
**PROFESSIONAL REALIZATION OF GRADUATES FROM THE FACULTY OF
PEDAGOGY AT SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"**

Sofia Georgieva Georgieva

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Pedagogy, Bulgaria, s.georgieva@fp.uni-sofia.bg

Iliana Petkova

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Pedagogy, Bulgaria, i.petkova@fp.uni-sofia.bg

Abstract: In recent years, the question of the relationship between completed education and the subsequent professional realization of young people has become increasingly relevant. This issue is particularly pressing for university graduates. It is closely linked to university admissions and funding, the development of different professional fields, and the overall vision for the economic development of the country. Sofia University is the oldest and largest higher education institution in Bulgaria, setting trends in the development of higher education. This article presents the results of a survey conducted among graduates of the Faculty of Pedagogy at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the period 2019–2024. The results focus on graduates' satisfaction with their academic preparation and satisfaction with employment in their field of study.

Keywords: satisfaction, higher education, professional realization

1. INTRODUCTION

Career planning should ideally begin in school through orientation toward a specific professional field and by exploring the young person's interests. At this stage, they should seek answers to the question of whether further education is necessary for the profession they wish to pursue. If the answer is yes, the next step is to find answers to additional questions—where and what can I study, what requirements must I meet to be accepted, how should I prioritize my choices, where should I apply, what will I be studying, and more. Once admitted to a particular specialty, the questions continue—will I be able to pass my exams, is this truly what I want to study and work in, and many others. Thus, gradually and sometimes unexpectedly quickly, the young person reaches their final exams, and after successfully passing them, they stand at the threshold of their professional life

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Professional realization is associated with the successful application of an individual's knowledge, skills, and competencies in their chosen professional field. It reflects not only career achievements but also the level of satisfaction, development, and social contribution of the individual.

Professional realization can be perceived subjectively—while for some, it means climbing the career ladder, for others, it is about maintaining a balance between work and personal life. It is a dynamic process that evolves over time, influenced by experience and personal goals.

According to Yana Rasheva-Merdzhanova, a career is a "relational concept of comparability" that prepares individuals to align themselves with the world of professions and throughout their lives. Consequently, a specific job is connected to career opportunities and the individual's perception of their future professional development. However, does graduating in a particular field always correlate with the desire to work in that field? Does a young person see themselves as a professional in that sector and associate their vision of professional realization with what the profession and specific job offer? Do they feel prepared to meet professional challenges?

As Anne-Kathrin Kleine, Antje Schmitt, and Barbara Wisse emphasize, "The college years are a significant time in young adults' lives during which they set career-related goals and explore potential career paths. However, choosing a career path and establishing a career-related identity can be a challenging endeavor. For example, the number of career-related options makes it challenging to commit to one."

By researching "social-cognitive resources that mitigate master students' experience of dysfunctional career-related worry before graduation," Anne-Kathrin Kleine, Antje Schmitt, and Anita C. Keller conclude:

1. "It seems like students who have obtained more clarity regarding their career goals were more likely to take follow-up questionnaires, thus possibly limiting the generalizability of our findings due to self-selection bias."

2. "Having clear career goals signals the achievement of a critical developmental task during the final period at university."

3. "Finally, as pointed out by Lent and Brown (2020), it is doubtful whether clear career goals provide longer-term benefits if choices are based on heuristic thinking rather than active career exploration (Lent & Brown, 2020)."

Apart from career planning and career-related self-efficacy, the transition from higher education to the labor market is also of great importance. As Ayla De Schepper, Noel Clycq, and Eva Kyndt point out, it "is considered an

important and uncertain life stage wherein young adults exchange an academic environment for an often-chaotic entry into the labor market.” The authors further highlight that “instead of hiring employees on a long-term basis with continuing contracts, there is an increasing reliance on part-time, freelance, and interim employment (Aronson et al., 2015).” They prove that “graduates from lower SES (socioeconomic status) backgrounds are less likely to achieve a successful transition compared to their peers from higher SES backgrounds.” In conclusion, they note that “to understand the positioning process of graduates on the labor market and their career development, not only graduates’ characteristics must be taken into account, but also the context in which graduates find themselves. More specifically, the labor market and even each sector within the labor market has its own valued symbolic capital and implicit rules that ought to be followed to make a more successful school-to-work transition.” In Bulgaria, studies on the labor market and work values have been conducted since the 1990s. R. Bozhinova, S. Georgieva, and S. Zhiliova examined 208 final-year students from humanities and technical fields in 1992 and 1996. The results showed that “in both periods, the choice of alternatives and strategies for future employment was influenced differently by work values.” In 1992, 70% of the surveyed students aimed to work in their specialty, 18% sought employment in a lucrative industry, and 12% were willing to take any job. By 1996, 51% aimed to work in their specialty, 27% sought a lucrative industry, and 22% were open to any job (Bozhinova, Georgieva, & Zhiliova, 1995).

