



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Career Engagement as Proactive Career Behavior: The Role of Core Self-Evaluation, Career Adaptability, and Negative Career Goal Feedback

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the relationships between proactive personality traits and adaptive behaviours to new and unexpected situations and negative career-related feedback can enrich explanations for the development of proactive career behaviours. In this context, the current study examined the relationships and mediating mechanisms of cognitive flexibility and negative career goal feedback between core self-evaluations and career engagement, an indicator of proactive career behaviours. A total of 334 (264 female, 70 male) university students aged 18-25 years participated in the study. The study found that career engagement was positively associated with core self-evaluation and career adaptability and negatively associated with negative career goal feedback. In addition, based on the parallel multiple mediator model analysis, career adaptability, and negative career goal feedback played mediating roles between core self-evaluation and career engagement. The results suggest that negative career goal feedback is a risk factor, whereas career adaptability is a protective factor for career engagement. Interventions that reduce this risk factor and increase this protective factor may help university students increase their career engagement.

Young adulthood or university years constitute a period when individuals move from school to work, which is an essential step in career development. This period between the ages of 18-25 is characterised as a period of indecision about work and education and a search for identity in work-related issues (Arnett, 2006; Kroger et al, 2010). Understanding the dynamics of career development during this significant period can make it easier for young adults to make a smooth transition and adapt to the organization upon starting working life. During this period, which is called the age of uncertainty (Blustein, 2019), understanding the career behaviours of individuals can contribute to overcoming the uncertainty and ensuring the flexibility demanded by working life. This can also help raise awareness about the working life and labor market, which will, in turn, help young teenagers invest in age-appropriate career skills that will enhance the likelihood of employment.

In today's world, job roles in working life are more flexible, while job tasks continuously change and develop as organizations encounter opportunities and demands (Sylva et al., 2019). The increasing uncertainty

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prevailing in working life makes it even more critical for individuals to get prepared to meet the needs of changing and developing working life and to take an active role in directing their careers and lives (Rossier et al., 2017). Furthermore, employers now expect their employees to exhibit more flexible behaviours rather than clearly-defined task roles to adapt to global competition, rapid technological changes, and innovation (Sylva et al., 2019). At this point, these uncertainties and expectations in working life require individuals to exhibit proactive behaviours about their future careers.

Proactive career behaviors include exploring alternatives, setting a goal, planning a career, establishing a network, improving skills and talents to ensure competitiveness regarding future careers, and broadening experience to ensure future employment (Strauss et al., 2012; Zikic & Hall, 2009). Young individuals who have the chance to explore career opportunities at an early period go on making more sensible decisions about their careers in the future life (Flum & Blustein, 2000; Zikic & Hall, 2009). In this respect, examining career engagement as a proactive behaviour of young adults studying at university can give some important clues to help them make the right and wiser decisions during the transition from school to work. For this reason, we addressed career engagement in the current study.

As an indicator of proactive career behaviours, career engagement (Hirschi et al., 2014) is a concept that has been examined concerning job climate and organizational psychology in recent years, but with a limited number of studies. (Nilforooshan & Salimi, 2016). An important reason is that career engagement is assumed to have a reintegrative mechanism (Peng et al., 2021). It seems possible to state from this perspective that antecedent behaviours (e.g., career adaptability) will foster proactive career behaviours (career engagement), and individuals who exhibit proactive career behaviours will achieve positive outcomes about their future careers (e.g., career success). Literature review shows that studies mainly focus on career engagement outcomes, whereas few studies address the antecedents of career engagement (Nilforooshan & Salimi, 2016; Peng et al., 2021).

Undoubtedly, it is important to focus on the results of career engagement. However, sometimes a focus on results can lead to palliative solutions. Moreover, focusing on outcomes may lead to overlooking the antecedents and hinder early intervention opportunities. It may be easier to plan interventions that can strengthen an individual's career engagement if we can understand their perceptions of themselves and how these perceptions affect the individuals' coping with changes in work life. Similarly, if we can understand what kind of feedback perceptions (positive or negative) individuals have about their career goals, it may be possible to produce solutions that will increase career engagement for career practitioners. To sum up, determining the dynamics that may be related to career engagement can provide clues about what we should focus on to make a smooth transition and achieve career success.

