

Life success in the ideas of Kazakhstani youth of the generation Z

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the problem of youth success in the context of consumer society and digital socialization. The purpose of the study: to identify the features of ideas about life success of student youth as typical representatives of generation Z.

The analysis of the main objective and subjective factors that determine the ideas of young people about life success and ways to achieve it revealed a dependence on the dominant type of activity. In addition, the orientation of schoolchildren, students and working youth towards individualism in achieving success was revealed. It is proven that a change in the objective and subjective factors of socialization entails a change in the value system of young people regarding success in life at different stages of youth. The cultural models of socialization of Kazakhstani youth (traditional, modernist, mobilization) are presented, the parameters of which are due to intercultural contradictions between the socio-cultural poles of society (Eurocentrism / traditionalism).

Keywords: generation Z ("zoomers"), schoolchildren / students / working youth, life success, success, individualism, socialization models, Eurocentrism / traditionalism.

Introduction

A modern person is immersed in a constant competition with himself in an effort to surpass the previously achieved level of performance, to solve the problem in an original way. The term "success" is one of the most common in the discourse of modern Kazakhstani society, oriented towards the Western model of development, where a successful person is judged in the context of material well-being, pragmatism and individualism. Despite the social significance of the problem of life success and social success, it remains insufficiently studied in the humanities. At the same time, some aspects of this phenomenon have been studied, such as the mechanisms of formation of social success in large and small groups (D. McClelland), features of behavior aimed at success (V. Friedrich, A. Hoffman), motives for striving for success and motives for avoiding failure (J. Atkinson), the place and role of the need for success in the system of human social needs (Yu.M. Orlov), basic forms of success (G.L. Tulchinsky), success as a value orientation of the individual (K.A. Mukhambetova). However, the youth context

of the problem remains little studied. Meanwhile, the idea of social success as a life attitude of the younger generation is necessary for developing ways and means of implementing personal plans, revealing the potential of the individual, forming a constructive attitude to reality, a positive approach to solving the problems facing it

The situation is aggravated by the fact that Generation Z (zoomers), born in the new millennium (2000-2015), like F.M. Dostoevsky's "teenagers of the Time of Troubles", faced a radical modernization of all aspects of public life, the destruction of seemingly unshakable traditions, views, ideas about life goals and ways to achieve them. This generation has had to endure two and a half years of social isolation, propaganda of fear and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like Dostoevsky's hero in the novel "The Teenager", zoomers strive to ensure absolute independence from society (*"Personal freedom, that is, my own, ... and then I don't want to know anything"*).

Young people aged 14 to 27 inclusive are a part of the population whose consciousness is especially vulnerable in an era of transformation and crises. In conditions where the modern socio-cultural environment orients young people towards mobility, prestige, and success, moral and ethical problems arise due to insufficient life experience and psychophysical imbalance. The presence of "adult" needs and desires runs into the lack of adequate means of satisfying them [Teslenko, 2020]. Therefore, the purpose of our study is to identify the features of ideas about success and success among young Kazakhstanis as typical representatives of Generation Z.

Research Methodology

The working hypothesis of the study was based on the assumption that the ideas about the life success of the "zoomers" generation depend on the level of socialization and leading activities. In order to increase the representativeness of the data, cluster groups were identified - schoolchildren, students and working youth. The main research method was a sociological survey. Data were collected and processed during the implementation of the scientific project AR 14869235 "Youth work as a condition for the successful socialization of student youth" (2020-2023), the empirical data of which were supplemented by a series of in-depth interviews conducted in the period from 10.09.2024 to 20.05.2025 on the basis of two Kazakhstani universities: the Eurasian Institute named after A. Kusainov (Astana), Kokshetau University named after. A. Myrzakhmetov and the capital's school-gymnasium No. 36. The general sampling model is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. General model of the research sample

