საქართველოს მეცნიერებათა ეროვნული აკადემიის მოამბე, ტ. 20(194), №3, 2026
BULLETIN OF THE GEORGIAN NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, vol. 20(194), no. 3, 2026

Educational Psychology

The Study of the Relationships between High School Students' Internet Addiction, Professional Identity, and Career Choice

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(Presented by Academy Member Irakli Imedadze)

Abstract. The aim of this study is to identify the interrelationships between Internet addiction, professional identity status, and professional choice motives of high schoolers on the threshold of choosing a profession. This can contribute to the achievement of the 4th UN Sustainable Development Goal, which aims to propose rational solutions for quality education targets outlined in the context of the ongoing reforms in the Republic of Armenia's (RA) education system. A multidimensional approach was used to study the general problem in this research, incorporating the socio-psychological and behavioral factors of high schoolers. To address the research problems, an analysis of different perspectives and approaches was conducted, focusing on the development of a set of methods for studying Internet addiction and professional choice. A comprehensive understanding of the interconnections between the psychological phenomena under study and the conclusions drawn is highly significant for both psychological and professional counseling, as well as for educational interventions and the development of education policy. This study contributes to the 4th SDG on quality education. It identifies the key aspects of high school students' personal and professional self-determination and explores the interconnections between their professional identity, motivations for choosing a profession, and Internet addiction. These findings can be considered within the context of educational reforms in the Republic of Armenia. © *2026 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.*

Keywords: high school student, internet addiction, professional identity, motives, quality education

Introduction

The ongoing reforms in the Republic of Armenia's education system aim to develop a well-managed framework that meets the needs of both youth and the labor market while enhancing the quality, accessibility, and affordability of education. As noted by the EU Ambassador to Armenia, Vassilis Maragos (2024): "It is expected to reduce youth unemployment in the long term and create a viable, well-educated, and trained workforce that will contribute to Armenia's development and transition to a Green and Digital agenda".

In this context, modern digital technologies and computer-based tools introduced into the general education sector, along with the increasingly active

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use of the Internet, significantly influence high school students' career choices, sometimes fostering a biased motivation for professional self-determination.

Thus, this study focuses on a key psychological issue in modern education, examining the statistical relationships between Internet addiction, motives for choosing a profession, and the professional identity status of high school students as they navigate vital and professional self-determination.

The compensatory theory of Internet addiction served as the methodological basis for this study (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014), which suggests that addiction can manifest as a way to overcome real-life difficulties, including a professional identity crisis. We also based our study on Erikson's identity theory (1968), which states that professional identity is formed during adolescence but becomes central in youth. As well as the concept of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for professional choice (Papoyan et al., 1990).

In today's world, where information technologies have become an integral part of daily life, the Internet provides new opportunities to meet diverse human needs. It offers a virtual space for addressing essential challenges, providing innovative tools and approaches for solving educational and professional problems. The Internet has also become a significant resource in adults' lifestyles. While these advancements can be beneficial when media literacy principles are followed, they also pose substantial risks-particularly for high school students-when used ineffectively. One major risk is Internet addiction, which can lead to the creation of an alternative reality where individuals exist parallel to the real world. This phenomenon can have serious psychological consequences and contribute to the development of Internet addiction (Grigorieva & Vanyukhina, 2014).

In recent decades, specialists studying adolescent and youth behavior have increasingly focused on the psychological impact of Internet addiction (Anderson et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2003; Davis, 2001; Durkee et al., 2016; Li & Chung, 2006; Oh et al., 2021; Shapira et al., 2003; Yang & Brow, 2015; Zheng et al., 2020). A review of the literature reveals that many researchers interpret Internet addiction as a means of escaping reality, fulfilling personal needs in the virtual space, and maintaining self-esteem.

The virtual self-image often becomes closer to a teenager's ideal self and inner aspirations. This may explain why some adolescents struggle to return to reality from the virtual world, reinforcing Internet addiction (Nikolaeva & Rumyantseva, 2019). Many young individuals become deeply immersed in the digital realm, experiencing a full range of emotions and interactions online.

