Career Adaptability in College Students: The Role of Proactive Personality and Perceived Social Support

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Abstract
The dynamic evolution of modern career orientations necessitates that individuals assume responsibility for defining their own career pathways. Moreover, it is essential for students to recognize these changes, as their awareness significantly impacts career adaptability development, a critical strategy for effectively navigating the transition from education to the workforce. This study aims to examine the impact of proactive personality and perceived social support on career adaptability among students from various educational backgrounds. The research employs a quantitative correlational survey design, involving 127 students with internships, part-time, or full-time work experience. The analysis conducted using the Pearson correlation test revealed a significant positive correlation between proactive personality and social support in career adaptability. The findings indicate that proactive personality contributed 40% to career adaptability, while social support contributed 22%. These results indicate that career adaptability is fundamentally a self-regulated process driven by individual agency, while social support functions primarily as a facilitator rather than a primary driver. Consequently, higher education institutions are advised to prioritize career interventions that cultivate students' internal psychological resources to prepare adaptable graduates.

Keywords: *Proactive Personality; Perceived Social Support; Career Adaptability; Undergraduate Students; Vocational Students*

INTRODUCTION

The global labor market has experienced significant transformations in career development due to advancements in digital technology and economic growth. This evolution has redefined the nature of work, transitioning from a traditional paradigm characterized by stable and linear career paths that primarily focus on organizational frameworks. In contrast, the contemporary environment emphasizes flexibility and individual empowerment in career progression. This evolution highlights the increasing relevance of the protean career concept (Hirschi, 2018). In this framework, career management is no longer solely held by organizations. Instead, individuals increasingly determine their career paths based on personal values and expectations regarding self-development (Baruch & Vardi, 2016). Recent data from BPS-Statistics Indonesia (2025) in the National Labor Force Survey of August 2024, reveals that younger workers, particularly those in the group (aged 25–34), exhibit significantly higher levels of job mobility compared to those aged 35 and above demonstrate greater stability in their careers. Crucially, with turnover rates of approximately 36.2% (aged 15–24) and 26.6% (aged 25–34), these transitions are frequently driven not merely a result of external instability, but predominantly driven by internal reasons, such as misalignment with personal values or expectations. These finding validates that the younger generation is increasingly aligning with the concept of protean career, where career success is defined by individual assessment and meaningful experiences, culminating in self-defined career satisfaction. (Haenggli et al., 2021).

In the current career landscape, the younger generation, particularly on higher education students, are increasingly expected to be mastery in adaptive career development. This evolving environment has established career adaptability as a fundamental requirement for success. Prior studies have established career adaptability as a key predictor for attaining life satisfaction (Cabras & Mondo, 2017) and consistently serves as a predictor of enhanced quality of life over time (Hirschi, 2009). Furthermore, adaptable students often express a greater sense of control managing their career

trajectories (Guan et al., 2017). Nonetheless, a significant gap persists, as many students are not aware to recognize that shifts in career orientation, marked by high job flexibility, affect all educational pathways both theoretical and vocational and ultimately have an impact on their readiness for the workforce. Studies have shown that numerous students remain convinced that academic degrees offer stable and clearly defined career paths (Tomlinson, 2017).

