

# **Research Article**

# Providing an Inclusive Career Guidance for Students with Special Educational Needs in Kazakhstani Schools

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Inclusive education, socialization, individual capabilities, career guidance, students with special needs Abstract: The purpose of this study is to define the main problems and provide organizational-methodological recommendations for ensuring vocational guidance for students with special needs. This research describes the main provisions and results of the realization of project work directed at the development of a modern system of inclusive education in the context of globalization and according to the career guidance of students. The results of the research can help organize career guidance work for secondary school teachers and school administration.

#### Anahtar Sözcükler:

# Kazakistan Okullarında Özel Gereksinimleri Olan Bireylere Kapsayıcı Bir Mesleki Rehberlik Sunma Arayışı

Kapsayıcı eğitim, toplumsallaşma,

bireysel beceriler,

mesleki rehberlik,

özel gereksinimli öğrenci Özet: Bu çalışmanın amacı, özel ihtiyaçları olan öğrencilere yönelik mesleki rehberliğin sağlanmasına yönelik temel sorunları tanımlamak ve örgütsel-yöntemsel öneriler sunmaktır. Bu araştırma, küreselleşme bağlamında ve öğrencilerin kariyer rehberliğine göre modern bir kapsayıcı eğitim sisteminin geliştirilmesine yönelik proje çalışmasının gerçekleştirilmesinin ana hükümlerini ve sonuçlarını açıklamaktadır. Araştırmanın sonuçları ortaokul öğretmenleri ve okul yönetimi için kariyer rehberliği çalışmalarının düzenlenmesine yardımcı olabilir.

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#### 1. Introduction

In Kazakhstan, much attention is paid to the issues of developing the readiness of high school students for professional self-determination. So, in the Address to the people of Kazakhstan, the Head of State Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (2021) emphasized: "The early career guidance of schoolchildren is of particular importance. The younger generation should be conscious about the choice of their future profession". In the State Compulsory Education Standard for all levels of education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the goal of basic secondary education is defined as the "formation of a general culture of an individual, the adaptation of the individual to life in society, creation of the basis for an informed choice and mastery of a profession and specialty taking into account special educational needs and individual capabilities students". The Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2019) approved "Methodological recommendations for diagnosing and determining the vocational guidance of students in secondary education organizations of the Republic of Kazakhstan" which proposed ways to develop a comprehensive career guidance system in order to coordinate the actions of all stakeholders in this area.

Determining one's purpose and personal satisfaction with one's life depends on the quality level of education, constructive behavior in the labor market and a well-chosen profession. In conditions of socio-economic transformations, democratization and humanization, the problem of self-realization and self-actualization of the individual has increased in the society. Agavelyan et al. (2020) pointed out that teacher training is a crucial lever for effectively implementing inclusive policies and practices. Therefore, they suggested the importance of training career guidance teachers for schools. During the transition to an information society, where professional activity occupies a special place, the needs and structure of the labor market the market of specialists, including qualification requirements, have been changed. In this connection, our research goal was to determine who works as career guidance teachers at schools and how effective they are in their jobs.

Akhmetova et al. (2022) indicate the importance of guidance teachers in socializing students with special educational needs by establishing positive relationships. Of course, developing a position of involvement and complicity in children creates a field for cultivating cultural patterns of behavior and interaction in an inclusive space and, in general, affects the educational situation. Nurshat et al. (2021) consider the role of interaction, teacher training, and classroom-teacher practices in creating inclusive classroom environments. According to the results of this study, teachers who strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and love in the classroom concerning students with special needs strictly monitor the preservation of a psychologically comfortable atmosphere in the classroom.

#### 2. Method

The authors used theoretical and empirical methods to implement the objectives and ensure the validity of the data analysis during the study. They include surveys, interviews, pedagogical and scientific-methodological literature analysis, regulatory legal documents and statistical data on the research topic. The authors, examining the compliance of the real situation in high schools with the approved requirements for the qualifications of a career guidance teacher, identified a number of problems that impede the effectiveness of career guidance work. Research data was obtained during the realization of the project "Organizational and methodological foundations for ensuring inclusiveness of vocational

guidance for students in schools" implemented in Kazakhstan during the 2022-2024 academic year.