Therefore, this study focused on core self-evaluation, career adaptability, and negative career goal feedback as antecedents of career engagement and examined the role of these constructs.

Career Engagement

Hirschi et al. (2014) define career engagement as the degree to express one's career with various proactive career behaviors such as establishing a network, developing skills, career exploration, career planning, and volunteer participation. In other words, it refers to seeking information, identifying opportunities and constraints, initiating career planning, and making decisions (Chan, 2017). Hence, career engagement is considered a higher structure since it refers to exhibiting various career behaviours such as career self-management, career management strategies, career exploration, and career planning (Hirschi et al., 2014).

Previous studies show that career engagement is associated with personal qualities (Nilforooshan & Salimi, 2016), self-competence in deciding on a career (Kim et al., 2014), core self-evaluation (Yoo & Lee, 2019), goal clarity (Chan, 2017), career adaptability (Peng et al., 2021), dispositional hope, career planning and career decidedness (Hirschi, 2014). Though limited in number, these studies focus on both antecedents and outcomes of career engagement, and they show some relationships among the variables mentioned above. Within this

framework, we focused on the the relations between career engagement and core self-evaluation, career adaptability along with negative career goal feedback in the current study.

Examining the role of core self-evaluation, career adaptability, and perceptions about career goals in young adults' career engagement can guide career counselors in helping young adults who are going through a period from school to work experience a smooth transition, look for a job, get the job they want and achieve the career success in the long turn. This way, young adults can deal with the uncertainties of working life by adopting a proactive approach to managing their careers. Also, defining the mechanisms that have a significant role in the career engagement of young adults who transition to work life and enhance career engagement is expected to contribute a new perspective to our current understanding.

Core Self-Evaluation And Career Engagement

Organizational psychologists have long been keen on the contribution of core self-evaluation to job variables such as commitment, job satisfaction, and career development. In recent years, research about careers has focused on individuals' self-management and proactive behaviours, emphasizing the need to have a sense of self-competence, self-efficacy, and control, and improve career-related issues. This focus is thought to be related to core self-evaluation (CSE) (Judge et al., 1998). CSE includes a comprehensive personality structure consisting of self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and control focus (Judge et al., 1998). It asserts that individuals' self-evaluation is linked to their career perceptions and behaviours (Tims & Akermans, 2017). CSE refers to being aware of one's feelings, self-esteem, one's belief in skills and capacity, staying away from anxiety as well as depressive situations, and taking control of what is going on around them, so it appears possible to state that individuals with higher CSE will participate in career behaviours more and will behave more proactively for their career. People with higher CSE focus on solving problems instead of avoiding them or using coping strategies more than others, and they are expected to exhibit more proactive career behaviours (Bakker et al., 2012). As people with higher CSE tend to establish internal control, exhibit behaviours of self-definition and self-control, and have a deeper understanding (Judge et al., 1998), they are more likely to exhibit proactive career behaviours. Similarly, people with higher CSE and higher self-esteem and self-efficacy are more confident in their skills, competence, and expectations than others; they have more explicit career goals and show more commitment. Previous studies in the literature support this view (e.g., Haynie et al., 2017; Yoo & Lee, 2019; Zhu et al., 2021).

Some earlier studies suggest that CSE can, directly or indirectly, affect career engagement. For example, Tims and Akkermans (2017) conducted a study concluding that core self-evaluation affected job commitment through autonomy, career competencies, job crafting, and social support. In a similar study, Stumpp et al. (2009) affected job satisfaction and organizational commitment via different job characteristics (e.g. career feedback, task identity), increasing life satisfaction. Some other studies in the literature have similar findings (e.g., Erez & Judge, 2001). In light of the related evidence, the first hypothesis we offered in the current study is as below:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a positive relationship between core self-evaluation and career engagement and, it predicts career engagement directly.

