

CAREER DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF THE 8TH GRADERS WITHIN THE REFORM PROCESSES IN LATVIA

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Abstract. *The present study investigates the career choice of 8th graders in the context of reform processes in Latvia and changing demands of the job market. Career planning in this article is seen as a spiralling and dialectic process that is influenced by multiple factors, the process that involves planning, generating options, evaluation of options and making decisions. Reform processes in Latvia requires career counsellors to help young people to maintain an attitude of acceptance while choosing a career path, and in addition to develop meaningful and professional life changing discussion on available career options in order to become significant adviser while guiding pupils on adapting to changing requirements of a job market. The aim of the study is to explore the main influences determining the career choice of the 8th grade pupils as well as to explore the sources of information that determine them on making such decisions. Research methodology: For the purpose of this study the authors chose a pilot questionnaire in order to explore the career path of the 8th graders. The study draws on tendencies of youngsters' choice of a career obtained in Latvia and Czech Republic. Research findings: Considering the changing demands of a job market, the teachers need to consider an adaptive career managing processes for the youngsters by taking into account a dialectic interplay of multiple influences on pupils' career choice and to foster a more sustainable career path in helping pupils to gain career maturity in decision making and developing competencies needed for the future.*

Keywords: *career choice, basic school pupils, reform processes in Latvia, competencies.*

Introduction

The present study investigates the career choice of the 8th graders in the contexts of reform processes in Latvia and the changing demands of a job market. The aim of the study is to explore the main influences that determine the career choice of the 8th grade pupils as well as to explore the sources of information that determine them on making such decisions.

The reform processes in Latvia towards implementing a competency based on approach put quite high demands on teachers in fostering pupils' professional growth. The reform processes are aimed on developing pupils' competence by reinforcing a shift from ready-made knowledge transfer to a learning process, where the teacher offers diverse, complex, and personally meaningful tasks in the pedagogical process, which enable pupils to develop an understanding how to interrelate the acquired knowledge.

A particular attention in schools is paid to pupils' professional choice and competencies that pupils need to acquire to be successful in a job market. Changes that are taking place globally, requires a set of sustainable competencies that are suited to fit for the dynamic and unpredictable models of economic and social development (Rychen, 2003). A competency that the pupils need to acquire involves their ability to meet complex demands of a job market, by mobilising all the resources in a particular context (OECD, 2003). This requires transforming educational system in a way that deepens and transforms teaching approaches as well. Teachers need to take into account new expectations on the part of learners that require more innovative approaches towards learning.

Adaptive Career Planning Skills of the 8th Graders in the Changing Job Market Situation

During the years of Latvia's independence, the strategic goals of society development aimed at more efficient use of human resources have changed, and in order to achieve this, the educational objective and educational implementation system are being revised to promote more targeted investment of human potential (knowledge, abilities, skills, experience, led education process. Contemporary improvement of human quality of life can be achieved by investing in human education (Brigmane, 2014).

The turn of the 20th and 21st centuries is characterized by changes in the life processes of the world, Europe and Latvia, including the disappearance of occupations of the previous century and the emergence for completely new professions. The rapidly changing situation in the labor market and in the society makes every individual, including pupils and their teachers, a need to adapt to changing situations and to be educated throughout their lives. The emergence of new professions, the overproduction of professions that had been required in the recent past, unemployment, uncertainty, increasing the financial resources of educational institutions to attract pupils to their schools, an urgency for graduates to make career choices within a limited time, creates difficult situation for the students to make a logical and thought-through professional steps towards their career choice and career management. Education policy makers acknowledge that the 21st century's labour market dynamics are linked to the need to improve career

education at schools in order for graduates to be able to navigate fast-changing living conditions and make independent career choices at any stage of their lives. Recent guidance from the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (EMCDDA) has emphasized the importance of career education in its diverse forms of delivery, as well as in the learner's ability to lead their careers in a lifelong perspective (Oomen & Plant, 2014).

