Research Article

Comparative Analysis of Career Adaptability among Working and Non-Working Students in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

In today's fast-paced and competitive job market, the capacity to adapt to career changes and challenges is essential for long-term success. Transitioning from academia to a professional career can be challenging for learners. Career adaptability is a trait that students utilise to navigate uncertainty in the workplace. Although numerous studies compared working and non-working students, few have specifically examined their career adaptability in the local context. Most existing research centers on post-employment outcomes such as job satisfaction and career growth, with limited attention given to the demographics of currently enrolled university students. This comparative study explored the career adaptability of university students in the Philippines. Using the Career Adaptability Assessment Scale (CAAS), data were collected from both groups through an online questionnaire. An independent samples t-test was used to compare the means of career adaptability dimensions and overall career adaptability between working and non-working students. Results showed a significant difference in career confidence ($p = 0.002$, $d = -0.44$) and overall career adaptability ($p = 0.04$, $d = -0.29$) between the two groups, demonstrating higher levels in working students. Furthermore, no significant difference was observed in terms of career concern ($p = 0.18$), career control ($p = 0.43$), and career curiosity ($p = 0.45$). These findings suggest that while employment status is associated with differences in career adaptability and confidence among students, the practical effect size of this difference is limited. The findings identify potential areas for targeted institutional support for student career development.

Keywords: *Career, Career adaptability, Career confidence, Employment status, Non-working students, Working students*

Background

Career adaptability has emerged as a critical trait for students transitioning from academia into the workforce. In an increasingly dynamic and competitive job market, the ability to adjust to career-related changes, challenges, and transitions is vital. Career adaptability encompasses four psychological dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. These traits enable students to take ownership of their career planning, explore possibilities, confront challenges, and develop future readiness. Felaco et al. (2023) investigated the various factors that come into work planning; mainly, representation of work and future planning. The researchers interviewed students regarding feelings, thoughts, and experiences that explored the topic. The results showed that career choices are factored by environmental-driven forces or attachment to the job when it comes to self-representation.

This study is anchored in Savickas' (2013) Career Construction Theory, which suggests that individuals build their careers by adapting to a changing work environment through psychological resources. A key part of this theory is career adaptability, which includes four core dimensions. The first dimension is career concern, which is the capacity to plan and prepare for one's vocational future. Students who are highly concerned actively create their career goals and see a fulfilling future. Second, career control entails accepting responsibility and exercising agency in making educational and career-related decisions. It is consistent with self-discipline and belief in one's ability to influence results. The third dimension is career curiosity, which refers to exploring potential self and career options. It enables students to engage in information-seeking behaviour and anticipate different future scenarios. These dimensions are not only developmental markers but also psychological competencies, which intersect with Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, where confidence plays a crucial role in behaviour motivation. Additionally, they also merge with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, which emphasises how learning from direct experience (e.g., employment) enhances adaptability.

Some students, especially those who are working, find it challenging to cope with the demanding developmental tasks associated with university life. However, it was determined that working students fare better in managing their time (Soares & Taveira, 2024). The experience that working students gain in the workplace is detrimental to the workforce by the time they graduate. The career adaptability of working and non-working students may differ due to differences in experience. Libago et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of addressing both the challenges that working students face, such as higher stress and limited time to study, and their potential benefits, such as greater time management and skill development. This could explain why research comparing non-working and working students found more health problems, such as anxiety and emotional weariness, and lower levels of academic performance and satisfaction in the latter group (Tessema et al., 2014; Chiang et al., 2020). Studies have found that difficulties in adjusting to higher education can lead to academic underperformance and eventual withdrawal. Factors contributing to poor academic adaptation include personal and professional challenges, lack of emotional support, and insufficient preparedness for university life (Garcés-Delgado et al., 2024; Souza & Murgo, 2023). Eventually, during their academic careers, these students may face the difficult decision of prioritising employment over academic completion.

