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Educational aspirations of junior high schools` students

Aspiracje edukacyjne uczniów gimnazjów

Key words: educational aspirations, values, junior high schools` students.

Słowa kluczowe: aspiracje edukacyjne, wartości, młodzież gimnazjalna.

Streszczenie. Autorki omawiają problemy aspiracji edukacyjnych młodzieży gimnazjalnej. Człowiek rozwija się przez całe życie. Wraz z rozwojem rosną jego aspiracje życiowe. Szczególnie ważnym okresem życia jest młodość, bowiem jednostka szuka wtedy swojego miejsca w społeczeństwie, w tym czasie staje też przed ważnym wyborem kierunku kształcenia, zawodu. Wartości i aspiracje są bardzo często powiązane z planami i celami, które człowiek zamierza osiągnąć. Głównym celem opracowania jest poznanie aspiracji edukacyjnych uczniów szkół gimnazjalnych. Podczas badań ankietowych pytano uczniów między innymi o preferowane przez nich wartości, aspiracje jak również uwarunkowania wyboru szkoły.

Values and aspirations in the light of literature. While talking about students` aspirations, the notion of value should be explained. These two ideas are inseparable.

A detailed analysis of literature in the field of ethics, psychology and sociology shows a variety of attempts to define **value**. Authors accordingly claim that it is impossible to provide one, universal and conventional definition of value because of its complexity. The criteria of its characteristics are very diverse, because, as Kowolik and Pośpiech claim, value is an aim in itself, these are values, which decide in our lives, they motivate us to actions and to make decisions (2009, p. 25).

The processes of making choices, classifying, estimating are an indispensable element of every person`s life, and it should be remembered, as Kozaczuk states, that the process of estimating helps the human being in participating in the world of values through directing behaviour in social situations (2005, p. 9).

The notion of value in social studies is ambiguous, but it usually has a positive connotation. For sociologists for example, value means moral and legal norms, habits, beliefs; for psychologists value is the group of positive and negative desires and motivations; for economists these are material goods. J. Szczepański has presented the widest and the most figurative definition of value, which states that it is any material or ideal object, idea or institution, a real or imaginary object, towards which individuals or groups express respect and attribute to it a great role in life. The desire

to reach it is perceived by people as a must (1963, p. 53). On the other hand, T. Wilk perceives values as elements of awareness, but they are not only abstract ideas but they also possess a grave emotional load; values do not have to be static, they can change together with passing time (2003, p. 39). Value can mean the opinion of an individual or society based on norms and rules, what a human being approves of and appreciates. These can be: family, prosperous life, wisdom, honesty, health, independence, education, good job, safety, friendship. For other pleasures, these can be: wealth, cleverness, impudence, courage. One can draw a conclusion concerning people's values on the basis of their behaviour and lifestyle. Both values and aspirations motivate human actions and they are very often connected with plans and aims which people are going to achieve.

Aspirations, on the other hand, is the factor that strongly determines human behaviour. They have a great influence on human plans and desires. Thanks to the aspirations young people take up the activities connected with fulfilling life plans. Intentions related to the future are particularly important in the period of adolescence. It is a period during which a young person shapes his or her dreams about the future. Aspirations strongly influence taking up innovative activities which aim at reshaping and improving oneself.

The idea of aspiration is variously defined by particular scientists. According to W. Okoń, aspirations mean pursuing intended goals, fulfilling life ideals (2004, p. 34). Some authors, like Z. Skorny or A. Janowski identify aspirations with time-conditioned wishes. According to A. Janowski, aspirations are quite standing and strong wishes of an individual, referring to the features of future life conditions and to the objects which an individual will want to gain (1977, p. 32). Z Skorny, on the other hand, claims that aspirations are wishes, desires and plans connected with the results of activities and with the future states relating to fulfilling a particular task or to achieving an aim (1993, p. 30). T. Wilk associates aspirations with needs of an individual. Educational needs and aspirations belong to the group of „higher” needs, and, as the academic states, young people's attitude towards education, their aspirations and expectations connected with gaining a higher education degree change together with social and economic changes (2002, pp. 17–18). W. Sikorski is of a similar opinion, and he defines aspirations as a factor that strongly influences human behaviour. Aspirations, created in accordance with the accepted hierarchy of values, codecide in forming life plans, closer and further intentions, desires, as well as they influence human activity connected with fulfilling these plans and making dreams come true (1997, p. 35). So, as Szymański states, educational aspirations mean also defining the level of opening wider life perspectives (1989). They play a crucial role in mental development of young people.

Aspirations are perceived as one of the most important elements of human personality; they are shaped and changed together with the development of human personality.

In a psychological sense, aspirations are understood as a desire of gaining something significant, pursuit for some important aim, ambitions, intentions. They

more relate to the nature of human desires rather than to the objects of these desires; here a man compared to the wider social group becomes a level of reference. On the other hand, from a sociological perspective, the objects of human desires become the point of interest; these are: values, issues, aims and pursuits. Here, aspirations of a group become a level of reference. In a pedagogical sense, then, general, encyclopaedic definitions are used; they can be of sociological character, they can also be linked and they can refer to the connections between the level of aspirations and the abilities of an individual (Lewowicki 1987, pp. 16–20). To sum up, it should be stated that values and aspirations are closely connected with each other; aspirations cannot exist without values, values can be the aim of aspirations.

