

Psychological, Learning, and Behavioral Factors Associated with Career Adaptability Among Students and Emerging Professionals: A Systematic Literature Review

Aqsal Falevi Harahap*, Mohammad Fakhruddin Mudzakkir, Mhd. Zamal Nasution

Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia

Email: aqsal.falevi.harahap-2025@pasca.unair.ac.id*,
fakhruddin.mudzakkir@pasca.unair.ac.id, mhd.zamal.nasution@pasca.unair.ac.id

Keywords:	Abstract
career adaptability, psychological capital, learning agility, self-efficacy, career development	Rapid technological change, organizational transformation, and labor market uncertainty have increased the importance of career adaptability for students and emerging professionals preparing to enter dynamic work environments. This study aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical evidence on psychological, learning-related, and behavioral factors associated with career adaptability. A systematic literature review was conducted using the PRISMA 2020 framework. Sixteen peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2022 and 2026 were selected based on predetermined eligibility criteria and analyzed through narrative synthesis across three domains: psychological factors, learning-related factors, and behavioral factors. The findings indicate that psychological resources are the most consistently examined determinants of career adaptability, particularly psychological capital, self-efficacy, resilience, mindfulness, basic psychological needs, and career decision-making self-efficacy. Career decision-making self-efficacy frequently functions as a mediating mechanism linking individual or contextual resources to adaptive career outcomes. Learning agility, career exploration, career coping, and readiness for change also contribute to adaptive development, although direct empirical evidence remains comparatively limited. The review concludes that career adaptability is shaped by interconnected psychological, learning-related, and behavioral resources. Future research should examine these factors simultaneously within integrated empirical models to strengthen career development interventions for individuals transitioning into changing professional environments characterized by increasingly complex and competitive labor markets.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world of work is characterized by rapid technological advancement, organizational transformation, economic uncertainty, and increasingly complex career demands. These changes require individuals not only to possess technical competencies but also to develop the capacity to respond effectively to changing roles, work environments, and career expectations (AlNuaimi et al., 2021; Ratten, 2022). This challenge is particularly relevant for students and emerging professionals transitioning from educational institutions into increasingly competitive and uncertain labor markets. Recent studies have shown that career adaptability is associated with work readiness and career-related outcomes among students and individuals in professional settings (Lakshmi & Elmartha, 2022; Tang et al., 2026). Therefore, the ability to prepare for, cope

with, and respond constructively to career-related changes has become an important component of individual career development.

Career adaptability refers to an individual's psychosocial resources for coping with current and anticipated career tasks, transitions, and disruptions. It involves an individual's ability to prepare for future career challenges, exercise control over career decisions, explore career possibilities, and maintain confidence in addressing career-related difficulties. Recent empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the relevance of career adaptability among university students, vocational students, medical students, and professional groups (Chuang et al., 2022; Xiang et al., 2024; Cao et al., 2025). Rather than being understood merely as a passive response to external changes, career adaptability reflects an active process through which individuals prepare themselves, explore opportunities, regulate their behavior, and construct meaningful career pathways. Ratten (2022) emphasizes that adaptability has become increasingly important as individuals encounter uncertainty and continuous transformation in contemporary work environments.

Psychological resources constitute an important foundation of career adaptability. Individuals who possess positive psychological resources are generally better equipped to cope with uncertainty, setbacks, and changes in career circumstances. Psychological capital is one construct that has received considerable attention and comprises self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. These resources provide individuals with confidence in their capabilities, positive expectations for the future, perseverance in pursuing goals, and the capacity to recover from difficulties. Empirical evidence indicates a positive relationship between psychological capital and career adaptability across different populations. Wulandari et al. (2024) found a positive and significant relationship between psychological capital and career adaptability among police personnel. Similarly, Tang et al. (2026) reported that psychological capital was associated with job readiness through career adaptability among Chinese university students. Mou et al. (2026) also demonstrated that psychological capital played a role in the relationship between academic major identity and career decision-making difficulties through career adaptability. These findings suggest that psychological factors may function as important internal resources that facilitate adaptive career development.

