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PEDAGOGICAL OPPORTUNITIES OF ORIENTING PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS TOWARDS CAREER CHOICE

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Abstract. The article provides a theoretical and practical analysis of the pedagogical opportunities of primary education for orienting pupils towards career choice. The author reveals the age-related features of the formation of children’s ideas about the world of occupations and substantiates the ways of organising career guidance work through the content of school subjects, extracurricular activities and cooperation with the family. The results of experimental work carried out with pupils of grades 3–4 at School No. 40 of Pastdarg‘om district, Samarqand region, are presented. The study demonstrates that at the primary stage career guidance performs the task not of choosing an occupation but of broadening pupils’ horizons about the world of work and fostering a positive attitude towards labour.

Key words: primary education, career guidance, vocational interest, propaedeutic stage, labour education, pedagogical conditions, experimental work.

Introduction

For a long time, career guidance was regarded as a task belonging exclusively to the upper grades of secondary school, when a pupil approaches the moment of making a real educational and occupational decision. Contemporary research in developmental and vocational psychology, however, shows convincingly that the foundations of occupational self-awareness are laid considerably earlier — in the years of primary schooling. By the age of ten a child has already formed a relatively stable image of “what people do at work”, has assigned a number of occupations to “male” or “female” categories and has begun to exclude whole areas of activity from the range of personally acceptable ones [1; 2]. Consequently, the question is not whether career guidance should begin in the primary school, but how it should be organised so as to expand rather than narrow the child’s horizons.

The relevance of the problem for the education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan is reinforced by the strategic documents adopted in recent years. The Concept of the Development of Public Education until 2030, approved by Presidential Decree No. PF-5712 of 29 April 2019 [3], sets the task of early identification of pupils’ abilities and interests and of building an individual educational trajectory on that basis. The Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026 [4] defines the formation of a rising generation with modern knowledge, professional skills and a conscious attitude to labour as one of the priority directions of state policy. The renewed State Educational Standards and the curricula of primary classes contain a considerable, yet not fully used, potential for propaedeutic career guidance.

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At the same time, everyday school practice reveals a number of contradictions: between the objective need for early career guidance and the absence of a coherent system of such work in primary classes; between the rich career-related potential of school subjects and the episodic, campaign-like way in which it is used; between the growth of new occupations generated by the digital economy and the narrow, often stereotyped repertoire of occupations known to children. International research emphasises that career guidance is not an auxiliary activity but an instrument of employability and of social mobility, and that its effect is the greater the earlier such work begins [5; 6]. Resolving these contradictions requires a theoretically grounded description of the pedagogical opportunities available to the primary school teacher.

The aim of the study is to identify, substantiate and experimentally verify the pedagogical opportunities of primary education in orienting pupils towards career choice. The objectives are: to analyse the theoretical foundations of early career guidance; to reveal the career-related potential of the content of primary school subjects and of extracurricular activity; to determine the pedagogical conditions ensuring the effectiveness of such work; and to verify the proposed model in experimental conditions.

Theoretical background of the research

The theory of career development treats occupational choice not as a single act but as a lengthy process covering the whole of childhood and adolescence. E. Ginzberg and his colleagues described the period up to approximately eleven years of age as the stage of fantasy choice [7], in which the child identifies himself or herself with attractive occupational roles without weighing up real abilities or the requirements of the labour market. D. Super, in his life-span concept, defined the years from birth to fourteen as the stage of growth [8], within which curiosity, exploration, orientation towards key figures, interests and, finally, an awareness of one's own capacities successively develop. From this standpoint, the primary school years are the time when the very ability to be interested in the world of work is formed. In contemporary career education this period is described as the beginning of career learning, that is, of the gradual accumulation of knowledge about oneself and about the world of work [9].

Of particular importance for the primary stage is the theory of circumscription and compromise proposed by L. S. Gottfredson [1]. According to it, the child gradually eliminates occupational alternatives that do not correspond to his or her growing self-image: at the age of six to eight the leading criterion of exclusion becomes gender role, and at the age of nine to thirteen the criterion of social prestige. This means that if the pupil is not deliberately shown the breadth of the occupational world, a significant part of the alternatives will be rejected before the child has had any opportunity to learn about them.

Empirical evidence supports this conclusion. The large-scale survey "Drawing the Future", which covered more than twenty thousand children aged seven to eleven [2], showed that children's occupational aspirations are shaped mainly by television, the internet and by the people they know personally; only a very small proportion of children named an occupation they had learned about through school; and stereotyped gender-based preferences were clearly expressed already at the age of seven. Analytical work carried out within the OECD framework [11] likewise emphasises that the

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earlier and the more systematically pupils encounter real representatives of different occupations, the more realistic and the broader their career expectations become.