In 2013, D. Yordanova identified the specifics and challenges of transitioning from higher education to professional realization. She formulated four key conclusions emphasizing the need for:

- “Achieving greater alignment between higher education and employer needs.”
- “Higher education institutions adopting a flexible approach to professional orientation.”
- “A shift in the higher education model to prepare adaptable professionals who can continuously develop according to labor market needs.”
- “Clarifying the roles of stakeholders in the transition from higher education to the labor market.” (Yordanova, 2013, pp. 185-186).

In more recent years, specific studies on the connection between youth values and the labor market have been lacking. As Y. Nikolova states, “The dynamic development of priorities in modern society, the shift in the hierarchical structure of youth values towards professional growth/material well-being, and the transformation of marriage into ‘a simple agreement between adults’ are frequently observed phenomena” (Nikolova, 2023, p. 10). However, some studies analyze factors affecting youth employment and integration. In 2014, the Institute for Market Economics (IME) published an analysis of youth unemployment dynamics from 2004-2013. The report emphasized the need to keep young people in the education system and enhance the qualifications of individuals with basic or lower education. IME also highlighted the necessity for a stronger partnership between the private sector and educational institutions to improve the employment prospects of young graduates.

In 2019, V. Apostolov conducted a study focusing on “the impact of public policies and measures aimed at stimulating employment among the younger generation, emphasizing the relationship between the education system and the labor market.” That same year, the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science published findings from a survey on skills necessary for successful labor market integration. The conclusions emphasized that:

- “Cognitive and socio-emotional skills play a crucial role in the labor market, complementing formal education.”
- “Cognitive skills (language, mathematical, and digital) are fundamental, and their absence or deficiency affects job performance, even in low-skilled jobs.”
- “Employers seek specific personal qualities and socio-emotional skills in job candidates and employees” (MoE, 2019, p. 36).

Career Orientation and Professional Identity attempting to clarify the relationship between young people's professional identity in Bulgaria through their career interests and personal traits, Eva Papazova touches upon the issue of professional realization. As she notes, “Employment strategies are ‘actions to cope with work-related challenges’ (Beşpınar, 2010, p. 523).” She argues that “choosing an academic specialty, finding a job, and future professional realization play a central role in the lives of many young people in Bulgaria. ... Only by better understanding issues related to career choice and employment strategies among young people in Bulgaria can policies be developed to counteract the costly effects of youth unemployment” (Papazova, p. 99). Therefore, professional orientation should start from an early age, providing information about various professions, their specifics, and career opportunities. In 2022, Papazova adapted the Oregon scale for professional interests. She highlighted three fundamentally different approaches to studying professional interests:

- As trait complexes (Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997)
- As trait constellations (Lubinski, 2000)
- As an organizational framework or model for integrating and evaluating information (Atlas Model of Individual Differences; Armstrong et al., 2008).

The third approach is based on John Holland's model of professional interests (Holland, 1997), known as RIASEC—Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C). In recent years, career counseling has gradually gained prominence in Bulgaria.

3. RESULTS

Convinced of the necessity to monitor the professional development of students, the Career Center of the Faculty of Education at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" has been conducting research every five years. Established to assist students in their career guidance, planning, and development, its main activities include providing information and consultations regarding labor market trends and professional opportunities to enhance students' competitiveness. In 2024, the Career Center team conducted a survey among graduates from 2019 to 2024 in the faculty's three specialties: "Pedagogy," "Social Activities," and "Non-formal Education." The survey focused on their professional realization, the alignment of their current profession with their completed specialty, and the sectors in which they have found employment. The research method employed was a questionnaire survey, sent to all graduates of the mentioned specialties. Fully completed responses were received from only 40 graduates, distributed across the years as follows:

- 2024 – 10 respondents
- 2023 – 6 respondents
- 2022 – 4 respondents
- 2021 – 8 respondents
- 2020 – 6 respondents
- 2019 – 6 respondents

The distribution by specialty is as follows:

- 40% from "Pedagogy"
- 32.5% from "Social Activities"
- 27.5% from "Non-formal Education"

Regarding employment status, 39 respondents (97.5%) are employed full-time, while only one respondent (2.5%) is currently not working.

In terms of the relevance of their current profession to their specialty, the results indicate:

- Approximately 60% work in their field of study.
- Around 30% are in partially related professions.
- About 10% are in entirely different fields.

Analyzing the relationship between completed specialty and professional realization, the highest percentage is among graduates of "Pedagogy," with 19 (47.5%) working in the education sector (teachers, educators, etc.). Graduates of "Social Activities" primarily work in social work, with some employed in administration and municipal structures, totaling 5 (12.5%). Graduates of "Non-formal Education" are engaged in various sectors, including education, human resources, administration, and the private sector, amounting to 16 (40%). Yearly trends show that graduates from 2024 are mainly employed in professions closely related to their specialties. In contrast, graduates from earlier years (2019-2021) exhibit more diversity in their career paths, with some transitioning to unrelated fields.