Various terms have been used to describe problematic Internet use, including "Problematic Internet Use" (Oh et al. 2021; Yang & Brow, 2015; Zheng et al. 2020), "Internet Addiction" (Kardefelt-Winter, 2014; Saliceti, 2015), "Pathological Online Behavior" (Davis, 2001) and "Compulsive Internet Use" (Reddan, 2015). Some researchers define Problematic Internet Use as excessive Internet consumption that causes psychological and social difficulties in school, work, or personal life (Durkee et al. 2016). It is characterized by uncontrolled Internet usage, leading to socio-psychological challenges and, in some cases, full-fledged addiction.

Despite variations in terminology, researchers broadly agree that excessive Internet use has negative consequences. Several international studies have documented these effects. For example, a study on the negative impacts of Internet use found that Chinese adolescents who use the Internet problematically are more likely to exhibit psychosomatic symptoms, such as fatigue, weakened immunity, emotional and behavioral disorders, and difficulties with social adjustment (Cao et al. 2011). Another study by Chinese experts found that Internet-addicted high school students are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (Li & Chung, 2006). Spanish researchers have linked Problematic Internet Use to a maladaptive perspective on the future, where ado-

lescents display an excessive focus on the present and a fatalistic attitude toward long-term goals (Díaz-Aguado et al. 2018).

Russian researchers (Gerasimova & Kholmogorova, 2020) caution against evaluating Internet addiction solely based on screen time. Many professions require substantial online engagement, and students often use the Internet for academic research and educational activities. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased students' reliance on information technologies, resulting in both constructive learning strategies and heightened risks of problematic Internet use. We agree with this perspective, as online learning introduced in the Republic of Armenia (RA) during the pandemic demonstrated that moderate, purposeful Internet use could yield positive educational outcomes (Avanesyan et al. 2022).

Additionally, researchers (Shapira et al. 2003) have suggested that problematic Internet use serves as a defense mechanism a coping strategy that helps individuals avoid real-world challenges. Social networks provide various compensation strategies, including gaming and digital interactions, that contribute to Internet dependency.

Studies on personal and professional self-determination (Gracheva, 2012; Hovhanisyan, 2014; Kishikov & Tikhonova, 2020) indicate that factors influencing career choices can be categorized as internal or external. Internal factors include motivation for a particular profession, awareness of job market demands, and personal characteristics. External factors include socioeconomic conditions, parental influence, the social environment, and online resources. Many young people focus solely on external factors when choosing a profession, often neglecting internal motivations (Papoyan et al., 1990).

In conclusion, a review of the literature and theoretical analysis confirms that Internet addiction is increasingly prevalent among high school students. It can disrupt emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development and negatively impact personal and professional self-determination.

Materials and Methods

The study involved 106 high school students, aged 14-18, from public educational institutions in Yerevan, the capital of the Republic of Armenia**.** However, 17 datasets were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete responses, leaving a final sample of 89 participants. Among them, 50 (56%) were female, and 39 (44%) were male**.**

The research was conducted using the following tests and questionnaires:

1. The Chen Internet Addiction Scale (CIAS) (Chen et al. 2003) measures specific indicators of Internet addiction, including tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, impairment, and psychological aspects such as time management difficulties and intrapersonal conflicts. The total score is based on integrative indicators and a scale-based nature, allowing classification into three groups: minimal risk group (27-42 points): internet use does not lead to addiction; at-risk group (43-64 points): participants exhibit tendencies toward developing Internet addiction; addicted group (65+ points): participants show signs of Internet addiction.

2. The Motives for Choosing a Profession test developed by Bogdanovskaya I. M. and Kosheleva A. N. (2022) is designed to identify the leading motives behind professional choice. These motives characterize the meaning and goals of future professional education and can be either intrinsic or extrinsic in nature. Intrinsic motives are linked to pleasure, a sense of achievement, and self-realization. They are determined by a high school student's moral values and aptitude for a specific type of activity. Extrinsic motives, on the other hand, are shaped by external factors, such as socio-economic conditions, perceptions of authority, and the influence of parents and peers. The test assesses the expression of six key motives for choosing a profession: Cognitive; Social success; Communication; Preservation of family values; Financial; Self-realization (Bogdanovskaya & Kosheleva, 2022).

3. A. Azbel and A. Gretsov's "Methodology for Studying Professional Identity Statuses" (2009)

provides a framework for assessing a young person's readiness to independently determine their life path. This methodology identifies four statuses of professional identity referred to as "levels" that represent different stages in an individual's process of professional self-determination: uncertain professional identity; imposed professional identity; professional identity moratorium (choice crisis); formed professional identity.

