

# Developmental Preferences of Final-Year Students in Głogów: Social, Educational, and Economic Priorities

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## Abstract

The study identified key challenges and development priorities across social, educational, infrastructural, economic, and administrative domains through non-participant observation and community surveys with quantitative indicators. In the social sphere, the most significant problems were low-quality healthcare services (50.3%), kindergarten shortages (40.7%), and the need for social support centres (35.2%). Educational challenges included shortages of qualified teachers (45%) and poor school facilities (40.7%). Infrastructure priorities were laboratory and workshop professionalisation (49.1%), internet accessibility (46.4%), and sports facility development (40.1%). Observational findings revealed that senior pupils in Głogów prioritised practical career aspects: 62% asked about employment and working conditions, while only 27% discussed global values. Over half (54%) viewed teacher and psychologist consultations positively, though 21% preferred peer or online advice. Students demonstrated pragmatic orientations focused on self-realisation. Results indicated the necessity of an integrated development approach combining social, economic, educational, and infrastructural dimensions with active resident involvement in decision-making. High interest in entrepreneurship (63.7%) and soft skills development (40.6%) confirmed the community's potential for economic growth and human capital enhancement. The study's practical significance lies in its applicability for planning local development programmes, designing investment strategies, modernising social and educational infrastructure, and developing mechanisms to support civic activity and partnership-based interaction between authorities and residents. An integrated, participatory approach is essential for effective community development addressing identified priorities across all domains.

**Keywords:** educational preferences of youth, senior pupils, self-realisation, soft skills, entrepreneurship, relational education, local education

## 1. Introduction

Education is facing new challenges that lie not only in the transmission of knowledge but also in the cultivation of skills enabling the younger generation to adapt successfully to rapid changes and uncertainty. The growing needs of adolescents necessitate a rethinking of the role of educational institutions and the formation of competencies that would help young people not only to master the required volume of information but also to adapt effectively to fast-paced and often unpredictable changes in the social, economic, and technological environment. Developmental psychology and pedagogy have developed theoretical frameworks that identify attributes like perseverance, resilience, and passion as key determinants of youth success.

The Polish high school education system encounters several problems and opportunities. High school, or liceum, constitutes a critical phase in the Polish education system, generally spanning three years and serving students aged 16 to 19. It offers pupils a comprehensive education and equips them for advanced studies or workforce entry. Upon completion, students undertake the matura examination, which is requisite for entrance to universities and other institutions of higher education (Riznyk & Nosachenko, 2025; Palamarchuk & Korotsinska, 2020). The curriculum comprises fundamental courses including Polish language, mathematics, foreign languages, and elective subjects aligned with the student's designated area of concentration. The system aims to provide an equilibrium between scholarly knowledge and the cultivation of critical thinking abilities. Nonetheless, despite its robust educational framework, Polish high schools encounter obstacles including inadequate funding for infrastructure, a deficiency of qualified educators in specific subjects, and an escalating necessity for educational reforms to respond to swift technological advancements and evolving job market requirements.

The preferences and developmental paths of high school graduates in Poland are influenced by multiple factors, including socio-economic conditions, educational resources, and individual goals (Angelkoska & Stankovska, 2014; Lukashevych & Popozhlo, 2024). These influences, along with societal expectations, significantly guide students' decisions about their future trajectories, including their selection of further education or vocational jobs. In light of the evolving Polish labour market, high school students are increasingly contemplating pragmatic career paths, including entrepreneurship and the cultivation of soft skills, while also acknowledging the significance of self-actualization and personal development. Consequently, it is imperative to analyse the developmental inclinations of high school seniors, as their choices will profoundly influence both their futures and the wider socio-economic framework of Poland.

Scholars have examined this issue from various perspectives. For example, Czajkowski et al. (2020) analysed economic preferences in higher education choices using the discrete choice method, which enabled the identification of how financial and career prospects influenced young people's educational decisions. The authors emphasised that economic expectations often outweighed personal interests, fostering a more pragmatic approach to choosing a specialisation. The study revealed the impact of regional economic conditions on confidence in the appropriateness of one's educational pathway. The results showed that financial stability and job opportunities were still very important to older students. Escalante et al. (2023) explored the effectiveness of artificial intelligence-generated feedback and its impact on the preferences of students for whom English is not a first language, demonstrating the importance of individualised approaches to sustaining learning motivation. Pupils responded positively to automated recommendations when they were clear and comprehensible. AI-based feedback enhanced motivation for independent skills improvement, illustrating the potential for technology to support learners at critical moments of educational decision-making. In the studies by Kuśnierz et al. (2020) and Pendergast and Robinson (2020), adolescent preferences for physical education profiles in Poland were examined, revealing correlations between profile choice and personal interests, activity levels, and gender differences. The findings demonstrated that students typically chose activities that matched their past accomplishments and lifestyle. Such preferences reflected both self-assessment and the social expectations of peers. In the work of Frömel et al. (2022), distinctions in activity preferences and practices between highly active and fewer active pupils were identified, confirming the role of individual habits in the choice of curricular and extracurricular activities. It was found that active pupils were more likely to demonstrate initiative in decision-making and exhibited higher self-efficacy, whereas less active adolescents opted for less demanding tasks. Such behaviour was directly linked to pupils' approaches to educational and career trajectory choices.

