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**UNDERSTANDING CAREER CHOICE MOTIVES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
OF KAZAKHSTAN**

Abstract

This article analyzes the ideas and scientific conclusions of both classical and contemporary sociologists regarding the professional choice motivations of high school students. Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan's higher education system has undergone significant qualitative and quantitative transformations. This shapes new reference points for young people and directly influence the motivations behind high school students' career choices. In a context where vocational education serves not only as a means of achieving personal goals but also as a tool for social mobility and economic stability, motivational factors – such as interest in the profession, career growth prospects, social relevance, and family influence – gain particular importance in the process of students' professional self-determination. The article presents the results of a survey conducted in 2023 across all regions of Kazakhstan, including major cities such as Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, Semey, and Pavlodar. The sample for the study included high school students from the 9th and 11th grades, totaling 1,156 respondents. The sample covers urban and rural students, private (paid) and public schools, as well as general education and specialized schools. The purpose of the study was to analyze the classification of motivations for choosing a profession and to conduct a comparative analysis of the professional choice motivations of high school students across different fields of study.

During the research, the motivations guiding high school students in their choice of profession were grouped into five categories: 1) "interest-oriented," 2) "career-oriented," 3) "social status-oriented," 4) "family-oriented," and 5) "accessibility-oriented." The influence and impact of these factors were individually analyzed for students planning to pursue careers in the humanities, medicine, technical fields, economics, and military professions, with distinct characteristics identified for each group.

Keywords: professional choice, career, high school students, choice of profession, social-humanitarian professions, medical professions, natural professions.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАН МЕКТЕПТЕРІНІҢ ЖОҒАРЫ СЫНЫП ОҚУШЫЛАРЫНЫҢ КӘСІБИ ТАҢДАУ МОТИВАЦИЯЛАРЫН ТҮСІНУ

Аңдатпа

Мақалада жоғары сынып оқушыларының кәсіби таңдау мотивтері туралы классиктерден бастап заманауи әлеуметтанушылардың ойлары мен ғылыми тұжырымдарына талдау жүргізіледі. Тәуелсіздік алған кезден бастап Қазақстанда кәсіби білім беру жүйесі елеулі сапалық және сандық өзгерістерге ұшырады. Бұл жастар үшін жаңа бағыт-бағдар қалыптастырып, жоғары сынып оқушыларының кәсіби таңдауына тікелей әсер етеді. Қазіргі таңда кәсіби білім тек жеке мақсаттарға жетудің құралы ғана емес, сонымен қатар әлеуметтік мобильділіктің және экономикалық тұрақтылықтың маңызды тетігіне айналып отыр. Осы орайда мамандық таңдаудағы мотивациялық факторлар – мамандыққа деген қызығушылық, мансаптық өсу мүмкіндігі, оның әлеуметтік маңыздылығы мен отбасының ықпалы – оқушылардың кәсіби өзін-өзі анықтау үдерісінде айрықша мәнге ие.

Мақалада 2023 жылы Қазақстанның барлық аймақтарында, соның ішінде Астана, Алматы, Шымкент, Семей және Павлодар сияқты ірі қалаларда жүргізілген сауалнама нәтижелері ұсынылған. Зерттеу 9-шы және 11-ші сынып оқушыларын қамтиды. Зерттеудің іріктеу жиынтығы 1156 респонденттен тұрады. Іріктеу жиынтығы қалалық пен ауылдық, жекеменшік (ақылы) мен мемлекеттік, жалпы білім беретін мен тереңдетілген мектеп оқушыларын қамтиды. Зерттеудің мақсаты мамандықты таңдау мотивтер классификациясын талдау және әр түрлі мамандықтар бойынша жоғары сынып оқушыларының кәсіби таңдау мотивтерін салыстырмалы талдау.

Зерттеу барысында жоғары сынып оқушыларының мамандықты таңдаудағы басшылыққа алатын мотивтер бес топқа біріктірілді: 1) «қызығушылыққа бағыттылықты», 2) «мансапқа бағыттылық», 3) «әлеуметтік мәртебеге бағыттылық», 4) отбасыға бағыттылық; 5) қолжетімділікке бағыттылықты бейнелейді. Осындай факторлардың ықпалы мен әсер ету деңгейі гуманитарлық, медициналық, техникалық, экономикалық және әскери мамандықты таңдауды жоспарлап отырған жоғары сынып оқушылары бойынша жеке-жеке талданды және ерекшеліктері анықталды.

Түйін сөздер: кәсіби таңдау, мамандық, жоғары сынып оқушылары, мамандықты таңдау, әлеуметтік-гуманитарлық мамандықтар, медициналық мамандықтар, жаратылыстану мамандықтары.