Career Adaptability And Career Engagement

Savickas (2013) defines career adaptability, one of the main components of Career Construction Theory, as the attitude and competencies individuals use to adapt to a career or job that is appropriate for them. Career adaptability refers to proactively adapting to altering career conditions, and constructively addressing the stress of new or challenging career conditions (Hirschi, 2012). Career adaptability helps young people cope with career problems and the demands of working life, making it easier for them to adopt proactive behaviours such as career engagement. (Tladinyane & Van der Merwe, 2016). Researchers indicate that career engagement is an essential proactive behaviour for career adaptability (Strauss et al. 2012). They emphasize that it refers to practices such as planning a career, improving skills, and setting goals. When career adaptability is considered as the state of being ready to deal with foreseeable career tasks such as planning, getting prepared, and starting a job as well as unforeseeable demands such as rapid changes in working life (Klehe et al., 2011), individuals with higher career adaptability are more likely to show more engagement behaviours. Previous studies in the

literature disclose that career adaptability is associated with job satisfaction (Fiori et al., 2015), work engagement (Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015), career success (Zacher, 2014), and job-seeking strategies (Koen et al., 2010). Although limited in number, some studies support the link between career adaptability and career engagement. (e.g. Ochoco & Ty, 2022).

The current study used career adaptability as the mediating variable in the relationship between core self-evaluation and career engagement. One can presume that individuals with higher CSE approach issues related to their career more proactively tend to be more aware of their career, take responsibility for their behaviours, make decisions, and act in line with their skills, which will, in turn, lead to higher career engagement. Moreover, while exhibiting proactive career behaviours, CSE can activate individuals' positive evaluation and career adaptability, and thus it can encourage them to behave more proactively in their careers. In short, CSE can positively affect career adaptability and predict career engagement. Though limited in number, some studies (e.g., Nilforooshan & Salimi, 2016) show that personality traits predict career engagement with the mediating effect of career adaptability. In light of the related evidence, the second and third hypotheses we offered in the current study are as below:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Career adaptability is positively related to career engagement.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Career adaptability has a mediating role in the relationship between core self-evaluation and career engagement.

Negative Career Goal Feedback And Career Engagement

Setting goals for career is important for individuals to be active agents in modifying their behaviours to manage their careers. In this way, they can adopt certain practices about which steps to take in their career path and when and how to take these steps. However, setting goals and getting feedback about the sufficiency of these goals and the progress to reach them are essential (Hu, Creed et al., 2017). Hu, Creed et al. (2017) defined career goal feedback as “internal resources including emotions and ideas about the appropriateness of a career goal, the progress to reach this goal and the improvements and arrangements to reach it based on information gathered from external sources such as parents, teachers, and peers as well as intuition and social comparison that aim to direct and motivate self-regulation process for the sake of ensuring individuals to make a better progress towards their career goals” (p. 658). It is argued that the feedback (positive-negative) that individuals in the career decision phase receive about their career goals influences the subsequent career behaviour of the individual (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001). Similarly, Hu, Creed et al. (2017) emphasize that feedback on career goals can come from both internal and external sources and that feedback is vital to implement or succeed in career plans. From this perspective, although receiving negative feedback does not always result in negative outcomes, it seems possible that individuals who frequently receive negative internal or external feedback about their career goals may not be competent enough to determine and exhibit behaviours to achieve these goals.

Lent and Brown (2013) state that when people are encouraged or supported by their environment, it is possible for them to engage in proactive career behaviours. Perceiving positive feedback about career goals and development can have a strong impact on an individual's career behaviors. Schuesslbauer et al. (2018) indicated that positive feedback received from significant others can encourage an individual's motivation to participate in career attitudes, resulting in career success. On the other hand, Johnston et al. (2014) state that negative career feedback can act as a restrictive function in career effort and career advancement, and therefore can reduce the career success of the individual. We focused on negative career goal feedback in our study because negative feedback limits people's effort to engage in goal-related activities, motivation, and well-being (Praskova & Johnston, 2021). Research shows that those who receive negative feedback about their career goals tend to have higher stress, anxiety, distress, and lower career expectation (Creed et al., 2015; Hu et al., 2018a; Ilies & Judge, 2005). Other studies have also found that negative career goal feedback is negatively associated with lower-level hope (Korkmaz, 2022), less adaptive behaviors, withdrawal from work performance, lacking confidence in achieving future career goals (Choi et al., 2018), and lower work effort (Praskova & Johnston, 2021).