Building upon the preceding discussion, career adaptability stands as a cornerstone within the contemporary employment landscape, particularly through the lens of Career Construction Theory. As conceptualized by Savickas (2005), this construct encompasses four foundational dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Career adaptability significantly enhances individuals' prospects of obtaining suitable employment (Yen et al., 2023) and contributes to the cultivation of attitudes within professional settings that foster job satisfaction (Maggiori et al., 2017). The career adaptability development is not strictly an autonomous process but rather requires a synergy between internal personality characteristics and external resources. Internally, a proactive personality is identified as a significant initiatory factor, as conceptualized by (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Individuals possessing this trait are empowered to identify opportunities actively, take the initiative in skill enhancement, and modify their surrounding environments, thereby stimulating the dimensions of control and curiosity integral to career adaptability. Empirical research indicates that proactive students are more inclined to actively enhance their career adaptability (Tolentino et al., 2014) and often serving as agents of change within dynamic environments, despite associated risks (Delle et al., 2022). Previous studies has consistently revealed that proactive personality is positively correlated with the development of career adaptability (Hou et al., 2014; Fang et al., 2024). However, relying solely on internal drivers in isolation is often insufficient. Consequently, external factors must be considered, specifically the contextual support surrounding them. Perceived social support, as defined by Zimet et al. (1988), represents an individual's subjective appraisal of the support received from family, friends, and significant others, plays a critical role. Social support influences students' perceptions of opportunities by enabling adequate decision-making and career exploration (Ghosh & Fouad, 2017). Furthermore, social support has been shown to enhance self-efficacy, further reinforcing the confidence dimension within career adaptability (Hou et al., 2019). Previous research findings have provided substantial evidence that social support is significantly and positively correlated with career adaptability (Wang & Fu, 2015; Öztemel & Yıldız-Akyol, 2021).

Despite previous research having established that proactive personality and social support as essential factors in career adaptability, these internal and external factors have frequently been examined separately within student populations. As a result, understanding of the relative roles and interrelationships between internal and external factors in shaping students' career adaptability remains limited. This lack of knowledge is becoming increasingly critical as students currently face complex dynamics in career transitions. Despite the differences in educational approaches, graduates from both academic and vocational pathways ultimately compete within the same labor market. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of proactive personality and perceived social support on career adaptability among students from various educational backgrounds.

METHOD

This research uses a quantitative method with a correlational survey design and a cross-sectional design, in which data were gathered at a single point in time A quantitative methodology was employed to objectively test the relationships between variables using instrument measurement, resulting in statistical analyses of numerical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The respondents included psychology and vocational education students from the same university as the research sample. Sample size estimation was performed using power analysis via G*Power software version 3.1.9.7. This approach determines the minimum sample size using effect size estimates, significance level, and statistical power. The analytical model used the F-test in Linear Multiple Regression: Fixed Model, R^2 Deviation from Zero. Since the research design involved two predictor variables, multiple regression models are used to determine the sample size. With an effect size parameter (f^2) of 0.15, a significance threshold (α) of 0.05, and a power of 0.80, the minimum sample size required is 124 respondents. The sampling technique was a nonprobability approach that used purposive sampling to select samples based on predetermined criteria. The criteria for respondents included students who had internship experience for at least one semester and minimum of three months of full-time or part-time work experience. Data

collection involved two methods: online distribution through commonly used communication media and direct visits to respondents. Online data collection was conducted by sharing a questionnaire link with respondents who met the reseaarch criteria via the Google Forms platform. In contrast, direct distribution involved providing questionnaires to respondents who were known to have fulfilled the research criteria.

This study investigates key variables, specifically career adaptability as the dependent variable, proactive personality and perceived social support as independent variables. The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS), developed by Savickas & Porfeli (2012), was used to measure career adaptability. This scale 24 item scale is divided into four dimensions: concern (6 items), control (6 items), curiosity (6 items), and confidence (6 items). Responses ranged from 1 (very disagree) to 5 (very agree). According to Sulistiani et al. (2018), this scale adaptation used in Indonesia. An example item is *",Thinking about what my future will be like*" which has a reliability coefficient of 0.91. The proactive personality variable is measured using the Proactive Personality Scale (PPS) created by Bateman & Crant (1993). This scale consists of 17 items and uses a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Indonesian adaptation of this scale, developed by Viratasya & Kadiyono (2024), was incorporated into this study. An example item is "*I always look for new ways to improve my performance,*" which has a reliability value of 0.826. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988), was used to measure feelings toward the social environment. This scale consists of 12 items, divided into three categories: family (4 items), friends (4 items), and significant others (4 items), uses a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Indonesian version of this scale is used as described by Sulistiani & Kristiana (2022). An example item is "*My family really tries to help me,*" which has a reliability coefficient of 0.85. All research instruments were adopted from previous studies that established their reliability and construct validity without modifying the content, ensuring adherence to proven research standards. Additionally, standardized estimates were employed in the analysis to facilitate the comparison of the influence strengths among the variables, despite their differing measurement scales. Classical assumption tests were performed to confirm that the data meets the criteria for regression analysis, such as normality, linearity, and heteroscedasticity. The results of these tests will inform the feasibility of the data for further analysis based on the required assumptions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

