

Developing career adaptability among early childhood education students: A case study at BA RIA - vung tau teacher training college

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Abstract

In the context of educational reform and increasing professional demands on early childhood teachers, developing career adaptability among students majoring in Early Childhood Education is of significant importance. This study aims to examine the current status of career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students at Ba Ria – Vung Tau Teacher Training College. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, using a questionnaire consisting of 20 observed variables and supplementary interviews. The results indicate that the measurement scale demonstrates very high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.943) and that students' career adaptability is at a fairly high level. Among the dimensions assessed, professional attitude emerges as the strongest component, while self-control and self-regulation remain relatively limited and uneven, particularly in emotional management and handling pedagogical situations. Based on the findings, the study proposes several recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of developing career adaptability for Early Childhood Education students in teacher education programs.

Keywords: Career adaptability; Early Childhood Education students; Early childhood teacher education; Educational reform

1. Introduction

In the context of the knowledge economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the labor market is undergoing profound changes. These changes place increasingly high demands on the adaptability of the workforce. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2023), flexibility and adaptability are core competencies that ensure sustainable career development. In the field of education, particularly in Early Childhood teacher training, this requirement becomes even more pressing, given the occupational characteristics that demand flexibility in handling pedagogical situations, adaptability within diverse social relationships, and the capacity to function in a constantly changing work environment.

From a theoretical standpoint, career adaptability has been identified as a psychosocial resource that enables individuals to effectively cope with vocational tasks and transitions (Savickas, 2020). The "4C" model comprising Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) is regarded as a foundational theoretical framework and has been widely applied across numerous studies. Building on this foundation, recent research has focused on clarifying the factors that influence this competency. Specifically, Alkal et al. (2025) emphasize the mediating role of career decision self-efficacy; Wang et al. (2025) highlight the positive impact of internship experiences and emotion regulation strategies; while Tianqi Qiao et al. (2022) explore the role of career awareness, self-leadership capacity, and teaching self-efficacy in enhancing students' adaptability.

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In Vietnam, several recent studies have begun to examine this issue within the context of educational reform (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021; Phan Trong Ngo et al., 2022). The work of Le Thi Bich Ngoc (2023) and Hoang Thanh Phuong et al. (2024) has contributed to clarifying the structure of career adaptability and proposing development strategies. However, these studies are largely descriptive or directional in nature, and have not provided sufficient empirical evidence regarding the actual state and specific manifestations of this competency in particular training contexts. In practice, students in Early Childhood Education programs continue to face significant difficulties when transitioning into professional environments, as evidenced by the phenomenon of "career shock" and a tendency toward early career dropout - both of which are primarily attributed to limitations in self-regulation and stress management (Nguyen Thanh Hung & Pham Van Thuan, 2023).

Although career adaptability has attracted considerable research attention, existing findings still have notable limitations: the majority of studies have been conducted in international contexts, the target populations tend to be broad, and there remains a lack of specialized research focused specifically on Early Childhood Education students. Furthermore, the structure and specific manifestations of this competency within particular training contexts have not been adequately clarified. There is therefore a need for further research within the Vietnamese context to provide empirical evidence and to narrow the gap between training practices and professional requirements.

On this basis, the present study was conducted to assess the current status of career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students at Ba Ria - Vung Tau Teacher Training College, while also analyzing variation across relevant factors. The findings are expected to contribute empirical grounding and to guide improvements in training programs toward a stronger focus on developing students' career adaptability.

2. Research methods

The study employs a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure both objectivity and depth in the assessment of career adaptability. The quantitative component was carried out through a questionnaire survey designed to collect broad-scale data on the extent to which the components of career adaptability are manifested. The qualitative component was conducted through in-depth interviews with students and lecturers to clarify the underlying causes, barriers, and influential factors within the training context. The research sample comprised 171 Early Childhood Education students at Ba Ria - Vung Tau Teacher Training College, selected through stratified sampling by year of study, including first-year, second-year, and third-year students.

