



Career Adaptability and Resilience as Predictors of Subjective Well-Being: Testing Self-Efficacy as a Mediator in University Students

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ABSTRACT

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From a Human Resource Management perspective, final-year students are considered prospective workforce members as they are in a transition phase from education to the labor market and are preparing competencies and psychological readiness required by organizations. This study aims to analyze the effects of career adaptability and resilience on subjective well-being, with self-efficacy serving as a mediating variable. This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey method by distributing questionnaires to 240 final-year students undergoing career transition. The collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software. The results revealed that career adaptability and resilience had positive and significant effects on subjective well-being. Furthermore, self-efficacy was found to significantly mediate the relationships between career adaptability and resilience and subjective well-being. These findings imply that strengthening adaptability, resilience, and self-efficacy can support students' psychological well-being and contribute to preparing a more adaptive, resilient, and work-ready future workforce.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is widely perceived as a strategic pathway for achieving better employment opportunities and improving social mobility through more promising career prospects (García-Aracil et al., 2021). This issue is socially important because successful school-to-work transition not only affects individual career development but also contributes to national productivity and economic sustainability. In contemporary society, labor markets have become increasingly dynamic due to technological advancement, globalization, and shifting employment structures, creating uncertainty for young adults entering

the workforce. Evidence indicates that the transition from education to employment has become more complex, particularly among emerging workforce populations who often encounter difficulties adapting to labor market expectations. Such conditions affect psychological well-being and workforce readiness among graduates. Therefore, understanding factors that support successful career transitions has become increasingly important, particularly from a Human Resource Management perspective that views final-year students as potential future employees requiring adaptive psychological resources and career preparedness.

This study is grounded primarily in the theoretical perspectives of Career Construction Theory and Social Cognitive Theory to explain the relationships among career adaptability, resilience, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being. Career Construction Theory proposed by Savickas emphasizes career adaptability as a psychosocial resource enabling individuals to cope with vocational tasks, career transitions, and unpredictable occupational changes. Individuals with strong adaptability resources are more capable of responding to career-related uncertainty and environmental demands. Meanwhile, Social Cognitive Theory highlights self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to execute actions necessary to achieve desired outcomes. Self-efficacy influences motivation, emotional regulation, and behavioral responses during challenging situations. Resilience further serves as a psychological protective mechanism that enables individuals to recover from stress and adversity. Together, these concepts suggest that adaptive resources and psychological strengths play an important role in enhancing subjective well-being during critical career transition periods.

Despite expectations that higher education facilitates employment opportunities, labor market realities often contradict these assumptions. The problem becomes more evident among final-year students who frequently experience anxiety and uncertainty during the transition from university to employment. Statistical reports from BPS (2025) showed that the open unemployment rate increased from 4.20% in February 2024 to 4.86% in August 2024. Furthermore, among 4,852 registered job seekers, only 2,024 positions were available, indicating a substantial imbalance between labor demand and supply. This condition illustrates that higher education alone cannot guarantee successful labor market entry. Interviews with several final-year students revealed concerns regarding employment uncertainty, digital-era competition, insufficient confidence in career-related competencies, adaptation difficulties, and social pressure from family expectations. Such circumstances create psychological burdens, increase stress levels, and intensify concerns about failure during the career transition process.

These psychological challenges align with the concept of quarter-life crisis, a developmental phase commonly experienced during emerging adulthood between ages 18 and 30. This phase is characterized by emotional instability, uncertainty, and concerns regarding career, education, relationships, and future life direction. Previous studies have demonstrated that insufficient career preparation may intensify stress and increase vulnerability to psychological difficulties during transition periods (Sepsita, 2024). Research has further reported that pressures associated with adapting to labor market expectations and social demands negatively affect well-being, quality of life, and self-efficacy (Grasaas et al., 2022; Nabi, 2024). Consequently, these conditions contribute to decreased subjective well-being among students (Hasyim et al., 2024). Moreover, Meilan (2024) identified a negative relationship between subjective well-being and quarter-life crisis, suggesting that enhancing subjective well-being may reduce the likelihood of developmental crises among emerging adults.