Cluster groups	Age	Place of study		Gender	
				male	female
schoolchildren	16-18	Senior grades (10-11)	School No. 36, Astana	12	18
student youth	18-21	1st-3rd year full-time students	Eurasian Institute named after A. Kusainov	33	36
			Kokshetau University named after. A. Myrzakhmetov	35	43

working youth	23-27		Kokshetau University named after. A. Myrzakhmetov	11	18
TOTAL:				91	103
				194	

Results and discussion

An analysis of young people's ideas about success in life and ways to achieve it revealed the presence of objective and subjective factors. Thus, among the objective factors of success in life, "zoomers" name the material status of the family, education, patronage of influential relatives, favorable circumstances, and the main subjective factor is personal qualities and intelligence (78%).

Despite the "moral panic" in public opinion regarding the younger generation, the study revealed a certain continuity in the value orientations of "zoomers" with the older generation. As the study shows, family is the main condition for social success. *"A happy family and its material well-being"* is the main criterion determining success in life; 61.99% of schoolchildren, 60% of students and 81.41% of working youth associate their success with it. Such a high rating of the family in the system of values of young people is associated, first of all, with the emotional perception of this institution of socialization: "Family is my rear, my EVERYTHING!" (Azamat, 18) In general, family is seen as the main criterion for success, to which other criteria can be added with varying degrees of frequency (Table 2).

Table 2. Young people's ideas about success in life (in % of responses)

	Schoolchildren	Students	Working youth
have a happy family, children	61,99	60,00	81,41
be independent, free	22,22	22,22	17,95
recognition by others, fame	10,5	7,22	1,92
power	3,51	5,00	1,92
to have a variety of leisure activities	7,60	8,33	9,62
having your own business	19,88	16,11	21,15
satisfaction in intimate life, love	11,11	20,00	8,97
travel a lot	5,26	10,00	7,05
high income	46,20	43,89	51,92
have good friends	49,12	27,78	23,72
peace of mind, harmony	9,94	20,00	13,46
have an interesting, favorite job	26,90	35,56	30,13
become a master of your craft	15,20	10,56	12,82
have a solid position in society	6,43	8,33	9,62
other	0,58	0,56	0,00

Note: Respondents were asked to select no more than three answer options, so the total number of responses is greater than 100%.

Another important criterion of success in the youth consciousness is a high income, which is more significant for young people than an interesting, favorite job. Professional self-realization ("to become a master of your craft") is noted among schoolchildren, students and working youth twice less often than a high salary. Based on these data, it can be stated that the pragmatic orientation of the generation is quite stable, which is recorded in the orientation of young people of all groups of generation Z on such personal qualities as purposefulness, education, self-confidence, sociability, professionalism and hard work (Table 3).

Table 2. Opinion of young people on the qualities necessary to achieve success in Kazakhstan (in % of responses)

	Schoolchildren	Students	Working youth
purposefulness	16	15	17
communicative skills	8	13	11
education	15	12	16
hard work	10	8	9
cunning	5	3	2
ambition	1,3	2	1,5
enterprise	6	10	7
professionalism	10	8	11
egoism	0,7	1	0,8
independence	3	3	3
charm	6	5	2
self-confidence	13	14	15
honesty	2	1	2
other	0,24	0,11	0,13

Note: Respondents were asked to select no more than three answer options, so the total number of responses is greater than 100%.

Further analysis of ideas about a person's success also demonstrates significant differences in the opinions of young respondents from different cluster groups. Schoolchildren are more focused on the "peer group", friendly companies, considering "having good friends" as an important criterion for success in life. This is the opinion of 49% of schoolchildren, while in the group of students and working youth only 27.7% and 23.7%, respectively.

For students, the spheres of personal life become more significant, first of all, in satisfaction in intimate life, love. The search for achieving harmony in relationships with the opposite sex was chosen by 20% of respondents (for comparison, in the group of students this is 11%, in the group of working youth - 9%).