There is a huge body of literature focusing on a career guidance, but still it is under aspects of research concerning the importance of childhood's experiences, among which is family's socioeconomic background that influences pupils' career choice, their unconscious motivation and why they choose a particular path of a career. While guiding students in their career decision making processes, one needs to be aware of both, rational and unconscious aspects of a decision-making process of pupils.

Super and Knasel (1996) defines career adaptability as involving: plan, exploration, ability to use information, decision making skills and reality orientation aspects. The term has been advanced by fostering one's ability to cope with difficulties at work. Adaptive skills are necessary for developing one's flexibility to fit in a global market economy. This also includes entrepreneurial sensibilities and emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The adaptability is a context rich term (Flum & Blustein, 2000) and has a context bound dimension. At the same time, it has as a future oriented dimension. Therefore, a career counsellor needs to be sensitive to the context and to involve pupils in a lifelong adaptive process that more often is an unplanned and unpredictable. According to Vygotsky (1978), children's understanding of the world is influenced by socio cultural context and the guidance of significant people, mentors. Therefore, teachers and career counsellors need to recognize the need of role models in the process of learning about the job market (As cited in Starr, 2000). As Marcus (2017) argues, the career choice of the 8th graders is influenced by their performance in certain fields of science. Pupils will most likely choose to study the subjects in the secondary school stage where they are more confident about their ability.

Socio-economic changes in Latvia since independence, the transition from a planned economy to a market economy and changes in the education system have created a new environment in which individuals need to be more actively involved in a decision-making process about their educational pathways and professional activities. The availability of human resources, the quality of labor resources, mobility (geographical and occupational) and productivity in Latvia are becoming increasingly topical, necessitating the need to promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills within the school curriculum that enable people to better adapt to changing your career (Jaunzeme, 2014).

Young people who have not been able to make career decisions during school constitute the highest number of registered unemployed young people, 31.8% of them are graduates of general secondary education.

The Research Methodology

For the purpose of this study the authors have designed a pilot questionnaire with the aim to explore the sources of information about the world of professions and the main influences in their career choice. The participants of the study are the 8th graders who are on the path of the career choice.

The survey was conducted in the schools of second biggest city of Latvia in Daugavpils during December 2019. Total number of respondents were 111. The sample comprises 67 boys and 44 girls. The questionnaires were distributed in the classes during the lessons via researchers and teachers of these pupils. At the beginning the researchers explained the aim of this questionnaire to the pupils and asked if there were some uncertainties. Because of this approach the return on questionnaires was 100%. We used only nominal (demographic variables) or so called dichotomic variables (options were only yes/no for the questions) in our pilot questionnaire, that is why we analysed the data only in descriptive way – descriptive analysis. The analysis was conducted via software STATISTICA. We counted the frequency for each item in connection with gender. The graphs used in this article were prepared by using software Microsoft Office Excel.

Research Findings

The empirical data gained in the questionnaire on Czech pupils indicate that pupils feel themselves as independent experts in making their career choices and display a high degree of radicalism as a result of their emancipation from the family. They declare that they want to decide themselves about their future, regardless their parents' decisions and influences (Hlad'o, 2012). The author points the socioeconomic status of the family as a significant determinant of pupils' choice. Namely, pupils who come from the families with a low socioeconomic status, are less influenced and guided by the family in the process of their career path. Different situation can be observed among the pupils and their parental influences in Latvia who are willing to listen to parental advices. The career choice of children in Czech Republic is influenced by their own decision (78%), 9% of pupils' decisions were influenced by their friends and 2% of choices were influenced by their teachers (Hlad'o, 2012). Among the most popular sources of information among the youngsters about the future job market becomes an internet (45%), school (39%) and parents (39%). The career choice is one of the most debated topics in families in both, Czech Republic and Latvia.