Previous studies have identified several psychological resources that contribute positively to career adjustment and well-being. Career adaptability has been found to support professional success and improve subjective well-being during life transitions (Rasyidi et al., 2021; Federici et al., 2021; Ran et al., 2023). Similarly, resilience has demonstrated significant protective effects against anxiety and depression while improving subjective well-being (Paredes et al., 2021; Leys et al., 2021; Bharti et al., 2023). Bhattarai et al. (2021) further emphasized that resilience and self-efficacy significantly contribute to subjective well-being outcomes. However, most previous studies focused on variables such as career calling (Ran et al., 2023) and employability (Gerçek, 2024), while the role of resilience during career transition remains underexplored. Additionally, studies examining self-efficacy generally positioned it as a direct predictor rather than as a mediating mechanism linking psychological resources and well-being outcomes (Kvasková et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023).

This study introduces a more comprehensive perspective by integrating adaptive and protective psychological resources into a unified explanatory model of student well-being during career transition. Rather than examining each psychological variable independently, this study proposes a multidimensional framework where career adaptability and resilience influence subjective well-being through self-efficacy as an underlying psychological mechanism. This perspective recognizes that confidence in one's capability may function as a process connecting adaptive capacity and psychological resilience with broader well-being outcomes. Such integration is particularly relevant in rapidly changing labor environments characterized by digital transformation, technological disruption, flexible work systems, and uncertain employment patterns. Examining these variables simultaneously may provide deeper insight into how future workforce populations psychologically navigate transition

challenges and maintain positive well-being under uncertain career circumstances.

Based on these issues, an important research question emerges regarding how career adaptability and resilience contribute to subjective well-being and whether self-efficacy functions as a mediating mechanism during career transition. From a Human Resource Management perspective, final-year students represent prospective workforce members whose readiness should involve not only technical competencies but also adaptive psychological capabilities. This study argues that individuals with higher adaptability and resilience are more likely to develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs, which subsequently enhance subjective well-being during periods of uncertainty and transition. The proposed argument assumes that psychological resources operate not independently but interactively in shaping positive adjustment outcomes. Therefore, examining this relationship may provide theoretical contributions by extending career transition literature and practical implications for educational institutions in designing interventions that strengthen psychological readiness among future workforce candidates.

Hypothesis Development

Building upon the issues discussed in the introduction and supported by relevant theoretical perspectives and previous empirical findings, this study develops hypotheses concerning the relationships among career adaptability, resilience, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being among final-year students during career transition. The proposed hypotheses are formulated as follows:

- H1 : Career adaptability has a positive and significant effect on students' subjective well-being during the career transition period.
- H2 : Resilience has a positive and significant effect on students' subjective well-being during the career transition period.
- H3 : Career adaptability has a positive and significant effect on students' self-efficacy during the career transition period.
- H4 : Resilience has a positive and significant effect on students' self-efficacy during the career transition period.
- H5 : Self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on students' subjective well-being during the career transition period.
- H6 : Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between career adaptability and subjective well-being among students during the career transition period.
- H7 : Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between resilience and subjective well-being among students during the career transition period.

Based on these hypotheses, a conceptual framework was developed to illustrate the proposed relationships among the study variables. As presented in Figure 1, career adaptability and resilience are proposed to directly influence subjective well-being and indirectly affect it through self-efficacy as a mediating variable.

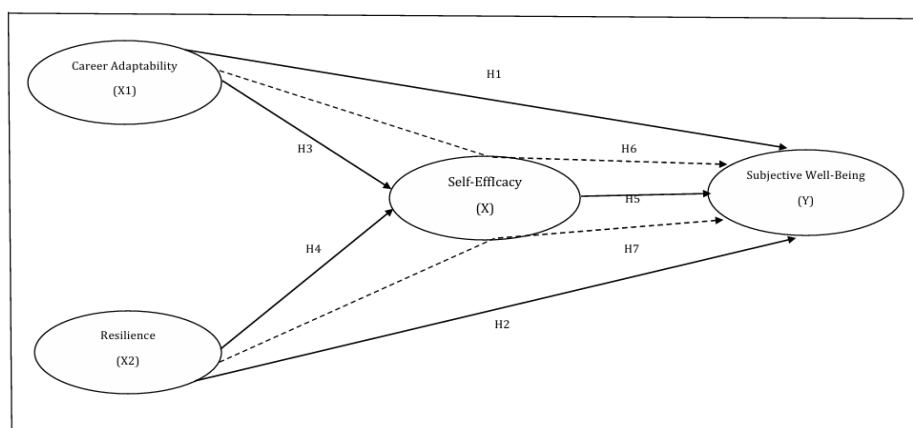


Figure 1. Research Framework

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal-associative research design to examine the relationships among career adaptability, resilience, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being. A quantitative design was selected because it enables researchers to statistically examine causal relationships among variables and test proposed hypotheses systematically. The study was conducted among final-year university students undergoing career transition. The research context focused on students in higher education institutions because final-year students represent individuals entering a critical transition phase from academic life to the workforce, making them an appropriate population for investigating psychological readiness and well-being during career transition.