The studies mentioned above suggest that when young individuals see that their career goals do not correspond to real life or when they receive feedback about not having realistic goals, they can have stress about their careers. They are less likely to exhibit career behaviours such as doing research, planning a career, joining activities, preparing a resume and job letters, or establishing a network. These shreds of evidence suggest that negative career goal feedback can be important for career engagement. Individuals who receive negative career goal feedback are uncertain about exhibiting proactive career behaviours. Therefore, understanding the career behaviours of individuals receiving negative career goal feedback will help them gain their career management skills. Those who receive negative feedback about their career goals can fail to exhibit proactive career behaviours.

The current study used negative career goal feedback as a mediating variable in the CSE-career engagement relationship. CSE is considered an antecedent to negative career goal feedback (NCGF), as it is considered a personality construct and is more stable than NCGF. As expected, individuals who have a positive self-evaluation of themselves and tend to be confident in their abilities are likely to engage in proactive career behaviors. However, it is not clear how negative evaluations of goals affect this relationship. The status of these individuals engaging in proactive career behaviors when faced with negative career goal feedback has not yet been clarified. Similarly, some studies show (e.g., Jawahar & Shabeer, 2021) that goal feedback is associated with career planning, which can be considered proactive behavior, and career goal disengagement due to inconsistency of career goals. Negative career goal feedback negatively affects individuals' participation in proactive career behaviors. This is why we considered NCGF an antecedent to career engagement in this study.

Some studies show that CSE is bidirectionally related to both positive and negative career behaviors. For example, Tims and Akkermans (2017) showed that individuals with higher CSE were more likely to evaluate their career competencies more positively, and it was positively related to job commitment. On the other hand, some studies reveal that CSE is negatively related to career indecision (Jaensch et al., 2015) and difficulties in making career decisions (Koumoundourou et al., 2011). These explanations suggest that negative career goal feedback may affect the relationship between CSE and career engagement. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Negative feedback on career goals is negatively associated with engagement in the career.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Negative career goal feedback plays a mediating role in the association between core self-evaluation and career engagement.

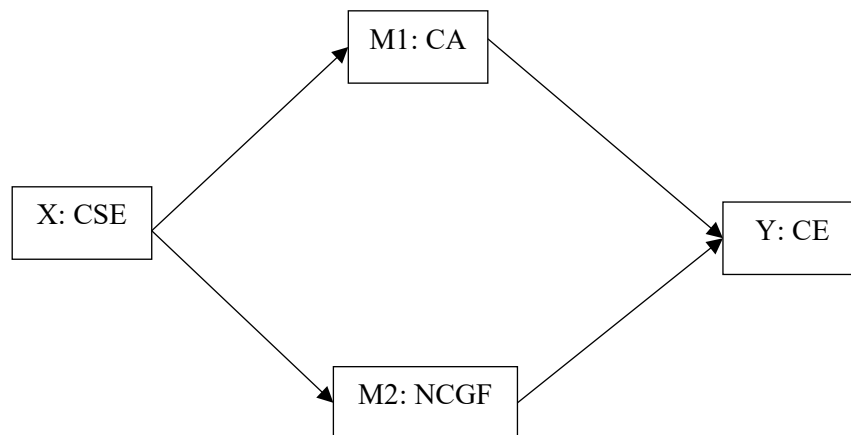
Study Purpose

Previous studies reviewed in the current study show the role of core self-evaluation, negative career goal feedback, and career adaptability in predicting career engagement. Results from some studies (e.g., Hirschi et al., 2011) show that early career engagement is associated with later career outcomes (e.g., job search, employment, career changes). Therefore, examining components that may influence career engagement can guide shaping subsequent career outcomes, both for the individual and professionals providing career assistance.

Furthermore, when reviewing the literature in the context of Türkiye, there are some studies that examine the relationship between career engagement and other variables (e.g. Çarkıt, 2022; Kara, 2024; Korkmaz et al., 2020; Tunç et al., 2022). However, although there are various studies on career engagement, it is a very new issue to be researched in Türkiye. Therefore, studies on career engagement of young adults in Türkiye are considered very important in terms of providing a new perspective on their career development.

Because of this reason, we aimed to present empirical evidence to the career engagement literature and examined if there were relationships among core self-evaluation, career adaptability, negative career goal feedback, and career engagement. We also investigated whether career adaptability and negative career goal feedback play a mediating role between core self-evaluation and career engagement. The mediation model is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The hypothesized parallel multiple mediator model in predicting career engagement. [Core Self – Evaluation: CSE; Career Adaptability: CA; Negative Career Goal Feedback: NCGF; Career Engagement: CE.]



