



PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVELOPING INDEPENDENT DECISION-MAKING AMONG ADOLESCENTS UNDER CONDITIONS OF CAREER CHOICE UNCERTAINTY

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Abstract. *This paper examines the psychological characteristics of independent decision-making among adolescents experiencing uncertainty in career choice. Particular attention is given to the cognitive, motivational, emotional and social factors influencing professional self-determination. Career uncertainty is analysed as a psychological condition associated with insufficient self-knowledge, conflicting expectations and difficulties in evaluating professional alternatives. The analysis draws upon the taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties, upon research into career decision-making self-efficacy and upon self-determination theory, and concludes that independent career decision-making develops through the interaction of cognitive competence, autonomous motivation, professional identity, emotional stability and constructive social support.*

Keywords: *adolescence, career choice, career uncertainty, independent decision-making, professional self-determination, cognitive processes, motivation, self-efficacy, professional identity.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of independent decision-making among adolescents has become an increasingly important issue in contemporary psychological research. Rapid changes in the labour market, the emergence of new professions and growing requirements for professional competence create additional challenges for young people who are determining their future careers. Adolescence represents a significant developmental period during which individuals begin to establish professional interests, personal values and long-term life goals (Gati, Krausz & Osipow, 1996:510-526).

However, insufficient knowledge about occupational opportunities, uncertainty regarding individual abilities and contradictory expectations from family members and from society frequently complicate the process of professional self-determination. Under these conditions, independent career decision-making becomes not only an educational necessity but also an important indicator of psychological maturity, of personal responsibility and of readiness for future professional activity (Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996:47-57).

The aim of the present paper is to establish the psychological characteristics that condition independent decision-making under career uncertainty, and to determine how cognitive competence, self-efficacy and autonomous motivation interact in the process of professional self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000:227-268).

MAIN PART

Career choice uncertainty can be understood as a multidimensional psychological phenomenon involving cognitive difficulties, motivational contradictions, emotional tension and social influences. Gati, Krausz and Osipow identified three major categories of career decision-making difficulty: lack of readiness, lack of information and inconsistent information (Gati, Krausz & Osipow, 1996:510-526). This classification demonstrates that career uncertainty cannot be explained exclusively by insufficient knowledge of the available professions. It may also result from difficulties in understanding personal interests, in evaluating individual capabilities and in reconciling professional aspirations with external expectations.

Adolescents experiencing such difficulties may postpone important decisions, may demonstrate excessive dependence upon parental opinions, or may select occupational directions without sufficient consideration of their psychological characteristics. Nevertheless, uncertainty should not always be interpreted as a negative condition, since it may stimulate further exploration, the critical evaluation of alternatives and the development of more realistic professional expectations (Gati, Krausz & Osipow, 1996:521).

Cognitive processes play a central role in the development of independent career decisions. The ability to analyse occupational information, to compare professional alternatives, to anticipate possible consequences and to establish relationships between personal characteristics and occupational requirements contributes to informed decision-making. Jabbor, in his research on the essence of cognitive methods in psychological research, emphasises the methodological importance of cognitive approaches to understanding psychological processes (Jabbor, 2020:28-31).

From this perspective, professional choice may be considered a complex information-processing activity in which adolescents interpret external information according to their individual experiences, interests and future expectations. Cognitive competence enables young people to distinguish between realistic professional opportunities and socially constructed stereotypes concerning occupational prestige, financial success or professional recognition. Consequently, the development of analytical thinking and

of the ability to evaluate information critically represents an important psychological condition for strengthening independent decision-making (Jabbor, 2020:30).

The subjective interpretation of career-related information is another significant aspect of professional self-determination. Different adolescents may attribute different meanings to the same profession depending upon their values, motivations and personal experiences. For some individuals professional success is primarily associated with financial independence, while others emphasise creativity, social contribution, personal satisfaction or opportunities for continuous development. Jabbor, in his study devoted to the psychosemantic analysis of texts, considers an approach to investigating psychological meanings and interpretations (Jabbor, 2019:40-41).

This methodological perspective may also be applied to the analysis of adolescents' perceptions of occupational alternatives. The subjective meanings associated with different professions influence not only career preferences but also the confidence with which individuals justify their decisions. Independent career choice therefore requires the integration of objective occupational information with personally meaningful goals and with individual psychological characteristics (Jabbor, 2019:41).

An important psychological determinant of independent career decision-making is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform the activities necessary in order to achieve specific outcomes. Betz, Klein and Taylor examined career decision-making self-efficacy as a significant construct in understanding professional choice (Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996:47-57). Adolescents who demonstrate greater confidence in their decision-making abilities may be more willing to explore occupational opportunities, to seek relevant information and to evaluate alternative educational pathways.

Conversely, insufficient confidence may contribute to indecision, to the avoidance of responsibility and to dependence upon external recommendations. Psychological confidence should nevertheless be accompanied by realistic self-assessment, since excessive optimism without adequate consideration of occupational requirements may equally result in inappropriate career decisions. The development of self-efficacy should thus be associated with an increasing awareness of personal capabilities, of professional interests and of the practical requirements of future occupations (Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996:53).

Motivational characteristics also influence the development of independent career decisions. According to the self-determination theory developed by Deci and Ryan,

autonomy, competence and relatedness constitute the fundamental psychological needs underlying human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000:227-268). Within the context of career choice, autonomy reflects the individual's ability to make decisions consistent with personal interests and values, while competence involves confidence in the capacity to achieve professional goals; relatedness emphasises the importance of constructive interpersonal relationships and of social support.

These psychological needs interact during adolescence and contribute to the development of responsible professional behaviour. Career decisions based exclusively upon external pressure may conflict with personal aspirations and may reduce the individual's sense of ownership over the chosen professional direction. In contrast, supportive family and educational environments may encourage adolescents to examine alternatives independently while taking into account relevant advice and realistic social expectations (Deci & Ryan, 2000:252).

The theoretical analysis indicates that independent career decision-making develops through the interaction of cognitive competence, autonomous motivation, professional identity, emotional stability and constructive social support. These components should be considered within an integrated psychological framework rather than as isolated characteristics. An adolescent may possess extensive occupational information and still experience uncertainty because of insufficient confidence or of conflicting family expectations; similarly, strong professional motivation may not result in an informed decision when the individual lacks reliable information about occupational requirements (Gati, Krausz & Osipow, 1996:510-526; Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996:47-57).

Psychological support for professional self-determination should therefore focus upon strengthening the individual's capacity to understand personal interests, to evaluate alternatives, to recognise external influences and to assume responsibility for career-related decisions. Further empirical research may examine the relationships between career uncertainty, self-efficacy, professional identity and independent decision-making among adolescents in different educational environments (Deci & Ryan, 2000:227-268).

CONCLUSION

The development of independent decision-making among adolescents under conditions of career choice uncertainty is a complex psychological process determined by cognitive, motivational, emotional and social factors. Career uncertainty may arise from insufficient self-knowledge, from limited occupational information, from contradictory expectations and from difficulties in evaluating professional alternatives (Gati, Krausz & Osipow, 1996:510-526).

Uncertainty may, however, also encourage professional exploration and the development of more realistic career expectations when adolescents possess adequate psychological resources and receive constructive support (Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996:47-57; Deci & Ryan, 2000:227-268).

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