The research instrument was a questionnaire developed on the basis of Savickas's (2012, 2013) "4C" model and the Professional Standards for Early Childhood Teachers (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). It included 20 observed variables across four competency dimensions: professional awareness, self-regulation and autonomy, professional adaptability, and connection and continuous learning, measured using a five-point Likert scale. The scale was developed through the following stages: defining the theoretical framework, constructing indicators, consulting with subject-matter experts, pilot testing on a small sample, and conducting the main survey. The reliability of the scale was verified using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a value of 0.943.

Data were collected through both in-person and online survey methods, supplemented by in-depth interviews conducted after the quantitative data collection phase. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software, with descriptive statistics including means (M) and standard deviations (SD), as well as comparative analyses to identify differences across student cohorts by year of study.

3. Findings

3.1. Theoretical framework for career adaptability

3.1.1. Key concepts

Career change

Career change refers to the process by which individuals proactively adjust and reorient their career trajectories in order to adapt to changes in the labor market and to meet the demands of personal development. This process encompasses not only shifts in job position or field of work, but also the enhancement and restructuring of one's skill set, as well as the adjustment of career goals at different stages of professional growth. Research suggests that this is an adaptive and developmental process closely linked to an individual's capacity for learning, self-evaluation, and career

self-management (Hirschi, 2012). In the field of education, particularly for students, career change also reflects the degree of flexibility in professional orientation and career development (Le Thi Bich Ngoc, 2023).

Adaptability

Adaptability refers to an individual's capacity to identify, adjust, and respond flexibly to changes in the environment in order to maintain effective performance and achieve established goals. According to Savickas (2013), career adaptability manifests as the ability of individuals to proactively orient and adjust their professional development in the face of dynamic circumstances, while Hirschi (2012) emphasizes the developmental nature of this competency through the effective mobilization and use of personal resources.

Career adaptability

Career adaptability is understood as a psychosocial competency that enables individuals to cope effectively with vocational tasks, transitions, and changes. Savickas's (2013) "4C" model, comprising concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, identifies the core components that support individuals in adapting to and sustaining their career development.

Recent studies have continued to expand this framework through an integrative lens, highlighting the role of career awareness and individual psychological factors in the adaptation process. For instance, Tianqi Qiao et al. (2022) found that career awareness has a positive influence on students' career adaptability, with self-leadership and professional self-efficacy serving as mediating factors. In the Vietnamese context, Le Thi Bich Ngoc (2023) argues that students' career adaptability constitutes an integrated construct encompassing awareness, attitude, skills, and self-regulation capacity.

Drawing on prior theoretical frameworks and research findings, this study approaches career adaptability as an integrated, developmental competency that reflects an individual's capacity to proactively identify, adjust, and grow in response to changes in the professional environment. Accordingly, this competency encompasses the psychosocial dimensions outlined in the 4C model, while also being extended within the context of early childhood teacher education to include elements such as professional awareness, professional attitude, action-oriented skills, and self-regulation capacity.

Based on this conceptualization, career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students is defined as the capacity to proactively adapt to professional requirements through the interplay of career awareness, individual psychological factors, and practical pedagogical experience, thereby contributing to sustainable career development.

3.1.2. Structure of career adaptability

In international research, career adaptability is regarded as a central construct in career construction theory, reflecting an individual's capacity to manage developmental tasks, vocational transitions, and occupational changes (Savickas, 2013). According to Savickas, this competency comprises four core components: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. This model has been extensively validated across diverse cultural contexts and is measured using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS), which has demonstrated high reliability and validity. Recent meta-analytic studies have continued to confirm that career adaptability is closely associated with career satisfaction, occupational retention, and work performance (Rudolph et al., 2017).

However, some scholars argue that direct application of this model to specific professional fields requires certain adjustments. Hirschi (2012) notes that career adaptability is not solely a personal resource but is also strongly influenced by the professional context and the specific demands of the work environment. In education, particularly in early childhood education, the teaching profession is characterized by high emotional demands, considerable work intensity, and the need for flexibility in interactions with young children, parents, and the broader educational environment (OECD, 2020). As such, operationalizing the structure of career adaptability must be grounded in professional standards and the realities of pedagogical practice.