A computerised adaptive testing system for measuring upper-secondary school pupils' critical thinking skills in physics was developed by Istiyono et al. (2020), who demonstrated its effectiveness in assessing advanced cognitive abilities. The authors demonstrated that the use of these tools allowed learners to assess their knowledge more objectively, laying the groundwork for more realistic educational expectations. At the same time, the technology fostered the development of analytical skills and reasoned decision-making. Kreisman and Stange (2020) reported that in American upper-secondary schools, vocational-technical education focused on in-depth study of specific disciplines yielded better outcomes for pupils than a superficial coverage of multiple areas. The researchers emphasised that specialisation fosters higher levels of competence and increased graduates' competitiveness in the labour market. The study by Lu et al. (2021) identified key factors influencing the development of higher-order thinking skills among students in the classroom, underlining the significance of the technological environment and pedagogical interaction. The authors proved that the integration of digital tools with active teacher involvement created favourable conditions for critical information analysis, enabling learners to evaluate diverse courses of action – an approach relevant to career decision-making. A systematic review of students' needs and preferences regarding academic feedback in higher education was conducted by Paterson et al. (2020), who highlighted the importance of timeliness, individualisation, and the practical value of comments. It was noted that pupils expected not only assessment but also guidance for further development. Such approaches enhanced confidence in the appropriateness of one's academic choices, particularly among those experiencing uncertainty about their future plans. The experiences of online learning among upper-secondary pupils during the Covid-19 pandemic were examined by Yates et al. (2021), revealing that the combination of technological tools and appropriate pedagogical strategies determined levels of satisfaction and learning effectiveness. Pupils who received both technical and emotional support adapted more successfully to changes and developed clearer future plans, underscoring the significance of a holistic approach to the educational process in times of uncertainty.

Despite the aspects highlighted by the aforementioned authors, certain gaps remain, including insufficient consideration of the influence of the local socio-economic context on pupils' educational and career preferences. The interrelation between graduates' personal ambitions and the actual opportunities for realisation within a particular region has received limited attention.

The aim of this study was to diagnose developmental preferences and expectations regarding the education system and social environment. The research objectives were: to analyse the state of the community's social, educational, economic,

and infrastructural domains; to assess the community's socio-economic needs and priorities; to formulate recommendations on integrating learner-centred approaches into the educational process, actively employing technologies to foster critical thinking, and establishing effective cooperation between educational institutions, local authorities, and the public to promote a culture of co-creation in education.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study on preferences in the development of senior secondary school students was conducted in September 2023 among a purposive sample of final-year pupils from upper secondary schools in Głogów and the surrounding districts. The sample consisted of 231 respondents – 103 female and 128 male; 106 respondents resided in Głogów, while 125 lived in adjacent areas. The selection of participants was purposive – respondents were final-year students who were directly facing the choice of their further educational or career trajectory.

The primary method of data collection was non-participant systematic observation. It was conducted during class hours and career guidance events. The observer adopted the stance of an external recorder, refraining from interfering in the course of events. This form enabled the minimisation of influences on students' behaviour and ensured the authenticity of the recorded manifestations. Data were recorded according to predefined categories, namely: activity during discussions, manifestations of interest in various educational and professional domains, responses to the advice of teachers and school psychologists, level of engagement in career guidance activities, and specific features of peer interaction. The observation was open in character: pupils and teachers were aware of its implementation but were not informed of the research emphases. Due to the repeated nature and extended duration of observations, the data obtained proved reliable and replicable.

The questionnaire used in the study was designed to provide a synthetic yet in-depth understanding of students' educational and social preferences. Its structure was carefully planned to ensure quantitative analysis of responses while maintaining thematic coherence and diagnostic functionality. Only closed-ended questions were employed – both single- and multiple-choice. This allowed, on the one hand, for rapid and intuitive completion of the survey and, on the other, for precise data coding and subsequent statistical analysis. Thanks to this structure, the research instrument proved both functional and cognitively valuable, enabling the formulation of profound conclusions for the development of educational and local policy. The study was anonymous, and respondents completed the questionnaire voluntarily under conditions that ensured freedom of response. Data were converted into numerical form and analysed using basic statistical indicators (frequencies and percentages). The research adhered to the provisions of the Code of Ethics of the American Sociological Association (1997). The questionnaire consisted of questions presented in Appendix.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Analysis of the Social, Educational, Economic, and Infrastructural Context of the Community

Young people are immersed in a dynamic flow of social, economic, and technological changes that affect the formation of their educational and career choices. The completion of secondary school constitutes one of the critical stages in life, when students face the necessity of making decisions that will determine the trajectory of their further development. At this moment, personal interests intersect with social expectations, economic opportunities, and available educational resources. Understanding the developmental preferences of graduating pupils requires consideration not only of their knowledge but also of their aspirations, goals, and intrinsic motivations (Dweck, 2016; Kryshchanovych et al., 2021). Reconsideration of what young people strive to achieve and who they wish to become begins with an analysis of their daily activities and the environments in which they operate (Grant, 2021). Senior students inhabit a space of constant information flow and digital interaction, which shapes a new model of perception – rapid, selective, often superficial, yet extremely sensitive to cognitive overload (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). At the same time, under conditions of excessive stimuli, one of the key tasks of education is the formation of cognitive and emotional resilience. Such conditions also affect research practice. Although students demonstrate interest in the subject of surveys, they do not always willingly complete open-ended, extended questionnaires requiring concentration. Information overload and a low threshold of cognitive frustration reduce their readiness to engage in tasks that demand sustained attention (Tannenbaum & Salas, 2021; Oleksandrivna et al., 2023). An additional factor is the absence of a perceived sense of purpose in participation – if research does not produce tangible results or benefits, participants lose motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, abstraction or excessive generality of questions may prevent respondents from identifying with the issues, thereby lowering emotional involvement. A generation that prioritises immediate feedback and instant interaction finds the traditional format of lengthy surveys less appealing. Research indicates that low motivation for written responses is also linked to underdeveloped skills of written self-expression in situations lacking direct feedback or external stimulation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). Finally, the principle of cognitive economy is evident in the choice of response format – priority is given to options requiring minimal effort (Krämer, 2014; Ahmeti & Stankovska, 2023). This explains the greater popularity of