Decisions approved the research methodology of the scientific-methodological and academic councils of the I. Altynsarin National Academy of Education of Kazakhstan. The research methodology was developed by a focus group, involving psychologists, sociologists, and scientists from the National Academy. Questions for high school students are designed taking into account their age characteristics and compliance with general ethical principles and research standards aimed at ensuring the interests of high school children. The focus group was selected from four secondary schools for inclusive children (two cities, two villages) and one special education organization from each regional center of Almaty city. A triangulation method was used to solve the problems and ensure the validity of the data analysis during the study. It includes a complex of qualitative and quantitative methods, such as:

- Interviews were carried out with career guidance teachers and school administrations
  to define the school's relationship with other social institutions and employers on
  career guidance issues.
- An online survey was administered to parents of high school graduates who were preparing them for choosing future professions, determining their role in the vocational guidance.
- An online survey was administered to teachers of high school graduates whose features of the career guidance system and ways to improve it, as well as opportunities for choosing a future career for school graduates with special educational needs.
- An online survey was administered to 9th-grade students who needed information about their readiness to make an informed choice of profession. The aim is to define their awareness of the labor market, promising professions and personal and professional requirements for them.
- As part of the field research, career guidance events were visited in schools, and the
  plan for career guidance work and the results of diagnosing the professional
  orientation of school graduates were studied.

Special visits to educational organizations were organized to regional centers representing the urban population and rural settlements. The National Educational Database (NEDB) was applied to ensure that all schools have the opportunity to be included in the principle of random selection from existing lists of schools. The developed research methodology aimed to obtain an objective and scientifically based data analysis of the school graduate's readiness to choose a profession consciously that is in demand in modern conditions, meeting their individual capabilities and special needs.

# 3. Findings and Discussion

The research made it possible to identify the level of school graduates' professional orientation as a result of the activities and factors of the school system that impede the effectiveness of career guidance work in high schools. To achieve the effectiveness of vocational guidance for high schoolchildren with special needs, professional guidance is necessary to systematically prepare school graduates for an informed choice of a profession that is in demand in modern conditions and meets their individual capabilities and special needs.

As part of the study, a survey was conducted for 9th-grade students with special educational needs to study their degree of readiness for professional self-determination and level of awareness of the world of professions. The total number of participants in the online survey was 1,451 school graduates, of which 54% were in urban areas and 46% in rural areas. The choice of respondents among 9th-grade graduates. It is because it is at this stage of education that the issue of self-determination becomes the most important, differentiation of interests occurs, and life values are affirmed. They need to make an important decision: to continue their studies in the 10th grade of high school, choose a field of study (humanities, science and mathematics), or study in a technical and vocational education organization to obtain a profession.

#### 3.1. Formation of Professional Self-determination

The study of career guidance work in schools aimed to identify the level of professional orientation of the graduates as a result of the career guidance system activities. Therefore, the first question of the survey was concerned with professional self-determination. According to the data obtained, 48% of the total number of respondents have firmly decided on their choice of profession after high school, while 29% are not entirely sure about this ("more likely yes than no"). 16% of respondents admitted that they absolutely or rather do not know what they will do after school ("more likely yes than no" - 5%, respectively). The share of those who found it difficult to answer was 7% of the total number of respondents. According to the survey, a low level of professional certainty is observed among urban and rural students, which may indicate insufficient career guidance work in educational organizations, regardless of location. This may indicate that the factors that form professional ideas are typical for most students. The respondents were from different schools, so we defined the students' choices according to urban and rural contexts.

Table 1. Professional self-determination of students in the urban-rural context

Have you already decided on your profession after	Schoolchildren from	Schoolchildren from
graduating from school?	cities	villages
confirmed with the chosen profession	51.1	45.3
more likely yes than no	29	29.8
more likely no than yes	10.5	11
absolutely, don't know	4.7	5.4
hesitated to answer	4.8	8.5

The share of respondents who found it difficult to answer about long-term professional plans in rural areas is two times higher than in the city (Table 1). In our opinion, they can be classified as not being confirmed by their professional choice. Such results show that school graduates need psychological and pedagogical support for their professional self-determination, especially in rural districts.