In Vietnam, the Professional Standards for Early Childhood Teachers (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018) identify requirements related to personal qualities, subject-matter competence, professional development capacity, and adaptability to the educational environment. However, these standards are primarily oriented toward the evaluation of practicing teachers and do not fully specify the components of career adaptability at the pre-service stage. There is therefore a need to integrate international theoretical frameworks with the domestic teacher training context in order to develop a more appropriate structure for student populations.

Building on Savickas's model (2005, 2013) and incorporating perspectives on teacher competency development within the context of educational reform (Darling-Hammond, 2017; OECD, 2020), this study proposes a four-component structure of career adaptability for Early Childhood Education students, with modifications to the content of each dimension to reflect the specific characteristics of the profession:

- *Professional awareness.* Professional awareness, as a component of career adaptability, reflects the degree to which students are engaged with their professional future through the capacity to set career directions, develop plans, and prepare for successive stages of professional growth. For Early Childhood Education students, this component manifests in a thorough understanding of occupational characteristics, a clear sense of professional responsibility and the pressures involved, and a proactive orientation toward the early childhood curriculum and the holistic developmental needs of young children. Students with a strong sense of professional awareness are typically able to map out an appropriate career development trajectory from the practical training phase through to formal employment, while also proactively updating their knowledge of current trends and innovative educational models — thereby enhancing their ability to adapt to changes in the early childhood education landscape (Rudolph et al., 2017; OECD, 2020).
- *Self-regulation and autonomy.* Self-regulation and autonomy, as a component of career adaptability, reflect students' capacity to manage their emotions, behaviors, and professional development within a demanding and dynamic early childhood education environment. This component encompasses the ability to remain composed and regulate emotions when managing pedagogical situations, the capacity to make appropriate and timely professional decisions in the care and education of young children (Darling-Hammond, 2017), and an awareness of and commitment to professional norms, regulations, and ethical standards (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). In addition, self-regulation and autonomy are associated with self-directed learning through effective time management and maintaining a proactive approach to study (Zimmerman, 2002), as well as the capacity for self-assessment and adjustment in order to continuously improve professional competence (Hirschi, 2012). These manifestations are operationalized through observable behaviors related to autonomy, emotional regulation, and self-adjustment capacity, thereby reflecting the degree to which students exercise self-mastery during the formation and development of their professional competencies.
- *Professional adaptability.* Professional adaptability, as a component of career adaptability, reflects students' capacity to adjust and develop their professional knowledge and skills in order to effectively meet the practical demands of the early childhood education environment. This component is evidenced by students' active engagement in practical activities, research, and the management of pedagogical situations, as well as their ability to flexibly apply educational methods appropriate to the developmental characteristics and needs of young children (Darling-Hammond, 2017; OECD, 2020). Students with a high level of professional adaptability tend to demonstrate flexibility and creativity in organizing educational activities, and are able to transform lesson plan content into play-based and experiential activities suited to the classroom context. This component is also associated with the ability to integrate technology into the design and management of educational activities, as well as professional communication skills with children and parents through adaptive interaction approaches (OECD, 2020). These manifestations are operationalized through observable behaviors related to flexibility, creativity, and effectiveness in pedagogical practice, thereby reflecting students' professional adaptability within the current early childhood education context.
- *Connection and continuous learning.* Connection and continuous learning, as a component of career adaptability, reflects students' capacity to develop themselves through social interaction and ongoing learning within the pedagogical environment. For Early Childhood Education students, this component is evidenced by confidence in applying knowledge and skills to professional practice, as well as the ability to proactively manage situations that arise in the classroom, grounded in self-efficacy beliefs (Savickas, 2013). Students also demonstrate the capacity to collaborate with colleagues in organizing educational activities and to actively participate in professional learning communities (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, this component is linked to the capacity for continuous self-directed learning and professional development, particularly through proactive updating of knowledge in areas related to child psychology and early childhood education (UNESCO, 2015), as well as the ability to learn from practical experience. Another important manifestation of this component is empathic capacity — the ability to observe, listen to, and respond appropriately to the needs of children. These behaviors are operationalized through observable indicators related to confidence, collaboration, and a spirit of continuous learning, thereby reflecting students' capacity for connection and professional development within the early childhood education context.

In sum, the four components of career adaptability interact closely with one another, forming a solid psychosocial foundation that supports early childhood education students in developing well-rounded professional competencies and in adapting to the evolving demands of the contemporary educational environment.