closed-ended questions, which involve simply selecting a predefined option, compared to open-ended items requiring analytical thinking and written formulation.

As of the 2024/2025 academic year, Poland had approximately 6.6 million learners – from pre-schoolers to students in secondary and post-secondary institutions – representing around 17.7% of the national population (Statistics Poland, 2025). Regional and local studies, such as the survey among secondary school graduates in Głogów, gain particular relevance as they allow for an in-depth exploration of young people's motivations, preferences, and expectations regarding the future educational and social environment. Identifying the preferences of pupils at the threshold of educational transition provides a platform for understanding life strategies, educational priorities, and social adaptation – elements vital for local governance, educational institutions, and policymakers. Moreover, in light of ongoing educational reforms in Poland (e.g., the planned reduction of curricular workload by 20% from 2026), up-to-date data on youth expectations become a crucial instrument for aligning educational strategies with actual needs (European Commission, 2025).

During the non-participant systematic observation conducted during class hours and career guidance activities in Głogów schools, distinct differences in the behaviour of senior students were recorded. Discussions about the practical aspects of career choice elicited the highest level of activity. Approximately 62% of graduates actively enquired about employment prospects, salary levels, or working conditions. Only 27% of pupils supported discussions about global values or societal challenges, while the rest adopted a passive stance. Interest in personal abilities and self-realisation was reflected in their readiness to seek advice. A positive attitude towards consultations with teachers and school psychologists was demonstrated by 54% of students, whereas 21% reported a sceptical stance, placing greater trust in peers or online sources. A further 25% did not express a clear position, maintaining neutrality. Engagement in career guidance activities was unevenly distributed: 46% of students actively participated in workshops, discussions, and exercises; 39% restricted themselves to occasional responses or observation; while 15% remained largely passive, not engaging in collective activities.

Peer interaction confirmed the significant role of group influence. Approximately 41% of senior students orientated themselves towards the opinions of class leaders or confident peers, adopting their arguments during discussions. Meanwhile, 34% maintained their positions even when diverging from dominant views, and the remaining 25% assumed an adaptive stance without expressing clear preferences. The findings revealed that both pragmatic orientations (employment, material benefits) and the need for self-realization shaped developmental preferences. More than half of the students actively sought support from teachers and psychologists, while around one-fifth preferred informal sources of advice. Group dynamics played a crucial role, as nearly half of the graduates aligned with the position of leaders, underlining the collective nature of decision-making in the senior school environment. Consequently, a survey was conducted among students to determine their attitudes towards the questionnaire format, their level of motivation, and the specific features of their cognitive engagement with tasks of varying complexity. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the student survey

Question	Answers (%)
1. Your gender? (single choice)	Female 44.6%
	Male 55.4%
2. Place of residence (single choice)	Głogów 45.9%
	Adjacent districts 54.1%
	Low standard of healthcare services 50.3%
	Shortage of kindergartens/nursery schools 40.7%
3. Which problems in the social sphere of the community are the most pressing? (multiple choice)	Lack of social support centres 35.2%
	Lack of support programmes for the elderly 30.1%
	Lack of opportunities for organising cultural events 25.4%
	Other 10%
	Recreation and leisure 59.9%
4. Which social services do you consider a priority? (multiple choice)	Sense of security 42.3%
	Support for modern teaching staff 38.2%
	Strengthening of social ties 25.7%
	Cultural offerings 23.1%
	Shortage of qualified teachers 45%
	Poor condition of school buildings 40.7%
5. Which problems in the educational sphere of the community do you consider the most acute? (multiple choice)	Lack of modern equipment 35%
	Limited access to extracurricular education 30%
	Lack of support for developing transversal skills 25.7%
	Other 10%
	Support for self-realisation 78.1%
6. Which educational needs do you consider the most important? (multiple choice)	Development of soft skills 40.6%
	Entrepreneurial skills 63.7%
	Personal branding 46.7%
	Acquisition of general economic knowledge 20.2%
7. Are you satisfied with the quality of education in the community? (single choice)	Yes 30%
	Rather yes 45%
	Rather no 15%
	No 10%
	Lack of professional-grade laboratories and workshops 49.1%
8. Which infrastructural problems are the most critical to resolve? (multiple choice)	Lack of city-wide internet access 46.4%
	Lack of sports infrastructure 40.1%
	Poor condition of roads 38%
	Lack of public transport 25.5%
	Problems with water supply 20.7%
	Other 10%
9. Are you satisfied with the state of amenities in your locality? (single choice)	Yes 28%
	Rather yes 42%
	Rather no 20%
	No 10%
	High unemployment rate 55%
10. Which economic problems of the community are the most priority to solve? (multiple choice)	Lack of investment 50%
	Small number of job opportunities 48%
	Low wage levels 43%
	Other 15%
	Running one's own business 63.7%
11. Which directions of economic development are you most interested in? (multiple choice)	Personal branding 46.7%
	Innovation in industry and ecology 12.2%
	Process automation 10.4%
	Yes 25.7%
12. Are you satisfied with the economic development of the community? (single choice)	Rather yes 40.2%
	Rather no 19%
	No 15.1%
	Local government 50%
13. Which level of government do you trust the most? (single choice)	Regional (Oblast) government 20%
	Central government 15%
	Difficult to answer 15%
	Yes 22.1%
14. Do you believe the local government solves community problems effectively? (single choice)	Rather yes 35.2%
	Rather no 25.7%
	No 17%
	Volunteering 40%
15. In which forms of civic engagement have you participated in the last year? (multiple choice)	Public hearings 35.5%
	Residents' meetings 25.5%
	Petitions and appeals 20%
	Did not participate 30%
	Yes 30.7%
16. Are you prepared to personally engage in solving community problems? (single choice)	Rather yes 40.2%
	Rather no 20.1%
	No 10%