A multivariate correlation study was conducted to test hypotheses regarding the relationships among the variables. After data collection, responses were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics Software (Version 23), where Pearson's linear correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationnships and differences among the study groups.

Results and Discussion

The results of the high school students' Internet addiction test show that 29.2% of the total participants have a minimal risk of addiction, 51.7% have a tendency toward addiction, and 19.1% are addicted. Interestingly, among the high school students with computer addiction and tendencies toward addiction, there are significantly more girls (by 5% and 6%, respectively) than boys. Thus, gender differences in Internet addiction among the study participants are graphically presented in Fig. 1.

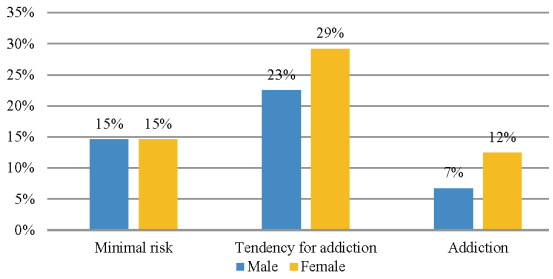

Fig. 1. Internet addiction results in two groups according to Chen's methodology.

The results of the "Motivations for Choosing a Profession" test showed that among high school students who successfully completed the study, the self-actualization motive was the most pronounced (85.4%, with 59.5% strongly expressed and 25.9% moderately expressed). The cognitive motive (67.5%) was also quite pronounced, with some subjects showing it strongly (32.6%) and others moderately (34.9%). The material motive (59.6%) was expressed as follows: 40.5% strongly expressed and 19.1% moderately expressed. The remaining motives observed in the testing framework were either very insignificant (the motive of preserving family values, at only 11.1%) or significantly weaker than average (the motives of communication and social success, at 43.8% and 31.5%, respectively) (see Fig. 2. 0-5 color mentionned by ranking of the test: 0 is lowest, 5 is highest).

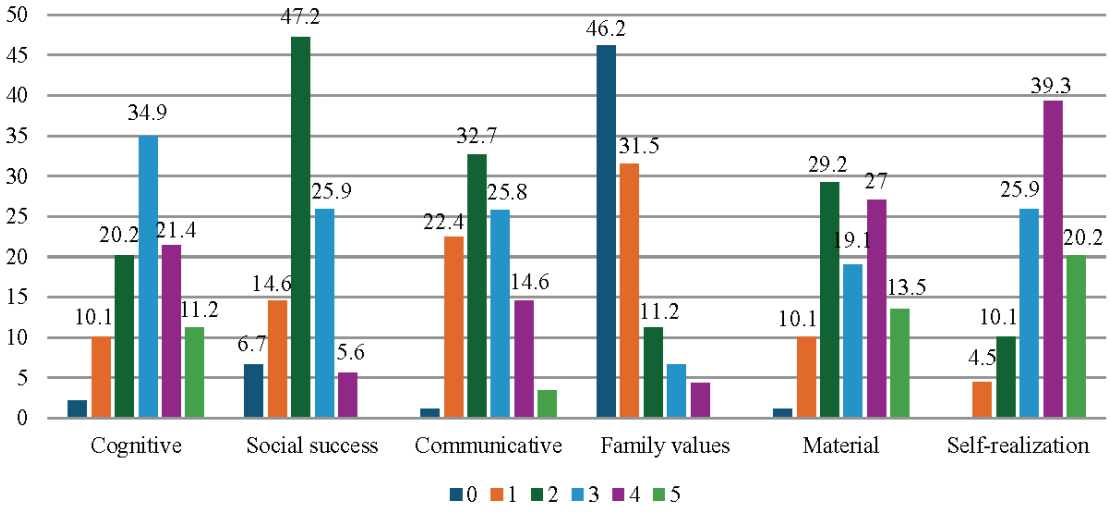

Fig. 2. Overall results of the test of motivations for choosing a profession.