3.1.3. Requirements for developing career adaptability in Early Childhood Teacher Education

First, regarding professional awareness. Early childhood teacher education programs should aim to cultivate in students a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the occupational characteristics, as well as the roles and responsibilities of teachers in the contemporary educational context. Students need to have a clear grasp of professional standards, changes in the early childhood curriculum, and the social factors that influence childcare and educational practices. At the same time, developing an awareness of occupational flexibility, professional pressures, and the need for continuous adaptation is considered an essential foundation for career adaptability (Savickas, 2013).

Second, regarding professional attitudes and qualities. The training process should emphasize the development of positive professional attitudes, including a sense of responsibility, dedication to the profession, and perseverance in carrying out one's duties. In addition, career adaptability requires learners to be open to change, to sustain their motivation, and to manage their emotions effectively in complex professional situations. These are considered core elements of self-regulation capacity and contribute to enabling teachers to adapt effectively to diverse and dynamic work environments (Albert Bandura, 1997).

Third, regarding adaptive skills in professional practice. Training programs should develop in students the skills needed to respond flexibly to pedagogical situations, to communicate and collaborate effectively with children, parents, and colleagues, and to adapt teaching methods and organizational formats to suit practical conditions. These skills reflect the ability to apply knowledge and experience in an integrated manner to professional practice and represent concrete expressions of career adaptability in a constantly changing educational context (UNESCO, 2020).

Fourth, regarding self-directed learning and professional development capacity. Early childhood teacher education should create conditions that enable students to develop the capacity for self-directed learning, self-assessment, and self-adjustment in their professional activities. The proactive use of learning resources, the integration of technology, and the pursuit of professional support are important factors that help students adapt to the demands of educational reform and sustain their professional development after graduation (European Commission, 2018).

Fifth, regarding the training environment and delivery methods. Training institutions should build an open learning environment with strong connections between theory and practice, and should strengthen opportunities for hands-on activities, experiential learning, simulation exercises, and teaching practicums. At the same time, adopting flexible, learner-centered instructional approaches will contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of career adaptability development, preparing students to meet the demands of real professional environments (World Bank, 2020).

3.2. Career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students at Ba Ria - Vung Tau Teacher Training College

3.2.1. Current status of career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students

The findings from the survey on career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students at Ba Ria - Vung Tau Teacher Training College are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Level of career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students

Survey criteria	M	SD
I. Professional awareness	4.03	0.82
1. Clear understanding of occupational characteristics	4.15	0.83
2. Proactively exploring professional standards	3.97	0.92
3. Having a clear career development plan	3.79	1.05
4. Keeping up with trends in early childhood education reform	4.09	0.81
5. Awareness of career opportunities and challenges	4.15	0.83
II. Self-regulation and autonomy	3.80	0.86
6. Confidence in handling unexpected situations	3.76	0.94
7. Remaining calm when children are distressed	3.88	0.96

8. Managing time effectively	3.79	0.93
9. Controlling negative emotions	3.85	0.91
10. Proactively adjusting one's own behavior		
III. Professional adaptability	4.02	0.80
11. Flexibly applying new pedagogical methods	3.91	0.88
12. Integrating information technology into teaching	4.00	0.90
13. Independently designing creative teaching materials	4.06	0.83
14. Adapting to real classroom environments	3.94	0.90
15. Collaborating effectively with colleagues	4.18	0.81
IV. Connection and continuous learning	4.17	0.82
16. Caring for children and being dedicated to the work	4.45	0.87
17. Perseverance in overcoming difficulties	4.06	0.90
18. Willingness to change in order to adapt	4.18	0.88
19. Active engagement in professional development	4.12	0.89
20. Desire for long-term commitment to the profession	4.03	1.05
Overall mean	4.01	0.83

The analysis results indicate that students' career adaptability is at a fairly high level ($M = 4.01$; $SD = 0.83$), reflecting a relatively well-developed foundation in terms of professional awareness, skills, and attitudes. This suggests that students have begun to establish an initial basis for meeting the professional demands of an early childhood education sector that is undergoing significant change. Nevertheless, the "fairly high" rating also indicates that career adaptability has not yet reached a solid level, and that there remain certain limitations in the transition from the training environment to actual professional practice.