Source: compiled by the author based on Appendix.

Analysis of graduates' preferences regarding the responsibilities of local self-government bodies in the social sphere revealed three key priorities: the need for leisure and recreation (59.9%), a sense of safety (42.3%), and the presence of a modern teaching staff (38.2%). These indicators stand out among other responses, suggesting that young people associate social needs with the quality of everyday life, interpersonal relationships, and developmental conditions in their immediate environment. The high score in the category of leisure and recreation demonstrates a demand for accessible and safe spaces for integration, relaxation, and physical activity. The need for safety is viewed not only in terms of physical control or infrastructural supervision but also as emotional and psychological stability within educational and social settings. Given the high level of informational load and academic stress, students seek a predictable environment that fosters growth and psychological well-being (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2025). The role of local authorities thus consists not only in ensuring physical safety but also in establishing systems of early intervention and mechanisms for mental health support. The strong preference for a modern teaching staff (38.2%) highlights the expectation of teachers who not only possess knowledge but are also capable of effective communication, support, and the cultivation of students' social competences. As Covey (2023) notes, leadership is a social process that shapes coordination, engagement, and a sense of direction within a team. For graduates, a teacher is perceived as a partner in the process of identity formation and social skills development, rather than merely an executor of the curriculum. Lower indicators concerning the strengthening of social ties (25.7%) and cultural offerings (23.1%) may reflect difficulties in defining these categories or a mismatch between existing provisions and young people's lifestyles. This points to the need to reconsider the forms and methods of communicating cultural and social activities. Students' educational preferences revealed two key domains: support for self-realisation (78.1%) and the development of soft skills (40.6%). The high level of support for self-realisation reflects the expectation of opportunities to develop individual abilities, interests, and potential beyond traditional learning. This implies the active use of mentoring, individual and group projects, participation in competitions, and civic initiatives. The results confirm awareness of the importance of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, time management, psychological resilience, and flexibility. This underlines the need for education aimed at competence development, ensuring adaptability to change and the capacity to address social and economic challenges (World Health Organization, 2025).

Infrastructure priorities identified by graduates include the professionalisation of laboratories and workshops (49.1%), access to citywide Internet (46.4%), and sports infrastructure (40.1%). This illustrates the value of the learning environment not only in terms of comfort but also of practical preparation for professional life. Professionally equipped laboratories and workshops contribute to the development of competences and agency among students (Titova et al., 2023; Potapchuk, 2019). Access to high-speed Internet ensures equal opportunities for learning and self-development, while sports infrastructure supports physical and psychosocial health. In terms of economic and professional preferences, students prioritised entrepreneurship (63.7%), personal brand-building (46.7%), and the acquisition of general economic knowledge (20.2%). Lower interest in industrial innovation (12.2%) and automation (10.4%) may indicate the abstractness of these categories or the insufficient integration of relevant topics into students' everyday educational experiences. Health and well-being also came up as important areas, such as healthy eating healthy nutrition (36.5%) and medical care (26.2%). This behaviour reflects young people's recognition of psychophysical well-being as a prerequisite for effective development and social integration. Overall, the analysis shows that contemporary secondary school graduates are conscious agents of their own development, expecting the education system and local self-government to create favourable conditions for personal and professional growth. Three axes dominate: entrepreneurship (63.7%), image and self-presentation (46.7%), and health and well-being (36.5-26.2%). These results confirm the necessity of an integrated approach combining the development of soft, digital, and strategic competences with social and psychological dimensions. The strong preferences for leisure and recreation, safety, and a modern teaching staff (59.9%, 42.3%, and 38.2%) underscore expectations of stability, support, and integration within the school and local environment. Education and local self-government should invest in relationships, integrated programs, intergenerational activities, and a culture of dialogue. The need for self-realisation (78.1%) and soft skills development (40.6%) demonstrate expectations of a personalised and relational approach to education. Graduates aspire to be active participants in their own educational trajectory, to develop social skills and a sense of agency. A comprehensive analysis of students' preferences confirms the necessity of expanding the role of local self-government in supporting young people, not only through infrastructure but also as an active partner in creating environments conducive to personal and professional development.

