

A Study on Factors Influencing Career Adaptability among Chinese High School Students

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the factors that affect the career adaptability of Chinese high school students. By investigating and analyzing the impact of personality, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and social support on career adaptability. Sample for this study consists of approximately 304 students in their first to third year of a high school in Lanzhou city, China. Research Instruments include on Career Adaptability Questionnaire (CAQ) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .996$) and the personality section that included emotional intelligence (Cronbach's $\alpha = .971$), self-efficacy (Cronbach's $\alpha = .952$), and social support (Cronbach's $\alpha = .951$). This study employed a questionnaire survey with a total of 304 students invited to complete the questionnaire. All responses were submitted electronically. SPSS statistical software was analyzed using Correlation Analysis and Multiple Stepwise Regression Analysis. Results found that personality and career adaptability have a significant positive correlation ($r=0.936$). Emotional intelligence, Self-efficacy, social support and career adaptability have a significant positive correlation ($r=0.971, 0.960, 0.946$). The regression coefficients show that emotional Intelligence (Beta=0.497), self-efficacy (Beta=0.254), and social support (Beta=0.177) have a significant positive impact on the dependent variable ($p < 0.001$). Personality (Beta=0.065) and the constant term did not reach

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a significant level ($p > 0.05$), and their theoretical necessity or measurement reliability and validity may need to be re-evaluated. This findings open several avenues for further academic inquiry into the development of career adaptability among adolescents.

Keywords: Career Adaptability, Emotional Intelligence, Self-efficacy, Social Support, Personality

Introduction

Previously, career maturity was used to measure individual career development levels. In recent years, this concept has evolved into career adaptability (Super and Knasel 1981). Career adaptability refers to the readiness and resources an individual possesses to cope with changing work and career conditions. It encompasses four key dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Concern involves planning and preparing for the future; control is about taking responsibility for one's career; curiosity reflects exploring possible selves and future scenarios; and confidence relates to believing in one's ability to pursue and achieve career goals (Bocciardi, Caputo et al. 2017).

Studies have shown that career adaptability is crucial for successfully navigating the modern, dynamic labor market. Individuals with high career adaptability are better equipped to handle career transitions, overcome challenges, and seize new opportunities. For high school students, fostering career adaptability can lead to more resilient and flexible career paths. This approach is particularly relevant in today's fast-changing world, where traditional career paths are becoming less common and the ability to adapt is increasingly valued (Savickas 2005, Savickas 2013).

In China's education system, high school students face a highly competitive environment, with significant pressure to perform academically. This pressure not only affects their mental health but also deeply influences their career aspirations and choices (Li, Wong et al. 2013). In this context, exploring the factors influencing the career adaptability of Chinese high school

students is of great importance. Numerous studies have discussed various factors affecting career adaptability, such as personality, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and social support. Additionally, optimism, attribution styles, parental values, and family environment have also been proven to be related to career adaptability (Xu, Hou et al. 2014).

Personality, such as the Big Five dimensions (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism), play a significant role in shaping an individual's career adaptability. For instance, conscientious individuals tend to be more organized and goal-oriented, which can enhance their career planning and adaptability (Robbins, Lauver et al. 2004). Extraverts may find it easier to seek and utilize social resources, further supporting their career adaptability (Shin and Kelly 2013). Recent research has shown that career adaptability is a key mediator in the relationships between personality traits and career exploration behavior. Career concern and career curiosity were identified as the most significant dimensions in this mediation model, advancing the understanding of how different personality traits predict career exploration behavior (Li, Guan et al. 2015).

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others. High EI can contribute to better stress management, improved interpersonal relationships, and enhanced decision-making skills, all of which are crucial for career adaptability (Salovey and Mayer 1990). In career decision-making, the role of emotional experience, illustration, and communication is essential (Kidd 1998). Cizel (Çizel 2018) emphasized that EI is vital for success in various life domains, including career adaptability. Emotions and EI are important for understanding and explaining career paths. Previous studies have shown that EI is a strong predictor of career adaptability (Vashisht, Kaushal et al. 2023).