In the post-Soviet pedagogical tradition the most widely used instrument for the propaedeutic stage remains the classification of occupations by the object of labour developed by E. A. Klimov [12]: "human–nature", "human–technology", "human–human", "human–sign systems" and "human–artistic image". Its advantage for primary classes lies in its visual clarity: the five groups can be presented to a nine-year-old child through pictures, riddles and role-play. The methodological works of N. S. Pryajnikov demonstrated the effectiveness of game forms of career guidance [13], while J. Holland's typology of vocational personalities [14], though designed for older age groups, offers a useful framework for interpreting the stable preferences observed in children's play and drawing. Within the same tradition the problem of the pedagogical support of the pupil's self-determination at all stages of schooling has been elaborated in detail [15].

A further theoretical support is provided by the social cognitive theory of career development elaborated by R. Lent, S. Brown and G. Hackett [10], which explains the formation of interests through the interaction of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations: a child develops a lasting interest in those activities in which he or she experiences success and receives encouraging feedback from significant adults. For the primary school this has a direct practical meaning — the teacher shapes the range of future occupational preferences not only by informing pupils about occupations, but also by organising the experience of success in manual, technical, verbal, artistic and social activity.

Summarising the theoretical positions, it may be stated that career guidance in the primary school is propaedeutic in nature. Its result is not a chosen occupation but the formation of a "map" of the world of work, of a respectful attitude to any socially useful labour, and of the initial ability to correlate one's own interests and abilities with the demands of an activity.

Materials and methods

The experimental part of the study was carried out at School No. 40 of Pastdarg'om district, Samarqand region, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Ninety-four pupils of grades 3–4 took part in it: forty-eight pupils formed the experimental group (EG) and forty-six pupils the control group (CG). In the control group career guidance was limited to the measures traditionally envisaged by the curriculum; in the experimental group a system of work integrating career-related content into lessons, extracurricular activity and cooperation with parents was implemented.

The following diagnostic methods were used: structured pedagogical observation during lessons and play activity; the projective technique "I draw my future occupation" with a subsequent interview; a pictorial questionnaire adapted from E. A. Klimov's classification; an essay-conversation on the theme "The occupations of my family"; a questionnaire for parents; and expert assessment by the class teachers. The level of career orientation was determined according to three criteria — cognitive (the volume and accuracy of knowledge about occupations), motivational and value-related (interest in labour activity, respect for the labour of others), and activity-related (the ability to perform simple labour and project tasks, to describe and to model an occupation).

Three levels were distinguished on the basis of these criteria. The high level presupposes knowledge of more than fifteen occupations, an understanding of their social significance, a stable

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interest and the independent performance of labour and project tasks. The medium level corresponds to knowledge of eight to fifteen occupations, mostly those of the immediate environment, and to interest that requires the support of the teacher. The low level means knowledge of fewer than eight occupations, an unstable interest and the need for constant guidance.

Results and discussion

The ascertaining stage revealed a narrow occupational horizon in both groups. On average a third-grade pupil named nine occupations and a fourth-grade pupil eleven, the list being dominated by teacher, doctor, driver, cook, policeman and blogger. Modern occupations connected with digital technologies, ecology, logistics or agricultural engineering were practically absent from the children's answers. The distribution of pupils according to the dominant orientation towards the objects of labour is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of pupils by dominant orientation towards the object of labour (ascertaining stage, n = 94)

No.	Group of occupations by the object of labour	Number of pupils	Share, %
1	Human – nature	18	19.1
2	Human – technology	21	22.3
3	Human – human	29	30.9
4	Human – sign systems	11	11.7
5	Human – artistic image	15	16.0
Total		**94**	**100.0**

The predominance of the "human–human" group is explained by the fact that children primarily perceive the occupations they observe directly — those of the teacher, the doctor, the shop assistant. The comparatively low share of the "human–sign systems" group indicates that the pupils have a weak idea of occupations connected with information, calculation and analysis, that is, precisely of the sphere that is developing most rapidly.

In accordance with the results obtained, a system of career guidance work was designed for the experimental group. Its core consists in the systematic use of the career-related potential of the subjects of the primary curriculum, since a special hour for career guidance is not provided in the timetable. The main lines of this work are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Career guidance potential of the subjects of primary education

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Subject	Career-related content	Forms and methods
Reading literacy and the mother tongue	Texts and proverbs about labour, images of working people, occupational vocabulary	Analysis of texts, essays "The occupation of my parents", dictionary of occupations
Mathematics	Applied tasks based on the work of the builder, the farmer, the seller, the engineer	Composing problems with occupational content, mini-calculations of a family budget
Natural science	Occupations of the agronomist, the veterinarian, the ecologist, the meteorologist	Observations, school plot, virtual excursions, mini-research
Technology and labour	Instruments, materials and operations of craft and technical occupations	Practical work, modelling, workshop "The masters' town"
Fine art and music	Creative occupations: designer, architect, musician, restorer	Drawing competitions, project "The town of the future"
Physical education	Occupations of the coach, the rescuer, the military servant, the physician	Role-play games, sports relay "Rescuers"