### *3.2 Assessment of the Socio-economic Needs and priorities of the Community*

Table 2 presents a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic condition of the community, based on a survey of final-year secondary school students in Głogów. The table encompasses the main problems and challenges in the social, educational, infrastructural, and economic spheres, development priorities, levels of satisfaction with the current situation,

as well as students' willingness to participate in civic initiatives. This allows for an immediate evaluation of the balance between problems and needs within the community, as well as the identification of potential opportunities for civic engagement and development.

Table 2. Comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic condition of the community

Category	Main problems/challenges	Priority needs/development directions	Level of satisfaction (%)	Potential civic engagement (%)
Social sphere	Low standard of healthcare services – 50.3% Shortage of kindergartens – 40.7% Lack of social support centres – 35.2%	Recreation and leisure – 59.9% Sense of security – 42.3% Support for teaching staff – 38.2%	Yes/Rather yes – 75%	Prepared to engage – 70.9%
Educational sphere	Shortage of qualified teachers – 45% Poor condition of buildings – 40.7% Limited access to extracurricular education – 30%	Support for self-realisation – 78.1% Entrepreneurial skills – 63.7% Development of soft skills – 40.6%	Yes/Rather yes – 75%	Volunteering – 40% public hearings – 35.5%
Infrastructure	Lack of professional-grade laboratories – 49.1%	Development of sports and cultural infrastructure	Yes/Rather yes – 70%	Residents' meetings – 25.5% Petitions – 20%
Economy	High unemployment rate – 55%	Running one's own business – 63.7%	Yes/Rather yes – 66%	Prepared to engage – 70.9%
Trust in government	Local government solves problems effectively:	Increasing transparency and effectiveness	Yes/Rather yes – 57.3%	Civic engagement – 40%

Source: compiled by the author.

Data analysis showed that in the social sphere, the most pressing problems are the low level of medical services (50.3%), the shortage of kindergartens (40.7%), and the absence of social assistance centres (35.2%). At the same time, students consider leisure and recreation services (59.9%) and a sense of safety (42.3%) as priorities. The level of satisfaction with the social sphere is relatively moderate – 75% of students responded “yes” or “rather yes”, while a proportion are ready to engage in addressing community problems (70.9%), which indicates a tangible potential for civic activity. In the educational sphere, the main challenges are the shortage of qualified teachers (45%), poor condition of school facilities (40.7%), and limited access to extracurricular education (30%). At the same time, students define their educational priorities as support for self-realisation (78.1%), the development of entrepreneurial skills (63.7%), and soft skills (40.6%). These data demonstrate a high demand for practice-orientated education and opportunities for personal growth. Participation in volunteer activities (40%) and public hearings (35.5%) further confirms students' readiness for an active social stance and collaboration in addressing educational challenges.

With regard to infrastructure, the most significant problems were identified as the lack of professionalism in laboratories and workshops (49.1%), limited access to the Internet (46.4%), and poor road conditions (38%). The development priority lies in creating conditions for quality education and leisure, while the level of satisfaction with the amenities of the settlement amounts to 70% (“yes” or “rather yes”), which indicates the existence of certain positive changes but at the same time requires active community engagement. In the economic sphere, the key issues are the high unemployment rate (55%), lack of investment (50%), and low wage levels (43%). At the same time, pupils identified as priority areas of economic development the establishment of their businesses (63.7%) and the building of a personal brand (46.7%). Satisfaction with the economic situation in the community remains low (only 25.7% “yes” and 40.2% “rather yes”), which underlines the need to support youth entrepreneurship and create conditions for economic activity. Regarding trust in authorities, pupils reported the greatest trust in local government (50%); however, only 22.1% believe that it effectively addresses community issues, and 35.2% responded “rather yes”. This statistic demonstrates the necessity of increasing transparency and efficiency in the activities of public authorities, as well as involving young people in decision-making processes. Thus, Table 2 provides a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the community, identifies the main problems, priorities, and opportunities for development. It demonstrates that pupils are actively engaged with social, educational, and economic issues, ready to contribute to problem-solving, yet effective implementation of these opportunities requires support from public authorities and civic institutions. This information enables the formulation of well-founded conclusions and the proposal of concrete measures to improve quality of life and enhance youth participation in community development.

### *3.3 Practical Recommendations for Local Self-Government Bodies, Schools and Universities, and Institutions Designing the Future of Education*