The profile of the expression of motives allows us to conclude that the meaning of future professional education for the high school students who participated in the study, as well as the purpose of choosing a profession, is their self-realization. This suggests that, for modern high school students, a profession is seen as an opportunity to develop their own talents and abilities, as well as an area for personal growth. This is further supported by the expression of the cognitive motive, which is related to a person's desire for knowledge, a deeper understanding of the essence of professional activity, and intellectual satisfaction from their work. Finally, the expression of the material motive indicates that, for these students, the profession is also viewed as a source of income and the foundation of material well-being. The results of the test for studying professional identity statuses are presented in Fig. 3.

As can be seen from the percentages presented in Fig. 3, the general profile of the respondents is as follows: there are almost no individuals with an uncertain professional identity status. 70% of the participants rated the undecided type as low, and 25% rated it as below average. The imposed identity is also weakly expressed, with 83% of the respondents rating it low and another 14% rating it below average. The crisis or moratorium identity was assessed proportionally, meaning that some respondents showed a crisis, while others rated it as average, low, or unexpressed. Additionally, 45% of the respondents already have a formed professional identity. In general, it is worth noting that at this age, it is quite difficult to prioritize the issue of choosing a profession and find an appropriate solution to it making a decision independently requires the assistance and support of adults, including psychologists. In the case of Internet addiction, the crisis of choice becomes more acute for both girls and boys. Thus, the observations show that the majority of high school students are currently concerned about their professional future, unsure of their own abilities, and anxious about the uncertainty of their life prospects.

A correlation analysis between the key variables obtained from the research results was performed using the Pearson linear formula. According to the research plan, the mutual relationships between the motives for choosing a profession and the status of professional identity were observed among the three research groups, which were separated based on the obtained indicators of Internet addiction (Table 1).

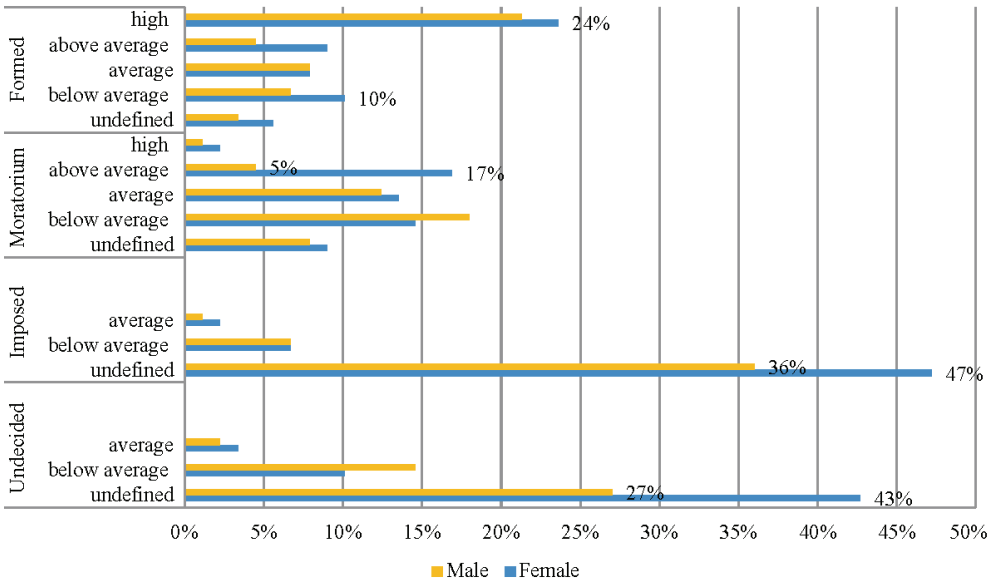

Fig. 3. General indicators of professional identity according to Azbel's test.

Table 1. Professional identity and motivations for professional choice in the group with the lowest risk of Internet addiction

	Cognitive	Social success	Communicative	Family values	Material	Self-realization
Undecided	-0.099	0.255	0.096	0.362	-0.101	-0.353
Imposed	-0.173	0.050	0.002	0.328	-0.083	-0.022
Moratorium	-0.173	-0.005	-0.232	0.038	-0.083	-0.117
Formed	0.217	-0.222	0.182	-0.384	-0.140	0.258
n=26; P>0.05						

Table 2. Professional identity and professional choice motives in the group with a tendency to Internet addiction