Method

Procedure

First of all, we received the necessary ethical permission to gather the study data. In this regard, data collection tools and permissions were requested from the researchers. Ethical approval was then obtained from Gazi University Ethics Committee. After receiving legal permission, data were collected online via Google Forms from university students older than 18 studying at various universities. Before starting the implementation, all the participants submitted Informed Consent to confirm their voluntary participation. The informed consent form includes information that the research is for scientific purposes, no personal information will be requested, and that participation is voluntary. Participants were not compensated in any way during the data collection process.

Measures

Core Self-Evaluation Scale (CSES): The CSES scale developed by Judge et al. (2003) is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 12 items. It was adapted by Kisbu (2006). The scoring of the scale varies between one (completely false) and five (completely true). Six of the items in the scale (2,4,6,8,10,12) are reversed items. Examples of statements include 'Sometimes I don't feel competent in what I'm doing' and 'I complete tasks successfully'. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was calculated as .70 for the original study and .85 for the current study.

Career Adapt-Abilities Scale-Short Form (CAAS-SF): The CAAS-SF was developed by Maggiori et al. (2017) and adapted into Turkish culture by Işık et al. (2018). It consists of 12 items and four dimensions (worry, control, curiosity, and confidence) with a 5-point Likert scale. The high score indicates a high level of professional adaptability. A 4-week test-retest analysis was conducted to have evidence of reliability and the Pearson coefficient was .82 for the full scale. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the instrument was .90 in the original study and .87 in the current study.

Career Goal Feedback Scale (CGFS): The CGFS was developed by Hu, Creed et al. (2017) and adapted into Turkish culture by Korkmaz and Kırdök (2019). It is a 5-point Likert-type scale composed of 24 items. The scale measures the level of perception regarding the internal-external negative feedback about three dimensions: improvement, goal suitability, and current career progress. A high score refers to a high level of

negative career goal feedback. The test-retest correlation coefficient was .77. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the instrument was .88 in the original study and .87 in the current study.

Career Engagement Scale (CES): The CES was developed by Hirschi et al. (2014) and Korkmaz et al. (2020) adapted to Turkish culture. This 5-point Likert scale consists of 9 items and is unidimensional. A high score on the scale indicates highly proactive career behaviour. Test-retest conducted with an interval of four weeks resulted in a middle-level and statistically significant correlation ($r = .67$, $p < .001$). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the instrument was .88 in the original study and .90 in the current study.

Demographic Information Form: The DIF consists of questions about gender, age, grade level, and perceived economic status.

Data Analysis

The study data gathered with the aforementioned data collection tools were analysed via statistical techniques appropriate for the situations given in the hypothesis. IBM SPSS version 24 was used to conduct basic statistics (mean, standard deviation, correlations, normality tests, etc.). In addition, process macro model 4 (Hayes, 2018) was used to determine the mediating role of the variables and to test the parallel multiple mediator model with career adaptability and negative career goal feedback as mediators of the link between core self-evaluation and career engagement. Indirect effects were tested using 5000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

There were no missing data as the data was collected online. The data set was analyzed in terms of outliers. In line with Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), univariate outliers were detected by visualization of score plots, and box plots, and also by analyzing z-scores for each variable. As a result of these investigations, 9 cases were excluded from the study, and further analyses were conducted with 334 cases. In addition, it was examined whether there was a multicollinearity problem. Since it was seen that the tolerance values were greater than .10 and the VIF value was less than 10, it was understood that there was no multicollinearity problem.

Descriptive, Normality, and Correlational Analyses

Before data analysis, each measurement tool was analyzed in skewness and kurtosis, Q-Q and histogram graphics, and normality. The results showed that none of the variables had a skewness and kurtosis value within the intervals of -1.0 and +1.0 (Kline, 2011), and Q-Q and histogram graphics displayed a normal distribution. It was demonstrated that the distributions were normal and that all the data were retained. Subsequently, the researchers computed the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables (see Table 1).

