



## EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF CAREER ADAPTABILITY ON PERCEIVED FUTURE EMPLOYABILITY: THE MEDIATION ROLE OF SELF-EFFICACY

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose-** Economic turmoil, rapid changes and instabilities in the labor market may create disturbance regarding the individuals' perceptions of employability. At this point, obtaining and managing a successful career draw attention to coping with a constantly changing environment. Vocational psychology has recently focused more on individual factors such as personal characteristics, perceptions and attitudes which provides individuals to manage their careers better. The concept of perceived future employability, which is one of the substantial factors for the development of a successful career for young adults, denotes the perceptions and beliefs about the likelihood of success in the graduate labor market. Due to its effects on young people's career decisions, goals and success, it is important to identify possible antecedents of perceived future employability. However, little is known about the factors forming the perception of future employability. To fill this gap, the present study aims at investigating the role of career adaptability and self-efficacy in predicting perceived future employability by using social cognitive career theory.

**Methodology-** Quantitative research methods were adopted in the present study. Data were obtained from 237 undergraduate business students and analyzed using statistical programs.

**Findings-** Results indicate that career adaptability has a positive association with perceived future employability. In addition, self-efficacy has a mediating effect on the relationship between career adaptability and perceived future employability.

**Conclusion-** Based upon the findings it may be concluded that both career adaptability and self-efficacy are identified as important determinants of perceived future employability.

**Keywords:** Perceived employability, career adaptability, self-efficacy, social cognitive career theory, vocational psychology

**JEL Codes:** M54, M15, M10

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, there have been rapid changes in job-market dynamics and career patterns due to increasing competition (Kasler, Zysberg, & Harel, 2017). As expected, these changes have several influences on organizations' requirements for hiring employees. Since organizations become more demanding and it is hard to meet the rapidly changing job market requirements, young adults are concerned about their employability. In this case, young adults heed and struggle to obtain, maintain and manage a successful career in a constantly changing environment (Kasler et al., 2017). The concept of perceived future employability, which is one of the major factors for the development of a successful career for young adults, denotes the perceptions and beliefs about the likelihood of success in the graduate labor market (Pitan & Muller, 2020). It also refers to how employable young adults perceived themselves to be in the future after completing their education (Gunawan, Creed, & Glendon, 2018). This concept provides individuals to feel secure and independent towards the shifting labor market conditions (Berntson, 2008). When the perception of future employability is high, young adults feel more ready to enter the labor market by appraising their own skills, qualifications, personal traits and knowledge (Pitan & Muller, 2020). In addition, individuals with a high level of perceived future employability make better decisions to navigate their careers effectively (Pitan & Muller, 2020). Since it is a substantial factor influencing individuals' career orientation and decisions, it is important to identify the possible contributing factors forming the perception of future employability. Yet, research about the antecedents of perceived future employability is scarce (Gunawan, Creed, & Glendon, 2021). To fill this gap, the present study aims at investigating the role of career adaptability and self-efficacy in predicting perceived future employability. For this purpose, social cognitive career theory was used to build the study's theoretical foundation.

### 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT), which was originated from Bandura's social cognitive theory, focuses on the individual career development process. It assumes that there are complex connections between individuals and their career-related contexts (Lent, Brown, &

Hackett, 2002). In this respect; personal inputs, self-efficacy and outcome expectations form career interests, goals and actions (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). SCCT highlights that these factors are influential in determining how one interacts with his/her environment in developing a career (Blustein & Fouad, 2008). In addition, the achievement of goals requires specific self-regulation skills (Zhao, Peng, & Liu, 2021). At this point, it is assumed that perceived future employability and its predictors may affect individuals' career-related interest, goals and actions.

Personal inputs consist of personal resources such as personal traits, adaptation characteristics and abilities (Savickas, 2005). For the present research, career adaptability is considered as a personal input since it is defined as one of the personal attributes and resources facilitating the regulation of career goals (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In addition, perceived future employability is defined as an outcome expectation in the present study. Outcome expectation includes beliefs about the consequences of performing certain behaviors (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). It also involves the imagined outcomes. Thus, perceived future employability may be considered as an outcome expectation. Lastly, self-efficacy, which is the core component of SCCT, is defined as a mediator in the relationship between career adaptability and perceived future employability.

The concept of career adaptability, which is based on Savickas' (1997) Career Construction Theory, refers to a psychosocial construct that includes personal resources for coping with existing or potential tasks, transitions and traumas in occupational roles (Savickas, 2002). Since it is associated with successful career development, high levels of job satisfaction and better employment credibility, career adaptability has drawn more attention as an important factor influencing career orientations and working roles (Anas & Hamza, 2020). One of the most accepted models developed by Savickas (2002) examines career adaptability with four sub-dimensions as concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. This model provides a valid framework for understanding career interventions and their effectiveness (Hartung & Cadaret, 2017).

