In England, the Careers Hubs model has been recognized as an effective system for enhancing career guidance, with higher outcomes observed in hub schools [10]. These findings align with our observations that students in specialized schools tend to have broader professional awareness.

Studies conducted by Larran and Hein emphasize the high demand for school counselors in East and Southeast Asian countries, as well as the necessity of specialized training in this field [11]. In the practice of Uzbekistan, however, career guidance is largely implemented within the framework of general psychological services, which indicates the need for training specialized professionals. Nazareno and colleagues substantiate the importance of introducing specialized courses that assist students in making conscious career choices [12]. Such courses not only help identify students' interests and abilities but also become more effective when organized with consideration of national and cultural factors.

Sadirova M. S. and co-authors note the low effectiveness of certain traditional methods used in career choice, including standard tests and general counseling sessions [13]. Contemporary approaches highlight the necessity of comprehensive diagnostics and individualized approaches in career guidance. In addition, disparities between urban and rural students constitute a significant factor: urban students actively utilize additional resources, whereas rural students tend to rely primarily on school-based support [14]. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the process of career choice is shaped by the interaction of individual, social, and cultural factors. Therefore, improving the career guidance system requires the implementation of modern diagnostic methods, the reduction of regional disparities, and the provision of approaches tailored to students' individual characteristics.

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Results and Discussion

In order to guide specialized school students toward professional activity, it is necessary to identify their interests and abilities, diagnose their compatibility with specific professional types and their motivational orientations toward professional activity, and support them in choosing careers that correspond to their individual characteristics. Selecting a suitable profession enables specialized school students to achieve professional development. To determine the professional suitability of these students, several diagnostic methodologies are employed. To identify the main factors influencing career choice among specialized school students, the socio-psychological questionnaire “Motives for Career Choice” (IPS) was applied (see Figure 1).

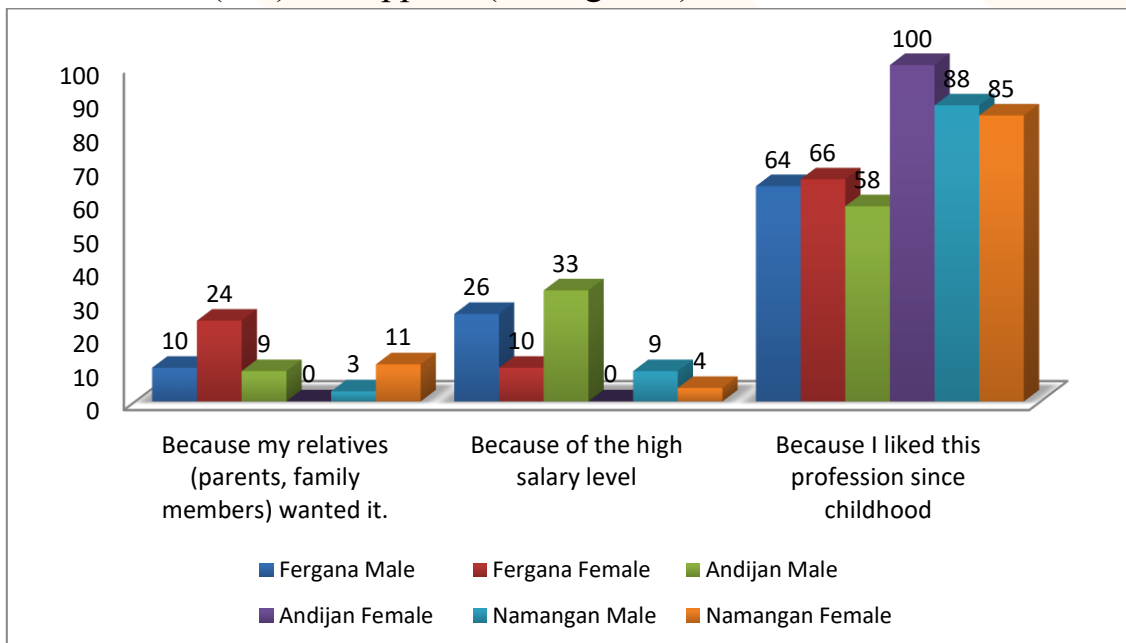


Figure 1. “Why did you choose this profession?”

