

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CAREER CHOICE PROCESS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: The process of career choice in secondary school students is influenced by a variety of psychological factors that shape their decision-making and future professional paths. These factors include personal interests, self-esteem, cognitive development, social influence, and parental expectations. Adolescence, marked by significant emotional and psychological changes, plays a crucial role in shaping the individual's career preferences and aspirations. This article explores the key psychological determinants that impact career decision-making in secondary school students, focusing on the interplay between internal factors such as personality traits and external factors such as societal expectations. By understanding these psychological influences, educators and counselors can better guide students in making informed and fulfilling career choices.

Keywords: Career choice, Psychological factors, Adolescence, Personal interests, Self-esteem, Cognitive development, Decision-making, Professional aspirations, Parental influence, Social factors, Personality traits, Educational guidance.

Introduction.

The process of career choice is one of the most significant decisions that secondary school students face as they approach adulthood. During this formative period of adolescence, students are exposed to various influences that guide their understanding of the world and their future aspirations. Psychological factors play a central role in shaping a student's career preferences, as they are at a stage where their cognitive abilities, self-concept, and social interactions are rapidly evolving. Personal interests, self-esteem, and cognitive development are some of the internal psychological aspects that contribute to a student's career decision-making process. At the same time, external influences such as societal expectations, parental guidance, and peer pressure can either reinforce or challenge the individual's career choices. As students navigate through this critical phase of identity formation, the decisions they make regarding their future careers can have a lasting impact on their personal and professional lives. Understanding the psychological factors that influence career choice is crucial for educators, counselors, and parents who seek to support students in making informed decisions that align with their values, skills, and interests. This article aims to explore these psychological determinants, emphasizing how they shape the career choices of secondary school students, and offering insights into how they can be better supported in this important aspect of their lives.

Main Section.

Career choice is a complex and multidimensional process, especially during adolescence when students are in a critical phase of personal and cognitive development. Several psychological factors influence how secondary school students make career decisions, and these factors often interact in ways that can significantly impact the final choice. Understanding these factors is essential for educators, parents, and counselors to guide students toward making choices that align with their abilities, interests, and future goals.

1. **Personal Interests and Passion:** One of the most influential psychological factors in career choice is a student's personal interests and passions. Adolescents tend to gravitate toward careers that align with their hobbies, skills, or areas of curiosity. This intrinsic motivation to pursue a profession that reflects personal interests often provides students with a sense of purpose and satisfaction in their future career. Interests, whether in art, science, technology, or social interaction, often drive the direction of career exploration. A student who has a passion for animals might consider a career in veterinary science, while a student who enjoys technology may explore professions in IT or engineering.

2. **Self-Esteem and Self-Concept:** Self-esteem, or how a student perceives their own worth, plays a pivotal role in shaping career choices. Students with higher levels of self-esteem are often more confident in pursuing careers that align with their abilities and aspirations. On the other hand, students with lower self-esteem may shy away from certain career paths, feeling that they are not capable or deserving of success in those fields. A positive self-concept can encourage students to aim higher and explore a wide range of career opportunities. Conversely, a negative self-concept may limit a student's options, causing them to settle for careers that they feel are "safe" or within their reach.

3. **Cognitive Development and Decision-Making:** Adolescence is a period marked by rapid cognitive development, including improved problem-solving abilities, abstract thinking, and decision-making skills. These cognitive advancements enable students to consider a wider range of career options and to evaluate them more critically. However, despite these cognitive changes, adolescents often face difficulties in making fully informed decisions due to a lack of life experience and exposure to different career fields. While cognitive development allows students to consider various possibilities, it does not guarantee that their choices will be based on solid information or realistic expectations. Therefore, guidance from adults and professionals is essential during this period to help students make well-informed decisions.

4. **Parental Influence:** Parents are among the most significant external influences on a student's career choice. Parental expectations and attitudes can either positively or negatively impact a student's decision-making process. In some cultures, parents may have a clear idea of what career path their child should pursue, based on family traditions, social status, or economic stability. In other cases, parents may offer unconditional support for whatever career path their child chooses. Both types of parental influence shape the student's perception of their career options. While some students benefit from parental guidance and encouragement, others may experience pressure or anxiety if they feel they are not meeting their parents' expectations. The role of parental influence is complex, as it can provide both support and stress during the decision-making process.

5. **Social and Peer Influence:** During adolescence, peer influence becomes increasingly significant. Friends, classmates, and social groups often play a role in shaping career interests. Students may choose certain career paths because they align with the values or ambitions of their peers, or because they want to fit in with a particular social group. Additionally, the media and popular culture also contribute to shaping career ideals by portraying certain professions as glamorous or prestigious. For example, many students are drawn to careers in entertainment, sports, or technology because of the visibility and status associated with those fields. Social media platforms, where influencers and public figures frequently share their career journeys, can also have a strong impact on adolescents' career choices.

6. **Societal and Cultural Expectations:** Societal and cultural norms significantly influence career choices, particularly in societies where certain professions are considered more prestigious or desirable than others. In many cultures, there are specific career paths that are seen as markers

of success, such as becoming a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. These societal expectations can create pressure on students to follow a predetermined path, even if their personal interests lie elsewhere. On the other hand, in more progressive societies, there may be greater freedom and encouragement for students to pursue unconventional careers in creative fields, technology, or entrepreneurship. The challenge for students is to balance societal expectations with their own interests and aspirations, ensuring that they are not unduly influenced by external pressures.

7. Educational Guidance and Career Counseling: Educational institutions play a crucial role in supporting students during their career decision-making process. Career counseling programs and workshops offer students the tools and resources to better understand their strengths, weaknesses, and potential career options. These programs are especially important for helping students who may feel overwhelmed or uncertain about their future. Well-designed career guidance programs help students build self-awareness, explore various career paths, and understand the educational requirements for different professions. Additionally, mentoring and internships provide practical experience and insight into various industries, giving students a clearer understanding of what a specific career entails.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the process of career choice among secondary school students is influenced by a variety of psychological, social, and cultural factors that shape their aspirations and decisions. Personal interests, self-esteem, cognitive development, and the impact of parental, peer, and societal expectations all play a significant role in guiding students as they navigate their career paths. Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, and the decisions made during this time can have lasting effects on an individual's future. It is essential for educators, counselors, and parents to understand these psychological influences in order to provide the support and guidance that students need. By fostering a positive environment for career exploration, offering resources, and encouraging self-reflection, we can help students make informed, confident decisions about their professional futures. Ultimately, the goal is to empower students to choose careers that align with their interests, abilities, and values, ensuring both personal fulfillment and professional success.

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