Table 1. Normality Analysis, Descriptive Statistics, and Correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	M	SD	Skew.	Kurtosis
1. CSE	-	.38	-.40	.41	38.34	7.12	-.525	.024
2. CA		-	-.55	.62	47.99	6.47	-.370	.021
3. NCGF			-	-.55	56.27	15.69	.320	-.017
4. CE				-	29.02	7.07	-.133	-.191

All correlations are significant at $p < .001$ level. Note: [Core Self-Evaluation: CSE; Career Adaptability: CA; Negative Career Goal Feedback: NCGF; Career Engagement: CE.]

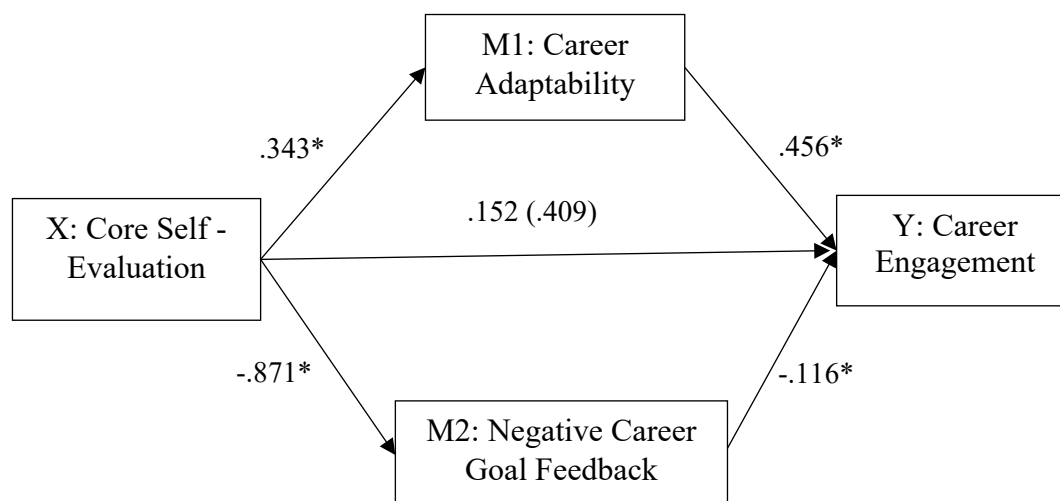
As Table 1 shows, all correlations between variables are statistically significant. Career engagement was found positively related to core self-evaluation ($r = .41$; H1), and career adaptability ($r = .62$; H2), and negatively related to career goal feedback ($r = -.55$; H3). Career adaptability also directly predicts career engagement ($B = .456$,

$p < .001$; H1) (see Figure 2). These results support H1, H2 and H3. The aforementioned relationships indicate that these variables are suitable for model testing (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013)

Parallel Multiple Mediation Analysis

In the parallel multiple mediator model, the X variable was the core self-evaluation, the Y variable was the career engagement, the M1 variable was the career adaptability, and the M2 variable was the career goal feedback. All paths in the model from core self-evaluation to career engagement are shown in Figure 2, and the indirect effects are shown in Table 2.

Figure 2. The proposed parallel multiple mediator model. $N = 334$. The non-standardized coefficients were shown and total effect was shown in parenthesis. $*p < .001$.



When Figure 2 is examined, the result showed that CSE was positively associated with CA and CE and was negatively associated with CGF. Therefore, H1 was supported. At the same time, results demonstrated that CA was positively associated with CE, and CGF was negatively associated with CE. Thus, H2 and H4 were supported.

Table 2. Indirect Effects

Indirect Effects	Boot.	Boot.	95% CI	
	Coef.	SE	Lower	Upper
CSE → CA → CE	.156	.041	.087	.248
CSE → NCGF → CE	.101	.033	.046	.174
Total	.257	.065	.148	.398

Note: [Core Self-Evaluation: CSE; Career Adaptability: CA; Negative Career Goal Feedback: NCGF; Career Engagement: CE.]

As seen in table 2, the mediating effect of CSE on CE via CA was significant ($B = .156$, boot $SE = .041$, boot 95%CI[0.087, 0.248]) which confirmed H3; and the mediating effect of CSE on CE via CGF was also significant ($B = .101$, boot $SE = .033$, boot 95%CI[0.046, 0.174]) which supported H5 (see Table 2). All variables in the model together explained 46% of the variance in CE ($R^2 = .461$, $F(1,332) = 94.340$, $p = .000$). According to these results, it can be deduced that both CA and CGF mediate the effect of CSE on CE, and the mediated effect via CA is stronger than the mediated effect via CGF. As a whole, the hypothesized parallel multiple-mediator model in predicting career engagement was supported.