The analysis of responses to the question “Why did you choose this profession?” presented in Figure 1 indicates that respondents’ career choice motivation has a complex psychological structure in which internal and external factors are manifested in an integrated manner. According to the obtained results, across all

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regions and gender groups, the highest percentage corresponds to the response “because I have liked this profession since childhood.” In particular, this indicator reached its maximum among girls in Andijan (100%), while it remained consistently high in other groups as well (Fergana: 64%–66%; Namangan: 85%–88%). This finding demonstrates that internal interest, personal inclination, and early-formed professional identity play a decisive role in the career choice process. As emphasized in contemporary motivational theories, this result confirms that intrinsic motivation is a key psychological predictor of professional stability and satisfaction.

At the same time, although the motive “because my relatives (parents, family members) wanted it” was expressed at a relatively lower level, significant gender differences were observed. Specifically, this indicator was higher among girls than boys (for example, 24% among girls in Fergana and 11% among girls in Namangan). This pattern can be explained by processes of social influence and gender socialization. In traditional societies, girls tend to adapt more to social expectations and family perspectives. Consequently, in the process of career choice, the influence of parents and close relatives emerges as a more significant psychological factor for them.

The motive “because of a high salary” is characterized by uneven distribution across groups. This factor is relatively more prominent among boys (33% in Andijan boys and 26% in Fergana boys), whereas in some cases it is very low among girls (for example, 0% among girls in Andijan). These findings indicate that economic interests and material incentives play a more important role in career choice among male respondents. This reflects the influence of socially constructed gender roles, particularly the stereotype of men as the primary providers.

Regional differences were also identified. For instance, the strong predominance of intrinsic motivation among girls in Andijan suggests an early and well-established professional orientation. Among respondents from Namangan, all

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motives were relatively balanced, indicating the multifactorial and complex nature of career decision-making. In contrast, among respondents from Fergana, social and material factors appeared to play a more active role. These differences can be explained by the socio-economic conditions of the regions, the specific characteristics of the educational environment, and the system of cultural values.

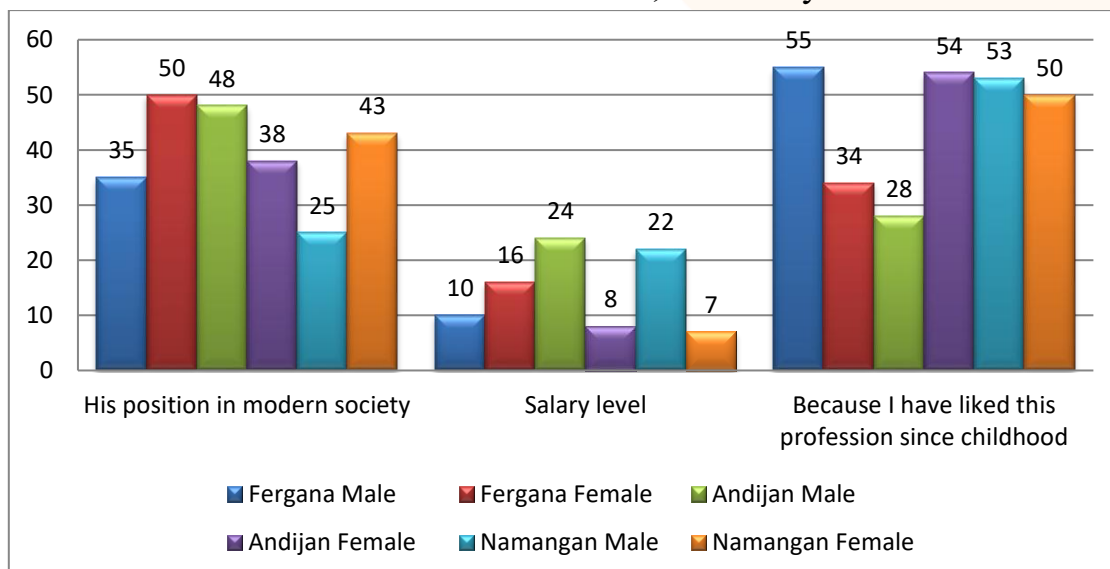


Figure 2. “What did you primarily focus on when choosing a profession?”