The population of this study consisted of active students enrolled in public and private universities. Samples were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on specific criteria: students in the sixth semester or above, individuals who had participated in community service programs (KKN/KKM) or internships, and those willing to participate voluntarily. A total of 240 respondents participated in this study. This sample size met the recommended requirements for PLS-SEM analysis involving a model with moderate complexity (Hair et al., 2022). All study variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (Sugiyono, 2023).

Data were collected online using questionnaires distributed through Google Forms and shared via social media platforms. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 through two stages: outer model and inner model evaluation. The outer model assessment examined validity and reliability using criteria including outer loading ≥ 0.70 , Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50 , Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.70 , Composite Reliability ≥ 0.70 , and discriminant validity using Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) < 0.90 (Hair et al., 2022). Furthermore, the inner model was evaluated through bootstrapping procedures by assessing R^2 , path coefficients, t-statistics ≥ 1.96 , and p-values < 0.05 . Mediation analysis was also conducted, where self-efficacy was categorized as partial mediation when both direct and indirect effects were significant (Hair et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study involved 240 respondents who were used in hypothesis testing. The characteristics of the respondents in this study are described as follows.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Category	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	90	37.5
	Female	150	62.5
	Total	240	100
Age	20–22 Years	194	80.9
	23–25 Years	45	18.8
	26–27 Years	1	0.4
	Total	240	100
Semester	Semester 6	28	11.7
	Semester 7	113	47.1
	Semester 8	75	31.3
	Semester ≥ 9	24	10.0
	Total	240	100
Domicile	Pontianak City	47	19.6
	Singkawang City	32	13.3
	Kubu Raya	25	10.4
	Mempawah	13	5.4
	Bengkayang	13	5.4
	Ketapang	22	9.2
	Landak	11	4.6
	North Kayong	12	5.0
	Sambas	14	5.8
	Sanggau	10	4.2
	Sekadau	7	2.9

	Sintang	12	5.0
	Melawi	11	4.6
	Kapuas Hulu	11	4.6
	Total	240	100
Are you an active student in West Kalimantan?	Yes, please continue	240	100
Have you ever participated in KKN/KKM or an internship program?	Yes, please continue	240	100

Source: Processed data, 2026

Based on Table 1, this study involved 240 respondents (N = 240) with diverse characteristics. In terms of gender, respondents were predominantly female (62.5%) and male (37.5%). The majority were aged 20–22 years (80.9%), followed by 23–25 years (18.8%) and 26–27 years (0.4%). In terms of semester, most came from semester 7 (47.1%), semester 8 (31.3%), semester 6 (11.7%), and semester ≥ 9 (10%). Respondents were spread across 14 districts/cities in West Kalimantan, with a predominance from Pontianak City (19.6%), Singkawang City (13.3%), and Kubu Raya (10.4%). Overall, respondents were predominantly productive-age students in their final semester with diverse domicile backgrounds relevant to the research objectives.

Measurement Model (Outer Loading)

Validity and Reliability Test

In the initial stage of data analysis, the validity and reliability of the research instrument were tested. Validity was assessed using loading factors and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while reliability was assessed using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha . The instrument was deemed suitable for use in the next stage of analysis if all of these criteria were met.

Table 2. Convergent Validity and Composite Reliability

Variables	No Indicator	Indicator Code	Outer Loading	Note	AVE	CA	CR	Note
CA	1	CA1	0.925	Valid	0.835	0.934	0.938	Reliable
	2	CA2	0.917	Valid				
	3	CA3	0.896	Valid				
	4	CA4	0.917	Valid				
RE	9	R1	0.882	Valid	0.781	0.930	0.930	Reliable
	10	R2	0.857	Valid				
	11	R3	0.892	Valid				