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ПОНИМАНИЕ МОТИВАЦИЙ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО ВЫБОРА СТАРШЕКЛАССНИКОВ КАЗАХСТАНСКИХ ШКОЛ

Аннотация

В статье анализируются идеи и концепции как классических, так и современных социологов относительно мотивации профессионального выбора старшеклассников. За годы независимости система профессионального образования Казахстана претерпела значительные качественные и количественные преобразования. Это формирует новые ориентиры для молодежи и напрямую влияют на мотивации профессионального выбора старшеклассников.

В условиях, когда профессиональное образование становится инструментом не только для достижения личных целей, но и для социальной мобильности и экономической стабильности, мотивационные факторы – такие как интерес к профессии, перспективы карьерного роста, социальная значимость и влияние семьи – приобретают особую значимость в процессе профессионального самоопределения школьников. В статье представлены результаты опроса, проведенного в 2023 году во всех регионах Казахстана, включая крупные города такие как Астана, Алматы, Шымкент, Семей и Павлодар. В выборку данного исследования были включены старшеклассники 9-х и 11-х классов, всего 1156 респондентов. Выборка охватывает учащихся городских и сельских школ, частных (платных) и государственных школ, а также общеобразовательных и специализированных учебных заведений. Цель исследования – анализ классификации мотиваций выбора профессии и сравнительный анализ мотивации профессионального выбора старшеклассников по различным профессиям.

В ходе исследования мотивации старшеклассников при выборе профессии были объединены в пять групп: 1) «ориентированность на интерес», 2) «ориентированность на карьеру», 3) «ориентированность на социальный статус», 4) «ориентированность на семью» и 5) «ориентированность на доступность». Влияние и степень воздействия этих факторов были отдельно проанализированы и выявлены особенности для учащихся, планирующих выбирать гуманитарные, медицинские, технические, экономические и военные профессии.

Ключевые слова: профессиональный выбор, профессия, старшеклассники, выбор профессии, социально-гуманитарные профессии, медицинские профессии, естественные профессии.

MAIN PART

The role of professional education is crucial in forming the global competitiveness of young specialists and the country itself. In the years of independence, many qualitative and quantitative changes have taken place at the national level in the field of professional education in order to meet international standards. These changes also affect the professional choices of high school students. The relevance of studying the motives behind professional choice is linked to the fact that, in the current conditions of Kazakh society, education serves as a guarantee of social mobility, and its high level not only ensures the economic development of the country, but also improves the welfare and social status of individuals, helping to overcome inequality. Moreover, the results of labor market analysis show that the indicators of young people working in their field of study in the first years after graduation from higher educational institutions are low. Despite the increasing opportunities for state regulation of the labor market to meet the demand for qualified specialists, successful employment experiences are often not related solely to obtaining higher education but are often associated with the motives behind professional choice among high school students.

The relevance of the research topic is determined by following factors:

1) In modern Kazakhstan society, education acts as a factor of social mobility, where its high level increases not only the country's economic potential, but also the well-being of people, their social status and contributes significantly to the overcoming of inequality. In recent years, this problem has become relevant because of the instability of social structures and the movement of people in the system of social hierarchy, a significant relationship between the level of education and incomes.

2) The modern society provides high school students with an expanded career choice and a vision of their own prospects. The development of the system of secondary education and the emergence of advanced, specialized schools that promote the differentiation of starting educational capital of high school students, as well as the formation of a hierarchy of “elite” and “affordable” universities, and the expansion of the fee-paid form of training actualize the significance of the study of choice in the context of family resources.

3) The results of the analysis of professional labor market indicate a low rate of youth employment related to their major in the first years after graduation. According to the data of the

“JSC Information and Analytical Center”, of the total number of university graduates in 2014 only 12% found a job related to their major among those who were employed [1].

Despite the expansion of opportunities that influence on the state regulation in providing labor market with in-demand specialists, the practice of successful employment is not only related to higher education, but also to effective youth motivex in carer choice. Recent studies conducted in 2023 show that 17% of young professionals with higher education in Kazakhstan are employed outside their field of specialization. This misalignment between educational background and actual job responsibilities in the labor market contributes to a notable decrease in labor productivity. For young professionals, such discrepancies often result in reduced income levels, commonly referred to as a "wage penalty" when their current occupation does not correspond with their field of study. On average, the earnings of young specialists working outside their specialty are approximately 15% lower compared to those employed in positions that match their qualifications [2].

According to alternative studies conducted by independent organizations, more than 40% of young people in Kazakhstan with a higher education degree are employed outside their field of study. This raises concerns about the efficiency of public spending aimed at job creation and youth employment programs. The situation has a negative impact on the national economy, as the government invests significant resources in educating each student, yet many graduates ultimately do not work in their area of specialization and instead shift to other sectors. As a result, shortages of qualified professionals in specific fields persist across the country [3].

Sociological study of high school students' motives in career choice in all its multifacetedness opens new opportunities and prospects for their forecasting and regulation in accordance with the demands of the economy. High school students' motives in higher education and career influence on the development of society and at the same time are modified in the context of global changes. Therefore the study of this problem is important from the standpoint of social and scientific significance.