Descriptive data were used to analyze the distribution of responses from 127 participants who met the criteria for the research sample. The respondents were categorized based on several characteristics, including age, gender, education, and experience. The collected data revealed variations in these demographic aspects, focusing on frequency and percentage distributions. Data processing was conducted statistically using Jamovi software version 2.6.44.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Categorization	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18-20 years old	18	14.1
	21-24 years old	109	85.8
Gender	Man	34	2.68
	Woman	94	73.2
Education	S1	87	68.5
	D4	40	31.5
Internship	Yes	117	92.1
	No	10	7.9
Work	Yes	42	33.1
	No	85	66.9

Based on Table 1, the largest proportion of respondents falls within the 18–20 age range, comprising 14.1% of the sample with 10 individuals. The majority of respondents (85.8%, totaling 109 individuals) were aged 21-24. In terms of gender, the study had a predominantly female population, with

73.2% identifying as female, while only 2.68% identified as male. This illustrates the significant dominance of female respondents over male respondents. Regarding educational background, the majority of respondents were psychology students, representing 68.5% of the sample. This indicates that psychology students significantly outnumbered vocational students who represented diploma programs. Regarding experience, a significant majority of respondents, specifically 92.1%, reported having participated in internship programs, which contrasts with 33.1% who indicated prior work. This suggests that the proportion of students with internship experience far exceeds that of students without any internship or work experience.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variables	Min	Max	Empiric *M* (*SD*)	Hipotetic *M* (*SD*)	Categorization
Career Adaptability (Y)	68	120	102.14 (10.73)	72.00 (16.00)	High
Proactive Personality (X1)	56	119	91.21 (12.83)	68.00 (51.00)	High
Perceived Social Support (X2)	27	84	62.33 (12.77)	48.00 (12.00)	High

Based on Table 2, the descriptive analysis of 127 respondents revealed empirical and hypothetical mean data obtained from three research instruments: the career adaptability scale, proactive personality scale, and perceived social support scale. Overall, the results fell within high category, as indicated by empirical mean values that exceeded the hypothetical mean values. This suggests that students generally exhibit good career adaptability, proactive personality traits, and social support. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationships between proactive personality and career adaptability ($r = 0.525$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived social support was positively correlated with career adaptability ($r = 0.446$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, proactive personality and perceived social support were positively correlated with career adaptability ($r = 0.556$, $p < 0.001$). These correlation tests indicate that higher levels of proactive mindset and social interaction are associated with increased students' career adaptability to modify their careers. Furthermore, a positive correlation exists between the external and internal predictor variables, which contributes to fostering career adaptability.

Table 3. Summary of Multiple Linier Regression Results

Variables	*B* (Unstandardized)	SE	*β* (Standardized)	*t*	*p* (Sig.)
(constant)	59.83	5.82	-	10.29	< 0.001
Proactive Personality (X1)	0.34	0.08	0.40	4.47	< 0.001
Perceived Social Support (X2)	0.19	0.08	0.22	2.49	0.014
R	0.56				
R²	0.31				
F	27.90				< 0.001