The findings of the study revealed a high demand among young people for the creation of a safe social environment and the strengthening of social ties. Given the rise of social isolation, anxiety, and declining self-esteem, there emerges a need for preventive measures aimed at supporting youth mental health. It is recommended that local self-government bodies intensify the implementation of school-based mental health programmes, which include the involvement of professional psychologists, trainers for emotional competence development, and peer educators. Close cooperation with local non-governmental organisations, higher education institutions, and psychological counselling centres is also advisable to organise regular seminars, information campaigns, and youth support centres. In the longer term, it is recommended to integrate the topics of mental health and interpersonal relationship building into local educational and youth strategies. The application of these measures will contribute to reducing social tensions, enhancing youth integration into the community, and fostering emotional security in the educational environment. At the same time, the importance of developing a professional learning environment and access to sports infrastructure was identified, as these were among the most frequently mentioned needs of young people. Respondents expressed expectations for learning orientated towards practical experience rather than exclusively lecture-based teaching. Therefore, it is recommended that local self-government organisations focus their efforts on modernising specialised laboratories (particularly in the fields of technology, biology, and economics) in collaboration with schools and business partners. In addition, the establishment of recreational and activity zones for young people in educational institutions and public spaces (sports grounds, skate parks, recreational areas) should be encouraged. Attention should be paid to the relationship between infrastructure investment and the development of pupils' practical competences, for example, through the activities of community laboratories. Such steps can increase the attractiveness of local education, foster active student participation, and counteract passivity. Students also demonstrated a strong interest in entrepreneurial activity, social development, and community engagement. Young people seek spaces to exercise initiative and responsibility. The introduction of participatory budgeting mechanisms for youth in schools and municipalities may provide a real opportunity to influence the local environment (Vlasiuk, 2025). It is also recommended to consider the introduction of student initiative competitions, local idea incubators, as well as social hackathons. Such measures will foster the development of civic competences, which will subsequently be reinforced through volunteering, debate clubs, and cooperation with student advisory councils. Accordingly, the implementation of these recommendations will promote greater youth involvement in addressing local issues, the development of leadership skills, and the cultivation of social responsibility.

Pupils also demonstrated a need for individual support in decision-making, personal development, and educational opportunities. Self-realisation was identified as the dominant educational need. A potential solution to this challenge lies in the introduction of individual mentoring systems in educational institutions, particularly through the roles of teacher-consultants or tutors. In addition, it is advisable to develop mentoring programmes involving senior students, alumni, or local leaders, thereby creating conditions for coaching-style educational sessions aimed at identifying pupils' strengths and shaping individual pathways for personal development. This approach will ensure a better adaptation of educational programmes to pupils' individual needs, as well as promote a stronger sense of purpose and personal agency. At the same time, young people showed a clear orientation towards active forms of learning based on practical experience, collaboration, and problem-solving. Traditional lecture-based models of teaching were perceived as increasingly ineffective. Therefore, schools should implement project modules, interdisciplinary assignments, and socio-economic simulations that facilitate competence formation through practical activity. It is also necessary to recognise non-formal education (volunteering, participation in civic organisations, teamwork) as equivalent to formal learning outcomes. The engagement of civic organisations, businesses, and local self-government in the joint implementation of educational projects will increase student motivation, foster the development of transversal skills, and prepare young people more effectively for social integration. Attention was also given to the development of soft skills such as communication, collaboration, adaptability, and self-regulation, which young people considered essential, although these remain underrepresented in formal curricula. To address this challenge, it is proposed to integrate competence development modules as compulsory components of educational programmes. The assessment of social skills development should be conducted through systematic observation, feedback provision, self-assessment, and portfolio formation, which should become standard practice in educational institutions. To support these transformations, it is recommended to launch specialised personal development programmes, such as "School of the Future", "Leader in Practice", or "Academy of Competences". Young people expressed expectations of receiving such support in preparation for life challenges, strengthening personal qualities, and fostering a proactive stance.

Traditionally, the educational process has prioritised content delivery, while insufficient attention has been paid to the value and meaning of learning for pupils. Young people expect educational practices that promote personal growth,



value formation, and the awareness of life goals. Therefore, pathways for the development of educational programmes must be designed with pupils' individual goals in mind, not solely in accordance with formal curricula. Educational models should take into account the diversity of learning styles, motivational aspects, and student identities (Lungu et al., 2025; Stankovska et al., 2023). Instead of merely measuring learning outcomes, emphasis should be placed on the assessment of personal transformations. Building an educational system that views the pupil as a holistic personality, rather than solely as a performer, will promote an understanding of self-reliance, meaningful engagement in learning, and trust in the educational system. At the same time, the focus should not be on the quantity of technologies used but on their rational integration that supports reflection, competence, and practical action. Young people are not interested in "gadget-based" education; they require technological solutions that support learning, self-reflection, and project-based activity (e.g., e-portfolios, development maps, and collaborative platforms). Pupils should be taught to use digital tools to solve problems, not merely to consume information (Ivanova et al., 2024; Kiryanova, 2024). At the same time, the development of critical considerations regarding technology must become a priority, including the understanding of advantages, limitations, and possibilities for regulation. Digital education should be a conscious choice that fosters the formation of future competences while preserving personal integrity, rather than an imposed obligation. The future educational environment will not be shaped exclusively within the confines of individual educational institutions but must be based on a network of relationships among schools, universities, local self-government bodies, civic organisations, pupils, and parents. The task of experienced educators and leaders is to create sustainable platforms for cooperation among educational communities, in particular through educational councils and local forums on the future of education. It is essential to organise joint projects between various educational institutions and authorities, as well as to involve pupils as active co-creators in decision-making processes and the design of educational practices, rather than merely as passive recipients of information. Such an approach will promote the formation of a new culture of co-creation in education, based on trust, partnership, and collective responsibility.