The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that the identified motivational factors influencing high school students' career choices can be used by teachers, school psychologists, parents, and career guidance specialists to provide more accurate and effective support to students in the process of making decisions about their future careers. The results obtained can contribute to the development of individual and group career guidance programs adapted to the specific characteristics of students and the educational environment.

Moreover, a more informed and deliberate career choice can help reduce mismatches between education and labor market needs, leading to more efficient use of government resources allocated for educational grants. In the long term, this can positively impact the national economy by improving workforce planning and reducing the number of specialists working outside their field of training.

INTRODUCTION

The article analyzes the scientific concepts of both classical and contemporary sociologists on the research topic. The sociological ideas of the classics regarding the issue of education are related to determining the role and place of professional education in society and the life of an individual. For example, O. Comte defined the "positive" nature of the educational system as a social guarantee for public development and reforms [4]. His ideas were continued by É. Durkheim, and both sociologists connect the importance of educational institutions not with the intellectual and cultural development and growth of the individual, but with the development of society. Durkheim defined the educational institution as the basis for maintaining social harmony and order through the preparation of specialists needed by society [5, p. 244-264]. H. Spencer, in turn, described society as a whole biological organism and connected the development of society with the education system, which ensures the all-round growth of individuals [6]. In the works of M. Weber [7] and P. Sorokin [8, p. 405-409], professional education is recognized as a factor that forms the social structure and determines a person's role and place within it. Weber, within the framework of his concept of social stratification, viewed professional choice primarily from the perspective of the "prestige" category [9]. In the global sociology science, the experiences of youth in the field of education have been

considered since the 1970s primarily in terms of social inequality, social renewal, and the professional structure of society. Previous studies on students' career choice intentions have primarily focused on factors such as career opportunities, internship environment, and student loan debt [10], with limited attention to motivational factors. Motivations behind the choice has emerged as a growing area of research interest. While several studies have explored the link between motivations and career intentions, most have focused on employed individuals [11]. This research contributes to the academic discussion of career choice motivations among students and provides theoretical insights for understanding motives differentiations due to professional fields.

The aim of the study is to analyze the classification of motives for choosing a profession and to make a comparative analysis of the professional choice motives of high school students for different professions.

The research hypothesis is that high school students adhere to profession-oriented (through admission to higher education) and status-oriented motives, both of which are not active in nature, and are mainly characterized by an orientation toward the opinions of "significant others" (parents, teachers, and peers).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of career decision-making process is classified into economic and sociological approaches. Within the economic framework, the career decision-making process is studied through the lens of the rational choice theory, which is based on the concept of human capital. Such studies are based on the methodological individualism approach proposed by R. Boudon. According to this approach, it is essential to consider the actions of the individual as "the free choice of an active individual" in order to better understand the career choice by high school students. The transition from one level of education to the next is described as a rational decision linked to expectations and aspirations for the future. The characteristics of career choice by high school students from different socio-economic groups are defined as a rational decision closely related to their aspirations and expected achievements after obtaining professional education.

Representatives of the behavioral economics approach suggest studying the career decision-making process within the framework of the concept of bounded rationality. Since high school and their parents do not have access to all necessary information during career decision-making process, they are in a state of uncertainty to some extent. Therefore, predicting their decision in advance presents certain difficulties. To predict a person's decision, the following condition must be met: "the person must be fully informed and aware of their risks and opportunities" [12]. According to the bounded rationality theory, due to cognitive limitations and the absence of complete information, a person continues to make choices that align with their needs and interests, but this choice may not be the best one. The decision made by youth in choosing higher education cannot be compared with the rational decision of an economist who has all the information. The decision made by a young person is based on their values, beliefs, interests, and needs. Therefore, considering the process of choosing higher education based solely on the rationality model does not provide a complete understanding of the decision-making process [13].

In the field of behavioral economics, four interrelated barriers that high school students and their parents encounter during career decision-making process are identified:

1) The desire to avoid costs: This refers to the reluctance to pursue professional education due to the risk that the costs incurred for education might not be justified by the future returns.

2) Continuation of established experience: This occurs when parents without professional education do not plan for their children to pursue professional education after graduation, continuing the cycle of lower educational attainment.

3) Mismatch of interests over time: This is the tendency to overvalue the immediate costs of obtaining professional education rather than considering the long-term benefits that would come after graduation, such as higher income and improved job opportunities.

4) Reluctance to disclose one's socio-economic status: The fear of admitting financial need to receive support can be a barrier for some high school students and their parents, as applying for financial aid can feel like an admission of weakness, leading to anxiety or shame.

Other economic perspectives suggest that explaining the career decision-making process through the theory of costs and benefits underscores the importance of government intervention [12]. Government involvement, particularly in financing professional education, is necessary due to limitations in payment ability and external factors. Individuals may face financial barriers, such as the difficulty in paying tuition fees, and therefore, the introduction of financial support systems is essential. Professional education positively impacts societal development in various ways, such as reducing crime and unemployment rates. According to several researchers, failing to acknowledge such factors may lead to insufficient funding for the professional education sector [13].