The ideas of working youth about success in life are determined by the conscious or unconscious acceptance of a group with such values as family, marriage, children: on the one hand, money, on the other - personal well-being. It should be noted here that the choice of the criterion of material well-being is more typical for young people from low-income families, they note this criterion of success twice as often as those with average and well-off incomes (Table 4)

Table 3. The influence of the material well-being of the young person's family on the opinion about success in life (in % of responses)

	Low-income family	Average-income family	Well-income family
have a happy family, children	67	68	64
be independent, free	22	20	25
recognition by others, fame	6	7	11
power	0	3	8
to have a variety of leisure activities	10	8	11
having your own business	10	19	23
satisfaction in intimate life, love	10	14	12
travel a lot	6	8	5
high income	50	49	39
have good friends	23	35	36
peace of mind, harmony	23	14	11
have an interesting, favorite job	31	32	27
become a master of your craft	21	11	16
have a solid position in society	15	7	9
other	0	0,5	0

Note: Respondents were asked to select no more than three answer options, so the total number of responses is greater than 100%.

Dialectically, success in life, on the one hand, individualizes a person in their socio-cultural environment, makes them different from everyone else, on the other hand, a person is not initially free in their achievements, since they are forced to focus on social criteria of success - a kind of "standard" of achievements, so as not to be isolated from society, but to be recognized. The leading role in the personification of personal achievements is played by a personal strategy, focused on the achievements of already successful people. Accordingly, success has an imitative nature - it reproduces the model of success of other people (Table 4).

Table 4. Respondents' opinions about "significant others", their idols (in % of responses)

	Schoolchildren	Students	Working youth
parents, relatives	40	24	26
acquaintances, colleagues	16	19	22
friends	15	13	11
teachers, lecturers	6	6	8
pop music stars	9	5	4
sports stars	12	9	7
movie and theatre stars	13	4	5
socio-political figures	10	14	15
scientists	9	8	14

nobody is an idol	27	37	26
other	20	14	17

Note: Respondents were asked to select no more than three answer options, so the total number of responses is greater than 100%.

The study showed that the ambivalence of orientation towards success is inherent in all “zoomers”, but specific features can also be identified. Quite a significant number of schoolchildren, about 40%, would like to be similar in their achievements to their parents and relatives, while only 24% of students and 26% of working youth think so. In addition, 27% of schoolchildren would like to be similar only to themselves, and 37% of students. Working youth, in contrast to the previous two groups, are equally oriented towards: 1) parents and relatives – 26%, 2) colleagues – 22%, 3) themselves – 26%. Apparently, there is a rethinking of their life achievements in the process of acquiring independence and responsibility in the process of socialization.

Gender analysis of data determining youth’s ideas about life success yields interesting results. The idea that “...a woman should be, first of all, a mother, a keeper of the hearth, her world is the home, housekeeping, raising children; a man is a breadwinner, a provider, a communicator, who carries out the connection between the family and society” has remained in the distant past. Our study confirms the global trends of blurring the ideas about traditionally “female” and “male” roles. There is a convergence of gender roles, similarity of ideas of young men and women about success in life (Table 5).

Table 5. The influence of a young person’s gender on success in life (in % of responses)

	male	female
have a happy family, children	68	74
be independent, free	20	22
recognition by others, fame	11	5
power	5	2
to have a variety of leisure activities	8	9
having your own business	20	18
satisfaction in intimate life, love	17	12
travel a lot	5	9
high income	47	47
have good friends	44	27
peace of mind, harmony	11	17
have an interesting, favorite job	24	35
become a master of your craft	14	12
have a solid position in society	9	8
other	0,49	0,33

Note: Respondents were asked to select no more than three answer options, so the total number of responses is greater than 100%.