Career adaptability is one of the personal attributes which helps individuals to cope with uncertainties and obscure regarding career in the ever-changing labor market (Chong & Leong, 2017). It also provides to respond to varying environments and new challenges that occur more rapidly and unpredictably in the business world (Spurk, Kauffeld, Meinecke, & Ebner, 2016). Since individuals with a high level of career adaptability cope more effectively with present and future tasks, transitions, strains and work roles (Savickas, 2002), they may be expected to perceive themselves as more employable in the future. In addition, career adaptability consists of self-regulation skills that eliminate the concerns about uncertain and complex career circumstances (Spurk et al., 2016). This enables individuals to form the expectations and predictions of their future state more clearly (McIlveen & Midgley, 2015). Moreover, individuals form their perceptions related to future employability by evaluating their personal inputs (Pitan & Muller, 2020). By considering career adaptability as a personal input that enables to cope with current and future career demands and challenges (Chui, Li, & Ngo, 2020), individuals with a high level of career adaptability are expected to perceive themselves as more employable in the future. Based on the conceptual framework explained above, this hypothesis is established:

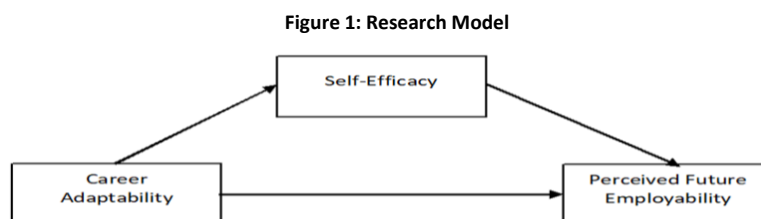
*H1: Career adaptability is positively associated with perceived future employability.*

Self-efficacy refers to one's beliefs of his/her ability and capability in performing a specific behavior to accomplish goals (Bandura, 1986). It has the power to affect the way how people motivate themselves and how they endure the difficulties while achieving targeted goals (Bandura, 2012). Accordingly, self-efficacy has a major role in career decisions and orientations (Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017). According to SCCT, one of the potent sources of self-efficacy is personal sources, inputs and attainments (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). Considering career adaptability as a personal input factor contributing to self-efficacy (McLennan, McIlveen, & Perera, 2017), we assume that career adaptability may have a positive effect on self-efficacy.

Based on SCCT, self-efficacy is defined as a key factor to foster and sustain career-related interests, goals, choices, performance and beliefs (Lent, 2005). It influences how individuals perceive what they can or cannot become in terms of vocational identity (Heppner & Fu, 2011). Individuals with a high level of self-efficacy respond better to situational demands and have more useful coping strategies which facilitate to overwhelm stressful circumstances (Gandloff & Mazilescu, 2017). Furthermore, the level of self-efficacy helps to understand a person's future attitudes in various areas (Aypay, 2010). It enhances individuals' self-cognition and capacity to look for resources and opportunities to achieve future goals and tasks (Zhao, Peng, & Liu, 2021). In this way, individuals may think they have adequate capacity and competency for accomplishing goals and it may affect their future employability perception positively. According to SCCT, outcome expectations are influenced by self-efficacy, as well (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). Since we introduced perceived future employability as an outcome expectation in the present study, we assume that self-efficacy may affect perceived future employability. The SCCT model argues that self-efficacy has a mediator role between personal input and desired outcome expectations (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). Based on theoretical discussions, we argue that career adaptability enhances self-efficacy, which in turn will affect perceived future employability.

*H2: Self-efficacy has a mediator role in the relationship between career adaptability and perceived future employability.*

The research model is shown in Figure 1.



### 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

**Sample** - The present study was conducted in Turkey. The sample of this study consists of 237 undergraduate business students who were in their final year of the bachelor's degree program. The convenience sampling method was used to reach the participants. The data were collected via an online questionnaire form. It was stated that participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous. Participants comprised 56.3% female and 43.7 male students. 74.4% of the students came from public universities and the remaining 25.6% came from private universities.

**Measurement**- To measure career adaptability, the scale developed by Savickas and Profeli (2012) and adapted to Turkish by Kanten (2012) was used. The scale consists of 24 items. To measure self-efficacy, the scale developed by Magaletta and Oliver (1999) and adapted to Turkish by Yıldırım and İlhan (2010) was preferred. The scale includes 17 items. To measure perceived future employability, the scale developed by Gunawan, Creed and Glendon (2018) and adapted to Turkish by Alkın, Korkmaz and Çelik (2020) was used. The scale comprises 24 items. Respondents were asked to choose, on a 5-point Likert scale, their degree of agreement or disagreement with the items of all scales (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). To test the reliability and whether the data fit the measurement model, reliability and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted for each construct. Results showed that all scales had good and acceptable fit indices. Reliability test results, confirmatory factor analysis results and mean values of the scales were presented in Table 1. The data were analyzed with SPSS 20 and PROCESS MACRO.

