THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZING CAREER-ORIENTED SCHOOL REVIEWS AND COMPETITIONS ON STUDENTS' CAREER CHOICE MOTIVATION

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Abstract. This article investigates the impact of career-oriented school reviews and competitions on students' career choice motivation, drawing on Social Cognitive Career Theory, Career Construction Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. Through a comparative analysis of career-oriented competition systems in Uzbekistan, Germany, South Korea, and the United States, the study identifies the mechanisms through which structured competitive activities influence vocational self-efficacy, career exploration behavior, outcome expectations, and intrinsic career motivation. The analysis draws on regulatory frameworks including Uzbekistan's Government Decrees No. 562 (2021) and PF-158 (2024), international WorldSkills standards, and empirical findings from PISA and career development research. A multi-dimensional motivational impact model is proposed, comprising five indicators: vocational self-efficacy, career exploration behavior, outcome expectations, intrinsic motivation, and career adaptability. Evidence-based recommendations are developed for enhancing career-oriented competition formats in Uzbekistan's general education schools, including the integration of industry mentorship, formative career assessment, digital career portfolios, and expanded WorldSkills Junior participation.

Keywords: career-oriented competition, career choice motivation, vocational self-efficacy, career guidance, WorldSkills, SkillsUSA, career adaptability, school review-competition, career exploration, vocational education, Social Cognitive Career Theory.

Introduction. The transition from general education to professional life represents one of the most consequential decisions in a young person's developmental trajectory. Career choice motivation — the complex of psychological forces that direct, energize, and sustain an individual's movement toward a particular professional path — is shaped by a confluence of personal, social, and institutional factors. Among the institutional mechanisms available to education systems for influencing career motivation, career-oriented school reviews and competitions occupy a unique position: they provide structured, experiential encounters with professional fields that go beyond the passive information delivery of traditional career guidance, offering students opportunities to actively demonstrate, test, and develop vocational competencies in authentic or simulated work contexts.

The Republic of Uzbekistan has set ambitious targets for transforming its vocational education landscape. The strategic goal of increasing vocational education enrollment from 29% to 50% of ninth-grade graduates by 2030, as articulated in Presidential Decrees PF-158 (October 16, 2024) and PF-190 (October 23, 2025), requires not merely expanding institutional capacity but fundamentally strengthening the motivational pathways that guide students toward vocational careers. In this

context, career-oriented competitions serve as a critical interface between general education and the vocational system, functioning as both diagnostic instruments for identifying aptitudes and motivational catalysts for career exploration.

Uzbekistan's engagement with international skills competition frameworks has accelerated rapidly since joining the WorldSkills movement in 2020 through the Association for the Development and Popularization of Working Professions. The first open national championship, UzbekistanSkills, was conducted in Tashkent with participants competing across ten vocational specializations. Concurrently, the Ministry of Pre-School and School Education's roster of over 26 officially recognized school competitions for the 2024–2025 academic year includes several with explicit career orientation functions, including the Kamalak Yulduzlari children's creativity festival, the Zakovat intellectual game, and various subject-specific olympiads that channel students toward STEM, humanities, and vocational pathways.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the mechanisms through which career-oriented school competitions influence students' career choice motivation, drawing on a multi-theoretical framework and international comparative analysis. The study examines competition systems in Uzbekistan, Germany, South Korea, and the United States, developing a comprehensive motivational impact model and formulating evidence-based recommendations for enhancing career-oriented competition practice in Uzbekistan's general education schools.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework. Understanding how career-oriented competitions influence career choice motivation requires a multi-theoretical approach that integrates complementary perspectives from vocational psychology, educational theory, and motivational science.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett, provides the most comprehensive framework for understanding the career-motivation nexus. SCCT posits that career choices emerge from the dynamic interplay of three core cognitive-person variables: self-efficacy beliefs (confidence in one's ability to perform career-related tasks), outcome expectations (anticipated consequences of pursuing a career path), and personal goals (career aspirations and commitments). Critically, SCCT identifies four types of learning experiences that shape these variables: personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological/affective states. Career-oriented competitions directly engage the first three of these mechanisms: students experience personal mastery through practical skill demonstration, observe peers' vocational performance (vicarious learning), and receive expert feedback from industry professionals (social persuasion).