The table shows that the criterion of "having a happy family, children" is equally valuable for both girls (74%) and boys (68%). Even greater convergence is observed in the criteria of "being independent, free" (20% / 22%), "having your own business" (18% / 20%), and "high earnings" (47% for both girls and boys). However, if success in life for boys is self-affirmation, which implies a positive assessment of achievements by the social environment, social recognition (it is noted by 11.2% of boys, girls - twice as less), then for girls it is peace of mind, harmony (it is noted by 17.2% of the surveyed girls and 10.7% of the surveyed boys). As for the means of achieving success in life, the respondents also show unanimity in choosing such methods as education, professionalism, hard work, labor, here it is also interesting to note the dependence. Here, there is also a direct dependence of the choice of the method of achieving success on the criterion of the material well-being of the parental family (Table 6).

Table 6. Respondents' opinions on ways to achieve success (in % of responses)

	Low-income family	Average-income family	Well-income family
Education, professionalism	82	74	84
Work hard	56	52	45
Money	16	9	11
Having and supporting friends	20	32	36
Protection of influential relatives, acquaintances	14	11	8
Personal charm, attractiveness	18	27	32
Chance	40	21	12
Practical, enterprising	18	24	33
Any way is good	14	18	21
Other	2	1	0

Note: Respondents were asked to select no more than three answer options, so the total number of responses is greater than 100%.

If "chance" as a way to achieve success is considered by 40% of young people from low-income families (versus 21% of middle-income and 12% of well-off youth), then those from middle-income and well-off families are focused on personal qualities, personal efforts in achieving success in life. These groups prefer the following methods: practicality, enterprise - respectively, 24% and 33% of respondents (only 18% of low-income), personal charm, attractiveness - respectively, 27% and 32% of respondents (only 18% of low-income). There is a dominance of Western individualistic values in the youth consciousness: professionalism, enterprise, freedom of choice, independence, confidence, well-being.

The value of education as a condition for success in life decreases with age: 81% of schoolchildren, 74% of students and 56% of working youth. The opposite trend is observed when analyzing the criterion of "work hard, toil" as an effective way to achieve success: 43% of schoolchildren, 46% of students and 56% of working youth. There is a tendency to move from "traditional" ways to achieve success to "youth" ones: blogging, design, freelancing, etc. The "zoomers" generation is more focused on the support of

friends than the patronage of influential relatives and their acquaintances (less than 12%). Paternalistic and, to some extent, infantilistic sentiments are being replaced by an awareness of the need, first of all, for personal efforts in achieving success.

It is alarming that the opinion that any method is good for achieving success is quite widespread among schoolchildren (14%), students (18%), and working youth (21%), which indicates that zoomers are indiscriminate in choosing methods for achieving success. During in-depth interviews, an opinion was expressed about the possibility of participating in “divorcing” old people, fraudulent schemes.

Generation Z is fixated on self-presentation of their status, appearance, and sexuality. Girls, in contrast to boys, prefer personal charm and attractiveness when choosing a method for achieving success: 33.9% of the girls surveyed (for comparison, 15.6% of boys). In-depth interviews revealed a persistent stereotype in the minds of some girls that “bed” is a necessary way to achieve success.

All this indicates profound changes in the value-motivational sphere of modern youth regarding success in life. If in Soviet society young people wanted to be like astronauts, geologists, literary heroes in achieving success, then in postmodern society young people strive to be like politicians, businessmen, heroes of domestic and foreign films and TV series in their achievements, whose actions often cannot be called noble. The collapse of the USSR left a deep mark on the transformation of institutions of socialization of younger generations: violation of the continuity of generations, inconsistent education reform, dehumanization of the media, stratification of youth consciousness. In the value system of the younger generation, there are such polar values as good and evil, freedom and dependence, truth and lies, beauty and ugliness.

The study showed that the ideas of “zoomers” about success in life are interconnected with their ideas about a successful person in modern Kazakhstan. The analysis of the data obtained made it possible to identify six significant criteria for assessing success.

The first criterion is *appearance*. Most of the young people surveyed (60%) evaluate a successful person, on the one hand, as neat, tidy, and on the other hand, as “stylish”. “branded”.