The research data on the main influences in regards to the choice of the career for boys and girls presents the following picture:

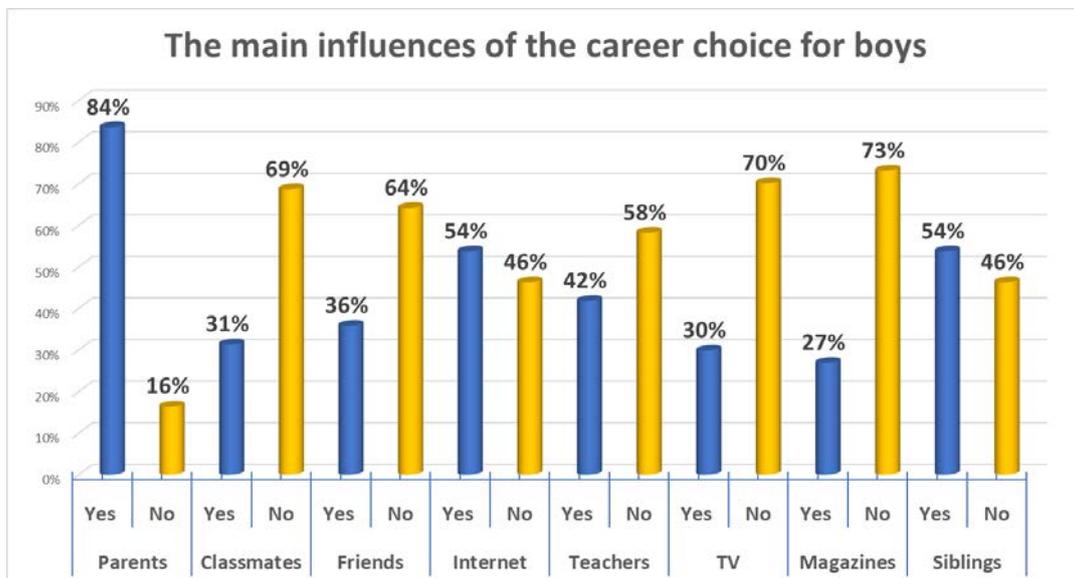


Figure 1 The main influences of the career choice for boys

The data gained in the pilot study indicates that the 8th graders are willing to listen to parents’ advices about the career choice in contrast to pupils from the Czech Republic who prefer to be independent in their career choice. In both countries the opinion of siblings is important for the 8th graders in their career choice.