Self-efficacy, or the belief in one's own ability to succeed in specific situations, is a critical factor in career adaptability (Bandura 1997). Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to set challenging goals, persist in the face of obstacles, and recover from setbacks (Lent, Brown et al. 2000). This confidence in their capabilities can drive proactive career planning and adaptability.

Research has demonstrated that general self-efficacy is related to the dimensions of career adaptability, particularly confidence (Rossier 2015). A study by Öncel (Öncel 2014) found that general self-efficacy was most strongly correlated with confidence, followed by control, curiosity, and concern. Other studies have investigated the predictive value of general self-efficacy for career planning (Zikic and Klehe 2006) and career optimism (McIlveen, Beccaria et al. 2013), suggesting that self-efficacy can predict career adaptability.

Social support from parents, peers and teachers can significantly influence students' career adaptability (Wang and Castañeda-Sound 2008). Supportive relationships provide emotional encouragement, informational resources, and practical assistance, helping students explore career options, make decisions, and cope with challenges. Some studies have examined support from parents, friends, and teachers simultaneously. For example, Hirschi (Hirschi 2009) found that students who received support from parents, friends, relatives, and teachers more frequently reported higher career adaptability. Similarly, Hui, Yuen, and Chen (Hui, Yuen et al. 2018) found that social support from family members, friends, and significant others is positively linked to university students' career adaptability.

Objectives of Research

1. To examine the relationships among personality traits, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, social support, and career adaptability in Chinese high school students.
2. To investigate the predictive effects of personality traits, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and social support on career adaptability among Chinese high school students.

Research Methodology

This study aims to investigate the factors that affect the career adaptability of Chinese high school students. By investigating and analyzing the impact of personality, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and social

support on career adaptability, the government, schools, and parents can better understand the impact of career adaptability on high school students.

1) Population and Simple

Sample: The target population for this study consists of approximately 304 students in their first to third year of a high school in Lanzhou city, China. We will employ a census method, where every student in the population will be included in the study, ensuring that all students have an opportunity to participate. Since the entire population is surveyed, this method eliminates the need for random sampling and minimizes selection bias. By including every student, we can achieve a comprehensive and accurate representation of the population, allowing for more robust and generalizable results.

2) Research Variable

The independent variables of the study are 1) personality, 2) emotional intelligence, 3) self-efficacy and 4) social support. While the dependent variable is career adaptability.

3) Research Instrument

The present research developed a Likert 5-point scale questionnaire, namely career adaptability and factors affecting career adaptability questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into six sections based on the variables of this study, with a total of 110 items. The content validity of the questionnaire was evaluated using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), reviewed by three experts in the relevant field. The items that had scores higher than or equal to 0.5 were reserved. Based on the experts' IOC ratings, the items in the questionnaire were carefully reviewed. Detailed results of the validity and reliability (See Table 1) are described below. 1) In the career adaptability (12 items), IOC values were all 1; Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.996; CICT values ranged from 0.761 to 0.828. 2) In the personality section (60 items), IOC values were all 1; Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.992; CICT values ranged from 0.789 to 0.853. 3) In the emotional intelligence section (16 items), IOC values were all 1; Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.971, CICT values ranged from 0.785 to 0.837. 4) In the self-efficacy (10 items), IOC values were all 1; Cronbach's Alpha value

was 0.952, CICT values ranged from 0.760 to 0.824. 5) In the social support (12 items), IOC values were all 1; Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.951, CICT values ranged from 0.722 to 0.788. The overall Cronbach's Alpha value of the entire questionnaire scale was 0.996, reflecting a great level of reliability.