#### 3.2. Awareness About the World of Professions

One of the factors in forming students' subjective idea of what they want to be in adult life is awareness of the profession. In the following question, we focused on where the school children get information about various professions and who (or what?) has the greatest influence on the professional self-determination of students. Students' responses demonstrate that, to a greater extent, knowledge about professions comes from parents

(36%). One-fifth of respondents (20%) made their professional choice based on information from a class teacher and other school teachers, while 18% learned about the profession from relatives and friends. Mass media also plays a role in choosing future professions (5% of respondents). A minimal number of respondents noted that they receive information regarding their future profession from a career guidance teacher or pedagogue-psychologist (5% and 3%, respectively).

Meanwhile, the help of qualified specialists is very important at this stage because by the time they graduate, students "experience psychological difficulties when independently choosing a profession; most of them experience fear in choosing a profession and shift the responsibility of choice to their parents". High school students assess the period associated with professional self-determination as a difficult time in their lives and experience anxiety and uncertainty about their future profession. In this regard, strengthening the role of psychological and pedagogical services in the career guidance system is becoming increasingly important. Assisting both schoolchildren and parents in obtaining reliable and complete information about the changing world of professions is the most essential task of high schools.

### 3.3. Motivation for Professional Choice

The success of professional self-determination depends on the formation of students' motivation. "The motivational sphere of the individual is understood as the entire set of motives that are formed and developed throughout a personal life". In order to determine the leading type of motivation when choosing a profession, the survey included the question "What will you pay attention to when choosing a profession?" containing ten statements (motives), of which respondents had to mark the three most suitable answers for them or write their own versions. Based on the adapted methodology, "motives for choosing a profession," the research group divided the received answers into two groups. First, internal individually significant motives (interest, determination, abilities, etc.), internal socially significant motives (opportunities to benefit society, professional development, career growth, etc.), external positive motives (material benefits, prestige of a profession, etc.), and second, external negative motives (the influence of others, circumstances, situations, recommendations, advice, wishes of parents, etc.). In this connection, the respondents' answers are grouped by types of motivation (Table 2).

Table 2.

Decisive Motives for Choosing a Profession

External motives	%
external motives and interest in the profession	84.7
ability for the profession	49.7
opportunity for career growth	22.1
opportunity to benefit society	16.2
Internal motives	%
the prestige of the profession	44.9
material benefits	42.2
parents' opinions	15.3
health status	5.3
recommendations from teachers	1
recommendations from a teacher-psychologist, career guidance teacher	0.9

Regardless of location and the ranking of school children's ideas, it was determined that their choice of profession is dominated by external motives: interest and ability for a future profession (84.7% and 49.7%, respectively). Such results demonstrate that the student's understanding is concentrated and that they will be successful in activities if they are interesting to them and suit their individual abilities (they rely on their own choice). As is known, psychologists consider motivation of interest in two aspects. Some believe that interest arises on the basis of different forms of needs (Aseev, 2010; Golovey et al., 2019), while others consider it broader, not only as simple needs (Heckhausen, 2000; Pavlyutenkov, 2000; Verbitsky, 2013).

In our study, interest is associated with the attitude/liking of respondents towards any profession based on their personal experience, which is confirmed by data from options: "I am attracted to this work...", "I like working with ...", "I love engage in this activity, because ..." "I like it, because ...".

Hence, the superiority of the share of those who chose the motive "interest" (2 times higher) over those who noted "ability". From the respondents' answers, it follows that their motivation for "ability" is less pronounced due to poorly formed ideas about their personal skills and qualities ("I don't know what profession is suitable for me...", "I don't know what my abilities are...", etc.).

In our opinion, many 9<sup>th</sup> graders do not yet understand the meaning of a profession, so their declared "interest" is most often not supported by real knowledge of their future profession. Only a persistent and deepened interest over time can develop into a need and become a decisive motive when choosing a professional path. Consequently, students need qualified advice from pedagogue-psychologists, including professional inclinations and motivation diagnostics. As a result of systematic activities, through the joint efforts of the teachers, parents and specialists, students will be able to navigate the world of professions, become active members of society, and find their places as competitive specialists in the labor market.

It should be noted that the ratio of the respondents by type of leading motivation when choosing a profession in general education and special schools is almost the same; accordingly, the type of school does not affect this indicator. However, an additional interview with the respondents during school visits showed that students with special educational needs are dominated by external motives for choosing a profession ("My parents decide for me", "Not all colleges accept us", "The choice of profession depends on my health", "I will go where there are conditions for my education", and etc.).