Representatives of the economic approach explain the career decision-making process within the framework of rational choice theory, based on "cost-benefit analysis". However, this approach does not consider the reasons for the differentiation in career choice across different social groups. Scholars have pointed out that factors that cannot be quantified, such as non-economic factors, also influence career choice [14]. In this regard, the importance of the sociological approach in studying career choice by high school graduates increases. Sociologists consider two issues when explaining career choice:

1) Even when individuals are fully informed about their chances of success, they cannot objectively assess them;

2) The career decision-making process is based on their family's socio-economic situation and their subjective opportunities [15].

Within sociological theories, P.Blau and O.Duncan, when studying the professional structure of American society, identify class-based distinctions in the division of labor. Their research shows that parents pass their social status to their children through education and professional choices. The connection between professional choices and the social-economic resources of the family has been identified [16]. Blau and Duncan particularly emphasize the strengthening of the relationship between education and future professional success. According to the scholars, this relationship narrows the scope of social mobility. Moreover, the continued importance of education as a bridge to the professional hierarchy may perpetuate social inequality in professional choices. The global sociological community continues to refine the Blau-Duncan model and is introducing additional factors in the study of the mechanisms for maintaining social status from one generation to the next.

In the context of capital theory, career choice by high school graduates is examined with consideration of structural factors such as social, cultural, and historical conditions. Taking structural conditions into account provides a deeper understanding of the reasons and origins behind the differences in career decision-making process. According to P.Bourdieu, capital is "a set of resources and opportunities." Capital is an important value that is accumulated over time, creating and renewing life opportunities. Bourdieu argues that the life and structure of the social world can only be understood by considering all forms of capital, and he categorizes capital into four types: economic, cultural, social, and academic [17].

Economic capital is associated with material goods and is measured through family income and wealth [18]. To determine the discrete, cumulative effects of a family's economic situation, it is necessary to consider not only annual income but also the level of wealth as an economic resource. Economic capital is formed based on the interaction between an individual and the economy. Financial aid and government scholarships can serve as an additional source of economic capital when choosing higher education [19]. Financial assistance may affect youth's academic preparation and, consequently, their decision to pursue higher education by alleviating concerns related to tuition fees.

Cultural capital refers to a set of symbolic resources and benefits passed from generation to generation to maintain class status. Cultural capital plays an important role in examining the specifics of career decision-making process. Cultural capital is categorized into three types: (1) embodied cultural capital—cultural values expressed through behavior and style; (2) institutionalized cultural

capital-objective forms of cultural capital, such as a higher education diploma; (3) objectified cultural capital-cultural goods such as works of art, books, and musical instruments. The first type of cultural capital is formed in an individual from early childhood through pedagogical activities. This is shaped by parents, other family members, or specialized professionals engaged in child-rearing. The second type of cultural capital manifests in institutional forms, such as professional or educational competence. The third type of cultural capital is represented by cultural goods such as textbooks, artifacts, dictionaries, and pictures. The volume of cultural capital increases as an individual's social rank rises.

Despite often being associated with social connections and relationships, social capital is distinct in that it is defined as a potential resource and support that can be used when needed, rather than simply the relationships themselves. Empirical studies describe social capital through the presence of relationships both within and outside the family (with peers, teachers, law professionals, etc.) and classify it based on the family's socio-economic status [20]. Within the framework of social capital theory, the key factors that contribute to the formation of social capital are often debated, such as close connections or weak ties (i.e., professional connections characterized by distance and short duration).

Academic capital can be described as graduating from a prestigious school or university. The former reflects the quantitative measure of education, while the latter defines not only the quantitative but also the qualitative aspects of education. Academic capital includes diplomas, including those for professional education. When considering academic capital in the field of professional education, researchers define it as educational experiences or outcomes [21].

The theory of cultural capital was developed by P.Bourdieu and his colleagues to explain the cultural and social renewal of society. They attempted to investigate why students from wealthier families tend to have significantly better academic performance compared to their peers from lower-income families [22]. In this context, the scholars highly value the importance of cultural capital in career choice. Cultural capital is seen as a factor influencing higher academic performance in schools. According to P.Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, academic success is not solely determined by intellectual capacity and ability. Academic success is primarily determined by the type and amount of cultural capital passed on from the family environment, rather than individual abilities and achievements. According to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, society is inclined to reproduce its structure. The education system, especially professional or higher education, plays a role in the reproduction and preservation of social inequalities.