In the Philippine context, this inquiry is especially relevant. As the country recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, many students face disrupted career pathways and economic certainty (Mea et al., 2024). Reportedly, approximately 62% of Filipino graduates believe there is a significant disconnect between the education system and the labor market, which leaves them inadequately prepared for the workforce. (Albert et al., 2023). This raises the question of whether interventions are needed to prepare students more adequately by having work experience and being immersed in the field. Filipino students now need to show greater resilience and proactive planning to close the growing gap between education and employment (Corpin, 2025). Thus, identifying which group,

working or non-working, shows stronger adaptability can guide institutional efforts to improve career readiness.

Soares and Teveira (2024) examined career construction and sociocognitive career theories to investigate an integrative model of career adaptability in higher education. It included 523 Portuguese university students: 335 non-working students ($\bar{x}$ age = 20.64) and 188 working students ($\bar{x}$ age = 29.05). The study looked at social support, protean orientation, flexibility, and adaptation as important determinants of career adaptation, with professional certainty, academic well-being, and life happiness as primary outcomes. Multigroup route analysis validated the model's fit and invariance across groups after various adjustments. While more study is needed, the findings add to the career development literature and highlight the relevance of career counsellors in helping students improve their job flexibility by cultivating professional attitudes and increasing social networks. Khalid and Ahmad (2021) examine how key employability skills contribute to students' ability to adapt to career challenges in a dynamic job market. Employability skills, such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and critical thinking, play a crucial role in shaping career adaptability, which encompasses concern, control, curiosity, and confidence in career decision-making. The research findings suggest that students who possess strong employability skills are better equipped to handle career transitions, demonstrating greater resilience and flexibility in uncertain employment landscapes.

Moreover, career adaptability serves as a bridge between academic learning and professional success, allowing students to proactively manage their career paths and respond effectively to workforce demands. The study emphasises the importance of integrating employability skill development into higher education curricula to enhance students' career readiness. Universities and policymakers are encouraged to design programs that foster both technical expertise and soft skills, ensuring graduates are prepared for the evolving job market. Career services, internships, and mentorship programs should focus on strengthening students' adaptability and problem-solving abilities, enabling them to navigate career uncertainties with confidence.

While much literature exists in comparing working and non-working students, only a few have studied and compared career adaptability. Most studies have focused on the aftermath and its effects on employment, employment satisfaction, and growth, specifically among previously employed students who are no longer employed. Limited studies focus on the demographics of current university students who are working and non-working. The goal of this study is to measure the career adaptability of working students and non-working students. The study investigated whether employment while studying significantly influences the students' career adaptability, facilitating a seamless transition from academia to the workplace. It also aims to determine whether support and guidance are needed for students, working or non-working, to ensure they have a strong foundation for their future.

Methods
Research Design
A comparative research design is used in this study to inspect the difference in career adaptability among working and non-working students. This design is used to compare and identify differences between two or more groups without manipulating any variables. This study compared Career Adapt-Abilities Assessment Scale (CAAS) scores and employment status among students in private universities in the Philippines.

Research Locale
This study took place across several private universities in the Philippines. These universities are known for their engaged student community and a variety of academic programs. It offered a fitting environment for the research, particularly because it serves both working and non-working students from different backgrounds. The students from this locale have access to the internet and are digitally literate, making them ideal for the data collection, which was conducted online. This approach also allowed for a broader range of participants.

Participants and Sampling

A total of 210 students, with an equal allocation of 105 respondents per group, from various universities in the Philippines. The researchers used G*Power 3.1.9.7 analysis to compute the required sample size using the following parameters: an effect size of 0.5, a significance level of 0.05, and a power of 0.95. G*Power is a widely recognised software tool for determining sample sizes with high precision, commonly used in various fields of research. Participants were recruited through an online survey shared on the social media accounts of the researchers. The link included a short explanation of the study's objectives and eligibility criteria. Inclusion criteria included being a college student, age 18 and above, and classified as either working or non-working. For this study, a working student is defined as an individual enrolled in a college or university program who is also employed in either a part-time or full-time job at the time of data collection. Conversely, non-working students were those who reported no current employment during the study period. A non-random quota sampling method was used to ensure equal representation across working and non-working categories. While this approach allowed for targeted group comparison, it may limit the generalizability of the findings due to potential sampling bias. Specifically, because participants self-selected into the study via online platforms, responses may be influenced by availability and internet access. These limitations are acknowledged and considered in the interpretation of results.