In addition to psychological resources, learning represents another important dimension of career adaptability. The transition from education to employment requires individuals to continuously acquire, evaluate, and apply new knowledge in unfamiliar situations. Learning is therefore not limited to formal educational activities but also includes learning from experience, reflection, feedback, and interactions with changing environments. One concept that is particularly relevant to this process is learning agility. Learning agility describes an individual's capacity and willingness to learn from experience and subsequently apply that learning effectively when confronted with new, unfamiliar, or complex situations. Research has shown that learning agility is associated with work readiness and adaptive outcomes among students and employees (Jari & Satwika, 2025; Sutardi & Novitasari, 2024). Individuals with greater learning agility tend

to be more capable of responding to unfamiliar situations and transforming previous experiences into useful knowledge for subsequent challenges (Novitasari & Sutardi, 2023). Thus, learning-related capacities may contribute to career adaptability by enabling individuals to continuously update their knowledge, adjust their strategies, and respond constructively to novel career situations.

Behavioral factors also play an important role in the development of career adaptability. Adaptive career development requires individuals not only to possess psychological resources and learning capacities but also to translate these resources into concrete actions. Career exploration, career decision-making, proactive behavior, and readiness for change are examples of behavioral processes that may support adaptive career development (Parola, 2023; Salim et al., 2023; Simatupang, 2022). Career decision-making is particularly important because individuals transitioning from education to employment must actively evaluate alternatives and make decisions concerning their future careers. Salim et al. (2023) found that career decision-making self-efficacy mediated the relationship between peer support and students' career adaptability, whereas Zhang et al. (2024) identified a mediating role of career decision-making self-efficacy in the relationship between career adaptability and career coping styles. These findings indicate that adaptive career development involves not only internal psychological resources but also active behavioral processes.

The relationships among psychological, learning, and behavioral factors are particularly important because these dimensions may not operate independently. Positive psychological resources may encourage individuals to engage more actively in learning and career exploration, whereas learning experiences may strengthen confidence and improve an individual's ability to respond to unfamiliar situations. Evidence from the reviewed literature indicates that psychological resources such as psychological capital, resilience, and self-efficacy are frequently associated with career adaptability and career-related self-efficacy (Alkal, 2025; Woreta & Zewude, 2026; Xu et al., 2025). At the same time, learning-related capabilities and career decision-making processes may provide mechanisms through which these psychological resources are translated into adaptive career outcomes (Salim et al., 2023; Sutardi & Novitasari, 2024). From this perspective, career adaptability can be understood as a multidimensional capacity supported by the interaction of internal psychological resources, continuous learning processes, and adaptive behaviors.

The importance of these factors becomes increasingly apparent among university students and emerging professionals. The transition from higher education to employment represents a critical developmental period during which individuals must move from relatively structured educational environments to uncertain and rapidly changing professional contexts. Research involving university and vocational students has demonstrated that career adaptability is associated with work readiness, career decision-making, and future career development (Chuang et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2026; Zewude et al., 2025). Lakshmi and Elmartha (2022) also reported that career adaptability contributed substantially to students' work readiness. Such findings indicate that

developing career adaptability during higher education may help individuals prepare for the demands of professional life. Consequently, identifying the factors that contribute to career adaptability is important not only for individual career development but also for higher education institutions seeking to strengthen graduate employability.

Although previous studies have examined psychological, learning, and behavioral variables in relation to career adaptability, the evidence remains fragmented across different constructs, populations, and research contexts. Some studies have focused primarily on psychological resources such as psychological capital, self-efficacy, and resilience (Wulandari et al., 2024; Alkal, 2025), whereas others have examined learning-related processes and adaptive career behaviors (Jari & Satwika, 2025; Parola, 2023). Several studies have also examined career decision-making self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism between contextual or individual factors and career adaptability (Salim et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Consequently, the findings are dispersed across different strands of the literature, making it difficult to obtain an integrated understanding of how psychological, learning, and behavioral factors contribute to career adaptability among students and emerging professionals.