Career Construction Theory (CCT), advanced by Savickas, complements SCCT by emphasizing the narrative and meaning-making dimensions of career development. CCT conceptualizes career development as an ongoing process of adaptation in which individuals construct coherent career narratives from their life experiences. Within this framework, career-oriented competitions function as structured vocational exploration episodes that provide rich material for career narrative construction. The competitive experience — preparing for a professional challenge, performing under assessment conditions, receiving expert evaluation, and reflecting on outcomes — constitutes a concentrated career development microcycle

that can significantly advance a student's career adaptability, defined by Savickas as the set of attitudes, competencies, and behaviors that individuals use to fit themselves to work that suits them.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), articulated by Deci and Ryan, provides essential insights into the motivational quality of competition experiences. SDT distinguishes between intrinsic motivation (engaging in an activity for its inherent interest and satisfaction) and extrinsic motivation (engaging for external rewards or pressures), and identifies three basic psychological needs whose satisfaction sustains intrinsic motivation: autonomy (a sense of volition and choice), competence (a sense of effectiveness and mastery), and relatedness (a sense of connection with others). The design of career-oriented competitions has profound implications for which type of motivation they cultivate: competitions that emphasize skill mastery, allow specialization choice, and foster mentor relationships are more likely to generate intrinsic career motivation than those that focus primarily on ranking and external rewards.

Among Uzbek scholars, Muslimov's integrative competency approach and Karimov's credit-module framework provide the local theoretical context for connecting competition participation with formal competency development and academic credentialing.

Table 1.

Theoretical frameworks for understanding the impact of career-oriented competitions on career motivation

Theoretical Framework	Core Principle	Application to Career-Oriented Competitions	Key Scholars
Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)	Career choices are shaped by the interaction of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals within environmental contexts	Competitions provide mastery experiences that build vocational self-efficacy; success in career-related tasks strengthens outcome expectations for specific professions	R.W. Lent, S.D. Brown, G. Hackett (1994, 2013)
Career Construction Theory	Individuals actively construct their careers through adaptive behaviors and meaning-making from life experiences	Career-oriented competitions serve as structured vocational exploration experiences that help students construct career narratives and develop career adaptability	M.L. Savickas (2005, 2013)
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Intrinsic motivation is sustained when three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness	Well-designed competitions satisfy competence needs through skill demonstration, autonomy through choice of specialization, and relatedness through team and mentor relationships	E.L. Deci, R.M. Ryan (1985, 2000)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)	Learning is optimized when challenges slightly exceed current independent capability	Progressive competition stages (school → district → regional → national) create graduated ZPD challenges that develop vocational competencies incrementally	L.S. Vygotsky (1978)
Integrative Competency Approach	Professional competency develops through systematic integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills	Career-oriented competitions that combine theoretical assessment with practical demonstration foster holistic professional competency formation	N.A. Muslimov (2023), K.Kh. Karimov (2023)

Comparative Analysis of International Models. A systematic examination of career-oriented competition systems across four countries reveals distinct institutional architectures, each with characteristic strengths and limitations in their capacity to influence career choice motivation.

Table 2.

International comparison of career-oriented competition and guidance systems

Criterion	Uzbekistan	Germany	South Korea	United States
Primary career competition platform	WorldSkills Uzbekistan (since 2020); "Yosh Hunarmand" contests; technikum skill demonstrations	Dual education practical exams; Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK) skill assessments; regional Berufswettbewerbe	Meister system certifications; national vocational skill competitions; hagwon-linked career tests	SkillsUSA (since 1965); Career and Technical Education (CTE) competitions; STEM fairs
School-level career orientation	"Kamalak yulduzlari" festival; career-themed essay contests; Zakovat game; school career days	Berufsorientierung (career orientation) integrated into grades 7–10; mandatory internships (Praktikum); enterprise visits	Career aptitude testing from middle school; vocational high school streaming; intensive career counseling	Career exploration courses in middle school; CTE pathway selection in grade 9; job shadowing programs
Industry engagement model	Ministries assigned as "client-partners" to technikums (Decree PF-158); emerging dual education partnerships	Deep industry integration: enterprises co-design curricula, host apprentices, and co-assess competencies through IHK	Meister system: master craftsmen train and certify apprentices; government-subsidized corporate training	SkillsUSA industry partnerships; employer-judged competitions; school-to-apprenticeship pipelines
Link to formal qualifications	Developing: competition results factor into teacher	Strong: IHK exam results are nationally	Direct: Meister certification enables	Moderate: CTE credentials (OSHA,

	salary bonuses; GPA-based credit transfer to higher education	recognized qualifications; dual diploma (Gesellenbrief) has labor market value	independent practice; competition winners receive employment preferences	NCCER); competition results enhance college/employer applications
Impact on career motivation	Growing: early-stage development; 29% of 9th-graders currently enter vocational education (target: 50% by 2030)	High: ~50% of school-leavers enter dual vocational training; career competitions normalize vocational pathways	High: strong skill-based career identity; but ILO data shows skill-matching ranked 30th/30 OECD countries	Significant: 85% of CTE families satisfied with career exploration; CTE students have higher graduation rates

Germany: The Dual Education Benchmark. Germany's dual education system represents the gold standard for integrating career-oriented assessment into formal education. Career orientation (Berufsorientierung) is embedded in the curriculum from grades 7 through 10, with mandatory internships (Praktikum) and enterprise visits providing structured exposure to professional environments. The Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK) conducts standardized practical examinations that simultaneously serve as skill competitions and formal qualification assessments. Approximately 50% of German school-leavers enter dual vocational training, a proportion that reflects the system's success in motivating career engagement through authentic professional experiences. For Uzbekistan, the German model demonstrates the power of deep industry integration: when competitions are co-designed and co-assessed by employers, they acquire direct labor market relevance that profoundly strengthens students' outcome expectations and career commitment.