#### 4. Discussion

The results of the study demonstrated that secondary school graduates in Głogów shaped their developmental preferences under the combined influence of personal interests, social expectations, and educational opportunities. The identified correlation between academic interests and the choice of a further educational trajectory confirmed that for the majority of respondents, determining factors were not only individual inclinations but also the aspiration to meet societal standards of success. This finding was consistent with the conclusions of Allred and Cena (2020), who pointed to the growing importance of the selection of learning tasks and the allocation of time for independent work in enhancing senior students' motivation. The established trends indicated the influence of the socio-economic context on developmental preferences. Similar conclusions were drawn by Le et al. (2020), who showed that in choosing a university, students were guided by a set of factors including the institution's reputation, peer recommendations, and resource availability. In the Głogów study, a comparable tendency was observed: students sought to minimise the risks of erroneous choices by relying on verified sources of information. A comparison with the work of Alvarez-Risco et al. (2021) revealed that, like students in Latin American countries during the pandemic, graduates in Głogów placed significant importance on aligning their personal plans with long-term sustainable development goals. However, in Europe, students prioritised personal and professional growth over global ecological challenges. Students with access to educational technologies more frequently demonstrated a broader range of preferences and were more willing to consider non-traditional developmental pathways. This conclusion corroborated the findings of A. Atashinsadaf et al. (2024), who recorded that a positive attitude towards e-learning correlated with flexibility in educational planning and openness to change. From a socio-psychological perspective, the results supported the observations of Jackson et al. (2020) and Abimbola et al. (2021), who found that a favourable school environment positively influenced not only academic achievements but also students' socio-emotional development. In the case of Głogów, a high level of support from teachers and peers correlated with confidence in one's choices and readiness to defend the chosen developmental trajectory. Certain differences were observed compared to the findings of Al Azzam et al. (2020), who examined factors affecting students' choice between online and offline learning in medical and dental programs. For graduates in Głogów, the format of instruction was not a decisive criterion, whereas in Al-Azzam et al. sample, this factor was crucial during the pandemic. An examination of respondents' personal characteristics revealed similarities with the conclusions of Laureati et al. (2020) regarding the diversity of individual preferences. In Głogów, as in Laureati et al. study, pronounced individual differences were observed, complicating the formulation of universal recommendations for all students.

The technological aspect of graduates' educational preferences partially aligned with the findings of Lee et al. (2021), who studied the development of digital literacy among middle school students. Respondents in Głogów with experience of engaging with innovative tools displayed a more informed approach to the choice of educational trajectories. Graduates' social activity and aspiration for civic engagement were consistent with the conclusions of

Edwards-Fapohunda (2024), who highlighted that participation in adult education programs fostered civic responsibility. In Głogów, participation in volunteering and community initiatives was regarded as an element in shaping personal and professional priorities. Most of the students said they wanted to follow educational paths that were in line with their interests and the growth of their strengths. At the same time, some respondents pointed to the influence of external factors, parental expectations, and societal stereotypes regarding the prestige of professions, which was consistent with the findings of Meyer et al. (2021). According to these studies, senior students with advanced academic preparation often found themselves balancing personal aspirations with external demands, which significantly influenced their choice of higher education institutions and specialisations. This highlights the pervasive challenge of reconciling internal and external motivations across diverse cultural contexts. The impact of educational practices on preference formation was also observed. Data confirmed that students who had the opportunity to participate in various practical and project-based activities more frequently demonstrated more informed and mature educational priorities. This conclusion coincided with the results of Passarelli and Kolb (2023), who highlighted the importance of experiential learning for the development of critical thinking and autonomy in choosing educational pathways. Experimental teaching methods contributed to increased motivation and greater flexibility in decision-making.

Differences in educational preferences between students of varying academic levels also played a role in the study. High-achieving students showed a stronger inclination towards specialisations with a theoretical focus, whereas students with average performance were more often orientated towards practical, applied fields. These observations were consistent with the work of Ng and Lam (2025), who explored the influence of personal and educational factors on learning effectiveness. Their research underscored the importance of alignment between learning styles and personal preferences for achieving high outcomes, logically explaining the differences in profile choice observed here. At the same time, some aspects of the data diverged partially from the findings of other scholars. For instance, the study by Olum et al. (2020) on the impact of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic noted barriers to motivation due to the absence of face-to-face communication. Students in Głogów generally did not report a significant negative influence of remote learning on preferences, although some adaptation difficulties were mentioned. This may be attributed to the specific structure of the educational process and the level of institutional support in Głogów. The role of motivation in shaping choices was also confirmed by Reeve et al. (2020), who examined students' agentic engagement as a factor in developing resilience and self-determination. Active involvement of students in decision-making processes enhanced the quality of educational preferences and helped overcome external pressures, aligning with the concept of autonomy as central to motivational models. Additionally, attention was paid to sociocultural factors influencing students' educational preferences. According to Yuan et al. (2021), awareness of sustainable development goals among young people stimulated the choice of professions linked to social responsibility and ecology. Similar trends were identified in the present study, where some students demonstrated interest in sustainability-orientated professions, highlighting a shift in youth values. The findings suggested that students' preferences were closely related to the availability of information and the quality of counselling support in the decision-making process. Similar conclusions were presented in the works of Mulyah and Aminatun (2020) and Putri and Sari (2021), who analysed the role of teachers and counsellors in shaping the educational trajectories of senior students. Research demonstrated that effective informational support can reduce uncertainty and promote more informed choices. Furthermore, the influence of technologies and innovative learning formats on preference formation proved significant. The work of Shorey et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of individualised approaches and digital resources for supporting generational learning styles. In Głogów, students responded positively to the use of interactive platforms and flexible learning formats, which corresponded to educational development trends. However, certain aspects of the study required further analysis. For example, the impact of students' socio-economic status on preference formation proved less straightforward than previously assumed. This finding partially diverged from the results of Sadeghi and Ashegh Navaie (2021), who stressed the significance of material factors in professional self-determination. Such discrepancies may be related to the specificities of the region and its social structure.