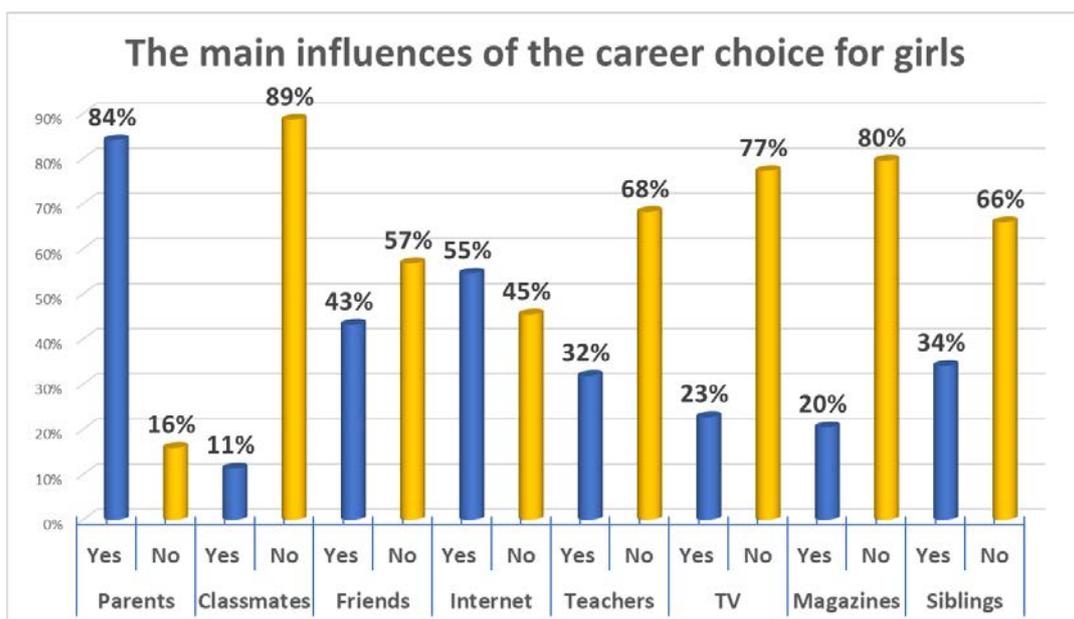


Figure 2 The main influences of the career choice for girls

As for girls, the parental advice is still worth considering. The girls also consider the opinion of friends and information gained in the internet.

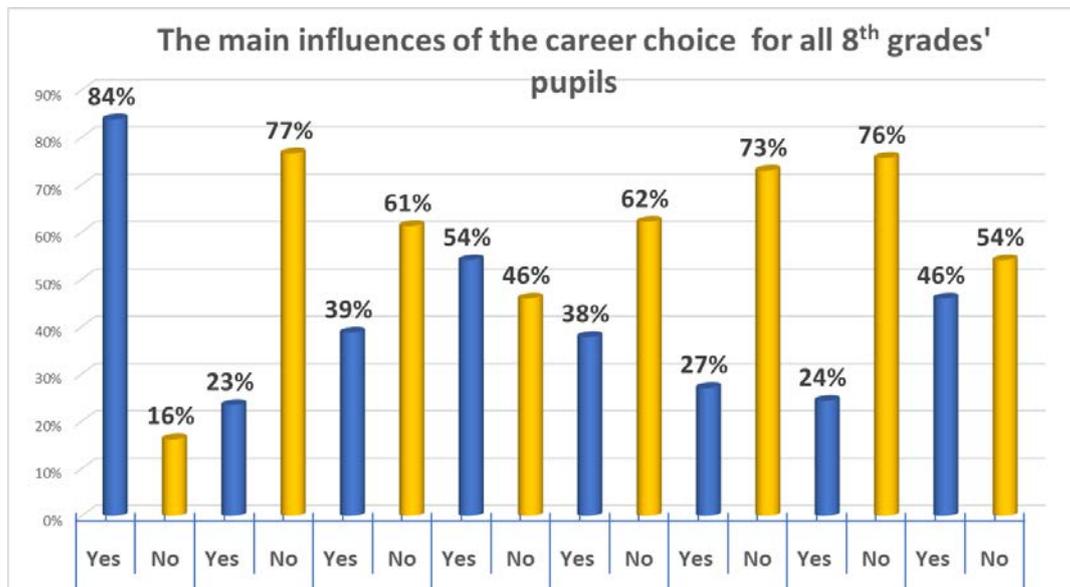


Figure 3 The main influences of the career choice for the 8th graders

The analyses gained from the total sample of 8th graders allow us to conclude that parents still play a significant role in the career choice of the teenagers, although internet and siblings play not the least significant role in the career choice of the teenagers.

We received interesting results while exploring on the differences between boys and girls on the question: *Do classmates influence your career choice?* It is only one question (in the case of “influences”) where we found some bigger differences in answer between boys and girls. In this case boys are influenced in their career choice by their classmates more often than girls (see Figure 4 below).