Discussion

The study investigated the associations among career engagement, core self-evaluation, negative career goal feedback, and career adaptability. The initial objective was to examine the mediating role of CA and NCGF in the relationship between CE and CSE. In line with the expectations, the study findings indicated that career engagement was positively related to core self-evaluation and career adaptability and negatively related to negative career goal feedback. Considering the study findings, career adaptability and negative career goal feedback mediated the effect of core self-evaluation on career engagement.

The current study makes two important contributions to the literature about career engagement. Firstly, the outcomes of career engagement have been the main focus of previous research. (e.g. Chan, 2017; Smale et al., 2019). Besides, some of these studies focused on job-related outcomes to explain career engagement. Even though these studies broaden our perspective in our efforts to understand career engagement and make significant contributions, this research focuses on the antecedents of career engagement, exploring the effect of core self-evaluation, career adaptability, and negative career goal feedback on career engagement, and enriches the related theories and research studies. The present research suggests that core self-evaluation, career adaptability, and negative career goal feedback are likely to impact young adults' career engagement significantly. Secondly, although previous studies reveal that career engagement is associated with various career constructs (e.g., Kim et al., 2014; Nilforooshan, 2020; Ochoco & Ty, 2022), these studies are few. The current study puts an emphasis on the gap in the literature and contributes to it this way.

The results of the present study indicated that CSE was associated with career adaptability and career engagement. The possible reason might be that young adults feel encouraged to adapt more to career changes as well as expected and unexpected developments in working life when they perceive themselves more positively, control undesirable conditions, think that results of some incidents are indeed a result of their activities and believe that they can overcome any difficulty they face. This also suggests that individuals with a positive sense of self are more likely to have the necessary psychosocial resources to handle changes (Savickas, 2013). Higher CSE people are less likely to have anxiety, addiction, and lower self-esteem (Judge et al., 1998), and their sense of control and trust can increase (Nilforooshan & Salimi, 2016). Therefore, they can get more interested in their future career, be more prepared for the future, and be more willing to learn more about themselves and new experiences. When individuals have positive feelings about themselves and their careers, they are likely to engage in practices that enhance their repertoire of personal resources, and this will can guide individuals towards positive behaviours such as proactive career behaviour. Such interactions might affect career engagement. This finding is consistent with previous studies in the literature (Haynie et al., 2017; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015; Sou et al., 2022; Spurk et al., 2020).

Another possible reason for the relationships between students' career adaptability and proactive behaviours might be that there are more activities on and out of the campus. Brown et al., (2021) performed a study with university students and conducted focus group interviews. They concluded that participating in proactive career behaviours or being willing to participate in such behaviours was related to career adaptability. The students reported that acquiring new skills via internships, short training, or micro skills specific to the sector, participating in voluntary work, and networking were all related to career adaptability. Namely, the findings of the study above suggest that proactive career behaviours are associated with career adaptability, which supports the current study finding.

In brief, considering the studies that emphasize the importance of identifying barriers that can restrict individuals' positive experiences and meaningful career behaviours (Gutman & Schoon, 2012; Zikic & Hall, 2009), the current study shows that having high CSE and acquiring the behaviour of dealing with uncertainties in working life can increase their likelihood to participate in proactive career behaviours. Thus, they can construct their future career more consistently. Those individuals with high CSE, consider themselves competent, and take the initiative about their career problems can act more about their future career and join more activities that present appropriate career opportunities, such as career planning, career search, and networking. This is likely to increase individuals' career engagement.

The current study findings showed that CSE was associated with NCGF and had a mediating effect on career engagement. Put another way, as hypothesized, the results showed that CSE was negatively associated with NCGF, which may lead to a lower tendency to engage in proactive behaviors. The possible reason for this is that individuals who see themselves as less competent, have low self-esteem, are more anxious, and are more prone to an external locus of control tend to have more negative career feedback perceptions and, as a result, tend to show less proactive behaviors. The current research supports the view that regulatory processes have a stronger influence on career-related behaviour than personal tendencies (Lent et al., 1994).