Classical assumption tests were performed to verify the suitability of the data for further analysis in multiple regression analysis before conducting hypothesis testing. The classical assumption tests used the Shapiro-Wilk technique, which produced a statistical value of 0.990, $p = 0.507$ ($p > 0.05$). This indicates that assumption was met, confirming that data are normally distributed. Additionally, the tests for linearity and heteroscedasticity satisfied the assumptions, as evidenced by the data distribution pattern. Therefore, the completeness assumptions, allows for further regression analysis. The results presented in Table 3 indicate, that proactive personality and perceived social support have a significant simultaneous effect on career adaptability in students ($F = 27.90$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 31% of the variance in career adaptability ($R² = 0.31$). Remaining 69% of career adaptability is influenced by factors outside the research model. The results indicate that both internal and external factors contribute significantly to the development of career adaptability. When examined individually, proactive personality has a positive and significant impact to career adaptability ($B = 0.34$, $t = 4.47$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher levels of proactive personality correlates are correlated with increased career adaptability. Similarly, perceived social support has a positive and significant impact to career

adaptability ($B = 0.19$, $t = 2.49$, $p < 0.001$), showing that social support enhances career adaptability, although its impact is not as strong as that of proactive personality. Furthermore, a comparison of the β values revealed that the impact of proactive personality (0.40) is greater than that of the perceived social support (0.22). This finding emphasizes that proactive personality is a more dominant predictor of career adaptability than perceived social support. However, the concept of social support as an external factor influencing career adaptability must be recognized.

Discussion

This study was conducted to analyze the role of proactive personality and perceived social support on career adaptability. The findings suggest that proactive personality serves as a more significant predictor of career adaptability compared to perceived social support. These findings support previous studies that proactive personality is a strong predictor of career adaptability (Pan et al., 2018; Cai et al., 2015). The effect size of proactive personality (40%) indicates that this influence does not arise solely as a reaction to supportive environmental influences, but rather as a deeply rooted psychological process forming self-directed characteristics and a sense of individual agency. Even though proactive personality has a significant impact, there remains a portion of variance in career adaptability driven by other predictors outside the scope of this research. In the student context, this finding implies that proactive students are better able to construct career paths even with limited external resources. This aligns with other studies stating that proactive personality functions as a natural initiator impacting the enhancement of career adaptability, without having to rely entirely on external support received by the individual (Jiang, 2017). These findings reinforce Savickas's (2013) Career Construction Theory, empirically highlighting self-regulation as the primary mechanism in career adaptability. Consistent with the dominant influence produced in this study, it becomes increasingly clear that proactive personality, centered on internal factors, is the result of psychological self-regulation mechanisms occurring within the individual, thereby increasing career adaptability. As a result, the adaptive abilities obtained from internal sources are easier to control than external resources. Psychologically, career adaptability reflects an individual's activity in developing their career, where the individual takes initiative, identifies opportunities, actively explore, and even influence surrounding conditions as a way to respond to existing career challenges. Research results indicate that adaptability arises from the way individuals utilize their internal resources to face career-related challenges (Johnston, 2018). In this context, the dominant influence of proactive personality on students is likely due to the career transition phase they face, reflecting the current modern career landscape characterized by career transformation, career path uncertainty, and high competition, which indirectly helps students focus more on managing things they can control rather than external support that is not always available and supportive.

Another finding regarding the influence of perceived social support as an external factor proved to be significantly positively correlated with career adaptability. However, social support demonstrated a smaller influence (22%) than proactive personality. Research results suggest that social support functions primarily as a facilitator in the development of career adaptability rather than as a primary driver. The modest effect size of social support shows a lower percentage or does not even approach the magnitude of the influence of proactive personality, strengthens the link with the concept of Locus of Control. In the current job market, the concept of Locus of Control triggers a high sense of control in students through the belief that internal control is more necessary by relying on their own capacity in determining future career directions rather than simply depending on external support or assistance from others (Rudolph et al., 2017). Psychologically, the social support mechanism works alongside internal motivation. Without a proactive approach, the support received may remain passive and may not lead to meaningful adaptive behaviors, thus not automatically increasing an individual's career adaptability. These findings are in line with previous studies that, although social support contributes as a small contextual predictor, the role of social support essentially helps to strengthen or accelerate the stimulation process rather than being a primary factor (Park & Park, 2020; Liu & Liang, 2025). In the context of students, the social support received generally takes the form of emotional and material reinforcement rather than strategic career planning, especially since not all students have the same supportive environment or equal access to support, resulting in support not working directly in the development of career adaptability. These findings reinforce prior studies indicating that the impact of social support is significantly moderated by the internal readiness of students, particularly their proactive personality and adaptability, which often make the effect less significant (Xia et al., 2020). This may

explain why the impact of social support is less pronounced compared to proactive personality, resulting in perceived social support not always playing a major role in various research contexts.