Coetzee et al. (2023) similarly noted that research on the psychological states underlying adaptive readiness and their role as activators of career adaptability remains relatively limited. Recent studies have continued to identify various psychological and contextual pathways associated with career adaptability, including mindfulness, emotional intelligence, psychological capital, basic psychological needs, and resilience (Woreta & Zewude, 2026; Zewude et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025). This diversity of findings indicates the need for a systematic synthesis of the available empirical evidence to identify consistent patterns and clarify the mechanisms associated with career adaptability.

A systematic review is therefore necessary to consolidate the findings of previous empirical studies and provide a broader understanding of the factors associated with career adaptability. In particular, examining psychological, learning, and behavioral factors within a single review may provide a more comprehensive perspective than investigating each category independently. Such an approach can identify dominant factors, variations in findings, research gaps, and potential directions for future research on career development among students and emerging professionals. Therefore, this systematic literature review aims to synthesize empirical evidence regarding psychological, learning, and behavioral factors associated with career adaptability among students and emerging professionals.

This systematic literature review aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical evidence concerning psychological, learning, and behavioral factors associated with career adaptability among students and emerging professionals. Specifically, the review seeks to identify the psychological resources, learning-related capacities, and behavioral characteristics that have been examined in relation to career adaptability; synthesize the directions and patterns of their reported relationships; and identify gaps in the existing literature that may inform future research and career development practices.

METHOD

Study Design

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical evidence on psychological, learning-related, and behavioral factors associated with career adaptability among students and emerging professionals. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines to ensure transparent and systematic reporting (Page et al., 2021).

Search Strategy and Eligibility Criteria

The literature search focused on empirical studies examining career adaptability and its psychological, learning-related, and behavioral determinants. The main keywords included “career adaptability,” “psychological capital,” “self-efficacy,” “resilience,” “career decision-making self-efficacy,” “learning agility,” “mindfulness,” “career behavior,” “career exploration,” “career planning,” “students,” and “emerging professionals.” Boolean operators AND and OR were used to combine the keywords.

Studies were included when they: (1) examined career adaptability as a primary variable or outcome; (2) investigated at least one psychological, learning-related, or behavioral factor; (3) involved university students, vocational students, graduates, medical students, or emerging professionals; (4) were empirical studies; (5) were published in peer-reviewed journals; and (6) were published within the last ten years. Studies published before the specified period, duplicate publications, conference abstracts, book chapters, non-empirical articles, and studies that did not directly address career adaptability were excluded.

Study Selection and Data Synthesis

The selection process consisted of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, following the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021). The initial literature search identified studies relevant to career adaptability and related psychological, learning, and behavioral factors. After removal of duplicate and irrelevant records, titles and abstracts were screened based on the predetermined eligibility criteria. Potentially relevant studies were subsequently assessed through full-text review.

Based on the literature collected for this review, 16 empirical studies were identified as relevant to the research focus. These studies were published between 2022 and 2026 and involved diverse populations, including university students, vocational students, medical students, nursing students, and emerging professionals. The selected studies examined psychological capital, resilience, self-efficacy, mindfulness, basic psychological needs, career decision-making self-efficacy, learning-related factors, and career-related behaviors.

Data were extracted systematically, including author and publication year, participants, research context, main variables, research design, and principal findings. The findings were then synthesized narratively and organized into three major domains: psychological factors, learning-related factors, and behavioral factors. Studies examining psychological capital and related psychological resources included Tang et al. (2026),

Mou et al. (2026), Woreta and Zewude (2026), Cao et al. (2025), Alkal (2025), Chuang et al. (2022), and Xu et al. (2025). Studies concerning career decision-making self-efficacy and related career processes included Zhang et al. (2024), Salim et al. (2023), Parola (2023), and Chen et al. (2024). Other studies examined resilience, mindfulness, psychological needs, self-efficacy, and career-related factors associated with career adaptability (Gülşen & Şahin, 2022; Yiming et al., 2024; Xiang et al., 2024; Zewude et al., 2025; Du et al., 2025).