4) Data collection method

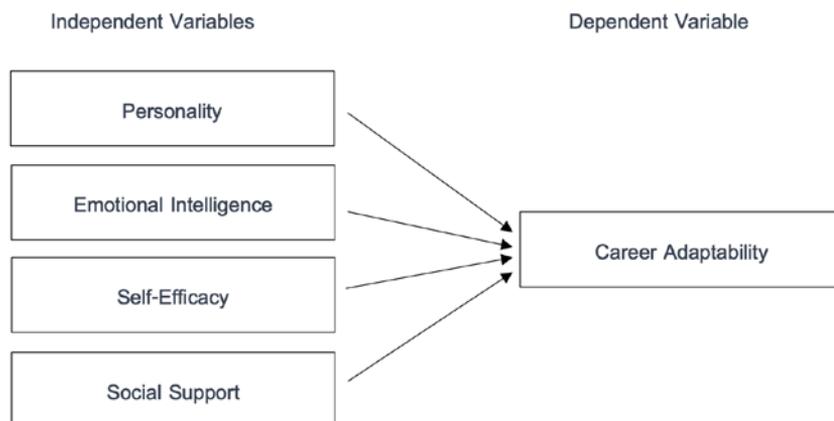
This study employed a questionnaire survey, with a total of 304 students invited to complete the questionnaire. All responses were submitted electronically. The collected data were then exported from the platform and processed for statistical analysis.

5) Data analysis

Correlation Analysis. The relationships between the dependent variable, career adaptability, and the independent variables — personality, emotional, intelligence, self-efficacy and social support will be examined. The correlation coefficient's sign and magnitude will be used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between each factor and career adaptability.

Multiple Stepwise Regression Analysis. The impact of independent variables: personality, emotional, intelligence, self-efficacy and social support on the dependent variable career adaptability will be examined.

6) Conceptual Framework



Picture 1 Conceptual Framework

Results of Research

Based on the analysis of the available data and the variables, The researchers identified the key factors that have the most significant impact on the career adaptability of high school students.

Table 1 Correlation Coefficient between the Factors Affecting Career Adaptability

	Y	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄
Y	1				
X ₁	.936**	1			
X ₂	.971**	.946**	1		
X ₃	0.960**	.942**	.965**	1	
X ₄	0.946**	.917**	.949**	.938**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Correlation analysis is used to study the correlation between five items, namely, career adaptability(Y), personality(X1), emotional intelligence(X2), self-efficacy(X3), and social support(X4), and the Pearson correlation coefficient is used to indicate the strength of the correlation. Specific analysis shows that:

All independent variables—personality ($r = 0.936$, $p < 0.001$), emotional intelligence ($r = 0.971$, $p < 0.001$), self-efficacy ($r = 0.960$, $p < 0.001$), and social support ($r = 0.946$, $p < 0.001$)—exhibited significant strong positive correlations with career adaptability.

Table 2 Analysis of Variance of the Career Adaptability

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.977 ^a	0.95	0.95	2.195

As shown in Table 2, the overall R value of the regression model is 0.977, indicating a moderate correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.954, suggesting that the independent variables collectively explain 95.4% of the variance in growth mindset. The adjusted R^2 (0.953) provides a more conservative estimate of the

model's explanatory power, accounting for the number of predictors. The standard error of the estimate (2.19) reflects the average distance between predicted and observed values of the dependent variable.

Table 3 Predictive Factor Analysis of Career Adaptability

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	sig
1	(Constant)	.406	.922		.440	.660
	X1	.093	.058	.065	1.588	.113
	X2	.373	.043	.497	8.729	<.001
	X3	.300	.061	.254	4.919	<.001
	X4	.171	.040	.177	4.305	<.001

*** p<.001

Multiple regression analysis revealed that emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.497$, $p < 0.001$), self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.254$, $p < 0.001$), and social support ($\beta = 0.177$, $p < 0.001$) were significant predictors of career adaptability, whereas personality ($\beta = 0.065$, $p > 0.05$) did not reach statistical significance.

Unstandardized regression equation: $Y = 0.406 + 0.093 \times X_1 + 0.373 \times X_2 + 0.300 \times X_3 + 0.171 \times X_4$. Standardized regression equation: $Z = 0.497 \times X_2 + 0.254 \times X_3 + 0.177 \times X_4$

Conclusion and Discussion

This study explored the influencing factors of high school students' career adaptability through quantitative data analysis. The results revealed that emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and social support significantly predict career adaptability, with emotional intelligence demonstrating the strongest effect, followed by self-efficacy and social support. Personality traits, however, did not show a statistically significant influence.

