



DECISION-MAKING AND SELF-EFFICACY IN ADOLESCENTS' CAREER ORIENTATION

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Abstract. *Career choice during adolescence involves not only identifying occupational interests but also making decisions under conditions of uncertainty. This paper examines decision-making and career self-efficacy as psychological factors influencing adolescents' career orientation. Particular attention is paid to confidence in personal abilities, evaluation of career alternatives, goal setting, perceived responsibility for choice and the ability to cope with uncertainty. Adolescents with stronger career self-efficacy may be more willing to explore occupational opportunities, evaluate their own capabilities realistically and take responsibility for future educational and professional decisions. In contrast, low confidence and difficulties in decision-making may contribute to hesitation, dependence on external opinions or avoidance of career planning.*

Keywords: *adolescence, career orientation, decision-making, self-efficacy, career choice, career uncertainty, professional development.*

INTRODUCTION

Career choice is one of the first major decisions through which adolescents begin to construct their future independently. Unlike many everyday decisions, professional choice has long-term educational, social and personal consequences. Adolescents need to compare different occupations, assess their own abilities, consider educational opportunities and anticipate possible future outcomes. At the same time, they often make these decisions while their interests and self-concept are still developing. For this reason, career orientation involves not only knowledge about occupations but also psychological readiness to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty.

MAIN PART

Decision-making is particularly important because contemporary adolescents are exposed to a wide range of educational and occupational alternatives. A large number of options can provide greater freedom, but it may also make the selection process more difficult. Adolescents need to identify meaningful criteria, compare alternatives,



distinguish their own preferences from external expectations and understand the possible consequences of each choice. Career indecision may emerge when the adolescent lacks sufficient information, has conflicting interests, experiences uncertainty about personal abilities or finds it difficult to accept responsibility for a final decision (Gati, Krausz & Osipow, 1996). Therefore, the psychological mechanisms of decision-making become an important component of career development.

One of the factors closely connected with career decision-making is self-efficacy. Bandura defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in his or her ability to organise and perform actions required to achieve particular goals (Bandura, 1997). In the context of career development, self-efficacy refers to confidence in performing tasks associated with occupational exploration and choice. These may include gathering information about professions, identifying personal strengths, comparing alternatives, setting career goals, overcoming difficulties and making a final decision. Taylor and Betz demonstrated the relevance of self-efficacy expectations to career decision-making, providing an important basis for subsequent research on career decision self-efficacy (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

Career self-efficacy does not mean that an adolescent should be certain about every professional decision. Rather, it reflects confidence in the ability to manage the process of choosing. An adolescent may not yet know exactly which profession to select but may still believe that he or she can obtain relevant information, evaluate alternatives, seek appropriate guidance and eventually make a reasoned decision. This distinction is important because uncertainty itself is not necessarily problematic. Difficulties arise when uncertainty is combined with a belief that one is incapable of managing the decision-making process.

The relationship between self-efficacy and career behaviour can also be understood through social cognitive career theory. Lent, Brown and Hackett proposed that self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations and personal goals play important roles in the development of academic and career interests and choices (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). Adolescents who believe that they can succeed in a particular activity may be more likely to explore corresponding educational and professional opportunities. Conversely, low self-efficacy can lead adolescents to exclude certain alternatives even when they have sufficient abilities to pursue them. Thus, career choice may depend partly on how



adolescents perceive their own capabilities rather than exclusively on their objectively demonstrated abilities.

External influences are also significant in this process. Parents, teachers, peers and social expectations can provide adolescents with information and support, but they may also influence the direction of career decisions. When adolescents have low confidence in their own decision-making ability, they may rely excessively on the opinions of others. As a result, a profession may be selected primarily because it is preferred by parents, considered prestigious by peers or socially valued rather than because it corresponds to the adolescent's interests and capabilities. Career guidance should therefore help adolescents listen to significant others while retaining an active role in their own decision-making.

Goal setting provides another important connection between self-efficacy and career orientation. A general wish to enter a prestigious or interesting profession does not automatically create an effective career plan. Adolescents need to transform broad preferences into achievable educational and professional goals. This requires understanding what qualifications are necessary, what steps should be taken and what difficulties may arise. Clear goals can make career planning more manageable because they divide a distant professional intention into specific actions. Successful completion of these actions can, in turn, strengthen confidence in one's ability to manage future career tasks.

Experience of success and failure can significantly influence adolescents' career confidence. Success in academic subjects, extracurricular activities, communication, creative work or practical tasks may provide information about personal strengths and encourage further career exploration. However, a single negative experience should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of professional unsuitability. Adolescents need to learn to analyse the causes of difficulties and distinguish between temporary failure, insufficient preparation and a genuine mismatch between personal characteristics and occupational requirements. This analytical approach can prevent premature rejection of potentially suitable career alternatives.

Career guidance can support decision-making by creating opportunities for adolescents to explore professional alternatives actively rather than simply receive information about them. Discussions with professionals, analysis of occupational situations, career counselling, practical tasks and comparison of educational pathways



can help adolescents develop more realistic representations of different professions. Such experiences allow them to test their expectations and evaluate whether a particular professional direction corresponds to their abilities, interests and goals. Career counselling becomes especially useful when it teaches adolescents how to make a decision rather than attempting to make the decision for them (Savickas, 2013).

Psychological support should also address career uncertainty. Adolescents should understand that some degree of uncertainty is natural when making a complex decision about the future. The goal is not necessarily to eliminate uncertainty immediately but to develop the ability to act constructively despite it. An adolescent who can collect information, compare alternatives, revise plans and seek appropriate support is better prepared for career development than one who expects absolute certainty before taking any action. In this sense, decision-making competence and self-efficacy provide psychological resources for adapting to changing educational and professional conditions.

CONCLUSION

Decision-making and self-efficacy are important psychological factors in adolescents' career orientation. Career choice requires adolescents to evaluate alternatives, understand their own capabilities, formulate goals, manage uncertainty and take increasing responsibility for future decisions. Career self-efficacy can support this process by strengthening confidence in the ability to explore occupations and manage career-related tasks. Career guidance should therefore focus not only on identifying occupational interests but also on developing adolescents' decision-making skills and confidence in their own capabilities. Providing opportunities for career exploration, realistic goal setting, analysis of alternatives and independent decision-making can contribute to a more conscious and sustainable professional orientation.

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