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# THE VARIABILITY OF ADOLESCENTS' INTERESTS IN THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT

VARIABILITATEA INTERESELOR ADOLESCENȚILOR ÎN CONTEXT  
ACADEMIC

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## STUDII EMPIRICE

# THE VARIABILITY OF ADOLESCENTS' INTERESTS IN THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT

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### **Abstract**

Adolescence is among the most studied developmental stages. It represents critical transition stage in human development, characterized by a large amount of changes, to which young people must find creative solutions in order to adapt. Among the most important developmental tasks is the dimension of motivation and, in particular, interests as motivational structures. A convenience sample of 1360 adolescents, aged between 12 and 24 years old, filled in the Questionnaire for Evaluation of Vocational Interests (Cognitrom Assessment System). The objectives and hypotheses of the research are mainly focused on the identification of the existing differences in the area of interests, based on the following criteria: age, gender and environment of provenance. The study identifies a preference of the postadolescents for the social and investigative interests; a preference for artistic, social and realistic interests of girls; and a preference of urban-based adolescents for conventional and investigative interests. Results highlight the importance of identifying the variability of interests for both a better knowledge of this developmental stage and a better organization of the instructive-educational activities, thus supporting the development of career counseling and guidance in schools, high-schools and universities.

**Keywords:** academic context, adolescence, interests.

### **Rezumat**

*Printre cele mai studiate stadii de dezvoltare uman se g se te adolescen a, etap*

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*critic de tranziție în evoluția umană, cu mare încercare de schimbări, la care tânărul trebuie să găsească soluții creative și să se adapteze. Între cele mai importante sarcini ale dezvoltării se află dimensiunea motivațională, iar în mod particular, interesele ca structuri motivaționale. Un eantion de conveniență, de 1360 de adolescenți, cu vârste între 12 și 24 de ani, au completat Chestionarul de Evaluare a Intereselor Profesionale (Cognitrom Assessment System). Obiectivele și ipotezele cercetării s-au centrat pe evidențierea diferențelor în variabilitatea intereselor profesionale pe baza criteriilor: vârstă, sex și mediu de proveniență. Am identificat o preferință a postadolescenților pentru domeniul social și categoria intereselor investigative; o înclinare a fetelor către domeniul artistic, social și realist; și o preferință a adolescenților provenind din mediul urban pentru categoria intereselor convenționale și investigative. Rezultatele obținute susțin importanța cunoașterii variabilității intereselor atât pentru o mai bună cunoaștere a adolescenților, cât și pentru o mai bună organizare a activităților instructiv-educative, susținând astfel dezvoltarea consilierii și orientării în carieră în colișe, licee sau universități.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** adolescență, context academic, interese.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Developmental tasks in adolescence

Adolescence begins around 10/11 years and reaches to 24/25 years of age. Specialized studies (Adams & Berzonsky, 2009; Birch, 2000; Creu, 2009; Papalia, Wendkos Olds & Duskin Feldman, 2010; Sion, 2007; Chiopu & Verza, 1997; Verza & Verza, 2000) describe three different developmental stages: puberty (10/11–14/15 years), adolescence (14/15—18/19 years) and postadolescence (18/19–24/25 years). Each theoretical model is focused on certain developmental tasks. A developmental task can be defined as a task which is active in a certain stage in life (Havighurst, 1948). Failure in accomplishing a task means the incapacity of solving other tasks associated with the next developmental stage.

Some scientists speak about certain periods in adolescence, each having their own set of developmental tasks. Melanie Rapp (in Nichols & Nichols, 1998) speaks about three stages in adolescence, as follows: early adolescence (12-14 years), characterized by independence from parents, fast physical