As highlighted by the above findings, the quality of education and the applicability of acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies in the real work environment are of utmost importance for higher education and society at large. Therefore, respondents were asked to evaluate their university preparation. The results reveal that:

- The majority feel that their acquired knowledge and skills are partially sufficient for successful professional realization, with 33 respondents (82.5%) expressing this view.
- A small portion, 5 respondents (12.5%), consider them fully adequate.
- There are also respondents who believe there are significant gaps in their preparation, totaling 2 (5%).

Regarding the level of preparation relative to job requirements, evaluations are as follows:

- Excellent: 11 respondents (27.5%)
- Very good: 18 respondents (45%)
- Good: 7 respondents (17.5%)
- Satisfactory (indicating a need for improvements in training): 4 respondents (10%)

Graduates suggest that the training could be enhanced by:

- Increasing practical hours—this is the most common recommendation.
- More frequent updates to course materials and teaching methods.
- Incorporating more practical tasks and case studies into theoretical classes.
- Providing training for administrative roles in the education sector.

- Organizing meetings with potential employers and offering more internship opportunities.
- Success in the profession and opportunities for career development are closely linked to continuous enhancement of acquired knowledge. Most respondents pursue further education through:
- Employer-organized courses: 22 respondents (55%).
 - Independent search for additional qualifications online: 12 respondents (30%).
 - Enrollment in courses with positive reviews in their respective fields: 6 respondents (15%).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate a high level of professional realization among graduates of the Faculty of Pedagogy at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." The highest stability in the alignment between specialization and workplace is observed among recent graduates, while earlier cohorts are more likely to transition into other professional fields. This data can be used to adapt curricula and strengthen the connection between academic education and the labor market. The preparation of highly qualified professionals in higher education is becoming increasingly challenging due to the rapid development of technologies and their integration into the workplace, the growing number of new professions, and the continuous expansion of the specific competencies required in the workforce.

5. REFERENCES

- Апостолов, В. (2019). Активната политика на пазара на труда и нейното въздействие върху младежката заетост. Научни трудове на УНСС -Том 3/2019. https://unwe-research-papers.org/bg/journalissues/article/10115?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Йорданова, Д. (2013). Преход от висше образование към професионална реализация – специфики, проблеми и заинтересовани страни. В: Научни трудове в Русенски университет, том 52, серия 5.1 <https://www.academia.edu/23492178>
- Мерджанова, Я., М. Богданова. (2012). Европейско кариерно образование и националната перспектива [Career Education in Europe and National Perspectives] ISBN 978-954-323-967-2, Издателство „Авангард Прима”, С. 2012
- Николова, Й. (2023). Перспективи за семеен живот и родителство в контекста на семейната педагогика. УИ „Св.Кл.Охридски“, С.
- Папазова, Ева. Личност, кариерни интереси и стратегии за професионална реализация в годините на възникващата зрелост (18-29 г) *Psychological Thought*, 2016, Vol. 9(1), 75–103, doi:10.5964/psyc.v9i1.159 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301694700_Licnost_karierni_interesi_i_strategii_za_profesionalna_realizacia_v_godinite_na_vznikvasata_zrelost_18-29_g
- Папазова, Ева.(2022). Българска адаптация на скалата на Орегон за измерване на професионални интереси. Професионално образование Volume 24, Number 1, <https://doi.org/10.53656/voc22-13bulg> <https://azbuki.bg/uncategorized/balgarska-adaptacziya-na-skalata-na-oregon-za-izmervane-na-profesionalni-interesi/>
- Aronson, P., Callahan, T., & Davis, T. (2015). The transition from college to work during the great recession: Employment, financial, and identity challenges. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(9), 1097–1118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2015.1020931>
- Bozhinova, R., Georgieva, S., & Zhiliova, S. (1995). Tsennosti za rabota i izbor na alternativi i strategii za badeshta trudova realizatsiya pri zavarshvashti studenti [Work values and choice of alternatives and strategies for a future career in graduates]. In V. Rusinova & R. Roe (Eds.), *Psihosotsialni problemi na trudovata zаетost* [Psycho-social problems of employment] (pp. 93-105). Sofia, Bulgaria: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov“
- Beşpınar, F. U. (2010). Questioning agency and empowerment: Women’s work-related strategies and social class in urban Turkey. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33(6), 523-532. doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2010.09.003
- Kleine, A.-K., Schmitt, A., and Wisse, B. (2021). Students’ career exploration: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 131, Article 103645. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2021.103645>
- Kleine, A.-K., A. Schmitt, A.C. Keller. (2022) Career Planning and Self-Efficacy as Predictors of Students’ Career-Related Worry: Direct and Mediated Pathways.
- Lent, R. W. & Brown, S. D. (2020). Career decision making, fast and slow: Toward an integrative model of intervention for sustainable career choice. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 120, 103448. DOI:10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103448. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103448>
- Schepper, A. De, N. Clycq, E. Kyndt (2023).Socioeconomic Differences in the Transition From Higher Education to the Labour Market: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Career Development*, Vol. 50(1) 234–250 <https://doi.org/10.1177/08948453221077674>