1) Correlation and Regression Analysis of Emotional Intelligence and High School Students' Career Adaptability. The results of the correlation analysis indicated a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between

emotional intelligence and high school students' career adaptability ($r = .971, p < .001$). This finding suggests that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to demonstrate greater adaptability in career-related tasks and decision-making processes, echoing prior research that links emotional intelligence to better coping, decision-making, and career exploration outcomes (Petrides, Pita et al. 2007) (Mayer, Salovey et al. 2008)

In the regression analysis, emotional intelligence emerged as the most significant predictor of career adaptability ($\beta = .338, p < .001$), explaining a substantial proportion of the variance ($R^2 = .942$). This supports the growing body of literature emphasizing the pivotal role of EI in facilitating career-related adjustment, particularly in dynamic or uncertain vocational contexts (Di Fabio and Kenny 2015).

Students with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions, which is crucial when confronting career uncertainty, overcoming setbacks, and making informed decisions. Moreover, EI enables students to align their career goals with personal strengths and values, and to remain flexible amid changing labor market conditions (Goleman and Intelligence 1995).

However, the exceptionally high correlation coefficient ($r > .90$) should be interpreted with caution. Such a strong relationship may indicate measurement overlap or shared variance between the constructs assessed by the emotional intelligence and career adaptability scales, potentially inflating the results (Podsakoff, MacKenzie et al. 2003). Future studies should consider using alternative or multi-method assessments to mitigate this issue and better isolate the unique contribution of emotional intelligence.

2) Correlation and Regression Analysis of Self-Efficacy and High School Students' Career Adaptability Self-efficacy also demonstrated a strong and significant positive correlation with career adaptability ($r = .960, p < .001$). Regression results revealed that self-efficacy was a significant predictor of adaptability ($\beta = .300, p < .001$), accounting for 92.1% of the variance ($R^2 = .921$). These findings are consistent with Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, which asserts that self-efficacy enhances individuals' capacity for goal setting, persistence, and effective coping strategies.

In the context of career development, high self-efficacy facilitates exploratory behaviors, problem-solving, and resilience in the face of obstacles (Betz and Hackett 2006). Moreover, self-efficacy contributes to students' confidence in handling career transitions, making it a central construct in career construction theory (Savickas 2005).

Although the predictive strength of self-efficacy was slightly lower than that of emotional intelligence ($\beta = .300$ vs. $.338$), its contribution remains substantial. This may indicate that while EI provides the emotional regulation needed for adaptive functioning, self-efficacy drives the motivation and action required for effective career planning and engagement.

Furthermore, self-efficacy may interact with EI to enhance career adaptability suggesting a potentially synergistic relationship worth exploring in future interaction or moderation models (Di Fabio, Kenny et al. 2014).

3) Correlation and Regression Analysis of Social Support and High School Students' Career Adaptability

Social support exhibited a significant positive correlation with career adaptability ($r = .946$, $p < .001$). The regression analysis further confirmed that social support was a significant, though relatively weaker, predictor of career adaptability ($\beta = .171$, $p < .001$), accounting for 89.5% of the variance ($R^2 = .895$).

These findings reinforce the importance of social support in career development, particularly within collectivist cultural contexts, where family, teachers, and peers often play a key role in influencing career choices (Leung, Hou et al. 2011). Prior studies have demonstrated that social support can buffer against career indecision, foster self-confidence, and provide informational and emotional resources that facilitate adaptability (Hirschi, Herrmann et al. 2015).

However, the relatively low regression coefficient compared to EI and self-efficacy suggests that social support may function more as a contextual or moderating factor, enhancing the effects of internal traits rather than serving as a primary determinant of adaptability. It is possible that individuals with high EI or self-efficacy are better able to mobilize or benefit from social support, indicating a potential interaction effect that warrants further investigation.