The second criterion is *education* (usually higher), which is considered by all groups of young people as the foundation of a successful life. This area remains a priority in the structure of future achievements of the young.

The third criterion is *the place of work*. More than half of young people evaluate the place of work as any, i.e. the place of work itself does not matter, but the position must be managerial.

The fourth criterion is the *income* of a successful person. More than 90% of young people estimate the income of a successful person as high.

The fifth criterion is the family of a successful person. The overwhelming majority of young people believe that a successful person must have a family, having children is also desirable.

And finally, the sixth criterion is the *hobbies* of a successful person. About 50% of young people believe that the main hobby of a successful person is sports (various types of sports). Just over 30% of young people rate the hobbies of a successful person as diverse.

Thus, we see that the ideas of young people about a successful person in modern Kazakhstan are consistent with their ideas about success in life and complement the latter. In general, the results of our study confirm the socio-cultural models of socialization of Kazakhstani youth that we have previously put forward (traditional, modernist, mobilization), the parameters of which are conditioned by intercultural contradictions between the socio-cultural poles of society (eurocentrism / traditionalism) and are determined by the ratio of the possibilities of coordinating and satisfying the basic, social and spiritual needs of young people in relation to the civilizational and historical vertical or the opposition "aul - city" (Teslenko, 2007).

The *traditional model of socialization* is inherent in a large part of the aul youth and urban migrants of the first and second generation. Mentally, they forever remain in the cultural and linguistic opposition to the Russian-speaking urban culture; Their cultural code is described by the concepts of zhuz tribalism, regionalism, xenophobia, respect for rank, loyalty to the cult of force and authoritarianism. In achieving success in life, they rely on such values as irrationalism, collectivism, lack of initiative, protectionism.

The *mobilization model of socialization* is typical for Russian-speaking youth from rural areas and some part of Kazakh youth, who are at the junction of two cultures (about 40%) – Kazakh and Russian-European, between rural and urban culture. Its distinctive feature is that it occurs under the influence of external, extreme factors, first of all, unequal starting conditions of socialization compared to urbanized youth. As a result, there is a contradictory system of values and ideas about success in life:

- *"the main thing is initiative, enterprise and the search for something new"* (Zhenis, 20);

- *"standing out from others and being a bright individual is much better than being like everyone else"* (Aliya, 22),

- *"for a person, first of all, it is important to evaluate his personal life according to his own individual criteria"* (Sergey, 18);

- *"as my dad used to say: initiative is punishable, the slower you go, the further you will get"* (Ilyas, 21);

- *"for the sake of success and well-being in life, I am ready to do anything!"* (Ivan, 19);

- *"I live by the principle a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush". Family, children - this, in my opinion, is happiness"* (Zhanna, 25).

And finally, the *modernization model of socialization*, characteristic of urbanized youth, among which a small (less than 3-5%) group of "golden youth" stands out - people from rich and prosperous families, in whose minds current values - rationalism, individualism, enterprise, initiative - steadily dominate. In modern conditions, young Kazakhstanis, through trial and error, are trying to independently determine (not requiring energy costs) techniques, tactics and strategies for social integration. As a result of constructing socialization trajectories for building life success, in our opinion, four sociotypes are emerging, differing from each other in: value orientations, social values, perception of living standards, the degree of activity / passivity of life attitudes. Social types, conventionally designated as "lagging behind", "catching up", "going" and

“running” are four sociotypes, for some a forced, for others a consciously practiced strategy for implementing the socialization trajectory (Table 7).