	Cognitive	Social success	Communicative	Family values	Material	Self-realization
Undecided	0.200	-0.055	0.152	0.280	-0.062	-0.537
Imposed	-0.006	0.068	-0.082	0.429	-0.176	-0.215
Moratorium	-0.308	-0.073	0.381	-0.107	0.085	0.070
Formed	0.159	0.064	-0.252	-0.342	-0.011	0.354
n=48; P>0.01						

Table 3. Professional identity and professional choice motives in the group of internet addicts

	Cognitive	Social success	Communicative	Family values	Material	Self-realization
Undecided	-0.226	0.134	-0.416	0.452	0.350	-0.378
Imposed	0.290	-0.287	-0.030	0.412	-0.217	-0.184
Moratorium	-0.395	0.240	-0.231	-0.440	0.466	0.426
Formed	0.441	-0.171	0.304	0.152	-0.509	-0.224
n=18; P>0.05						

Now, let us examine the correlation results for the group with the lowest risk of Internet addiction. As we can see, the professional identity formed in this group has a strong negative correlation with the motivation to preserve family values (r = –0.384). This suggests that the more educated and stable their professional interests are, and the more self-determined they are in choosing their profession, the weaker the influence of the family becomes, with family playing almost no role in their choice (Table 2).

There is a strong positive relationship between the communicative motive and the crisis identity /r = 0.381/. There is also a strong positive relationship between the imposed identity and the motive for preserving family values /r = 0.429/. This indicates that the stronger the family compulsion in choosing a profession, the stronger the imposed professional identity becomes. There is a strong negative relationship between the lack of orientation and the self-actualization motive /r = -0.537/. This is the most ideal relationship: the higher the self-actualization motive of a person, the weaker the lack of orientation in regard to their profession. The relationship between the formed professional identity and the self-actualization motive /r = 0.354/ also points to the same result. As we can see from the table, in the case of a tendency toward Internet addiction, a crisis of identity and socialization is already noticeable (Table 3).

There is a strong positive correlation between cognitive motivation and formed identity /r = 0.441/. This correlation is explained by the fact that cognitive interests are the foundation for the formation of a profession, which is particularly noticeable in the case of Internet addiction. It often happens that high school students who are addicted to Internet games and programs have high awareness and strong technological interests, such as in the fields of computer games and programming.

There is a strong relationship between the motive of preserving family values and ambivalence /r = 0.452/. The same relationship is also observed in the case of crisis identity /r = -0.440/. We can conclude that, in any case, the preservation and imposition of tradition by the family leads to a crisis. In this group, there is also a relationship between crisis identity and the motive of self-realization /r = 0.426/.

There is a strong relationship between material motivation and crisis /r = 0.466/. In the Internet addiction group, the formation of a crisis identity is also tied to material motivation; they often think or wonder about choosing a profession based on its high salary. This may explain why, in cases of addiction, there is a greater interest in choosing programming professions. This tendency is especially prominent among girls. Additionally, there is an inverse relationship – a strong negative correlation – between the formed identity and material motivation /r = -0.509/. This indicates that when professional interests are stably formed, material motivation weakens. Thus, it is clear that, in the case of Internet addiction, the connections between crisis identity and professional motivation are more numerous.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be confirmed that Internet addiction reduces the factors of self-realization and identity formation of high school students in relation to professions, causing a crisis of orientation. From the analysis, it is clear that in cases of Internet addiction, high school students often experience indifference, uncertainty, and disorientation in choosing a profession and forming their identity, with this trend being equally distributed between boys and girls. They highly value the cognitive motive, with half of them valuing the social success and communicative motives. Most students, however, do not value the motive of preserving family values, and fewer value the material and self-realization motives.

The analysis of professional identity types showed that there is almost no undecided identity type. The forced identity type is also weakly expressed, while the crisis or moratorium identity was assessed equally. Half of the respondents, however, have a formed professional identity.

In the case of different degrees of Internet addiction, both the motives and the type of identity differ. The general research showed that the issue of choosing a profession is critical during high school years. In the case of Internet addiction, the leading motive is the preservation of family values, and the imposed identity type is more prevalent among high school students. For those who are not addicted to the Internet, the leading motive is self-actualization, and the professional identity formation type is more prominent.