growth (especially for girls), integration in different groups and interests for sex life; middle adolescence (14-17 years), characterized by self-discovery, orientation towards performance and many interpersonal relationships; late adolescence (17-19 years), characterized by the orientation towards a career and self-sustainability. Joseph Moore (1988) describes three stages: purgatory (cleansing a false sense of self, especially from low self-esteem), illumination (acceptance of the self, without barriers and defense mechanisms), and union (with the Divine Creation). Elizabeth Fenwick and Tony Smith (1994) speak about: early adolescence (11-14 years), characterized by the concern for looks, gaining independence from the family, manifestation of rebel attitudes and behaviors, rising of the importance of social groups, egocentric perspectives toward all problems; middle adolescence (15-16 years), characterized by lower self-centeredness, decision making, experimentation of self-image, stable relationships, acknowledging own sexuality, mature abilities and interests; late adolescence (17-18 years), characterized by an idealistic view of the world, involvement in the external family life and school life, stable personal relationships, gaining independence and establishing relationships of equality with adults. Zimmerman (in Urdan & Pajares, 2002) states that during adolescence, young people acquire the necessary skills needed to succeed in adulthood. Among these skills, the self-regulatory techniques (that include goal setting, strategy use, time management, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reflection), if developed, allow adolescents to learn and perform at optimal levels.

Based on everything we said so far, we can acknowledge two important conclusions: the first one states that developmental tasks in adolescence cover all physical, psychological and social aspects of human evolution and the second one argues that there are certain factors with either positive or negative influence involved in this process.

There are other essential factors for the development in adolescence, such as educational system and teachers, family, parents and other adults in contact with the adolescent. The quality of the relationships between these institutions or persons is essential for a positive development. To create a supportive environment is crucial for the development of resilience and for the promotion of a healthy evolution. Resilience is the ability to manage the

changes. Because adolescence is a stage full of transformations, some of them can be quite challenging for young people, making resilience really important for managing physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional and social transitions.

## 1.2. Interests

Dragu and Cristea (2002) emphasize that early adolescence is a stage in which the emotional life is more complicated and diverse, because ideals, aspirations and intentions are defined at the motivational level. The most important aspect of the evolution of motivation is the one responsible for the stimulation and orientation of the learning process. Extrinsic motivation becomes intrinsic motivation and social motivations are greatly amplified (Cre u, 2009).

Some authors (Ciobanu & Jelescu, in Albu, Isac, Jugustru, Negru & Totelecan, 2015; Popescu-Neveanu, 1978) highlight some conceptualizations **of interest** such as: the only reason of human action, connected to things important for human well-being and happiness (Thiry); the structure which produces pleasure and keeps out people from harm (Helvétius); someone's liaison with economic relationships (Engels); factor responsible for adjustment and adaptation of the environment to individual needs (Claparède); human tendency to like some activities (Strong); a ratio between needs and objective conditions (Super); a specific orientation of personality in which an individual is concentrated on a mental object, that he/she wants to know really closely (Rubinstein); reason or selective attitude of personality towards an object, based on the object's vital significance and emotional attraction (Kovalev).

As we can see, interests are associated with positive emotional attitudes, needs, directions and orientation of the personality, cognition and passion. So, there is no unanimity regarding the definition of interests. Hidi and Renninger (2006) state that the factors contributing to the development of interests are knowledge, positive emotion and personal value. According to Harackiewicz and Hulleman (2009), the model of Hidi and Renninger can be explained through these statements:

- Individuals learn more about a topic and become more skilled and knowledgeable.
- Having more knowledge, individuals feel more competent and engage in different tasks.
- As they spend more time in an activity, they may find personal meaning and relevance in the activity.
- Having found a personal meaning in a field may contribute to the development of competences and further exploration of the topic.
- Engaging and establishing goals may encourage people to practice and to improve in that specific field.

Doron (2006) emphasizes that interests are relatively stable dispositions, oriented towards different objects, activities or experiences. These trends are conditioned by cultural requirements that define the corresponding roles of men and women and of the members of a certain social group. Studies show that, starting with adolescence, interests remain stable and can be predictive factors of the professional career (Lubinski, Benbow & Ryan, 1995) and core variables of the development of identity and of a healthy transition towards adult life (Schmitt-Rodermund & Vondracek, 1999).