Habitus theory suggests that habitus is a system of internalized values shared by members of a particular social group or environment. The concept of habitus is outlined in two main directions: 1) On the one hand, habitus is shaped based on a person's material conditions; 2) On the other hand, habitus influences the current state and future of an individual. When studying the process of career choice within the framework of habitus theory, it is important to analyze family capital and its volume. This provides insight into the primary motivations behind the choice of a specific university or field of study. Within the framework of habitus theory, Bourdieu aimed to move beyond dichotomies such as "structure and action," "stasis and dynamics," "conscious and unconscious," and "individual and society" [23].

Two key aspects of the theoretical structure of habitus can be distinguished: On one hand, habitus is formed based on opportunities, circumstances, attitudes, and values, which manifest in a person's behavior, speech style, feelings, and thoughts [24]. On the other hand, habitus limits individuals and their actions by a specific social structure, indicating which actions can or cannot be taken in particular situations. In this way, habitus shapes individual behavior patterns based on objective conditions. When conducting research in the career choice process, there are several advantages to using the concept of habitus. For example, based on structural limitations, Bourdieu notes the inequality in access to higher education. Therefore, it is important to consider the socio-economic conditions when studying the choice. In the process of selecting higher education, youth and their parents make decisions that are beneficial for them. The career choice by students from lower socio-

economic backgrounds is not always advantageous for students from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

Thus, while economic concepts have contributed to understanding the process of career choice, it is important to consider their limitations. The limitation of economic theories, including rational choice theory, is evident in their inability to explain the decision-making process in cases of uncertainty, where information is incomplete. According to economic theories, youth and their parents choose higher education by comparing the costs of education with expected benefits, aiming to maximize income. Behavioral economists, based on the concept of bounded rationality, explain the career choice in uncertain conditions by factors such as "risk aversion," "conflict between habitual behavior and time-based interests," and "the need to disclose one's socio-economic status." However, this framework does not clarify the influence of values or behavioral patterns or the impact of structural factors.

In studying career choice, representatives of the economic approach refer to the theory of rational choice, which was developed in the 1970s. Such research follows the methodological individualism approach proposed by R. Boudon. According to this perspective, in order to gain a deeper sociological understanding of strategies for choosing higher education, it is important to view individual actions as the result of a "self-determined choice made freely by an active individual." Transitioning from one level of education to another is thus characterized not as a choice shaped by social structure and inequality, but as a rational decision driven by expectations and aspirations for the future [25].

The theoretical concepts proposed by Boudon were further developed by Goldthorpe and Breen. In explaining young people's decisions regarding higher education and career, they offer three key propositions. First, individuals rely on rationality when choosing higher education and career: they take into account tuition costs, potential future earnings, and the consequences of their decisions. The final decision reflects the priority given to the expectation of achieving higher income. Second, the process of higher education and career choice occurs within a specific age range common to most young people, which is determined by the structure of the national education system. Third, it is important to consider the common social structure that unites young people making choices under similar circumstances. Representatives of this theory explain differences in young people's career choice primarily in terms of their academic achievements, aspirations, and motivations, and secondarily in terms of their socio-economic status. However, they do not view these differences as the result of social inequality [26].

Representatives of the behavioral economics approach propose studying young people's decisions about higher education and career within the framework of the bounded rationality concept. According to their view, both young people and their parents face a certain level of uncertainty when higher education and career choice, as they are unable to obtain all the necessary information. As a result, predicting their decisions in advance presents significant challenges [27]. This is because, in order to predict a person's decision, the following condition must be met: "the person must be fully informed and aware of their risks and opportunities" [28]. According to the concept of bounded rationality, due to cognitive limitations and the lack of complete information, people tend to make choices that align with their needs and interests, but these choices may not always be the most optimal ones.

Young people's decisions regarding higher education cannot be equated with the rational decisions of fully informed economists. These decisions are shaped by young people's values, beliefs, interests, and motivations. Therefore, analyzing the process of higher education and career choice solely through the lens of the rational choice model does not provide a comprehensive understanding of it. When analyzing career and higher education choice, it is important to adopt an alternative approach that incorporates both economic and sociological perspectives to study career choice.

METHODOLOGY

The article presents the results of a survey conducted in 2023 across all regions of Kazakhstan, including large cities such as Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, Semey, and Pavlodar. The sample of this study included high school students from the 9th and 11th grades. The main method for collecting primary data was face-to-face questionnaire among high school students of urban and rural schools. The choice of this method is due to the possibility of obtaining comprehensive information regarding the professional preferences of high school students and the motives behind their career choices. Data on high school students were obtained based on statistical data from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of secondary education. A targeted sampling method was used, with the criteria for selection being region of residence, type of school, and gender.

The sample size is 1000 respondents aged 15-17 years. The structure of sample is presented in the table 1.

Table 1 – Structure of the sample

Variables	Values	Distribution
Gender	Male	49%
	Female	51%
Grades	9th grade	50.9%
	11th grade	49.1%
Regions	Western	17%
	Southern	16%
	Nothern	13.2%
	East	11.7%
	Central	8.5%
Cities	Astana	9.7%
	Almaty	10.7%
	Shymkent	13.1%
Type of the school	Public	54,7%
	Specialized (lyceum, gymnasium, NIS, private)	35,3%

It is important to note that the study sample includes both urban and rural high school students, as well as those from private (paid) and public schools, including both general education and specialized (advanced) schools. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing high school students' decisions regarding their further educational paths.