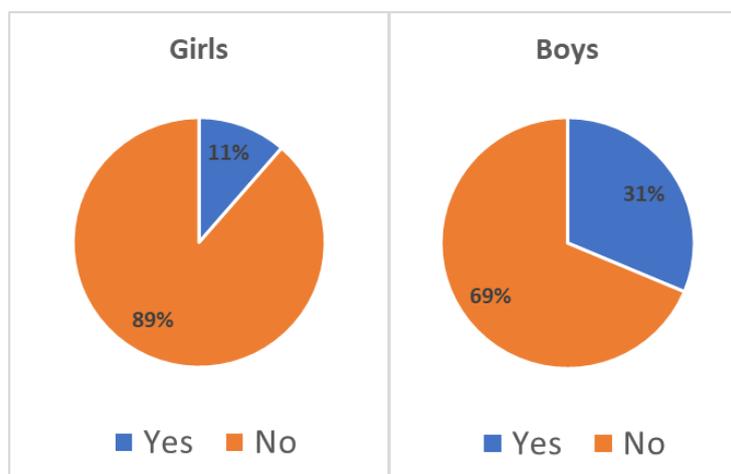


Figure 4 Influence of classmates for the career choice of the 8th graders

The other part of our questionnaire explored the main sources of information for the pupils for their career choice that are reflected in Figure 5.

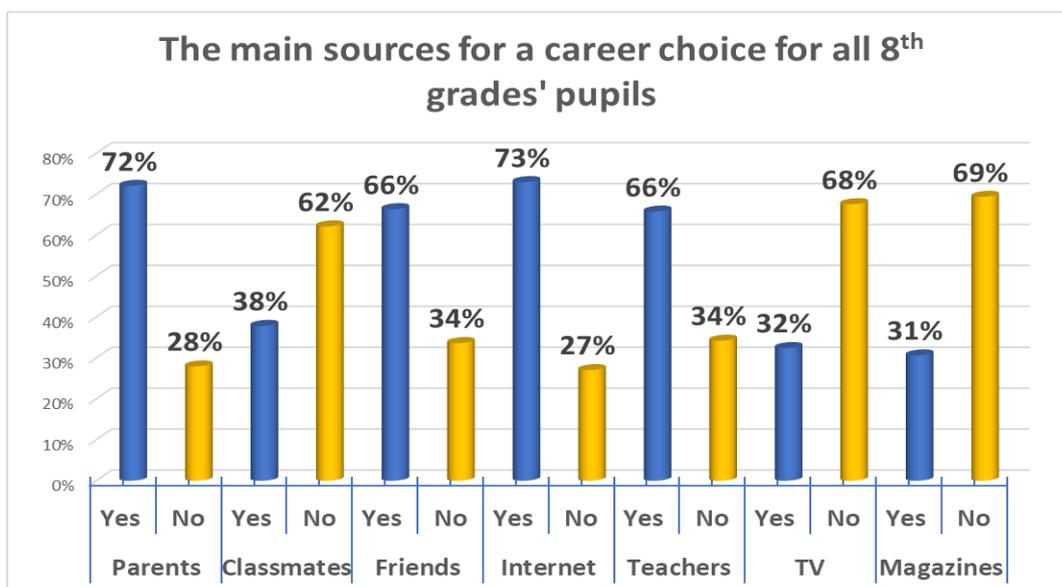


Figure 5 The main sources of information for the career choice for the 8th graders

Among the main sources where teenagers gain information about the career options are still parents, internet and friends. Teachers are also play a crucial role in introducing pupils to the professional world by encouraging them to participate in shadowing the experts of career field, pupils might be interested in, and other activities offered at school. In Czech Republic, among the most popular sources of information among the youngsters about the future job market is the internet (45%), school (39%) and parents (39%).