Instruments

Data were collected using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) developed by Mark Savickas (2013). This 24-item self-report tool measures the four components of career adaptability using a 5-point Likert scale. Each component—Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence—has six items. The CAAS is reported to have strong internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.74 to 0.85 across subscales and reach 0.92 for the overall adaptability factor. It has also shown acceptable to excellent reliability across various cultural contexts. Evidence for validity supports the CAAS as culturally and developmentally appropriate. Metric invariance was observed across 13 countries, indicating that individuals from different cultures and age groups interpret and respond to the items similarly. Demographic questions were also included to gather participant profile data.

Procedure

The data collection procedure included four key steps. Initially, formal approval was obtained from the university and program administrators to ensure adherence to institutional guidelines. Consequently, participants were selected using non-random quota sampling to represent the target groups accurately. Informed consent forms were distributed through online platforms, ensuring that participants are aware of the study's objectives and their rights. Finally, the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms to ensure practical and accessible data gathering.

Ethical Considerations

This research adheres to the code of ethics of the Psychology Association of the Philippines (PAP, 2022). All the participants who engaged in the study received a clear and straightforward explanation of the study's aim, protocol, and any potential dangers or discomforts they may face. It is the responsibility of the researchers to protect any information that participants may disclose, regardless of the format in which it was stored. (Section IV of PAP, 2022). Therefore, the researchers respect the participant's choice to withdraw, guaranteeing their autonomy throughout the study (Principle I of PAP, 2022). All the data of respondents were kept on a password-protected device only available to the researchers in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies were computed to summarise the demographic characteristics of the 210 participants. For the inferential analysis, independent samples t-tests were used to compare the dimensions of career adaptability, namely career

concern, career curiosity, career control, and career confidence, as well as the overall career adaptability scores between non-working and working students. Prior to conducting the independent sample t-tests, assumptions of normality were checked using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (p = 0.07 to 0.34), all of which determined no violation of normality. The data reported no violations on the assumption of homogeneity of variances, which was assessed using Levene's test (p = 0.54 to 0.98). All statistical analyses were conducted using Jamovi version 2.4.14.

Result and Discussion

The demographic profile of the respondents, particularly in terms of employment status. The study acquired 210 respondents with an equal distribution between working and non-working respondents, resulting in 105 (50%) each. This ensured balanced group representation.

The questionnaire measures career adaptability among working and non-working students. The first six items measure career concern. With a mean of M = 4.23, SD = 0.88 among working students and a mean of M = 4.13, SD = 0.93 in non-working students. The highest rated statement, "concerned about my career", had an overall mean of M = 4.5, SD = 0.72. The results indicate a modest difference between working and non-working students in terms of preparing and thinking about their future career paths. This indicates that both groups have a strong sense of awareness and preparedness in career planning. The following twelve items in the questionnaire measure career control and curiosity, divided into six items each. The descriptive statistics measured overall career control in working students (M = 4.04, SD = 0.92) and in non-working students (M = 3.88, SD = 1.01). The analysis revealed significant differences in career confidence and overall career adaptability between working and non-working students.

Table 1. Independent Sample t-test Results on Career Adaptability

Variable	Non-Working		Working		t-statistic	p-value	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Career Concern	24.7	3.81	25.4	4.15	-1.35	0.18	-0.19
Career Control	23.3	4.15	24.3	4.10	-1.77	0.43	-0.11
Career Curiosity	24.3	4.15	24.8	4.03	-0.79	0.45	-0.24
Career Confidence	23.3	4.24	24.8	4.27	-3.19	0.002	-0.44
Career Adaptability	95.0	14.63	99.3	14.48	-2.12	0.04	-0.29