This study presents new results on the study of career choice motivations among high school students in urban schools. However, it has certain limitations related to the use of the quantitative method. Since this method does not allow for the deep outlining of motivations in the context of different social groups of high school students, in comparison to interviews, it does provide an overview of the general trend characterizing the motivations of career choice among high school students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The motivations for career choice among high school students are formed based on their professional and educational goals. The goals identified when choosing a profession lead to specific actions, that is, to making a choice. Career choice can be defined as a long-term plan that allows a transition from the current situation to the desired one. During career decision-making process, high school students begin to think about "What do I want to achieve?" and "How can I achieve it?"

According to the results of the study, professional education occupies a special place in the value hierarchy of high school students. For 96.1% of respondents, obtaining professional education is

important at various levels, with 19.2% considering it moderately important and 76.9% finding it very important. Having an interesting job is a high priority for high school students. 93.8% of high school students plan to pursue professional education, with 70.2% considering domestic higher education institutions and 23.6% planning to study at foreign universities. High school students view obtaining higher education as a normal, even obligatory, stage after school graduation. Therefore, there is a need to understand the motivations behind their desire for education. The leading goals for obtaining higher education include "studying in an interesting field," "becoming a sought-after specialist," and "getting a well-paid job." Each of these goals has been identified as the main motivation for continuing education after school graduation by more than half of the students. For example, 59% of students strive to obtain higher education in a field they find interesting; 56.8% believe that higher education enhances their competitiveness in the labor market; 56.6% aim to engage in a successful career; 50.5% see it as a social institution that provides opportunities for professional career advancement; and 48.7% consider it necessary to obtain higher education in order to work in an interesting profession. There were also students who aim solely for the diploma, and their share is 43.6%. This demonstrates the growing importance of the institutional form of cultural capital, which is defined as educational competence in modern society. 34.6% of students consider higher education necessary for everyone, which confirms the high value placed on education among young people. However, some students view higher education as a means to gain social respect (29.0%) and to establish useful connections and expand their network (24.4%). There are also students who are interested in their parents' professional careers and wish to follow in their professional footsteps, but their proportion is small, only 2.5%.

In the study career choice by high school students, it is important to distinguish between **social orientation** and **professional orientation**. Based on **social orientation**, students define their future place in society, social status, and the ways to achieve them through the lens of a particular profession. Based on **professional orientation**, students choose a profession they like and find attractive among all available options.

Given the widespread desire of today's youth to pursue higher education, it becomes increasingly important to determine whether social or professional orientation takes precedence in their career choices. Although pragmatic motivations such as "the possibility of a high salary" (73.8%) and "the opportunity for career growth" (52.6%) dominate the hierarchy of factors considered by students, they also take into account the content-related aspects of a profession. For example, 41.2% of them emphasize "the social importance of the profession" and 36.2% consider "the opportunity to realize their potential" as key factors. In career choice, "the prestige and popularity of the profession" as symbolic capital is important for 35% of the respondents, while 23.8% are influenced by "advice from parents or relatives" and 7.4% by "the example of relatives, friends, or acquaintances," reflecting social capital.

We can observe a dominant social orientation in students' career choices: 73.8% consider the salary level, and 52.6% consider career growth opportunities. However, this preference is relatively conditional, as 41.2% of students also pay attention to the societal significance of the profession, and 36.2% consider the opportunities to realize their potential.

The study of high school students' professional orientations revealed that the leading fields are natural sciences, social-humanitarian sciences, and information technologies. After graduation, 30.5% of students plan to study natural sciences, 26.7% plan to pursue social-humanitarian sciences, and 21.3% plan to study information technologies.

A gender difference in professional orientations was also identified. The proportion of girls planning to choose foreign languages is higher than that of boys, with 12.1% of boys and 21.7% of girls intending to pursue this field. The creative fields are also more attractive to girls: 12.6% of girls and 7.7% of boys plan to choose this field. Conversely, there is a tendency for boys to favor economics and law sciences more than girls. Among students planning to study these fields, 12.1% of boys and 7.0% of girls prioritize economics, while 10.3% of boys and 8.7% of girls prioritize law (Table 2).