This study involved two different student demographic characteristics, those in academic programs (S1), particularly in psychology, and those in vocational programs (D4), with a sample dominance of academic program students majoring in psychology. The sample dominance has potential implications for findings regarding the strength of psychological internal factors, especially proactive personality. Research conducted by Su et al. (2018) referring to the concept of vocational interest, that an interest and orientation towards professional environments as an intersecting dimensional construct can define the character of psychology students who are generally more accustomed to being exposed to matters related to self-regulation, interest, self-reflection, and self-development. Therefore, it is assumed that students within this discipline may exhibit heightened sensitivity to psychological dynamics, demonstrating greater self-awareness compared to other fields of study. As a result, the finding of a strong influence on proactive personality may be in line with the sample size dominated by psychology students. However, the interpretation of the results still needs to be done cautiously by considering the characteristics of other disciplines. In this context, the findings imply that students with high reflective capacity may rely more on self-directed strategies related to career management. Meanwhile, vocational students in a practice-oriented education system navigate career transitions through different adaptation methods, such as self-exploration strategies based on contextual learning experiences (Zain et al., 2025). The strength of the internal factors found may not fully represent students from other disciplines, but essentially the core mechanisms of career adaptability formation remain consistently applicable to students from other disciplines. Although the dominance of psychology students might provide added value to the findings, sampling is also related to subject availability. Therefore, future research should strive to include a more diverse range of disciplines to ensure that the dominance of predictor influences consistently reflect universal mechanisms or limited to specific contexts.

This research elucidates that the mechanism underlying career adaptability is fundamentally formed through a hierarchy between the role of proactive personality as the main driving force and the role of social support as a facilitator or secondary mechanism. However, the ideal combination of a high level of proactive personality and the influence of positive social support can optimize the development of career adaptability. These findings imply that through a mechanism of dependence on external factors via internal factors, career adaptability can be maximized. This is in line with previous studies supporting that proactive personality and social support interact integrally with career adaptability (Wang et al., 2021). Overall, the interplay between proactive personality and perceived social support in shaping career adaptability is highly relevant in the context of students, reflecting the realities of navigating an increasingly dynamic and flexible current career transition landscape. In this context, Career Construction Theory becomes increasingly relevant by positioning career adaptability as a crucial competency. It reaffirms that contemporary students are required to be agents of change, managing their own career construction independently. Meanwhile, in the context of social support, these findings provide implications, particularly through career service program interventions in higher education as environments providing support in an academic context. These programs need to be developed beyond merely providing career information, job opportunities, or passive technical training. Furthermore, programs can begin to prioritize constructive career planning training that fosters students' internal capacity. By adopting strategies that bolster students' adaptive skills, these programs can play a critical role in shaping a resilient young workforce, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic growth in line with global objectives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 8).

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that students' career adaptability is influenced by the interplay of internal and external factors. The result reveals that both predictor variables significantly and positively influence the career adaptability of academic and vocational students, with proactive personality serving as a more dominant predictor compared to social support. In response to the central research inquiry, this study establishes that while external support provides value, it is internal initiative that exerts the decisive influence in enabling students to navigate their career paths effectively. Therefore, external support should not be viewed as a standalone solution but rather as a complement to the more critical task fostering intrinsic proactivity.

Theoretically, this research validates that proactive personality serves as the fundamental driver of career adaptability, whereas the beneficial function of social support is largely determined by the extent of the student's proactive traits. Practically, these findings urge higher education institutions to reform their career service programs, which have typically focused on providing career-related information or passive technical training. Instead, these programs should focus on encouraging proactive student engagement through initiatives such as job crafting workshops or growth mindset boot camps. Moreover, facilitating interactions with experienced professionals and alumni serves to strengthen the support network, thereby creating an environment conducive to holistic student growth.

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