South Korea: High-Stakes Vocational Certification. South Korea's Meister system creates a direct pathway from vocational skill competition to professional certification and employment. Meister high schools, modeled on the German Meister tradition, combine intensive practical training with competitive assessment, and their graduates receive preferential employment placement with partner corporations. National vocational skill competitions in South Korea are conducted with high visibility and substantial financial rewards, elevating the social prestige of vocational careers. However, the International Labour Organization's 2020 data reveals a paradox: South Korea ranks 30th out of 30 OECD countries in skill-matching level, suggesting that the competition-driven system may optimize for assessment performance rather than genuine vocational fit. This cautionary finding underscores the importance of designing competitions that develop authentic career exploration rather than merely incentivizing competitive performance.

United States: The SkillsUSA Model. SkillsUSA, established in 1965 and serving students from middle school through post-secondary education, offers perhaps the most developed model of career-oriented competitions as motivational instruments. The organization's framework explicitly integrates classroom instruction, student-led chapter activities (including local, state, and national competitions assessed to industry standards), and workplace experiences (job

shadowing, internships, and apprenticeships). Research data indicates that 85% of families with students in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs report satisfaction with career exploration experiences, compared to only 54% of non-CTE families. CTE students also demonstrate higher graduation rates than their peers. The SkillsUSA model's particular relevance for Uzbekistan lies in its explicit integration of employability skills (communication, teamwork, problem-solving) alongside technical competencies, reflecting a holistic understanding of career readiness that aligns with SDT principles.

Uzbekistan: An Emerging Career Competition Ecosystem. Uzbekistan's career-oriented competition infrastructure is developing rapidly across multiple fronts. WorldSkills Uzbekistan, established as a national operator in 2020, has begun building an expert community with UNDP support, conducting training in 14 high-demand competencies through the Ishga Markhamat monocentre. At the school level, the 2024–2025 competition roster includes formats with explicit career orientation potential: the Kamalak Yulduzlari festival exposes students to creative professions, the Zakovat intellectual game develops analytical and strategic thinking applicable across career fields, and subject olympiads channel academic talent toward STEM and humanities careers. Presidential Decree PF-158 (2024) has strengthened the school-to-technikum pipeline by assigning ministries and enterprises as "client-partners" to technikums, creating a structural foundation for industry-engaged competitions.

However, critical gaps remain. Career-oriented competitions at the general education level are not yet systematically designed to build the specific motivational variables identified by SCCT and SDT. The connection between school competition participation and subsequent vocational education enrollment has not been empirically tracked. The digital platform olympiad.uzedu.uz, while effective for academic olympiad management, does not yet incorporate career exploration or vocational self-assessment functionality. These gaps define the space for the recommendations that follow.

Proposed Motivational Impact Model. Based on the theoretical analysis and international comparison, we propose a multi-dimensional model for assessing the motivational impact of career-oriented school competitions. This model identifies five measurable motivational dimensions that career-oriented competitions should target, along with corresponding competition mechanisms and assessment indicators.

Table 3.

Multi-dimensional motivational impact model for career-oriented school competitions

Motivational Dimension	Competition Mechanism	Expected Outcome	Assessment Indicator
Vocational self-efficacy	Mastery experiences through practical skill demonstration in real or simulated work settings	Increased confidence in professional capability; stronger identification with specific career paths	Pre/post self-efficacy questionnaire (Bandura scale); career decision-making self-efficacy inventory
Career exploration behavior	Exposure to diverse professional fields	Broadened career awareness; informed	Career exploration survey; number of

	through multi-disciplinary competition formats	career decision-making based on authentic experience	career fields explored; information-seeking behavior index
Outcome expectations	Interaction with industry professionals as judges, mentors, and role models during competitions	Realistic understanding of career rewards, challenges, and requirements; alignment of expectations with reality	Vocational outcome expectations scale; career maturity inventory
Intrinsic motivation	Autonomy in specialization choice; competence feedback through expert assessment; team relatedness	Sustained interest in chosen career field; self-directed professional development beyond competition context	Intrinsic motivation inventory (SDT-based); longitudinal career commitment tracking
Career adaptability	Novel problem-solving under time pressure; adapting skills to unfamiliar competition scenarios	Enhanced ability to manage career transitions; resilience in face of labor market changes	Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS); employer satisfaction surveys for graduates

This model integrates SCCT's emphasis on self-efficacy and outcome expectations with SDT's focus on intrinsic motivation, CCT's construct of career adaptability, and behavioral indicators of career exploration. The model's distinctive contribution is its operationalization of these theoretical constructs into concrete competition design parameters and measurable assessment indicators, providing a practical framework for both competition organizers and educational researchers.