Table 2 – Professional orientations of high school students by gender

№	Career Fields	By Gender		By Sample
		Male	Female	
1	Natural Sciences	29,0%	31,8%	30,5%
2	Social-Humanitarian Sciences	26,5%	26,9%	26,7%
3	Information Technologies	20,6%	22,0%	21,32%
4	Foreign Languages	12,1%	21,7%	17,03%
5	Technical Sciences	19,5%	18,2%	18,8%
6	Creative Arts	7,7%	12,6%	10,22%
7	Economic Sciences	12,1%	7,0%	9,50%
8	Law Sciences	10,3%	8,7%	9,50%

In order to understand the direction of career choice, the factors were grouped as follows: 1) interest orientation; 2) career orientation; 3) social status orientation; 4) accessibility orientation; 5) family orientation. The influence and impact levels of these factors were analyzed individually for high school students planning to study in humanitarian, medical, technical, economic, and military fields. *The study of career choice motivations among high school students based on professional education trajectories yielded the following results:*

Table 3 – Interest-Oriented Motivations¹

Factors in career decision-making process	Humanitarian	Medical	Technical	Economic	Military	By all Professions
Interest-Oriented Motivations						
Develop my abilities	20,0%	41,6%	40%	58,4%	12,5%	36,2%
I like this profession	53,8%	15,4%	23%	7,6%	37,4%	25,7%

Students with "**interest-oriented motivations**" during career decision-making process tend to choose humanitarian fields, including social fields. Among students aspiring to enter the military field, the proportion of such students is half as low. The proportion of students who like their profession is higher among those planning to study in the humanitarian fields. In the overall sample, 25.7% of respondents like the profession which they are going to apply to, while 53.8% of those planning to enter the humanitarian field chose it.

This indicates a strong positive correlation between intrinsic motivation ("I like this profession") and the choice of humanitarian specialties. The contrast with economic (7.6%) and medical (15.4%) directions highlights the relatively low influence of pure interest in these fields. Meanwhile, the high percentage of students who wish to "develop their abilities" in economic (58.4%) and technical (40%) fields shows a positive relationship between self-realization motives and the selection of more skill- or outcome-oriented professions. The military field demonstrates the weakest association with interest-based motivation, suggesting that decisions in this direction are more likely influenced by external or structural factors rather than personal interest.

¹ **Note** – Since respondents were given the option to select up to 5 answer choices, the total percentage may exceed 100%.

These patterns suggest that interest-oriented motivation acts as a key internal driver in the choice of humanitarian professions, whereas in other fields, particularly economic and technical, rational or instrumental motivations prevail. The weak link between interest and military choice may indicate that causality lies more in perceived social stability, discipline, or external guidance rather than self-directed preference (Table 3).

Table 4 – Career-Oriented Motivations

Factors in career decision-making process	Humanitarian	Medical	Technical	Economic	Military	By all Professions
Career-Oriented Motivations						
Opportunity for career growth	66,6%	75,0%	66,4%	33,4%	37,5%	52,6%
High income	66,8%	66,6%	63,4%	75,2%	75,0%	73,8%
High professional status	53,2%	33,3%	38,8%	16,6%	37,5%	35,0%

During career decision-making process, there is a noticeable dominance of “**career-oriented motivation**”. For instance, “opportunity for career growth” is important for future medical professionals (75%), future economists place great emphasis on the possibility of “high income” (75.2%), and those choosing humanitarian fields give special importance to the “status of the profession” (53.2%).

On the other hand, **humanitarian students** (66.6%) place less emphasis on career growth, indicating that other factors, such as personal fulfillment and the meaning of the work, may play a larger role in their decision-making. The relatively lower importance placed on career advancement in these fields suggests that humanitarian careers may attract individuals who value intrinsic rewards over professional progression.

The strong emphasis on **high income** among **economics students** (75.2%) demonstrates that financial considerations are a major motivator in this field, aligning with the expectation of lucrative career prospects in economics. Similarly, **military students** (75%) prioritize **income**, likely due to the financial security and benefits the military offers, such as steady pay and pensions (Table 4). As previous studies show, high school students in choosing medical professions pay special attention to its prestige in society, especially in fields such as nursing where the competencies of the professionals associated only with helping patients’ personal hygiene or changing bedsheets [29].

Table 5 – Social -Oriented Motivations

Factors in career decision-making process	Humanitarian	Medical	Technical	Economic	Military	By all Professions
Social -Oriented Motivations						
Social importance	33,4%	75,0%	38%	41,6%	1,9%	41,2%
Expanding connections and acquaintances	46,8%	8,2%	22,2%	50,0%	12,5%	26,2%
Access to power	46,6%	16,4%	16,8%	58,4%	12,5%	31,2%

Social status-oriented motivation is characteristic of students choosing economic professions. Future economists, accountants are particularly focused on “expanding connections”. Additionally, when career decision-making medical professions, students place special value on the **social importance** of these fields in societal development (Table 5). As other research results show social importance is also dominated among students who are willing to choose social oriented professions such as social worker. Among these students public service motivations tend to be higher and altruistic motivation serves as the specific behavioral guidance in career choice [30].