The responses to the question “What did you primarily focus on when choosing a profession?” presented in Figure 2 were analyzed by region and gender. The results indicate that although multiple motives are involved in the career choice process, their relative importance varies across groups.

First, the motive “because I have liked this profession since childhood” was found to have the highest values in all groups. Specifically, this motive was identified as the leading factor among boys in Fergana (55%), girls in Andijan (54%), boys in Namangan (53%), and girls in Namangan (50%). This finding demonstrates that internal interest and personal inclination constitute the primary determinants in career choice. From a psychological perspective, this result can be explained by the process of professional self-awareness, in which individuals strive to choose activities that correspond to their interests and abilities. The predominance

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of intrinsic motivation is interpreted as an important factor ensuring future professional stability and a high level of job satisfaction.

The second significant factor is the motive “its current social status.” This indicator was particularly high among girls in Fergana (50%), boys in Andijan (48%), and girls in Namangan (43%). This result indicates that social prestige and status play an important role in career choice. Psychologically, this can be explained by the individual’s need for social identification, that is, the desire to find one’s place in society and achieve social recognition. Research widely shows that during adolescence, the motivation to attain social status through a profession becomes especially pronounced.

The motive “the level of salary” demonstrated the lowest values across all groups. Although the highest values were observed among boys in Andijan (24%) and boys in Namangan (22%), the indicator remained relatively low in other groups (for example, 8% among girls in Andijan and 7% among girls in Namangan). This suggests that respondents perceive material benefits as a secondary factor in career choice. From a psychological standpoint, this can be interpreted within the framework of the hierarchy of needs, where higher-level needs—such as self-actualization, personal interest, and social recognition—take precedence over material considerations.

Regional analysis also revealed certain differences. Among respondents from Fergana, social status and intrinsic interest appeared at relatively similar levels. In contrast, among respondents from Andijan, intrinsic motivation was more dominant. Among respondents from Namangan, all motives were relatively balanced, indicating that the career choice process in this group has a complex and multifactorial nature.

Conclusion

Based on the generalization of the research findings, it can be concluded that respondents’ career choice process manifests as a multifactorial psychological

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system in which intrinsic motivation serves as the leading determinant. The results of both analyses demonstrate that the motive “because I have liked this profession since childhood” is dominant across all regions and gender groups. This finding confirms the early formation of professional orientation and highlights the decisive role of internal interest, personal inclination, and identification in career choice. From a psychological perspective, this can be explained by the individual’s стремление (striving) for self-awareness and the selection of activities that correspond to their abilities, which in turn increases the likelihood of future professional stability and satisfaction.

At the same time, the significant influence of social factors was also identified. In particular, the impact of close relatives and the social status of a profession emerged as important determinants in certain groups. The higher influence of relatives among girls can be explained by gender socialization processes. The social status of a profession, in turn, is associated with respondents’ need to find their place in society and achieve recognition, and it was identified as a stable secondary motive. Material factors, particularly those related to salary, showed relatively low values. This indicates that respondents perceive economic benefits as a secondary factor in career choice. However, this motive was more pronounced among boys, which can be explained by socially constructed gender roles.

Although some regional differences were observed, the overall trend remains consistent: intrinsic motivation is more strongly expressed among respondents from Andijan, while among groups from Fergana and Namangan, motives are distributed more evenly. This demonstrates that the career choice process is a complex system based on the integration of individual and socio-cultural factors. Overall, the findings confirm the primacy of internal interest and personal inclination in career choice, the supplementary yet significant role of social factors, and the relatively lower influence of material motives. This indicates that

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the career choice process represents a complex psychological mechanism grounded in the interaction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

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