The synthesis was conducted by comparing the direction and consistency of findings across studies and identifying the mechanisms through which psychological, learning, and behavioral factors may contribute to career adaptability. Particular attention was given to direct relationships, mediating mechanisms, and interactions among variables, allowing the review to identify patterns and research gaps in the existing literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study Selection and Characteristics

The systematic literature review identified 16 empirical studies examining psychological, learning-related, and behavioral factors associated with career adaptability among students and emerging professionals. The studies were published between 2022 and 2026 and involved diverse populations, including university students, vocational students, medical students, nursing students, and early-career professionals.

Most studies employed quantitative research designs, while one study used a longitudinal design. The reviewed studies investigated several psychological factors, including psychological capital, resilience, self-efficacy, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and basic psychological needs. Career decision-making self-efficacy was also frequently examined as a mediator or explanatory mechanism in the relationship between other variables and career adaptability. Learning- and behavior-related factors included learning agility, motivation, career exploration, career coping, and career-related behaviors.

Overall, the findings indicate that career adaptability is associated with multiple psychological, learning, and behavioral resources. Psychological capital, resilience, self-efficacy, and career decision-making self-efficacy consistently demonstrated positive associations with career adaptability (Alkal, 2025; Chuang et al., 2022; Mou et al., 2026; Tang et al., 2026). Several studies also indicated that these factors may operate through mediating mechanisms, suggesting that career adaptability is not merely a direct outcome of individual characteristics but may develop through psychological and career-related processes.

Table 1. Characteristics of Studies Included in the Literature Review

Author & Year	Participants	Main Factor	Research Design	Main Finding
Gülşen & Şahin (2022)	University students	Basic Psychological Needs, Academic Self-Efficacy	Quantitative	Basic psychological needs, academic self-efficacy, and career-related factors were associated with career adaptability and life satisfaction.
Chuang et al. (2022)	Vocational students	Motivation, Self-Efficacy, Fear of Failure	Quantitative	Motivation and self-efficacy were positively associated with career adaptability, while meaning in life moderated the relationships.
Yiming et al. (2024)	Physical education students	Self-Efficacy, Career Development	Quantitative	Self-efficacy was associated with career development and subjective well-being.
Salim et al. (2023)	University students	Career Decision Self-Efficacy, Peer Support	Quantitative	Career decision self-efficacy mediated the relationship between peer support and career adaptability.
Parola (2023)	Students in school-to-work transition	Career Decision Self-Efficacy	Quantitative	Career decision self-efficacy was associated with career adaptability and willingness to compromise during career transition.
Chen et al. (2024)	Medical students	Career Calling, Career Decision Self-Efficacy	Quantitative	Career decision self-efficacy and career adaptability mediated the relationship between career calling and learning engagement.
Zhang et al. (2024)	Medical specialty students	Career Decision Self-Efficacy	Quantitative	Career decision-making self-efficacy played a mediating role between career adaptability and career coping styles.
Xiang et al. (2024)	Vocational nursing students	Career Adaptability and Related Factors	Quantitative	Career adaptability was associated with several individual and educational factors among nursing students.
Woreta & Zewude (2026)	University students	Mindfulness, Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Capital	Quantitative	Psychological capital and emotional intelligence contributed to the relationship between mindfulness and career adaptability.
Tang et al. (2026)	University students	Psychological Capital	Quantitative	Psychological capital was associated with job readiness, with career adaptability functioning as a mediating mechanism.
Mou et al. (2026)	College students	Academic Major Identity,	Quantitative	Psychological capital and career adaptability were involved in the relationship between academic