As stated by Zhumalieva (2016), the personal plans and desires of students with special educational needs due to their health status often run counter to the existing conditions in universities and colleges. Therefore, they are forced to choose only those professions that can be studied in educational organizations that are ready to accept them. Of course, they are more in need of psychological and pedagogical support for professional self-determination support for the development of social activity and personality as a whole.

#### 3.4. Opportunities for an Informed Choice of Profession

The question "Does the school provide you with enough opportunities to choose the right future profession?", consisting of ten statements, is aimed at studying the career guidance activities of the school. A less common form of organizing career guidance work at school is meetings with representatives of various professions at the school, as well as involvement and consultation

of parents (28% and 20%). From the responses, we can see some activities organized by school (11%) and pedagogue-psychologists (10%), extra classes on career guidance (3%), extracurricular (3%), consultations for parents (3%) etc. The fact that school does not help in choosing a profession was stated by 11% of respondents. This means that the role of parents in career guidance is still dominating, rather than the students' own choices in choosing a profession.

Based on the data presented in the diagram, we can conclude that career guidance is most often carried out in the classroom. Thus, 74% of 9th-grade students noted that they get acquainted with the world of professions in class. The students' answers correlate with the results of interviews with teachers: they shared their opinion that in the educational process, they pay essential attention to the professional education of students. As teachers reported, the career guidance material they use depends on the specifics of the academic subject itself and its connection with the topic and content of the lesson. Among the frequently discussed issues in the conversation about professions, teachers noted the role of labor and the importance of various professions.

The second most frequent affirmative response from students is the statement that the school introduces universities and colleges, as well as the rules for admission to these organizations (70%). An additional interview with school administrations also shows that the most popular career guidance activities are excursions to higher, technical and vocational education organizations, inviting representatives of universities and colleges to the schools. This allows us to conclude that universities and colleges are, along with schools, critical institutions for career guidance for schoolchildren. Experienced teaching staff from the city's colleges and universities are involved in teaching specialized disciplines. After graduation, the graduates receive certificates of completion of the profile and a general secondary education certificate. The profile areas vary depending on the demand for qualified personnel in the labor market of the city and region.

## 3.5. Teachers' Opinions on Career Guidance Work

As part of the study, 1,305 teachers participated in the survey. The structure of the sample of teachers by work experience is presented as follows: with work experience of up to 5 years – 22%; from 6 – 15 years – 29%; 16-20 years old – 12%; over 20 years (the largest group) – 37%. The effectiveness of career guidance in school depends on the readiness and motivation of teachers to carry out career guidance work. The results confirmed the research hypothesis: to achieve the effectiveness of vocational guidance for students, it is necessary to coordinate the actions of all stakeholders in preparing schoolchildren for an informed choice of profession. In order to study the opinion of the teaching staff regarding the problem under study, additional focus groups were conducted with subject teachers. The results showed that in their lessons, teachers strive to link cognitive information about professions with the topic and content of the lesson, and they most often use conversations, stories, and situational tasks for this purpose. Here are examples of teachers' responses:

When studying the topic "Flowering Plants," I introduce the children to the elements of the work of a pharmacist, phytodesigner, and ecologist through studying the medicinal properties of plants, making a bouquet/arrangement of flowers, excursions into nature to study the living conditions of plants in our area. (Biology Teacher).

Of course, career guidance work is integral part of the lesson, and each teacher, within the framework of the curriculum, touches on the topic of profession and work in his own way. (Mathematics Teacher).

At the same time, focus group participants expressed that career guidance is an additional type of educational activity, and it should be carried out in the form of extra classes by a career guidance specialist. It should be mentioned here that in schools in Kazakhstan, the position of such a specialist has been introduced since the 2022-2023 academic year. From interviews with school administration, it follows that the functions of a career guidance teacher are performed part-time by subject teachers (34%), deputy directors (32%), pedagogue-psychologists (12%), and social educators (4%). Some respondents (8%) noted that the school administration carries out this position. In most schools, the newly introduced staff position of a career guidance teacher is considered a school specialist (educational psychologist, social pedagogue). According to the school administration, starting the next academic year, assigning a specific person to organize and conduct career counseling events will be possible. At the same time, teaching staff are talking about the advisability of introducing the position of a career guidance teacher: "This relieved the workload of teachers and deputy school directors in educational work," "the personal responsibility of performers was increased", "the formality of events was eliminated".