Other studies show that interests are positively correlated with the educational expectations of the adolescent's mother and that a decline in the sphere of academic interests is positively related to grade decrease (Dotterer, McHale & Crouter, 2009). These findings show the relationship between interests and both educational and environmental factors. Other studies show a relationship between interests and historical and social context (Low, Yoon, Roberts & Rounds, 2005). Obviously, the evolution of science and technique has a great impact over the evolution of the personality.

However, this research is grounded in the theory of Holland, regarding career decision; this theory has a great impact in the field of career guidance and counseling, helping psychologists in understanding the relationship between personal and environmental factors in the process of decision making (Jig u, 2007). Holland's theory states that people tend to search and choose professional environments consistent with their interests. The compatibility between the chosen career and interests provides people with a sense of personal satisfaction (Jig u, 2007).

J. Holland describes six major categories of interests, which are: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional. Each type is characterized by a constellation of interests, preferred activities, beliefs, abilities, values and characteristics (Nauta, 2010). Holland's typology is based on certain assertions (Jig u, 2007): people have different sets of specific individual traits; some traits are relatively stable during adolescence; choosing a professional career is a way of expression of the personality; people who carry out their activity in similar professional fields have similar structures and history and may have the same reaction in similar work situations; satisfaction, stability and professional status depend on the compatibility of personality and work environment; people tend to choose those careers and activities which allow the prominence of their qualities and personal values. In conclusion, maturation, the development of personal experience and a positive identity are factors that define the process of career decision making, according to both the internal and the external reality of the individual (Jig u et al., 2003). The congruence between an individual's personality type and the work environment type determines several critical outcomes, such as job satisfaction, stability and performance.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Objectives and hypotheses**

The objectives of this study are:

1. The identification of differences regarding interests based on the age criterion.
2. The identification of differences regarding interests based on the gender criterion.
3. The identification of differences regarding interests based on the environment of provenance criterion.

The hypotheses based on the objectives above are:

1. We presume that there are statistically significant differences between preadolescents, adolescents and postadolescents regarding their career interests.
2. We presume that there are statistically significant differences between boys and girls regarding their career interests.

3. We presume that there are statistically significant differences between adolescents who live in urban areas and those who live in rural areas regarding their career interests.

## 2.2. Sample and instruments

A convenience sample of 1360 adolescents, aged between 12 and 24 years old, filled the Questionnaire for Evaluation of Vocational Interests, available in Cognitrom Assessment System.

The Questionnaire is grounded in the theory of J. Holland and measures the six categories of people and work environments proposed by the author: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, entrepreneurial and conventional. The main assumptions of this theory are:

- People tend to search for work environments that will allow them to use their vocational characteristics.
- Vocational behavior is the result of the interaction between the personality type and the environment.

The purpose of the questionnaire (related to the study) is to assess the adolescent's preferences for certain activities or fields of knowledge, and it can successfully be used in the career guidance and counseling activity.

The sample consists of 861 girls and 499 boys, out of which 456 live in rural areas and 904 in urban areas of Constan a County. The sample was also divided into three groups, based on the age criterion, as follows: 162 preadolescents, 534 adolescents and 664 postadolescents. The method of sampling involved the availability and the willingness of the participants to respond to the questionnaire. Schools' and high-schools' headmasters allowed the application of the questionnaire in their institutions as well.

The study level of the parents, as well as the social status of the families whose children were involved in the study were taken into account, for both urban and rural residents. A number of 689 participants from the entire sample come from families with parents that have university studies, 553 participants have at least one parent that has finished only the high-school

level, and 118 participants have at least one parent that has only completed secondary lower education.

All the data was processed using SPSS 20.

### 2.3. Findings and results

#### 2.3.1. *Hypothesis 1*

**We presume that there are statistically significant differences between preadolescents, adolescents and postadolescents, regarding their career interests.**

We used Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test for independent samples and we obtained the following ranks:

- Artistic – mean rank for preadolescents 695.38, mean rank for adolescents 703.84, mean rank for postadolescents 658.10.
- Conventional – mean rank for preadolescents 630.38, mean rank for adolescents 669.14, mean rank for postadolescents 701.86.
- Enterprising – mean rank for preadolescents 647.68, mean rank for adolescents 669.07, mean rank for postadolescents 697.70.
- Social – mean rank for preadolescents 559.40, mean rank for adolescents 695.63, mean rank for postadolescents 697.88.
- Realistic – mean rank for preadolescents 648.09, mean rank for adolescents 662.21, mean rank for postadolescents 703.12.
- Investigative – mean rank for preadolescents 630.40, mean rank for adolescents 637.41, mean rank for postadolescents 727.38.