Author & Year	Participants	Main Factor	Research Design	Main Finding
		Psychological Capital		major identity and career decision-making difficulty.
Alkal (2025)	University students	Resilience, Career Decision Self-Efficacy	Longitudinal	Resilience and career decision self-efficacy were positively associated with career adaptability over time.
Cao et al. (2025)	Pediatric residents	Psychological Resilience	Quantitative	Psychological resilience was associated with career adaptability and career-related outcomes.
Zewude et al. (2025)	University students	Basic Psychological Needs, Mindfulness, Career Self-Efficacy	Quantitative	Basic psychological needs and mindfulness were related to career adaptability through career self-efficacy and future career choice.
Xu et al. (2025)	University students	Basic Psychological Needs, Grit, Career Decision Self-Efficacy	Quantitative	Grit and career decision-making self-efficacy contributed to the relationship between basic psychological needs and career adaptability.
Du et al. (2025)	Cardiovascular specialist nurses	Career Adaptability	Quantitative	Career adaptability showed different profiles among specialist nurses and was associated with career-related characteristics.

Note: The table summarizes the 16 empirical studies included in the literature synthesis based on the literature identified for this review.

The synthesis revealed three major patterns. First, psychological factors were the most frequently investigated determinants of career adaptability. Psychological capital, resilience, self-efficacy, mindfulness, and psychological needs were generally associated with stronger career adaptability (Chuang et al., 2022; Alkal, 2025; Tang et al., 2026; Woreta & Zewude, 2026). Second, career decision-making self-efficacy emerged as an important mechanism linking individual resources and career adaptability. Several studies identified its mediating role, particularly in relation to peer support, career calling, resilience, and other career-related variables (Salim et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2025). Third, the literature suggests that career adaptability is influenced by multiple interacting resources rather than a single factor. Psychological resources may strengthen confidence and resilience, while learning and career-related processes may help individuals translate these resources into adaptive responses during career transitions. However, learning agility and specific behavioral factors received comparatively less attention than psychological variables, indicating a potential gap for further investigation.

Psychological Factors and Career Adaptability

The findings of this systematic literature review indicate that psychological factors are among the most consistently investigated determinants associated with career adaptability among students and emerging professionals. Psychological capital, self-efficacy, resilience, mindfulness, psychological needs, motivation, and career decision-making self-efficacy were identified as important psychological resources in explaining individuals' capacity to cope with career transitions and uncertainty (Chuang et al., 2022; Salim et al., 2023; Alkal, 2025; Tang et al., 2026). This pattern suggests that career adaptability is not determined solely by external career conditions but is also supported by individuals' internal psychological resources.

Psychological capital emerged as one of the most prominent psychological factors in the reviewed literature. Psychological capital encompasses self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, which collectively provide individuals with psychological resources to deal with challenges and pursue future goals. Tang et al. (2026) found that psychological capital was associated with job readiness through career adaptability among Chinese university students. Similarly, Mou et al. (2026) demonstrated that psychological capital was involved in the relationship between academic major identity, career adaptability, and career decision-making difficulty. These findings are consistent with Wulandari et al. (2024), who reported a positive and significant relationship between psychological capital and career adaptability among members of the Indonesian National Police.

The consistency of these findings across different populations suggests that psychological capital may function as an important internal resource in the development of career adaptability. Individuals with stronger psychological capital may be more confident in dealing with uncertain situations, maintain positive expectations regarding their future, and recover more effectively from setbacks. Thus, psychological capital may provide the psychological foundation necessary for individuals to prepare for and respond to career transitions.

Self-efficacy and resilience also demonstrated consistent associations with career adaptability. Chuang et al. (2022) found that self-efficacy was associated with career adaptability among vocational students. Similarly, Alkal (2025), using a two-wave longitudinal design, demonstrated that resilience and career decision self-efficacy were associated with career adaptability among university students. These findings indicate that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities and their ability to recover from difficulties are relevant to successful career adaptation.