Table 6 – Accessibility-Oriented Motivations

Factors in career decision-making process	Humanitarian	Medical	Technical	Economic	Military	By all Professions
Accessibility-Oriented Motivations						
Easy to find a job	12,6%	12,8%	50,0%	12,4%	25%	13,6%
Easy to get into university	13,4%	8,4%	22,2%	0,0%	12,5%	11,2%
Affordable (low) Tuition fees	0,8%	1,2%	16,7%	8,3%	12,5%	10,0%

Accessibility-oriented motivation is characterized by factors like "ease of finding a job," "ease of entering university," and "affordable tuition for my family." Such motivations are more common among those choosing technical professions (Table 6).

Table 7 - Family-Oriented Motivations

Factors in career decision-making process	Humanitarian	Medical	Technical	Economic	Military	By all Professions
Family-Oriented Motivations						
Advice from parents or relatives	13,2%	33,4%	22,2%	25,0%	12,5%	23,8%
The profession my parents or relatives work in	6,8%	8,2%	5,6%	0,0%	0,0%	7,4%

Family-oriented motivation is particularly evident in medical professions. When choosing a medical profession, students are more likely to prioritize positions like "the profession my parents or relatives work in" (8.2%) and "advice from parents or relatives" (33.4%). **Family-oriented motivations** are particularly influential in the choice of **medical professions**. The data shows that a significant portion of students (33.4%) chooses medicine based on advice from parents or **relatives**, indicating that family influence is crucial in this field. Additionally, 8.2% of students are motivated by **the profession their parents or relatives work in**, highlighting the importance of familial connections and role models in medical career decisions.

In contrast, **humanitarian** (13.2%) and **military** (12.5%) fields show a lower emphasis on family influence, suggesting that students in these fields may be more independently motivated or guided by other factors. The influence of family is also less pronounced in the **technical** (22.2%) and **economic** (25%) fields, where professional choice may be driven more by personal interests, career growth potential, or financial considerations rather than family traditions or advice.

This pattern suggests that **family-oriented motivations** are stronger in professions with clear, well-defined career paths, like medicine, and less significant in fields that may offer more diverse or flexible career opportunities (Table 7). Studies conducted among Russian and French students illustrates the connection between professional activity of parents and students' choice of economic professions. 44.6% students in Russia and 37.5% students in France tend to choose economic profession to follow their parents professional pathway [31]. While studies provided in Lithuania revealed that the main sources of information when choosing a study program are recommendations from peers. Such as differences shows regional features the process of career choice decision making [32].

In general according to research results, Kazakstani high school students place "**career-oriented motivation**" first, followed by "**social status-oriented motivation**", and "**interest-oriented motivation**" ranks last.

The data reveals that career choices among high school students are shaped by a blend of personal interests, career aspirations, social values, family influence, and practical considerations.

Humanitarian students are primarily driven by personal interest and passion for their chosen profession, while those pursuing technical, medical, and economic fields focus more on career growth and financial stability. Family influence is most pronounced in medicine, where parental advice and professional pathways play a significant role in decision-making. Social status and professional prestige are crucial in fields like economics and humanitarian studies, but have less impact in more pragmatic sectors such as military and technical professions. Overall, the study highlights that career decisions are influenced by both intrinsic motivations and external factors, with a notable distinction between fields that prioritize personal fulfillment and those driven by career prospects and family influence.

CONCLUSION

To fully understand the career choice motivations of high school students, it is important to study them by combining economic and sociological approaches. Within the framework of economic approaches, rationality is prioritized when studying the motives for career choice, while sociological approaches focus on the importance of social and cultural factors. Despite the significance of pragmatic motivations in career choice among high school students, there is also a noticeable predominance of "interest-oriented" motivations. In order to understand the direction and goals of career choices among high school students, the motivations guiding students in their career decisions have been grouped into five categories: 1) "interest-oriented," 2) "career-oriented," 3) "social status-oriented," 4) family-oriented, and 5) accessibility-oriented. The influence and impact of these factors were analyzed separately for high school students planning to choose careers in the humanities, medicine, engineering, economics, and the military.

The analysis provided the following interesting insights. The motivations forming "career orientation" are important for the majority of high school students, regardless of their career choice. "Social status orientation" is dominant among high school students aspiring to choose economic careers. High school students with a high level of "interest orientation" tend to choose humanitarian fields, including social professions. "Family orientation," including professional continuity, is characteristic of high school students planning to choose medical careers. "Accessibility orientation" is evident in the motivations of students planning to choose technical professions. Overall, the importance of the career choice motivations among high school students can be shown in the following hierarchy: 1 - "career orientation," 2 - "social status orientation," 3 - "interest orientation," 4 - "family orientation," 5 - "accessibility orientation". This hierarchy is characteristic of all high school students, regardless of their intended career path.

The results of this study deepen our understanding of the career choice motivations of high school students, highlighting their differences in terms of professional trajectories. However, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the causal relationship between motivations and career choice, which also change in the context of cultural and socio-economic conditions. Therefore, future research should further examine the factors influencing the formation of career choice motivations across different socio-economic groups.

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