4) Correlation and Regression Analysis of Personality and High School Students' Career Adaptability

Personality traits were also found to be strongly and positively correlated with career adaptability ($r = .936, p < .001$). Despite this, the regression analysis revealed that personality did not significantly predict career adaptability ($\beta = .093, p = .113$), indicating that its direct effect may be limited in the presence of other psychological factors.

This apparent contradiction may be attributed to multicollinearity, as certain personality traits particularly conscientiousness and openness often overlap conceptually and empirically with constructs like emotional intelligence and self-efficacy. For example, conscientious individuals may naturally exhibit higher levels of self-regulation and goal orientation, traits that also contribute to self-efficacy and adaptability.

Additionally, it is possible that the influence of personality traits is mediated by more dynamic psychological constructs. For instance, emotionally stable individuals may be more likely to develop higher emotional intelligence, which in turn enhances career adaptability (Zhou and Santos 2007). Future research should consider conducting mediation or structural equation modeling analyses to better understand the indirect pathways through which personality influences adaptability.

Moreover, the use of broad trait-based models (e.g., the Big Five) may obscure the contribution of specific personality dimensions. Finer-grained analysis of trait subcomponents could reveal more nuanced relationships that are not captured in global trait scores (Costa Jr and McCrae 1992).

Contributions of the Study

This study contributes new empirical knowledge to the field of career development by clarifying the relationships and predictive mechanisms of psychological and contextual factors influencing career adaptability among Chinese high school students.

First, in alignment with the first research objective, the findings confirm that personality traits, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and social support

are all significantly and positively correlated with career adaptability. This evidence reinforces career construction theory by demonstrating that adolescents' adaptive readiness is closely associated with both internal psychological resources and external social contexts. The exceptionally strong correlations observed suggest that career adaptability in high school students is a highly integrated construct, closely intertwined with emotional regulation, self-beliefs, and perceived support systems.

Second, addressing the second research objective, this study advances knowledge by identifying emotional intelligence as the strongest predictor of career adaptability, followed by self-efficacy and social support, while personality did not exert a significant direct predictive effect when other variables were controlled. This finding refines existing theoretical assumptions by indicating that dynamic and developable psychological capacities (emotional intelligence and self-efficacy) play a more decisive role in adolescents' career adaptability than relatively stable personality traits.

Third, the results generate theoretical insight by suggesting that the influence of personality on career adaptability may be indirect rather than direct, potentially operating through mediating mechanisms such as emotional intelligence and self-efficacy. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how dispositional traits translate into adaptive career behaviors, particularly within the sociocultural and educational context of Chinese high school students.

Finally, the high explanatory power of the regression model highlights the synergistic effect of emotional, cognitive, and social resources in shaping career adaptability during adolescence. This knowledge underscores the importance of shifting career development interventions away from trait-based selection toward capacity-building approaches that emphasize emotional intelligence development, confidence enhancement, and supportive environments.

Overall, this research enriches the literature by providing an integrated empirical model of career adaptability and by offering evidence-based directions for educational practice, future research, and policy formulation in secondary education contexts.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for Educators

Educators should enhance students' career adaptability by integrating emotional intelligence training into the curriculum, fostering self-efficacy through mastery experiences, and strengthening school-based social support systems such as counseling and mentoring. In addition, providing individualized career guidance that respects students' diverse backgrounds and promoting reflective practices can help students develop clearer self-understanding and more adaptive career planning skills.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should incorporate qualitative research methods to gain deeper insights into students' lived experiences related to career development. Further exploration of cultural and socioeconomic factors is recommended to understand their influence on career adaptability. Expanding research to diverse student populations across regions, school types, and demographic groups would also enhance the generalizability and equity relevance of future findings.

3. Policy Recommendations

1) Educational authorities should integrate career adaptability and emotional intelligence development into national secondary education curricula and guidance frameworks.

2) Schools should be supported with systematic funding and professional development to strengthen career counseling services and teacher mentoring programs.

3) Policymakers should promote data-driven and inclusive career guidance policies, ensuring equitable access to career development resources for students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

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