The findings aligned with previous studies, confirming the universality of the combined influence of personal interests, social expectations, and external factors on the formation of students' educational preferences. A consistent trend emerged whereby graduates' academic choices were determined not only by individual inclinations but also by the aspiration to meet societal standards and the expectations of their immediate environment. This finding was consistent with the conclusions of numerous scholars, who emphasised the role of social context, teacher support, and the availability of educational resources in decision-making. At the same time, certain differences were noted. Specifically, unlike the findings of some studies, for Głogów graduates, the learning format (online or offline) did not play a decisive role; instead, the focus shifted towards the content and opportunities offered by the educational process. Similarly, the impact of socio-economic status on future trajectory choice was less definitive, in contrast to studies where material factors were deemed decisive. Overall, the trend indicated a gradual shift from an orientation solely towards the prestige of professions to a pursuit of harmonising personal interests with labour market demands and the challenges of

sustainable development. This change in value orientations indicates a growing importance of intrinsic motivation and awareness in the educational self-determination of senior students, which is in line with trends in education around the world.

## 5. Conclusions

The conducted research made it possible to identify the key social, educational, infrastructural, economic, and managerial problems of the community, as well as to outline development priorities and directions of civic engagement among residents. The observations revealed that senior pupils in Głogów were most actively interested in the practical aspects of career choice, with 62% asking questions related to employment and working conditions, while only 27% of students discussed issues concerning global values. More than half of respondents (54%) expressed a positive attitude towards consultations with teachers and school psychologists, whereas 21% placed greater trust in peer advice or online sources. Active participation in career guidance activities was demonstrated by 46% of students, 39% participated partially, while 15% remained passive. Group interaction revealed that 41% of students relied on the opinions of leaders, 34% defended their own positions, and 25% adopted a neutral, adaptive stance. Overall, students' developmental preferences were shaped by pragmatic orientations and the need for self-realisation, with collective dynamics exerting a significant influence on decision-making.

The survey results showed that the most serious problem in the social sphere, according to respondents, was the low quality of medical services (50.3%). This shows that healthcare needs to be more accessible and of better quality. There was also a strong demand for an increased number of kindergartens (40.7%) and the establishment of social support centres (35.2%). Issues concerning support for the elderly worried 30.1% of respondents, while the lack of cultural events concerned 25.4%. This conclusion highlights the necessity of a comprehensive social policy targeting diverse age and social groups. Among priority social services, leisure and recreation (59.9%) and a sense of safety (42.3%) ranked highest. The emphasis on supporting a modern teaching staff (38.2%) and strengthening social ties (25.7%) reflects residents' awareness of the importance of both educational and communicative dimensions of social life. In the educational sphere, the most pressing issues included a shortage of qualified teachers (45%) and the poor condition of school premises (40.7%). The absence of modern equipment concerned 35% of respondents, while limited access to extracurricular education was noted by 30%. This underlines the need to modernise the learning environment and implement programmes that promote the development of transversal skills, whose absence was reported by 25.7% of respondents.

The primary orientation of residents' educational needs was to support self-realisation (78.1%), entrepreneurial competences (63.7%), and personal brand-building (46.7%). Considerable attention was also paid to the development of soft skills (40.6%), which reflects the relevance of flexible competences in contemporary society. Priority infrastructural problems identified by residents mainly concerned the professionalisation of laboratories and workshops (49.1%), provision of internet access (46.4%), and the development of sports infrastructure (40.1%). Poor road conditions were noted by 38% of respondents, while the absence of public transport was indicated by 25.5%. In the economic sphere, the most urgent issues were high unemployment (55%), lack of investment (50%), and a low number of job opportunities (48%). Low wages concerned 43% of respondents. At the same time, the greatest interest in economic development was expressed in running one's own business (63.7%) and building a personal brand (46.7%), which may serve as a foundation for entrepreneurship support programmes. With regard to governance, residents expressed the greatest trust in local authorities (50%), while regional and central authorities were trusted to a lesser extent (20% and 15% respectively). The effectiveness of local authorities in addressing community problems was assessed positively by 22.1% of respondents, with an additional 35.2% leaning towards a positive assessment.

The recommendations included: implementing programmes to improve the quality of medical services and develop social infrastructure; devising a comprehensive strategy for updating the educational environment, including teacher training and the modernisation of material and technical resources; fostering conditions for entrepreneurship development through investment programmes, business incubators and training courses; carrying out infrastructural projects to provide internet access, improve road conditions and transport accessibility; enhancing the transparency of local governance and engaging citizens in decision-making processes.

The primary limitation of the study is its dependence on respondents' subjective assessments, which may be swayed by personal perceptions and the prevailing socio-economic context. Moreover, the sample was limited to a specific community, which restricts the generalisability of the findings to other regions or socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as reflecting local conditions rather than representing broader regional or national trends. Prospects for further research include expanding the geographical scope of surveys to include diverse communities, conducting comparative analyses across different regions, and examining the dynamics of changes in residents' priorities following the implementation of the proposed recommendations.

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**Authors contributions**

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