Table 7. Socialization trajectories of the KZ generation and stylistic features of the strategy for their implementation

Strategies of socialization trajectory	<i>Lagging behind</i>	<i>Walking</i>	<i>Catching up</i>	<i>Running</i>
Stylish features of the strategy	"Driven" by the need to survive	"Consistent" traditionalists	Imitators	Advanced innovators
Main factors of implementation	Secondary education, limited resources of the parental family, low-paid budget job or its absence	Secondary and higher education, resources of the parental family can be different, low or average paid job (usually budget)	More often higher education, average and well-paid job (non-budget)	Higher education, well or average paid job, often in prestigious and promising positions (usually non-budget)
Characteristics of the group	Deprived youth, striving to maintain their existing status or to acquire it, less often - forced to "lag behind" (army, birth of a child, completion of education)	Conservative, conformist determined, striving or forced to maintain their status (army, birth of a child, completion of education)	Striving to achieve something, ambitious people, gaining experience	Highly ambitious, independent, mobile, inclined to everything new and experiments young people

Conducting a socio-cultural analysis of the emerging strategies for the implementation of potential resources of young people, it was easy to notice that the groups of "runners" and "catching up" differ from "laggards" and "walkers" by clearly expressed stylistic features. The prevailing strategy in Kazakhstan is "catching up", distinguished, on the one hand, by the desire for stability and gradual, step-by-step implementation of life plans, and on the other hand, by the presence of broad ambitious plans within the framework of traditional thinking and value orientation. Preferred jobs are budgetary institutions that guarantee certain privileges and provide chances for access to limited, but reliable resources. In contrast to them, young Kazakhstanis, who quite clearly (at the moment) formulate their idea of success, consciously articulate the goals they set for themselves. They have a clear idea of their chances of access to the resources they need and the risks they are taking, as well as the limitations and barriers they will have to overcome. Western values, a certain rational type of thinking and practices demonstrated by this group allow us to predict that pragmatically oriented Kazakhstanis will be able to smoothly integrate into the structures of power, business,

mass media, etc., while the so far equal group of "laggards" (driven by the need to survive) lacks their social and symbolic resource for this.

Conclusion

In summary, several key findings should be made.

Firstly, the current period of development of Kazakhstani society is characterized by a radical qualitative transformation of the value system, determined by political and economic modernization of all aspects of public life. The formation of the youth value system, as well as values regarding success in life, occurs in the context of a conflict with traditional institutions of socialization.

Secondly, the observed instability of the vital value system of youth, including regarding success in life at different stages of youth, largely determines the hierarchy of life goals corresponding to a certain stage of personality development, the implementation of which will be success. The "zoomer" generation is more focused not on social values (like parents), but on the mainstream values of a certain reference group and their own life attitudes.

Thirdly, a significant part of young Kazakhstanis are focused on individualism in achieving success in life, and strives to independently and responsibly design their lives. At the same time, on the one hand, there is a tolerant attitude towards norms, values, attitudes, and behavior patterns of adults, and on the other hand, there is intra-group conformism.

Fourth, young people are heterogeneous in their composition, which is expressed not only in the differentiation of ideas about success in life and ways to achieve it, but also in stratification into groups depending on the dominance of certain values in the minds of young people.

Fifth, there is such a tendency as an orientation toward individualism in the ideas of young people about success in life in modern Kazakhstan.

Sixth, we can talk about such a positive phenomenon in the youth environment as the ability not only to adapt to innovations, but also to create them. In general, Generation Z contains great innovative potential and is capable of active transformations of the social environment.

Generation Z is the children of economic liberalism and consumer society. This generation is distinguished by conformism and pragmatism of life plans, which in the future can contribute to financial stability and clear career advancement of young pragmatists. The unstable state of society gives pragmatists from the groups of "walking", "catching up" and especially "running" the best opportunities to realize their initiative, mobility, focus on success, since social institutions are unbalanced, the norms and practices of social relations are hybrid. The strategy of a pragmatist is almost the only optimal one, since it implies a greater concentration on the means to achieve the goal, rather than on the goal itself ("instrumental activism" according to Nikolai Genov [Genov, 2001]). Taking into account world-system processes, this means a high probability that new generations of pragmatists will be forced to continue the modernization of Kazakhstani society in a pro-Western direction.

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