	12	R4	0.901	Valid				
	13	R5	0.885	Valid				
	19	SE1	0.903	Valid				
	20	SE2	0.899	Valid				
SE	21	SE3	0.908	Valid	0.814	0.943	0.943	Reliable
	22	SE4	0.909	Valid				
	23	SE5	0.892	Valid				
	29	SWB1	0.922	Valid				
SWB	30	SWB2	0.911	Valid	0.818	0.889	0.896	Reliable
	31	SWB3	0.880	Valid				

Source: Data processed 2026

Based on Table 2, all indicators in the Career Adaptability , Resilience , Self-Efficacy , and Subjective Well-Being variables have an outer loading value > 0.70 and an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value above 0.50, namely Career Adaptability of 0.835, Resilience of 0.781, Self-Efficacy of 0.814, and Subjective Well-Being of 0.818, so that all indicators meet the convergent validity criteria according to Hair et al. (2022). The construct reliability was also met because the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values of all variables were above 0.70, namely Career Adaptability (CR = 0.938; α = 0.934), Resilience (CR = 0.930; α = 0.930), Self-Efficacy (CR = 0.943; α = 0.943), and Subjective Well-Being (CR = 0.896; α = 0.889). Thus, all constructs were declared valid and reliable and suitable for use in inner model analysis.

Table 3. Discriminant validity (HTMT) results

Variable Name	Discriminant Validity (HTMT)				
	Item Number	CA	RE	SE	SWB
CA	8				
RE	10	0.522			
SE	10	0.790	0.838		
SWB	6	0.740	0.698	0.799	

Source: Processed data, 2026

Based on Table 3, the discriminant validity test using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) value shows that all values between variables are below the threshold of 0.90 suggested by Hair et al. (2022), namely Career Adaptability and Resilience at 0.522, Career Adaptability and Self-Efficacy at 0.790, Career Adaptability and Subjective Well-Being at 0.740, Resilience and Self-Efficacy at 0.838, Resilience and Subjective Well-Being of 0.698, and Self-Efficacy and Subjective Well-Being of 0.799. Thus, all constructs are stated to have clear differences and there is no overlap between variables.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is conducted through an evaluation of the structural model (inner model) after the measurement model is declared valid and reliable. According to Hair et al. (2022), testing in SEM-PLS refers to the path coefficient , t-statistic, and p-value obtained through the bootstrapping procedure , where the hypothesis is accepted if the t-statistic > 1.96 and the p-value < 0.05.

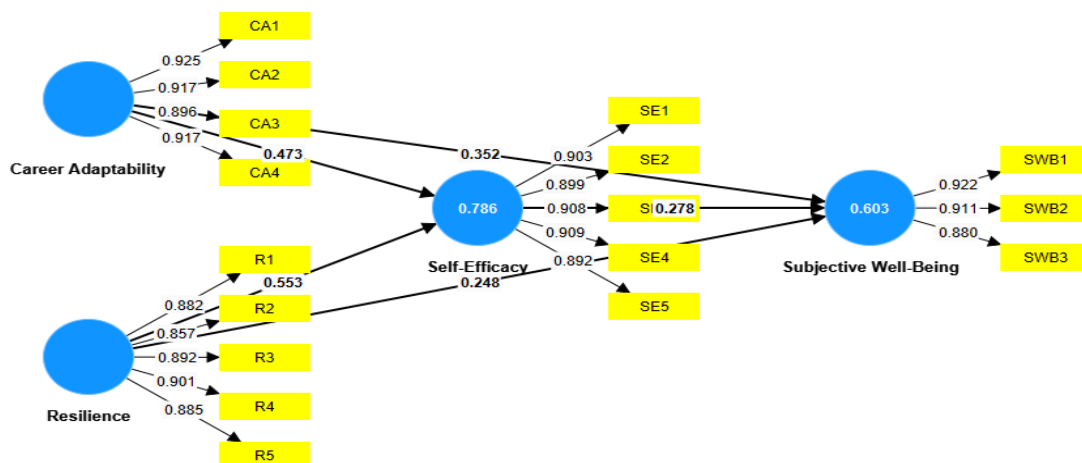


Figure 2. Research Model Testing

Figure 2 presents the results of the research model testing that illustrates the relationship between latent variables. The path coefficient values indicate that Career Adaptability on Self-Efficacy is 0.473, Resilience on Self-Efficacy is 0.553, and Self-Efficacy on Subjective Well-Being is 0.278. The R-Square values of 0.786 for Self-Efficacy and 0.603 for Subjective Well-Being indicate a strong to moderate model ability in explaining variations in the dependent variable, referring to Hair et al. (2022). Overall, this research model has proven quite reliable in explaining the influence of Career Adaptability and Resilience through Self-Efficacy on Subjective Well-Being of students during career transition.