It is very crucial for this study to get familiar with aspirations of young people (especially educational ones), and then, to shape them, because, as Kwiatkowski claims, the aware choice of a school type and of educational direction resulting from one's interests and abilities becomes a base for educational and professional success (2007, p. 171).

Educational aspirations: according to Skorny, they refer to the level of education which a particular individual wants or is going to achieve in future (1980, p. 35). They also, as Szymański states, define the level of opening wider life perspectives (1989). They play a crucial role in a mental development of young people.

Aspirations can also be understood as mental characteristics that can be noticed in a desire to achieve education and professional qualifications which stay in accordance with interests and school successes. If a young person succeeds in Maths competitions, it is highly probable that he or she will choose a scientific form at school; if a person has some successes in Polish language or history, he or she will probably choose humanistic or general type of a form at school.

Educational aspirations can be closely connected with **professional aspirations** of young people. As Porożyński states, young people more often perceive education as a chance, happiness and life success. They notice that there are connections between education and income and social position (2004, p. 48). Kozík and Lukáčová add that such aspirations can be defined as aspirations of achieving a success in action, or aspirations of effective action (2007, pp. 76–81).

Constantly appearing new market rules to which young people have to adjust, contribute to a crucial role of work and education. Young people, observing job market incline to further education. Learning, they achieve education to succeed in future. Planning their future they aim at choosing their further education and job which are closely related to their interests. Aspirations of this type can be called **educational-professional aspirations**.

Opinions about **educational-professional aspirations of the students in junior high school**.

Research has been conducted among the third-grade students in junior high school. It was anonymous. In order to collect data the students filled in a questionnaire referring to educational aspirations. 239 students have participated in the research.

The main aim of the research was to acquire knowledge about educational aspirations of the students in junior high school. During the research the students were asked, among others, about the values they prefer, aspirations, as well as about the factors that influence the choice of a school type.

The issue of values preferred by young people is closely related with widely-understood education, which gradually heads for educating society for knowledge, skills and action. Young people, while seeking values, can get lost in this process. Stimulation is sometimes needed in looking for values. K. Popielski, while conducting research concerning the range of preference of values, divided them into three groups: neo-ethical values (wisdom, love, will, dignity, freedom, hope, responsibility), psychological values (health, life position, family, education, achievements, life aims, pleasure), and physical values (car, money, living, work, sexual life, home, possessions) (2008, pp. 268–308). The above-mentioned values were also chosen by the students in the questionnaire. One of the most important questions asked was to point out the most crucial thing in students' lives. Family was indicated as the top priority by 20% of the students who took part in the survey. Education is the next important value (18%), and then work (15%). Health appeared to be a third-rate thing. Love, money and house are the least crucial things. If one takes into account the age of the students participating in the survey, it is not surprising that education and work are among the most essential things in life. The students themselves should decide what kind of education to choose: 1. Education that offers them a particular job or 2. Education that gives them a basis for further learning. It is worth mentioning what other educators proved in their research. In years 1972–1973 A. Janowski conducted research concerning aspirations of young people at secondary schools. The research showed that general aspirations of young people were connected with three major factors: work, financial independence, house. The research confirmed that the students had a high level of educational aspirations and strong will to study at university (1977, pp. 138–140). In years 1978–1984 T. Lewowicki conducted his research. It was aimed at the students from primary, secondary and vocational schools. 93% of the students claimed that family life is the most valuable thing. Job was in the second place (82%), education was the next one (65%) (2005, pp. 224–225). The research conducted by A. Przeclawska among the young people in Warsaw in 1991 showed that family occupies a central place in their lives. The life aims they declared concentrated on family, love and friendship. The research also showed that young people were not interested only in consumer values; 25.5% of the respondents underlined the will to gain a high financial position (Przeclawska 1994). Later research by the academic (1993–1994) proved that the importance of education as the way to achieve a life goal increased within several years. The research from 1999 shows that young people became less interested in participation in cultural and especially in social life. But, the aspirations connected with personal life emerged. They lost their high importance in comparison with the level of educational and professional aspirations from before 4 years. However, family aspirations became significantly important (Sikorski 1999, pp. 25–26).

Taking into consideration the research results connected with the values young people in junior high schools desire, it can be concluded that they are similar. However, their sequence changes in terms of importance. Family is always mentioned in the first place, then education.

What are the aspirations of the young people? The following chart presents detailed research. While analysing the results of the research presented in the chart it is noticeable that the majority of the respondents – 110 people (46%) want to start a secondary school. They all may go to University. It can be said that this group has high educational aspirations. Among the people who want to study in vocational schools (21%) there are people who are planning to gain the title of an engineer.