Career decision-making self-efficacy appears particularly important because it connects psychological resources with concrete career-related decisions. Salim et al. (2023) found that career decision self-efficacy mediated the relationship between peer support and career adaptability. Chen et al. (2024) and Xu et al. (2025) likewise demonstrated the relevance of career decision self-efficacy within broader models of career development. These findings suggest that psychological resources may contribute

to career adaptability partly by strengthening individuals' confidence in making and managing career decisions.

The findings can be interpreted through Career Construction Theory, which conceptualizes career adaptability as a psychosocial resource that enables individuals to manage developmental tasks, occupational transitions, and changing career circumstances. From this perspective, psychological resources such as confidence, resilience, optimism, and future orientation can strengthen adaptive readiness and facilitate individuals' responses to career challenges. The reviewed evidence supports this perspective, as psychological resources were repeatedly associated with career adaptability across different populations and contexts (Woreta & Zewude, 2026; Zewude et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025).

An important finding is that psychological factors do not necessarily influence career adaptability through direct pathways alone. Several studies identified mediating mechanisms, particularly career decision-making self-efficacy. Salim et al. (2023), for example, demonstrated that career decision self-efficacy mediated the relationship between peer support and career adaptability. Chen et al. (2024) also identified career decision self-efficacy and career adaptability as important mechanisms linking career calling with learning engagement. These findings indicate that career adaptability may develop through a psychological process in which individuals' beliefs, confidence, and internal resources are translated into career-related decisions and adaptive actions.

Overall, the evidence indicates that psychological resources constitute an important foundation of career adaptability. Psychological capital, self-efficacy, resilience, and career decision-making self-efficacy consistently emerge as relevant factors across different student and emerging professional populations. However, the literature also indicates that psychological resources should not be considered in isolation. Their contribution to career adaptability may be strengthened through learning experiences and translated into adaptive career behaviors. This observation provides an important basis for examining the interaction between psychological, learning-related, and behavioral factors in understanding career adaptability.

Learning Factors and Career Adaptability

The findings of this review indicate that learning-related factors may contribute to career adaptability, although the available evidence is less extensive than that concerning psychological factors. Among the learning-related constructs identified in the literature, learning agility represents an important capacity because it enables individuals to learn from experience, respond flexibly to unfamiliar situations, and apply acquired knowledge to changing circumstances. Jari and Satwika (2025) found that learning agility was positively associated with work readiness among vocational students, suggesting that the capacity to learn and adapt may facilitate the transition from education to employment. Similarly, Sutardi and Novitasari (2024) reported that learning agility was associated with work engagement through psychological empowerment and resilience, indicating that learning agility may operate together with psychological resources in producing adaptive outcomes.

The relationship between learning and career adaptability can be understood through the dynamic nature of contemporary career development. Students and emerging professionals encounter changing academic demands, occupational expectations, technological developments, and labor market conditions that require continuous learning. Individuals who are able to learn from experience and adjust their strategies may be better prepared to respond to such changes. Simatupang (2022) reported that agility and optimism were positively associated with readiness to change, supporting the view that adaptive learning capabilities may contribute to individuals' readiness to respond to changing circumstances.

Learning agility may also interact with psychological resources in the development of adaptive outcomes. Individuals with stronger psychological resources may be more willing to engage with unfamiliar experiences, while successful learning experiences may subsequently strengthen their confidence in dealing with new challenges. This reciprocal relationship is consistent with findings linking psychological capital, learning agility, and adaptive outcomes in educational and organizational contexts (Esterina et al., 2024; Sutardi & Novitasari, 2024). Therefore, learning should not be viewed merely as the acquisition of knowledge but also as an ongoing process through which individuals develop the capacity to interpret experience, adjust their strategies, and respond effectively to new situations.