The significance we obtained for the values of Chi-Square was: artistic .117, conventional .079, enterprising .238, social .000, realistic .106, investigative .000.

Therefore, we identified statistically significant differences regarding social and investigative interests, meaning that adolescents and postadolescents value social interests more than preadolescents, and postadolescents value more the investigative category of interests than preadolescents and adolescents.

### 2.3.2. *Hypothesis 2*

**We presume that there are statistically significant differences between boys and girls, regarding their career interests.**

We used Mann-Whitney nonparametric test for independent samples and we obtained the following ranks:

- Artistic – mean rank for girls 739.14, mean rank for boys 579.31.
- Conventional – mean rank for girls 671.91, mean rank for boys 695.32.
- Enterprising – mean rank for girls 673.03, mean rank for boys 693.39.
- Social – mean rank for girls 753.95, mean rank for boys 553.77.
- Realistic – mean rank for girls 600.75, mean rank for boys 818.10.
- Investigative – mean rank for girls 686.69, mean rank for boys 669.82.

The significance we obtained for the values of Chi-Square were: artistic .000, conventional .288, enterprising .356, social .000, realistic .000, investigative .444.

We identified statistically significant differences regarding artistic, social and realistic interests, meaning that girls value artistic and social interests more than boys, and boys value realistic interests more than girls.

### 2.3.3. *Hypothesis 3*

**We presume that there are statistically significant differences between adolescents that live in urban areas and those who live in rural areas, regarding their career interests.**

We used Mann-Whitney nonparametric test for independent samples and we obtained the following ranks:

- Artistic - mean rank for adolescents in rural areas 692.51, mean rank for adolescents in urban areas 674.44.
- Conventional - mean rank for adolescents in rural areas 648.30, mean rank for adolescents in urban areas 696.74.
- Enterprising - mean rank for adolescents in rural areas 666.28, mean rank for adolescents in urban areas 687.67.

- Social - mean rank for adolescents in rural areas 686.52, mean rank for adolescents in urban areas 677.46.
- Realistic - mean rank for adolescents in rural areas 694.27, mean rank for adolescents in urban areas 673.56.
- Investigative - mean rank for adolescents in rural areas 649.46, mean rank for adolescents in urban areas 696.16.

The significance we obtained for the values of Chi-Square was: artistic .422, conventional .031, enterprising .342, social .687, realistic .358, and investigative .038.

We identified statistically significant differences regarding conventional and investigative interests, meaning that adolescents in urban areas value conventional and investigative interests more than adolescents living in rural areas.

### 3. Discussion

**The first hypothesis** was focused on the statistically significant differences regarding interests, based on the age variable. We identified statistically significant differences regarding social and investigative interests, meaning that adolescents and postadolescents value social interests more than preadolescents, and postadolescents value more the investigative category of interests than preadolescents and adolescents.

Based on the theory of J. Holland, the social type is focused on activities which imply interpersonal relationships. They prefer to help people solve their problems or teach them different things, rather than participate in activities that imply the use of tools or machines. They value social service and fostering the welfare of others and demonstrate their interpersonal and educational competencies (Smart, Feldman & Ethington, 2000). These people can be great professionals in fields like education, therapy or counseling. While they see themselves as cooperative, empathetic, helpful and understanding, others regard them as agreeable, nurturing and extroverted.