Conclusions and Recommendations. This study demonstrates that career-oriented school competitions represent a powerful but underutilized mechanism for influencing students' career choice motivation. The theoretical analysis reveals that competitions impact career motivation through multiple interconnected pathways: building vocational self-efficacy through mastery experiences, shaping outcome expectations through industry exposure, fostering intrinsic motivation through autonomy and competence satisfaction, stimulating career exploration through multi-disciplinary engagement, and developing career adaptability through novel problem-solving demands.

The international comparative analysis confirms that the most effective career-oriented competition systems share three characteristics: deep integration with industry (exemplified by Germany's IHK-assessed dual education); explicit connection between competition performance and educational/employment advancement (demonstrated by Russia's Vseros and South Korea's Meister pathways); and holistic competency development that combines technical skills with employability skills (embodied in the SkillsUSA framework).

Based on these findings, the following evidence-based recommendations are advanced for enhancing career-oriented competitions in Uzbekistan's general education schools:

First, establish a structured Career Orientation Competition Framework integrated into the school curriculum from grade 7. Drawing on the German Berufsorientierung model, career-oriented competitive activities should be systematically embedded into the educational process rather than treated as extracurricular additions. This framework should include mandatory career exploration projects in grades 7–8, career skills competitions in grades 9–10 aligned with technikum specialization areas, and advanced vocational demonstrations in grades 10–11 conducted in partnership with enterprises assigned under Decree PF-158. Each stage should explicitly target specific motivational dimensions identified in the proposed model.

Second, develop industry mentorship programs embedded within competition structures. SCCT research demonstrates that interactions with vocational role models represent one of the most powerful influences on career self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Career-oriented competitions should be redesigned to include structured mentorship components: industry professionals should serve not only as competition judges but as mentors who guide students through preparation, provide formative feedback during the competition process, and maintain advisory relationships afterward. The WorldSkills expert community being developed with UNDP support in Uzbekistan provides a ready-made resource for this initiative.

Third, implement formative career assessment within competition frameworks. Current competitions primarily provide summative evaluation (final scores and rankings). Drawing on SDT principles, competitions should incorporate pre-competition career interest inventories, in-process career reflection exercises, and post-competition career planning workshops. This approach shifts the motivational emphasis from external ranking to internal career development, cultivating intrinsic rather than extrinsic career motivation. Assessment tools such as the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) and vocational self-efficacy inventories should be administered longitudinally to track motivational impact.

Fourth, expand the olympiad.uzedu.uz platform to include a Career Exploration Module. The existing digital infrastructure should be enhanced with: a vocational interest assessment tool linked to competition specializations; a digital career portfolio that aggregates competition results, career exploration activities, and self-assessment data; and an algorithm that matches student competition performance profiles with technikum programs and enterprise partnerships. This would create a data-driven pathway from school-level career competition to vocational education enrollment, supporting the strategic goal of increasing vocational education coverage to 50% by 2030.

Fifth, systematically expand WorldSkills Junior and career-specific competition formats. Building on Uzbekistan's 2020 WorldSkills membership and the UzbekistanSkills championship experience, a Junior WorldSkills program should be developed for general education school students in grades 8–11. This program should encompass at least 20 vocational specializations aligned with the priority sectors identified in the "Uzbekistan – 2030" strategy, with competitions conducted at technikum facilities using industry-standard equipment and assessed by certified WorldSkills experts. The SkillsUSA model of integrating classroom instruction,

chapter-based competitive activities, and workplace experiences provides a proven template for this expansion.

Sixth, establish a longitudinal research program to monitor competition impact on career trajectories. A systematic research initiative should track competition participants over a 5–10 year period, measuring: vocational education enrollment rates, career field alignment between competition participation and eventual employment, career satisfaction, and employer assessments of workforce quality. This empirical foundation would enable continuous, evidence-based refinement of the career-oriented competition system and provide accountability data for the substantial public investments being made in competition infrastructure.

In conclusion, career-oriented school competitions, when systematically designed on the basis of contemporary career development theory and informed by international best practices, represent one of the most promising instruments available to Uzbekistan for achieving its strategic human capital development objectives. The transition from competitions as isolated events to competitions as integrated components of a career motivation ecosystem will require coordinated institutional effort, sustained industry engagement, and rigorous empirical evaluation — but the potential returns, measured in the quality and motivation of the national workforce, are substantial.

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