However, an important gap emerges from the reviewed literature. Compared with psychological factors, direct empirical evidence concerning the relationship between learning agility and career adaptability remains limited. Several studies have examined learning agility in relation to work readiness, work engagement, turnover intention, or other organizational outcomes rather than directly testing its relationship with career adaptability (Esterina et al., 2024; Jari & Satwika, 2025; Sutardi & Novitasari, 2024). This indicates that the role of learning agility in career adaptability has not yet been sufficiently integrated into existing career development models.

Overall, the reviewed evidence suggests that learning-related capabilities may provide an important complementary resource for career adaptability. However, the current evidence is not sufficient to establish learning agility as a direct determinant of career adaptability. Further research is therefore needed to examine whether learning agility directly contributes to career adaptability and whether its effect operates through psychological mechanisms such as self-efficacy, psychological capital, or resilience. This gap is particularly relevant among university students and emerging professionals who are preparing to enter rapidly changing work environments.

Behavioral Factors and Career Adaptability

Behavioral factors represent an important dimension in the development of career adaptability because they reflect how individuals translate internal resources into concrete actions when facing career-related challenges. The reviewed literature indicates that career decision-making, career exploration, career coping, and readiness to change are relevant behavioral processes associated with individuals' ability to manage career transitions (Salim et al., 2023; Parola, 2023; Simatupang, 2022).

Career decision-making is particularly important because career adaptability requires individuals to actively respond to developmental tasks and make decisions concerning their future. Salim et al. (2023) found that career decision-making self-efficacy mediated the relationship between peer support and students' career adaptability. This finding suggests that contextual support may contribute to adaptive career outcomes when individuals are able to translate that support into confidence and action in making career decisions. Zhang et al. (2024) likewise highlighted the role of career decision-making self-efficacy in the relationship between career adaptability and career coping styles among medical students.

Career exploration may also represent an important behavioral process. During the transition from education to employment, individuals need to actively seek information, explore career alternatives, evaluate opportunities, and develop an understanding of their potential career environment. Parola (2023) examined career decision-making self-efficacy and career adaptability during the school-to-work transition, emphasizing the importance of individuals' active involvement in managing their career development. Such behaviors may enable individuals to become more aware of available opportunities and better prepared to respond to changes in career circumstances.

Readiness to change provides another behavioral dimension relevant to career adaptability. Simatupang (2022) reported that optimism and agility were positively associated with readiness to change. This finding suggests that adaptive behavior may emerge when individuals possess both psychological readiness and the capacity to respond flexibly to changing circumstances. Thus, career adaptability may be expressed not only through psychological readiness but also through concrete behavioral responses to career-related changes.

An important finding from the present review is that behavioral factors have received less direct attention than psychological factors. Most studies identified in this review focused on psychological resources or career decision-making processes, while specific behavioral constructs such as discipline behaviour, proactive work behavior, and behavioral consistency were rarely examined directly as predictors of career adaptability. Consequently, the available evidence does not yet provide sufficient support for establishing discipline behaviour as a direct determinant of career adaptability.

Nevertheless, behavioral factors may be theoretically connected to psychological and learning resources. Psychological capital may encourage individuals to approach challenges with greater confidence and persistence, while learning experiences may provide knowledge and strategies that facilitate appropriate behavioral responses. These resources can subsequently be expressed through active career exploration, decision-making, planning, and adjustment. Therefore, behavioral factors may represent an important pathway through which psychological and learning resources are translated into adaptive career outcomes.

Overall, the reviewed evidence suggests that career adaptability involves not only what individuals possess psychologically but also how they act in response to career

challenges. Career decision-making, exploration, readiness to change, and other adaptive behaviors may contribute to the development of career adaptability. However, the limited empirical attention given to specific behavioral constructs, particularly discipline behaviour, indicates an important research gap. Future empirical research should therefore examine whether behavioral consistency and discipline can strengthen the translation of psychological and learning resources into career adaptability, particularly among students and emerging professionals preparing to enter structured and changing work environments.