Chart 1. Educational aspirations of young people

No.	Type of education	Students	
		n	%
1	Starting a secondary school	110	46.0
2	Starting a vocational school (technical college)	51	21.3
3	Starting a vocational school (trade school)	43	18.0
4	Training for professional job (e.g. courses)	15	6.3
5	Professional work	10	4.2
6	No opinion	10	4.2
7	Together	239	100

Among the respondents, a great number wants to start a trade school (18%), in order to gain professional qualifications and go to work (comp. MacBrayne 1987, pp. 135–139; Rożnowski 2009; Wojtasik 2005, pp. 177–183). The group of people who want to be trained for professional job, as well as those who want to work just after graduating from junior high school can be of some concern. Those people have no educational aspirations; for them independence and making money are the most crucial. Young people closely connect their educational aspirations with their professional aspirations, which means choosing job. This also requires gaining appropriate education. The research conducted by D. Jęgorow and I. Niećko present a similar percentage of the students who want to continue their education after graduating from junior high school. A significant majority of the respondents made such a decision. Among them there are 12.6% who want to work simultaneously (2009, p. 20). The research conducted within the project Zachodniopomorskie Obserwatorium Rynku Pracy (West Pomeranian Observatory of Job Market) were aimed at the students from junior high and secondary schools. The results are very interesting. In the first place, young people chose a secondary, grammar school, especially girls (43%). Boys, however, more often chose technical college (38%). The least popular type of school was trade school (10.4% of boys and 8.7% of girls) (Jaroszevska et al. 2010, p. 34). According to the report prepared by Centrum

Doradztwa Zawodowego dla Młodzieży (the Centre of Professional Advice for Young People) in Poznań (2010, p. 12), secondary grammar schools are the most popular. More than 50% of young people choose this type of school. In the second place students choose technical college, then secondary school of a particular profile, finally trade school. The research conducted in 2007 delivered similar results. 75% of the students were then willing to choose secondary grammar school and 18% – technical college.

Taking into consideration the research results presented in the paper it can be said that the tendency is still popular. More and more students choose trade schools.

Parents have very often the influence on the decisions concerning further learning and choosing a school type. However, there are many other factors influencing the choice.

Chart 2 presents the factors that matter while choosing a school type by the respondents (they could choose several possibilities).

Chart 2. Students' opinion about the factors influencing a school choice

No.	Factors influencing a school choice	Students	
		n	%
1	Location (close, far from home)	48	20.1
2	Interests and educational aspirations	164	68.6
3	Teachers' and educators' influence	23	9.6
4	Friends' choices	44	18.4
5	Prestige of a school	112	46.9
6	Partents' financial status	58	24.3
7	No opinion	14	5.9

In the survey the students could choose several possibilities, because there are many factors that influence a school choice. In the majority of cases, young people chose two possibilities. Aspirations are defined as wishes, desires, plans connected with the results of actions. They cause taking up different forms of activities. They are connected with fulfilling a particular aim. Interests and educational aspirations as motifs of choosing a school type, were the most frequently chosen by the respondents (70%). The prestige of a school is in the second place (47%). A school is perceived as prestigious if after its graduation a student has educational and professional perspectives and possibilities of social promotion. Strict recruiting criteria and the level of final exams very often decide about the prestige. Prestigious schools have their strong points. A student of such a school is respected by a local community.

Another factor that was chosen by the students are parents' financial status. This was chosen by almost 25% of the respondents. Those students who come from the families with difficult financial situation chose trade schools which let them gain a profession quickly and let them be independent. It was also important for the student

how far the school is from the place of living. 20% of the respondents chose this answer. Teachers and educators had definitely less influence on the school choice (9%). Similar research results were presented in the report by Centrum Doradztwa Zawodowego dla Młodzieży (the Centre of Professional Advice for Young People) in Poznań (2010, p. 41). While choosing their educational career, young people take into consideration their own interests (34%), distance between the place of living and the school (19%), friends' and parents' opinion (12%).

To sum up, the students' interests are the most crucial factor influencing choosing a job.

The next important factors are the prestige of a school and parents' financial status.

Educational aspirations are created under numerous factors, which influence making a final decision by the students. The majority of the respondents take into consideration their own interests, which is a very good symptom.

Conclusion. Contemporary changes in social life make the graduates (who want to face the tasks in their future lives) gain better and more perfect qualifications than their predecessors, graduating from schools several years earlier (Bogaj et al. 1998, p. 13). It means lifelong learning, constant professional improvement, self-education. Future of education is for sure, as S.M. Kwiatkowski claims, integration of students' education with professional training of the adults. That is why it can be connected with a lifelong learning programme. To fulfil this idea, it should be remembered that lifelong learning is not only the task for the educational system, but also for the whole society – for all its institutions (Kwiatkowski 2008).

Times change, life still brings new experiences, education changes, Poland became the member of European Union, so new determinants of our aspirations appear. The most important though is to prepare young people to make decisions responsibly. Choosing a school and a job, gaining education, condition their future lives. The significance of school matters here – the influence of teachers, educators, peers and the knowledge gained is reflected in making further decisions. Creating the attitude open to further learning will favour lifelong learning, which is very essential due to the constant changes.

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