Note. SD = standard deviation

In Table 1, the results of the independent samples t-test are presented. This statistical analysis examines whether there is a significant difference in career adaptability between non-working and working students. Among the five variables, only career confidence and overall career adaptability have statistically significant differences. Working students reported significantly higher levels of career confidence (t = -3.19, p = 0.002), with a moderate effect size (*d* = -0.44). This suggests that work experience meaningfully contributes to students' belief in their ability to make sound career decisions and handle career-related challenges. Their self-confidence and preparedness to handle job responsibilities may be strengthened by the practical exposure, problem-solving, and accountability that come with employment, aspects that are less accessible to non-working students. This aligns with findings by Aminah et al. (2024), who stated that career adaptability develops when there is more exposure to career-related challenges. This highlights the importance of career experience when transitioning from academia to the professional workforce. Similarly, the difference in overall career adaptability was significant (t = -2.12, p = 0.04), with a small effect size (*d* = -0.29). While the difference is slight, it suggests that working students may be more ready to respond to changing career conditions and demands. This could come from real-world learning and skills they

gain through their work experience. Consistent with this result, the study of Tuononen et al. (2024) shows that working students exhibit higher levels of career engagement, particularly in networking and career planning.

In contrast, the differences in career concern (p = 0.18, *d* = -0.19), career control (p = 0.43, *d* = -0.11), and career curiosity (p = 0.45, d = -0.24) were not statistically significant, with all associated effect sizes falling within the negligible to small range. These results suggest that both working and non-working students share similar levels of future orientation, autonomy in making career decisions, and interest in exploring potential career paths. This may show the broader impact of educational settings, personal goals, or developmental stages on these career adaptability parts, regardless of their job status. To provide students with more flexibility, a study by Castro (2024) suggests that institutions may support and enhance a student's career adaptability through guidance and internship programs. This way, the gap between the career adaptability of working and non-working students can be bridged.

Discussion

The research study drew from Savickas' Career Adaptability Theory, and the research evaluated career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence dimensions between two distinct student groups: those working part-time or full-time and those focused solely on academics. The study found that both groups were relatively highly adaptable to careers across most dimensions, though they observed a meaningful difference in career confidence, since working students scored notably higher. Work experience, in fact, positively contributes to a student's belief that they can manage their future career challenges; it fosters confidence and prepares them for a professional environment. For working students, there was also a higher score in overall career adaptability with a small effect size. Career control, as well as career curiosity and career concern, were the three other components without any statistically important differences. This implies that while both groups behave and feel similarly toward planning and exploring careers, direct

exposure to the work environment mainly impacts how confident they feel and how well they generally adapt.

Limitations

This section presents the limitations of the study. First, using a self-report questionnaire can lead to bias. Participants might have answered in ways they think are socially acceptable or misjudged their career adaptability. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study makes it hard to determine if there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between employment status and career adaptability. Although associations were found, we cannot confirm that employment experience directly causes changes in career adaptability traits. Lastly, the study did not account for other key variables that might affect career adaptability, like academic performance (GPA), socioeconomic status (SES), and field of study or major. These factors could interact with both employment status and career adaptability, potentially skewing the results. Future research should employ a longitudinal or experimental design, incorporating these variables to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play.

Conclusion

This study concluded that working students tend to exhibit higher levels of career confidence and overall career adaptability than non-working students. These suggest that students who work while in college are better able to build their confidence and are prepared for future career challenges. While there were no significant differences in the areas of career concern, control, and curiosity, the data highlight the clear benefit of real-world work experience in building students' confidence and adaptability in their careers. The findings align with Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education by highlighting the need for higher education institutions to offer inclusive and equitable learning opportunities that integrate academic knowledge with practical career preparation. Furthermore, by promoting work-integrated learning and employability-focused programs, this study contributes to SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth by underscoring how education can foster youth

employment, productive skills development, and long-term financial resilience. In light of these findings, several practical steps can be taken. Higher education institutions should consider programs such as internship placement, career mentorship, and career development workshops to enhance the career adaptability of non-working students. Mentoring programs, especially those that involve professionals from the sector or university alumni, can provide insightful information and assist students in making better decisions, even if they lack work experience. Additionally, at the institutional and curricular level, it is recommended that universities consider the integration of career readiness modules across academic programs. These modules might include soft skills training, workplace simulations, and hands-on learning experiences that replicate the potential challenges of professional environments. Students can gain the skills necessary for successful job transitions by establishing academic policies that support practicum-based courses and service-learning activities.

Acknowledgement

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