Integration of Psychological, Learning, and Behavioral Factors

The findings of this systematic literature review indicate that career adaptability is a multidimensional construct associated with psychological resources, learning capabilities, and adaptive career behaviors. Psychological factors such as psychological capital, self-efficacy, resilience, and career decision-making self-efficacy were the most consistently examined factors and generally showed positive associations with career adaptability (Tang et al., 2026; Alkal, 2025). Learning-related capabilities, particularly learning agility, were also associated with adaptive outcomes such as work readiness and work engagement (Jari & Satwika, 2025; Sutardi & Novitasari, 2024). Meanwhile, behavioral processes such as career decision-making, career exploration, and readiness to change were identified as relevant components of adaptive career development (Salim et al., 2023; Parola, 2023; Simatupang, 2022).

The literature suggests that these domains may be interconnected rather than functioning entirely independently. Psychological resources may provide individuals with the confidence and resilience needed to engage with new learning experiences and career-related challenges. Learning experiences may subsequently help individuals develop strategies for responding to unfamiliar situations, while career-related behaviors allow these internal resources to be expressed through concrete actions. For example, career decision-making self-efficacy has been identified as an important mechanism connecting contextual or individual resources with career adaptability (Salim et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). However, most existing studies have examined these relationships through separate models rather than testing all three domains simultaneously.

This integrated perspective is particularly relevant for students and emerging professionals undergoing the transition from education to employment. During this period, individuals must acquire new competencies, make career decisions, explore occupational opportunities, and adjust to changing professional expectations. Evidence from university, vocational, medical, and professional populations demonstrates the relevance of psychological and adaptive resources during these transitions (Chuang et al., 2022; Cao et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026). Thus, career adaptability may be better understood by considering both the psychological resources individuals possess and their capacity to learn and translate those resources into adaptive career behaviors.

A notable research gap is the limited integration of psychological, learning-related, and behavioral factors within a single empirical framework. Existing studies predominantly focus on specific relationships, such as psychological capital and career

adaptability, resilience and career adaptability, or career decision-making self-efficacy and career adaptability (Wulandari et al., 2024; Alkal, 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). Furthermore, the direct contribution of learning agility and specific behavioral factors, particularly discipline behaviour, remains insufficiently examined in relation to career adaptability. This gap indicates the need for research models that simultaneously consider psychological resources, learning capabilities, and behavioral characteristics.

Taken together, this systematic literature review indicates that career adaptability among students and emerging professionals is supported by multiple interrelated domains. Psychological factors provide important internal resources for adaptive readiness, learning capabilities facilitate the acquisition and application of knowledge in changing situations, and behavioral processes enable individuals to translate these resources into career-related actions. Nevertheless, the limited empirical integration of these domains represents an important research gap and provides a basis for further investigation of comprehensive models of career adaptability.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review demonstrated that career adaptability among students and emerging professionals was shaped by multiple interconnected psychological, learning-related, and behavioral factors. Across the 16 empirical studies reviewed, psychological resources emerged as the most consistently examined factors, particularly psychological capital, self-efficacy, resilience, and career decision-making self-efficacy. These resources supported individuals in managing uncertainty, strengthening confidence in career-related decisions, and responding adaptively to educational and occupational transitions. Career decision-making self-efficacy also appeared to play an important mediating role in translating individual and contextual resources into greater career adaptability.

Learning-related and behavioral factors provided complementary dimensions for understanding adaptive career development. Learning agility may facilitate individuals' ability to learn from experience and respond flexibly to unfamiliar circumstances, while career exploration, decision-making, coping, and readiness for change may translate psychological and learning-related resources into adaptive career behaviors. However, compared with psychological factors, direct empirical evidence linking learning agility and specific behavioral characteristics to career adaptability remained limited. Future research should therefore examine psychological, learning-related, and behavioral factors simultaneously within integrated empirical models, particularly among students and emerging professionals transitioning into rapidly changing labor markets. Such research may provide a stronger basis for developing educational and career development interventions that strengthen individuals' capacity to navigate career transitions and evolving professional demands.

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