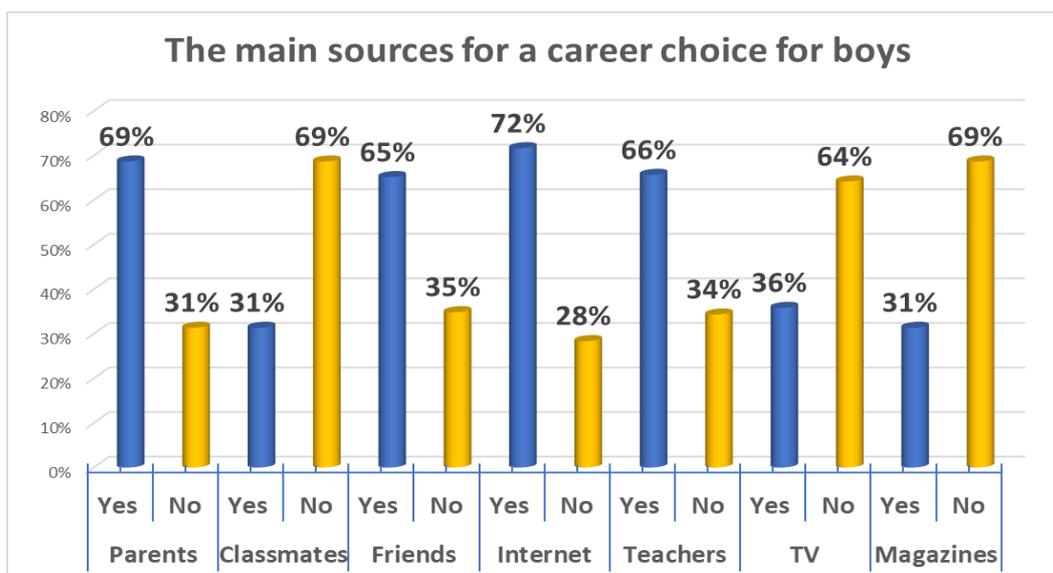


Figure 6 The main sources of information for the career choice for boys

The differences among girls and boys are very slight and is reflected in Figure 6 and 7.

As seen in the table, the career choice of the boys are influences mainly by internet, parents and friends. Similar picture derives from the responses of the girls as seen in Figure 7.

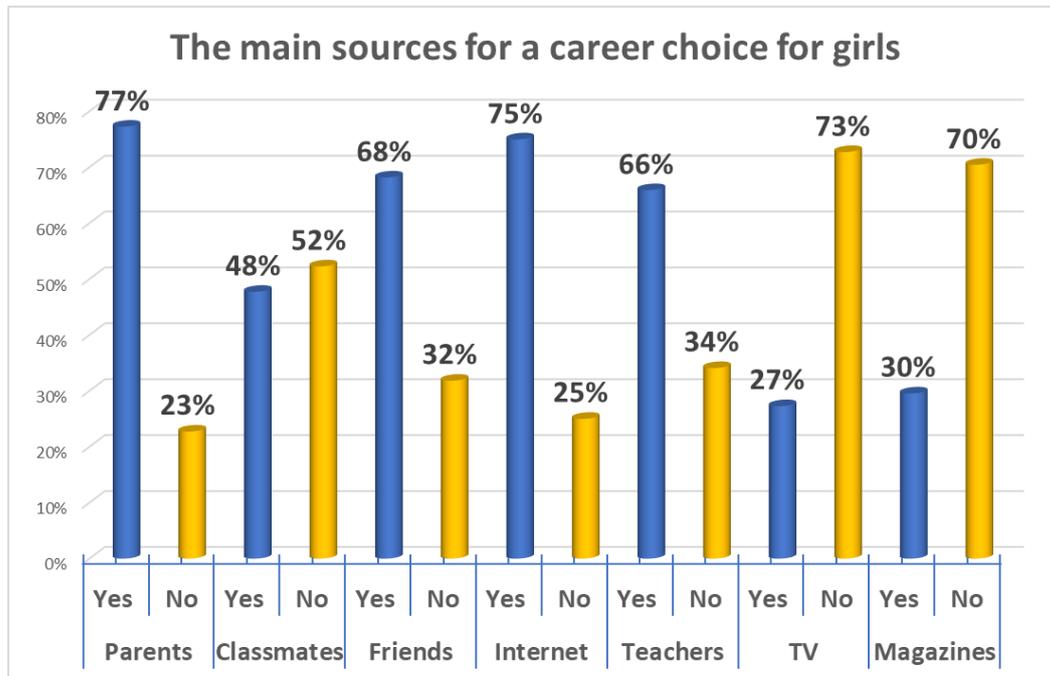


Figure 7 The main sources of information for the career choice for girls

For the girls, the main sources of information are internet, parents and teachers. This allows us to conclude that the career counsellor with the teachers are doing a good job in opening various options of education to their pupils.