Thus, generalizing the statistical data obtained, the following conclusions can be drawn that contribute to the improving the quality of education in the Republic of Armenia and the formation of graduates who meet the requirements of the labor market:

1. Problematic internet use is a significant barrier to rational career self-determination, directly impacting the achievement of UN SDG 4. To ensure "quality education" that leads to relevant employment outcomes, educational policies in Armenia must integrate digital hygiene and psychological support systems. These systems are essential to help students transition from "internet-driven" or "externally imposed" professional identities toward an autonomous, self-realization-based choice of profession.

2. Our findings reveal that 70% of surveyed high schoolers are at risk of or already suffer from internet addiction, which correlates with professional identity crises and vocational disorientation. From the perspective of SDG 4, which aims to reduce youth unemployment, it is critical to implement evidence-based vocational guidance that accounts for the compensatory role of the internet. By addressing internet addiction, educational institutions can foster a more resilient and well-

prepared workforce, capable of contributing to Armenia's "green and digital agenda" as envisioned in current educational reforms.

3. The research underscores that quality education (SDG 4) extends beyond academic curriculum to include the psychological well-being of students in a digital age. The identified correlation between internal motives (self-realization) and formed professional identity among non-addicted students suggests that fostering intrinsic motivation is key to educational success. Consequently, enhancing the applied value of high school education requires a shift towards pedagogical models that promote self-identity and critical thinking, thereby neutralizing the negative impacts of virtual escapism on future career trajectories.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the reviewers for their constructive comments and recommendations for improving the article, as well as the school psychologists for their assistance in obtaining consent to participate from the parents and guardians of the high school students who took part in the study.

განათლების ფსიქოლოგია

საშუალო სკოლის მოსწავლეების ინტერნეტდამოკიდებულების, პროფესიული იდენტობისა და კარიერული არჩევანის ურთიერთკავშირის შესწავლა

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კვლევის მიზანია ინტერნეტდამოკიდებულების, პროფესიული იდენტობის სტატუსისა და პროფესიის არჩევის ზღურბლზე მყოფ საშუალო სკოლის მოსწავლეების პროფესიული არჩევანის მოტივებს შორის ურთიერთკავშირის იდენტიფიცირება. ამან შეიძლება ხელი შეუწყოს გაეროს მდგრადი განვითარების მე-4 მიზნის მიღწევას, რომლის მიზანია სომხეთის რესპუბლიკის (RA) განათლების სისტემაში მიმდინარე რეფორმების კონტექსტში განსაზღვრული ხარისხიანი განათლების მიზნებისთვის რაციონალური გადაწყვეტილებების შეთავაზება. კვლევაში ზოგადი პრობლემის შესასწავლად გამოყენებულ იქნა მრავალგანზომილებიანი მიდგომა, რომელიც ითვალისწინებდა საშუალო სკოლის მოსწავლეების სოციალურ-ფსიქო-

ლოგიურ და ქცევით ფაქტორებს. ჩატარდა სხვადასხვა პერსპექტივისა და მიდგომების ანალიზი, რომელიც ფოკუსირებული იყო ინტერნეტდამოკიდებულებისა და პროფესიული არჩევანის შესწავლის მეთოდების ერთობლიობის შემუშავებაზე. შესწავლილ ფსიქოლოგიურ ფენომენებსა და გამოტანილ დასკვნებს შორის ურთიერთკავშირის ყოვლისმომცველი გაგება უაღრესად მნიშვნელოვანია როგორც ფსიქოლოგიური, ასევე პროფესიული კონსულტირებისთვის, ასევე საგანმანათლებლო ჩარევებისა და განათლების პოლიტიკის შემუშავებისთვის. ეს კვლევა ხელს უწყობს ხარისხიანი განათლების შესახებ მე-4 მდგრადი განვითარების მიზნის მიღწევას. იგი განსაზღვრავს საშუალო სკოლის მოსწავლეების პიროვნული და პროფესიული თვითგამორკვევის ძირითად ასპექტებს და იკვლევს მათ პროფესიულ იდენტობას, პროფესიის არჩევის მოტივაციასა და ინტერნეტდამოკიდებულებას შორის ურთიერთკავშირს. ეს დასკვნები შეიძლება განვიხილოთ სომხეთის რესპუბლიკაში განათლების რეფორმების კონტექსტში.

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Received March, 2026