Table 4. R-Square

Variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
Self-Efficacy	0.786	0.784
Subjective Well-Being	0.603	0.598

Source: Processed data, 2026

Based on the results in Table 4, the evaluation of the research model was measured using the Adjusted R-Square value to obtain a more accurate estimate by considering the number of predictors in the model. The Self-Efficacy variable obtained an Adjusted R-Square value of 0.784, which means that 78.4% of its variation can be explained by the Career Adaptability and Resilience variables ,

so it is included in the strong (substantial) category based on the criteria of Hair et al. (2022). Meanwhile, the Subjective Well-Being variable obtained an Adjusted R-Square value of 0.598, which indicates that 59.8% of its variation can be explained by the Self-Efficacy variable and is included in the moderate category based on the same criteria (Hair et al., 2022). Overall, the research model showed good and stable predictive accuracy after considering the number of predictors in the model.

Table 5. Direct Effect

Variables	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard Deviation	T statistics	P values	Result
CA-> SWB	0.352	0.353	0.058	6,021	0,000	Accepted
R -> SWB	0.248	0.252	0.065	3,851	0,000	Accepted
CA-> SE	0.473	0.473	0.049	9,621	0,000	Accepted
R -> SE	0.553	0.554	0.048	11,457	0,000	Accepted
SE -> SWB	0.278	0.274	0.089	3,111	0.002	Accepted

Source: Processed data, 2026

Based on Table 5, all direct influences in the research model are proven significant with a p-value <0.05. Career adaptability has a positive and significant effect on subjective well-being with a path coefficient of 0.352, a t-statistic of 6.121, and a p-value of 0.000, as well as resilience on subjective well-being with a coefficient of 0.248, a t-statistic of 3.851, and a p-value of 0.000. Career adaptability on self-efficacy shows a coefficient of 0.473, a t-statistic of 9.621, and a p-value of 0.000, while resilience on self-efficacy records the largest coefficient among all paths tested at 0.553, a t-statistic of 11.457, and a p-value of 0.000. Self-efficacy on subjective well-being was also proven significant with a coefficient of 0.278, a t-statistic of 3.111, and a p-value of 0.002. Referring to Hair et al. (2022), all hypotheses of direct influence were proven significant based on bootstrapping results with the criteria of t-statistic > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05.

Table 6. Indirect Effect

Variables	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Result
CA → SE → SWB	0.131	0.130	0.047	2,826	0.005	Accepted
R → SE → SWB	0.154	0.151	0.050	3,059	0.002	Accepted

Source: Data processed 2026

Based on Table 7, Self-Efficacy is proven to mediate the relationship between Career Adaptability and Subjective Well-Being with a coefficient of 0.131, a t-statistic of 2.826, and a p-value of 0.005, as well as the relationship between Resilience and Subjective Well-Being with a coefficient of 0.154, a t-statistic of 3.059, and a p-value of 0.002, where the path of Resilience through Self-Efficacy is the strongest mediation effect. Referring to Hair et al. (2022), both paths meet the significance criteria of t-statistic > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05, so Self-Efficacy is proven to be an intervening variable that connects Career Adaptability and Resilience with Subjective Well-Being of students during career transition.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that career adaptability has a positive and significant effect on subjective well-being among students during the career transition period. This result confirms that students with higher levels of career adaptability tend to demonstrate greater readiness in responding to career uncertainty and future challenges, ultimately enhancing positive emotions and life satisfaction. These findings align with Career Construction Theory proposed by Savickas, which conceptualizes career adaptability as an essential psychosocial resource consisting of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. These dimensions help individuals prepare for future career demands and reduce uncertainty-related anxiety. The findings are consistent with previous studies reporting a positive relationship between career adaptability and subjective well-being among students and emerging adults (Tian et al., 2021; Takao & Ishiyama, 2021; Panjaitan et al., 2023; Ran et al., 2023; Magnano et al., 2021). This suggests that adaptive career-related capacities contribute significantly to students' psychological adjustment during transitional phases.