The results we obtained regarding social interests are concordant with the developmental tasks in adolescence. One of these tasks is precisely the development of new social relationships, especially with other boys and girls of the same generation, mature relationships, based on intimacy, trust and respect (S Iceanu, 2015). Adolescents and postadolescents learn gradually, by experimentation, to interact with others in ways closer to those of adults. Preadolescence is a period of intense physical growth, but adolescence is the stage where people select their partners based on a similar level of physical and relational maturity. Furthermore, not only adolescents are integrated in groups, but they belong to different communities of peers that resemble with each other. Family, the school group, working groups or sport team are human assemblies with which, one way or another, adolescents have repeatedly been into contact (Amado & Guittet, 2007). Social contexts found in their proximity are usually associated with interactions between peers. They include school, neighborhood or family and they have the responsibility of monitoring social interactions (Adams & Berzonsky, 2009). Hence, we can see that the social system is becoming increasingly more elaborated. These are new types of relationships and levels of interaction. Brown (1999, in Friedman & Theodore, 1999) argues that the social environment of adolescents is: a multi-contextual phenomenon, based on larger sets of social and interpersonal contexts, which contributes to the frame of peers' contexts with impact on adolescent's life. Furthermore, relationships in adolescence are mutual. Typically, adolescents are part of a large variety of groups, which vary in stability and amount of time that they exist in. The structures of adolescent's social relationships are dyads, gangs and crowds. Dyads are the closest way of peer interaction. Gangs are large groups, created around certain people, who have a particular image or identity among peers. The leaders are labeled after a prominent personality trait, like residential location, ethnic or socio-economic provenance, individual skills or interests (Adams & Berzonsky, 2009; Brown, in Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). Bion (1961, in Amado & Guittet, 2007) suggests that in every group adolescents cooperate in order to complete different tasks, functioning rules and role distribution being acknowledged by everyone. This social chemistry may block or accelerate the actions needed for solving the problems.

Although Brown (in Lerner & Steinberg, 2009) argues that there are some peculiarities of group behavior in adolescence, like the instability of

relationships, antagonistic relationships, developmental changes of relationships' characteristics, it is certain that social interests gain importance in the developmental framework during this stage. Adolescents develop a sense of equality and reciprocity, they prefer a friendship based on mutual interests, they can exercise different roles and status, gender identity can be developed, and intimacy with peers of the same gender is developed.

But adolescents do not have personal relationships only with peers. Their social interests are also visible in their relationships with adults, from within or from outside their families. Adolescents gain their independence from their parents, but they come across other adults while they are involved in school activities, religious activities, or other places they go to, like the neighborhood, the mall or their friends' houses. These are factors that can influence the adolescent's development, because other adults represent sources of information and resources, different of the ones they obtain in their own families. Furthermore, these relationships with adults can be learning opportunities of social roles and status, which influence the development of identity in adolescence. Adults are mentors and models. Mentors have a big impact on vocational identity in adolescence (Adams & Berzonsky, 2009). Both adolescents and postadolescents seek mentors based on similar interests, that they also hope to extend (Bigelow, 1999; Pawlak, 1999; Schmidt, 1998, in Adams & Berzonsky, 2009). Furthermore, mentors have credibility and, as they provide feedback, they become increasingly significant adults in the adolescent's life.

Furthermore, another important aspect regarding these differences is the fact that more and more, during postadolescence, Romanian young adults begin to experience employment. They face challenges like the new social, cultural and organizational contexts, or the balance between school and work that they need to maintain. It is a certainty that paid work and the work experience shapes the adolescents' vocational development and educational/career achievement (Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006).

The investigative type is characterized by a special predilection towards research in a broad range of fields, such as biology, physics, social or cultural sciences. Usually, people with this kind of interests have mathematic and scientific skills, and they prefer to work alone in order to solve a variety of

problems. Furthermore, studies show that developmental and personality factors impact scientific thought, interest and achievement both directly and indirectly (Feist, 2006).