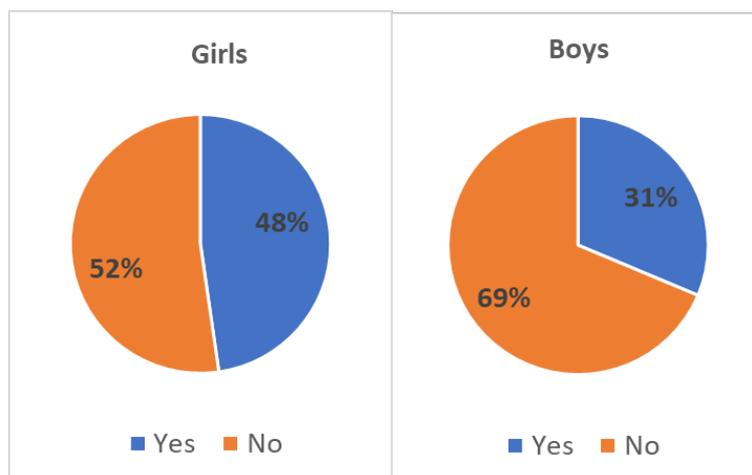


Figure 8 Classmates as a source of information for career choice

The differences between the boys and the girls in the questions focusing on sources of information for the career choice in general are small but we can see some slight differences in detailed information. For example, the differences between the boys and the girls are seen in the question: *Do your classmates tell you about future professional opportunities?* (see Figure 8 below).

In this case this is obvious that the girls more often discuss the future professional opportunities with classmates than the boys. In this way it is also interesting to compare this result with the Figure 4. We can see that the boys on one hand are more often influenced by their classmates than the girls, but on the other hand they probably do not discuss much about their future professional opportunities with them.

Suggestion for the Career Counsellors

Career guidance process needs to be planned in the way that it is adaptive and context bound process where pupils become more attuned to their needs, interests, and values, seeking to learn more about themselves and the job market around (Krieshok et al., 2009).

Career counsellors need to provide various opportunities for their pupils to develop career awareness, career exploration, and life career planning skills. They are required to provide an appropriate support and regular feedback by encouraging pupils to reflect on their own learning and thinking, thus fostering them to become interdependent and innovative problem solvers in the changing job market (Starr, 2000).

The ideas of projects, the weeks of shadowing in the work-based environment encourages youngsters to explore the options of the job market. They develop a confidence in exploring numerous future options.

Early career guidance needs to open children to a variety of options available in the job market in order to develop pupils' awareness of educational and other choices that will be available as they proceed through school education. Career education needs to be a part of school planning process for all graders.

Individual's ability to make decisions is influenced not only by the internal resources and factors of the personality, but also by external resources and circumstances that are classified as non-psychological and therefore difficult to measure. Among them there are economic, political, social, temporal, family, and financial factors (Super & Crites, 1966)

Conclusions

Career planning process need to be perceived as a life-long and a dialectic process that is contextually rich and sensitive. It requires acquiring adaptive career

planning skills in the context of changing job requirements. Career planning involves the stages of generating options, evaluating options, making decisions and planning actions. By developing career awareness pupils will become knowledgeable about themselves and the world of work which would lead to set their mind to adaptive career making process. It is to create their career path as an adventure.

The limitations of this pilot study were a relatively small sample of respondents and a need of further detailed exploration of some significant determinants of a career choice such parents' socioeconomic status and pupils' experiences that requires a more detailed in-depth qualitative study.

The study of year 2019, shows that the parents of Daugavpils students play a key role in the students' professional choice, their opinion is crucial for 8th grade pupils.

For the further research the following questions are set:

1. Is parents' influence too influential in students' career choices, or they tend to be over influential in realizing their own unrealized career opportunities (students' and parents' motives, and reasons should be explored);
2. Pupils themselves do not receive much of support from teachers, guidance counselors and other guidance providers, and make unsustainable and hasty decisions.

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