Fonteyne et al. (2018) state that negative feedback can negatively affect both cognitive discrepancy and the individual's ability to act. Bandura (1991) argues that negative feedback reduces the individual's expectations of success and distracts their focus from the target. Similarly, Hu, Creed, et al. (2017) state that negative feedback can cause individuals to struggle with their career goals and move away from their existing career goals. When these explanations are considered, individuals who perceive negative career goal feedback might tend to give up or move away from their career goals, which can negatively affect proactive career behaviours. Negative feedback about the goal can trigger moving away from the goal (Hu, Creed et al., 2017), which might have negatively affected career engagement.

When these results are evaluated in terms of Turkish context, they can be explained via cultural characteristics. Negative feedback is considered an unwelcome situation for Turkish society (Hofstede, 1984; Kagitcibasi, 1970), which partially exhibits collectivist cultural characteristics. In collectivist cultures, negative self-perceptions may serve to give importance to one's effort to meet others' standards (Jawahar & Sahabeer, 2021), and by strengthening the perception of negative feedback, it can negatively affect the participation of individuals in proactive behaviors and reduce their career engagement. In addition, unemployment and employment rates in Türkiye can be regarded as another factor. The employment rate in Türkiye was 48.3%, and the 15-24 unemployment rate was 17.4%. (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024). These rates may increase the anxiety of young individuals who receive negative feedback about their careers, become hopeless, and reduce their motivation to manage their careers, thus negatively affecting their career engagement. The results of the current study are also consistent with previous studies in the literature. (e.g., Erez & Judge, 2001; Hu et al., 2018c).

Limitations And Implications For Future Research And Practice

The current study has some limitations. The present study is correlational and focuses on the relations among study variables. In view of the fact that there are not many studies on career engagement, a correlation study is very important. However, the current study can be conducted again with a longitudinal design. Then it can be possible to understand if career engagement involves permanent effects or relations. The current study showed negative relations between career engagement and negative career goal feedback. However, it did not address sources of feedback (internal-external). Future studies can focus on the sources of negative career feedback to see which source is more influential on career engagement. In this way, it can be possible to identify the source to intervene in terms of feedback to improve young adults' career engagement. In terms of participants, there are more women than men in the study. This proportion could be considered a limitation of the research. It may be useful to take this into account when generalizing. To address this, it would be beneficial to ensure that the ratio of female and male participants is equal in future studies, thus eliminating this potential limitation.

The current study provides some evidence about the role of core self-evaluation, career adaptability, and career goal feedback in career engagement with a sample of young adults. Further research can be conducted with a sample of employees with the same variables. In this way, it would be possible to contribute to the construction of career interventions at both organisational and individual levels. The current study mostly focuses on career engagement as well as positive tendencies and behaviours. Further studies can focus on negative tendencies and behaviours of career engagement such as neuroticism, career distress, difficulties in deciding on a career, indecision, or career perfectionism. Thus, it would be possible to get some clues about how many negative tendencies are influential on career engagement and make early career interventions.

Providing students with a learning environment that allows them to participate in activities both on and off campus, as well as volunteering opportunities, can help them to overcome uncertainties, set career goals, and engage in proactive behaviours such as planning their future careers, doing research on it, networking and preparing a portfolio. Such practices can also give some clues to employees about students' improving their professional skills and can increase the likelihood of employment (Brown et al., 2021). Furthermore, students can have a more positive perception of their goals if they are taught how to develop realistic career goals during courses in career planning and provided with in- and out-campus events on setting career goals. Such events can be increased in and out of the campus to support their proactive behaviours.

Conclusion

Having flexible careers (Briscoe et al., 2006; Savickas, 2013) and transferring career management from individual to organization (Pope, 2015) means that focusing on a single feature or competency cannot be enough to support career development. When considered from this perspective, the current study reveals that while making career interventions, especially while trying to improve proactive career behaviours such as career engagement, it is essential to help individuals gain behaviours such as self-control, self-competence, positive self-evaluation, setting realistic goals and dealing with uncertainties in working life. Moreover, the current study asserts that when young individuals have a low sense of self and receive negative feedback about their career choice and behaviour, they can deviate from actions that will bring them to their career goals. In contrast, individuals with a positive sense of self can make use of adaptability sources better to overcome uncertainty in working life. Thus, they can take part in more acts to achieve their goals.

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