As we know, an important developmental task in adolescence is the evolution of the vocational and professional identity, which are influenced by education, knowledge, skills and abilities, aspirations, interests, work values, etc. Postadolescence is usually the stage where people go to a certain university. By now, people are conscious about certain goals, they may have a plan of achieving those goals, and they are engaged in the process. The experience of going to college may have some objectives related to the fact that society needs experts, in various fields, as well as motivated employees. Families hope that this experience may bring their children happiness and professional satisfaction in the future, and students hope to improve values and skills that are needed in getting a job. Universities are actually seen as factors that ensure the development of higher-order competencies, meant for improving one's life and for ensuring one's social and professional integration. Universities give postadolescents the opportunity to gain theoretical and practical knowledge and experiences in their field of interests.

**The second hypothesis** was focused on the statistically significant differences regarding interests, based on the gender variable. We identified statistically significant differences regarding artistic, social and realistic interests, meaning that girls value artistic and social interests more than boys, whereas boys value realistic interests more than girls.

Based on the theory of J. Holland, the realistic type is characterized by a tendency towards those activities that are based on the use of objects and instruments. These people have motor, mechanic or technical skills and they prefer those professional environments that use those skills (driver, aviator, operator, farmer, etc.). Since they value material rewards for tangible accomplishments, they usually perceive themselves as being practical, conservative and persistent (Smart et al., 2000). Our results are consistent with another study conducted by Su, Rounds & Armstrong (2009) that shows that men show stronger realistic interest than women. Gender-related differences in the variability of Holland's vocational dimensions were identified as well by Ion, Nye and Iliescu (2017) regarding realistic and

conventional dimensions. This issue of gender differences in interests was broadly studied, and the same conclusion emerged (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Eccles, 1994; Fouad, 1999; Hackett & Lonborg, 1993; Johansson, 2003; Parsons, Adler & Meece, 1984). It is widely acknowledged that sex differences of interests appear to be influenced by the socialization process, by parent's expectations, by educational experiences, and, furthermore, they do not seem to vary much across age (Holland, Fritzsche & Powell, 1994; Kuder & Zytowski, 1988) or over decades (Fouad, 1999; Hansen, 1988).

Regarding the artistic interests, based on the theory of J. Holland, people with these kinds of preferences can be described as being attracted to less structured activities, which need creative solutions and give the possibility for self-expression. They avoid activities associated with conformity to established rules and perceive themselves as open to new experiences, emotional, sensitive and often lacking in office skills (Smart et al., 2000). In expressing career aspirations, women usually endorse intrinsic values, such as helping others, more than men, who tend to favor power or money (Weisgram, Bigler & Liben, 2010). These gender differences emerge in childhood, but they are also reflected in later aspirations. Also, girls have consistently higher educational and occupational aspirations than boys (Mello, 2008; Schon, Martin & Ross, 2007). A possible explanation comes from Eccles (1987) who suggests that lower levels of self-confidence in their abilities, make women choose other professional fields than those that are traditionally male-dominated, such as mathematics or physics.

**The third hypothesis** was focused on the statistically significant differences regarding interests, based on the environment of provenance. We identified statistically significant differences regarding conventional and investigative interests, meaning that adolescent in urban areas value conventional and investigative interests more than adolescents living in rural areas.

Based on the theory of J. Holland, the conventional type is focused on those activities characterized by the systematized and ordered manipulation of objects, in a well-defined and organized frame. They prefer to establish and maintain orderly routines, and have an aversion to ambiguous or unstructured activities (Smart et al., 2000). They have skills that make them able to handle administrative tasks or services. They value material or financial

accomplishments and power in social, business or political arenas.

Therefore, based on the fact that the study level and social class of the parents were taken into account, a possible explanation is the known fact that the parents' social class also influences children's aspirations, through expectations. Educated parents are more proactive and successful in enabling their children's competencies than less educated parents (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996). The social class is also an important factor influencing the development of autonomy, anxiety, depression, life style and health condition in adolescence (S Iceanu, 2019). Since adolescents don't usually participate in their family income, the social status of adolescents is transferred from their parents. Low-income families (that belong to low social class) and their children cannot enjoy the benefits of a better social position. This situation translates itself in a reduced amount of resources at their disposal to manage real-life situations.