In addition to lesson work, the system included extracurricular components: a monthly meeting with representatives of various occupations from among the parents; excursions to the district agricultural enterprise, the medical centre, the post office and the fire station; the collective project "The atlas of the occupations of my village"; the role-play game "The town of masters"; and virtual tours of modern production facilities using video materials. Parents received short methodological recommendations on how to speak with a child about their own work.

The results of the control stage are given in Table 3 and illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 3. Levels of career orientation of pupils before and after the experiment

Group and stage	High level		Medium level		Low level	
	pupils	%	pupils	%	pupils	%
EG, before (n = 48)	7	14.6	19	39.6	22	45.8

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Group and stage	High level		Medium level		Low level	
	pupils	%	pupils	%	pupils	%
EG, after (n = 48)	20	41.7	22	45.8	6	12.5
CG, before (n = 46)	7	15.2	18	39.1	21	45.7
CG, after (n = 46)	9	19.6	20	43.5	17	36.9

As the table shows, in the experimental group the proportion of pupils with a high level of career orientation increased by 27.1 percentage points, while the proportion of pupils with a low level decreased by 33.3 points. In the control group the changes were considerably more modest — an increase of 4.4 points at the high level and a decrease of 8.8 points at the low level, which may be explained by the natural development of the children and by the general influence of the educational process.

Figure 1. Share of pupils with a high level of career orientation, %



Qualitative changes proved no less significant than the quantitative ones. The average number of occupations named by a pupil of the experimental group rose from ten to nineteen; children began to mention occupations connected with information technologies, ecology and modern agriculture. The number of pupils able to explain why a particular occupation is needed by society increased almost twofold. Observation of the role-play games revealed a decrease in rigid gender stereotypes: girls willingly took on the roles of engineer and programmer, and boys those of teacher and nurse.

Generalising the experience obtained, the pedagogical opportunities of primary education in orienting pupils towards career choice may be grouped as follows. The first group comprises the content-related opportunities of the subjects, whose material allows occupational information to be introduced without additional teaching hours. The second group consists of extracurricular and out-of-school activity — excursions, meetings and school events, which provide a direct, emotionally coloured encounter with the world of work. The third group covers the opportunities of play and project technologies, corresponding to the leading forms of the child's activity [16] and allowing the pupil to "inhabit" an occupational role. The fourth group includes the opportunities of cooperation with the family, which is the principal source of occupational information for a junior schoolchild.

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Finally, the fifth group is formed by digital resources — virtual excursions, educational videos and interactive simulators giving access to occupations absent from the environment of a rural school.

The realisation of these opportunities requires a number of pedagogical conditions: the systematic character of the work rather than isolated events timed to festive dates; the correspondence of the content to the age of the pupils, that is, informing instead of demanding an early decision; the deliberate overcoming of gender and prestige-based stereotypes; the integration of career guidance into the daily educational process; the readiness of the teacher, including knowledge of modern occupations and of the regional labour market; and close interaction with parents.

Limitations. The results obtained should be interpreted with regard to several restrictions. The sample was limited to one rural school and to ninety-four pupils, which does not allow a direct generalisation to urban schools or to other regions. The duration of the formative stage covered a single academic year, whereas the stability of the formed interests can only be judged over a longer period. A longitudinal study with a larger and more diverse sample would make it possible to verify how far the observed changes are retained at the lower secondary stage.

Conclusion

The study confirms that primary education possesses a considerable and largely unrealised potential for orienting pupils towards career choice. At this stage career guidance has a propaedeutic character: its purpose is not to lead the child to a decision but to form a broad and undistorted picture of the world of work, a positive attitude towards labour and the initial habit of correlating personal interests with different types of activity. The experimental work carried out at School No. 40 of Pastdarg‘om district showed that the systematic integration of career-related content into lessons, extracurricular activity and cooperation with the family produces a statistically noticeable growth in the level of pupils’ career orientation and, what is especially important, broadens the range of occupations perceived by children as accessible to them.

The practical significance of the results lies in the possibility of using the proposed system in any general secondary school, including rural ones, without changing the curriculum or increasing the teaching load. Further research may be devoted to the development of digital career guidance resources for junior schoolchildren in the Uzbek language and to the elaboration of criteria for the continuity of career guidance work between the primary and the lower secondary stages of education.

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