The results also demonstrate that resilience positively and significantly affects subjective well-being. Students with higher resilience are more capable of managing stress, regulating negative emotions, and maintaining psychological stability during uncertain career transitions. Resilience functions as a protective psychological factor that enables individuals to interpret difficulties as opportunities for growth rather than threats. Consequently, resilient students tend to maintain greater optimism and life satisfaction despite experiencing transitional pressures. This finding supports prior research indicating that resilience contributes positively to subjective well-being and psychological adjustment among students (Moreira et al., 2021; Bhattarai et al., 2021). The findings imply that psychological resilience serves as a crucial personal resource in helping students cope effectively with changing educational and occupational environments.

Furthermore, career adaptability and resilience were found to positively influence self-efficacy among final-year students. Students possessing strong adaptive capacities and resilience tend to exhibit greater confidence in their ability to handle future career challenges and uncertainties. Individuals who can effectively explore career opportunities, understand their personal strengths, and recover from setbacks are more likely to develop stronger beliefs regarding their capabilities. These findings support previous studies emphasizing career adaptability and resilience as important predictors of self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2020; Topino et al., 2022; Stead et al., 2022; Holderman & Wijono, 2024; Sanusi et al., 2023; Salvo-Garrido et al., 2024; Verma & Zafari, 2025; Ghasempour et al., 2024). Thus, psychological adaptation and coping resources appear essential for strengthening students' confidence during periods characterized by uncertainty and transition.

This study also found that self-efficacy positively and significantly influences subjective well-being. Students with stronger beliefs in their capabilities tend to demonstrate better emotional regulation, greater confidence in managing stressors, and more positive perceptions regarding future outcomes. Self-efficacy helps individuals approach challenges with optimism and persistence, reducing anxiety associated with uncertainty. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that self-efficacy contributes significantly to subjective well-being among students (Seon & Smith-Adcock, 2021; Céspedes et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2023). Therefore, confidence in personal capabilities appears to function as an important psychological mechanism influencing emotional well-being and life satisfaction during career transition periods.

The mediation analysis further revealed that self-efficacy partially mediates the relationships between career adaptability and subjective well-being as well as between resilience and subjective well-being. These findings suggest that career adaptability and resilience not only directly improve subjective well-being but also indirectly contribute through enhancing students' self-efficacy. Students with stronger adaptive and resilient characteristics are more likely to develop confidence in dealing with career-related uncertainty, enabling them to manage stress more effectively and maintain positive psychological functioning. These results support previous findings demonstrating the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationships between career adaptability, resilience, and well-being outcomes (Topino et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Supervía et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Sabouripour et al., 2021; Cabrera-Aguilar et al., 2023; Cassaretto et al., 2024).

This study contributes to the Human Resource Management and career transition literature by integrating career adaptability, resilience, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being into a comprehensive explanatory model among final-year students. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined direct

relationships or focused on variables such as employability and career calling, this study highlights self-efficacy as an underlying psychological mechanism linking adaptive and protective resources to well-being outcomes. The novelty of this study lies in positioning self-efficacy as a mediating variable that simultaneously explains the influence of career adaptability and resilience on subjective well-being during career transition. These findings offer both theoretical contributions by extending career transition models and practical implications for educational institutions in designing intervention programs aimed at strengthening students' psychological readiness before entering the workforce.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that career adaptability and resilience are important psychological resources that significantly contribute to students' subjective well-being during the transition from higher education to the workforce. From a Human Resource Management perspective, the study provides an important insight that preparing future human resources should not only focus on technical competencies and employability skills but also on psychological readiness and well-being. The results further demonstrate that career adaptability and resilience positively influence self-efficacy, which subsequently enhances subjective well-being. In addition, self-efficacy was found to function as a mediating mechanism linking adaptive and protective psychological resources with well-being outcomes. The key lesson from this study is that students who possess adaptability, resilience, and confidence in their abilities are more likely to navigate career uncertainty successfully while maintaining positive psychological functioning.

This study contributes to the literature by providing an integrated model that explains the relationships among career adaptability, resilience, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being during career transition among university students. The study extends previous research by positioning self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism connecting psychological resources and well-being outcomes. However, this study has several limitations. The use of a cross-sectional design restricts the ability to examine changes over time, while the focus on university students limits broader generalizability across workforce populations. Future studies are recommended to involve individuals who have entered the labor market and incorporate additional variables such as work readiness, employability, career planning, and organizational support. Longitudinal or mixed-method approaches may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of psychological development from education to employment transition stages.

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