From the open answers of the respondents, as well as from the additional interview, it also follows that the most common method of career guidance work in the educational process is the use of tasks related to everyday life practical activities of a person, with a career guidance orientation. In addition, as teachers noted, the top three most popular career guidance activities for students include career guidance role-playing games and exercises and conversations about professions.

Career guidance work in the classroom is undoubtedly necessary: "The more knowledge about professions a student receives, the fewer mistakes he will make in choosing a future profession. At the same time, according to teachers, their time and special knowledge are not enough to carry out effective work on career guidance for students in the educational process.

An analysis of the content of career guidance work revealed the absence of school events that unite the actions of all stakeholders in preparing schoolchildren for an informed choice of a profession that is in demand in modern conditions and meets the individual capabilities and special needs of students. There is a weak partnership between schools and employers, employment services and other social institutions, and there is weak involvement of parents in organizing and conducting career guidance activities for students. Thus, the analysis of the research results allows us to formulate the following conclusions concerning the problems of career guidance work at schools:

1. even though the position of career guidance teacher in Kazakhstani schools was introduced following the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated March 31, 2022, No. 121 "On amendments to the order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated July 13, 2009, No. 338 "On approval of standard qualification characteristics of positions of teaching staff and persons equivalent to them", in 9% of surveyed schools this vacancy remains in need;

- 2. career guidance work in many schools is distributed among different teaching staff, which leads to a dissolution of responsibility and, as a consequence, formality and ineffectiveness of career counseling activities;
- 3. appropriate advanced training courses are required for career guidance teachers;
- 4. there are difficulties associated with a lack of time to carry out career guidance work in schools;
- 5. parents are not sufficiently involved in career guidance activities; parents of students with special educational needs are not supported with professional self-determination of their children;
- 6. schools lack information about the modern labor market and in-demand professions;
- 7. career guidance work in schools is carried out without taking into consideration the special needs and individual capabilities of students, which indicates non-compliance with the principle of inclusiveness;
- 8. systematic work is required to strengthen the interaction of schools, families, technical and vocational organizations, higher education, employment centers, and employers on career guidance for school graduates.

The following recommendations can be offered.

- Development of a system of close cooperation between the high schools and higher institutions of additional and vocational training;
- Organization of the relationship between school, family, vocational educational institutions, career guidance centers, employment services, and public youth organizations;
- Involvement of parents of students for career guidance work;
- Election of the school's parent committee from representatives of the most active parents of students who are ready to provide pedagogical support for the self-determination of schoolchildren in cooperation with teachers;
- Replenishment of the library collection of literature on career guidance and professional training;
- Develop recommendations for class teachers on planning career guidance work with students;
- Organization of extra classes and seminars on career guidance work with students for subject teachers and class teachers.

#### 4. Conclusion

Analysis of the research results made it possible to study the state of the system of career guidance work in modern schools, find out the opinions of students and teachers about the readiness of students to make an informed choice of profession and identify factors that impede the effectiveness of career guidance work in school. The analysis confirmed the hypothesis that for the success of professional self-determination of students in an inclusive environment, it is necessary to develop their own opinions about the profession considering their capabilities and awareness. Inclusive education, uniting all participants in the educational process, should be coordinated based on a respectful attitude towards each other, understanding and accepting differences, and readiness for joint learning. Career guidance work at school solves the vital problem of socialization and social integration for all students, taking into account their abilities and skills. Our study is critical because it suggests that improving curricula based on career guidance takes into account the principles of

inclusiveness. It will contribute to the comfortable inclusion of students with special needs in the educational process and increase awareness of professions.

Based on the research materials, including theoretical and empirical data analysis, we can come to know that the position of career guidance teacher was not introduced in 9% of schools. The weak relationship between schools, families, technical and vocational companies, higher educational institutions, employment centers, and employers on career guidance for school graduates should be coordinated. Career guidance work in schools should be carried out without considering students' special needs and individual capabilities, which is the principle of inclusiveness. Parents should be involved in career guidance activities; parents of students with special educational needs should be supported in matters of professional self-determination of their children. The recommendations given in the research scope should be considered in the professional orientation of students in secondary educational schools of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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#### Note on Ethical Issues

The authors confirm that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: 10/04/2024).

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