Another possible explanation is the worldwide urbanization and the rapid growth of the world economy. In 1900, there were 6.7 rural dwellers to 1 urban dweller, and it seems that by 2025, the proportion will be 3 urban dwellers to 2 rural dwellers (Satterthwaite, McGranahan & Tacoli, 2010). In the context of such social and economic growth, urban areas imply many professions in the field of services. And as a consequence, many young people become employees in organizations that imply the use of different types of objects and tools. This is a big difference between rural and urban areas in Romania. The main rural activity in our country is agriculture, which also implies the manipulation of certain objects, tools and technologies, but these seem to be less diversified than in urban areas.

On the other hand, urban areas allow the existence of multiple professions in which the investigative interests can be applied. The evolution of science, higher education possibilities, and the modernization of different enterprises are factors that influence these two categories of interests and their prevalence in the urban areas.

That being said, we conclude that all our objectives are achieved. Our results suggest the importance of exploring the large field of occupational possibilities.

## 4. Conclusions

The study of interests, especially in adolescence, is a matter of great importance for many reasons:

- From the adolescents' point of view, acknowledging their fields of interest may allow them either to make better career decisions or to be able to choose the type of high-school suited for their skills and interests. Furthermore, in the complex process of career guidance and counseling, discovering their values, needs, interests, objectives, ideals, skills and abilities is a part of the personal development process as well.
- From the universities' point of view, if the students are happy with their choice of specialization, if they are motivated and participate actively in the educational process, this could mean, on the one hand, lower school dropout rates, especially after the first year. On the other hand, knowing the students' types of interests allows teachers to conduct the educational process in a manner that serves everyone's needs as best as possible. Students may be thus involved in different types of projects, entrepreneurial activities (through different kinds of student societies set up in the universities) or scientific research, based on their personal interests. And we consider this a strong point of the relationship between teacher and student: customization (as much as possible) of assignments or of research subjects, for example, based on students' interests is one of the key points for a good academic performance.
- From an organizational perspective, it is important to choose the employees that best fit a certain job. This compatibility means, in the end, job performance, satisfaction, fidelity and organization thrive.
- From the teachers' and psychologists' points of view, the assessment of interests may be a valuable starting point in the process of career guidance and counseling. Often, teachers and school psychologists are important people in the adolescents' life that can guide them and help them discover themselves. When a career is congruent with one's interest, people may feel more motivated to devote their efforts into gaining relevant knowledge and skills, which basically translates into taking action, and improve their performance or enhance their potential.

Working with students in their first year allows us to ask them, during the first meeting, about the reasons they based on their decision to choose their

university track. Although many of our students highlight their interest in the field of psychology or educational sciences, and acknowledge the importance of having certain skills necessary for working with other people, there is also a number of young people that have come to be our students either because their family/teachers insisted or because they failed to enter another department after the admission process. Whenever the subject of career counseling during high-school is brought to discussion, some students say they were never asked or assessed regarding their skills and interest related to a certain field. Therefore, based on our observations, the students have made the following suggestions:

- Universities should better inform their candidates regarding the educational offer.
- Teachers and school psychologists should more frequently assess their skills, interests, values, purposes in life, goals and guide them toward a certain career based on these assessments.
- Parents should be involved in the counseling process, since some students feel they do not receive enough support or information from their families.
- The curriculum in higher education should be constantly based on the realities of the world and on the demands made by the society.
- After graduation, some students have difficulties in finding a job in their field of specialization and are forced to choose another higher education track or work in another field.

In part, one of the consequences of poor career guidance is the fact that after the first year, some students choose to abandon their studies or to go through the admission process all over again in another specialization. This could mean that sometimes students' expectations are not really met, or that they did not choose the appropriate field for them.

Furthermore, studies show that both psychological and sociological aspects of Holland's theory of vocational choice aid in understanding the students' college expectations (Pike, 2006). And this brings us again to the idea that career guidance is one of the fundamental influencing factors of academic and professional success. And as it was suggested before, the study of interests is a good starting point for schools and universities in the process of developing educational programs and alternatives, mainly in order to avoid school dropout or school failure, but also in order to develop the

necessary skills for young people to adjust to the requirements of the society they live in.

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