**Table 1: Reliability Test and Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results**

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	$\chi^2/sd$	CFI	RMSEA	p
Career Adaptability	0.941	2.47	0.95	0.06	0.000
Self-efficacy	0.859	2.78	0.92	0.06	0.000
Perceived Future Employability	0.960	2.29	0.96	0.05	0.000

To explore whether common method bias would have any effect on the results, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The results revealed that the first main factor explained 32.4% of the total variance. This result indicated that common method bias was not considered a major concern for the current study.

### 4. FINDINGS

Before the hypotheses test, correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relations between variables (Table 2). The results showed that career adaptability was positively correlated with self-efficacy ( $r= 0.606$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and perceived future employability ( $r= 0.713$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In addition, self-efficacy was positively correlated with perceived future employability ( $r= 0.463$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

**Table 2: Correlation Analysis Results**

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Career Adaptability (1)	4.37	0.94	1		
Self-efficacy (2)	3.63	0.58	0.606**	1	
Perceived Future Employability (3)	4.83	0.67	0.713**	0.463**	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To test the first hypothesis, the effect of career adaptability on perceived future employability was examined. The results showed that career adaptability was positively associated with perceived future employability ( $\beta = 0.444$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In this context, the H1 hypothesis was supported. To test the second hypothesis, the mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between career adaptability and perceived future employability was analyzed. Results indicated that self-efficacy has a partial mediation effect on the relationship between career adaptability and perceived future employability ( $\beta = 0.172$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). According to this result, the H2 hypothesis was confirmed. Table 3 shows the direct and indirect effects of the model.

**Table 3: Direct and Indirect Effects and 95% Confidence Intervals**

Model Pathways	Estimate	p Value	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
<i>Direct Effects</i>				
Career adaptability- Self-efficacy	0.332	0.000	0.2186	0.4458
Self-efficacy- Perceived future employability	0.304	0.000	0.1943	0.4148
Career adaptability- Perceived future employability	0.342	0.000	0.2637	0.4219
<i>Indirect Effect</i>				
Career adaptability- Self-efficacy-Perceived future employability	0.172	0.000	0.0509	0.0668

## 5. CONCLUSION

The findings in the current study showed that career adaptability had a positive effect on perceived future employability. This finding is consistent with the recent studies conducted by Atitsogbe, et al. (2019), Kwon (2019) and Melo, Silva, Andrade and Moura (2021). The finding related to H1 indicated that individuals with a high level of career adaptability perceive themselves as more employable in the future. Thus, career adaptability was identified as an important predictor of perceived future employability in this study. As young adults generally have little familiarity with the job market (Guan et al., 2013), career adaptability is defined as an ability for helping them cope more effectively with uncertainties and challenges regarding their career. Through career adaptability, they feel more prepared for the complex job market and perceive themselves as more employable.

The findings related to H2 indicated that self-efficacy had a mediation role in the relationship between career adaptability and perceived future employability. Although we found no research that investigated the mediator effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between career adaptability and perceived future employability to compare with our results, our findings are consistent with findings that career adaptability influences self-efficacy (McLennan, McIlveen, & Perera, 2017) and self-efficacy affects perceived future employability (Chow, Wong, & Lim, 2019). Individuals with a high level of career adaptability feel more self-efficacy, which in turn shapes positively their future employability perception.

The findings of current research carry several implications for career counselors and human resource professionals. Career counselors may consider the levels of career adaptability and self-efficacy by guiding their clients that have problems related to career concerns or employability perceptions. They could guide them by helping to promote and strengthen their levels of career adaptability and self-efficacy. This study has also implications for organizations. Since perceived future employability is linked to employment success (Caricati, Chiesa, Guglielmi, & Mariani, 2016), human resources professionals should pay attention to the level of perceived future employability of their job applicants. In addition, career adaptability and self-efficacy levels could be considered as they are important predictors of perceived future employability.

This study has several possible limitations. Since the self-reporting survey method was used to gather the data, participants might have the tendency to exhibit bias and subjectivity. In addition, because the data was obtained from university students in Turkey, the economic conditions of the national labor market may affect the results. Future studies may test the same research model in other countries' contexts. Lastly, researchers may investigate job-related outcomes by integrating them into the current model.

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