Notably, the findings reveal a striking paradox: students demonstrate positive professional attitudes, yet their capacity for self-regulation and behavioral adjustment in practical situations is comparatively lower. This reflects a gap between professional motivation and actual performance in practice, suggesting that the development of career adaptability has not been uniform across the different competency dimensions.

Examining each competency group individually, the Connection and continuous learning dimension achieved the highest mean score ($M = 4.17$), with the criterion "caring for children and being dedicated to the work" reaching a particularly high level ($M = 4.45$). This result indicates that students have a strong foundation of positive professional attitudes and a clear sense of vocational commitment. According to Savickas's (2013) career construction theory, these qualities belong to the concern and career exploration dimension and play an important role in sustaining long-term professional orientation. However, the high degree of variability observed for the criterion "desire for long-term commitment to the profession" ($SD = 1.05$) indicates unevenness in professional commitment. This variability likely reflects the influence of factors such as income, work pressure, and career opportunities, and if not addressed, may reduce occupational stability after graduation.

The Professional awareness ($M = 4.03$) and Professional adaptability ($M = 4.02$) dimensions developed at relatively comparable levels, suggesting that students have begun to form an initial connection between professional understanding and practical action. However, the criterion "having a clear career development plan" reached only 3.79, reflecting a limitation in students' individual career orientation capacity. This finding suggests that students have not yet been sufficiently proactive or deliberate in constructing long-term career pathways - a weakness that warrants careful attention in training programs.

Notably, the Self-regulation and autonomy dimension recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.80$), indicating a clear limitation in students' ability to manage their emotions, regulate their behavior, and handle professional situations. Criteria such as "confidence in handling unexpected situations" ($M = 3.76$) and "managing time effectively" ($M = 3.79$) both fall within the moderate range, suggesting that students lack sufficient practical experience and coping skills for

high-pressure professional environments. This finding is consistent with the realities of teacher education, where students frequently encounter difficulties during the transition from academic learning to professional practice. If left unaddressed, these limitations could directly affect the quality of childcare and education during the early stages of professional employment.

Overall, career adaptability among students is developing in a positive direction but has not yet achieved a balanced profile across the different dimensions. Professional attitude is the most prominent strength, while self-regulation capacity and career orientation remain relatively underdeveloped. This suggests that current training programs have primarily focused on building awareness and attitudes, without sufficiently developing the action-oriented competencies needed for practical professional contexts.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that in order to enhance career adaptability, training programs need to strengthen practical experiential activities, simulate pedagogical situations, and provide systematic training in behavioral self-regulation. At the same time, greater emphasis should be placed on developing students' self-efficacy, emotional management skills, and individual career orientation, all of which are essential for preparing students to meet the demands of real professional practice.

3.2.2. Comparison of career adaptability by year of study

To clarify how career adaptability evolves across different stages of training, a comparative analysis of mean scores was conducted among first-year, second-year, and third-year students. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 2 Comparison of career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students by year of study

Year	Professional awareness (M)	Self-regulation & autonomy (M)	Professional adaptability (M)	Connection & learning (M)	Overall mean (M)
Year 1	3.85	3.62	3.78	4.05	3.83
Year 2	4.02	3.81	4.05	4.18	4.01
Year 3	4.22	3.97	4.23	4.28	4.18

The results indicate that students' level of career adaptability tends to increase progressively across years of study. This reflects a cumulative developmental process throughout the training program, in which the component competencies are reinforced through academic learning and practical experience.

Examining each competency dimension individually, third-year students achieved the highest mean scores across all components, particularly in professional adaptability and professional awareness. First-year students, by contrast, recorded lower scores and showed less uniform development across the dimensions, most notably in the self-regulation and autonomy component.

The upward trend across years of study suggests that the training program plays an important role in developing career adaptability. In the early stages, students primarily develop a general awareness of professional requirements. By the second year, their competencies begin to be reinforced through coursework and initial practical exposure. By the third year, career adaptability reflects a higher degree of integration among knowledge, skills, and professional experience, particularly in the context of teaching practicums.

It is noteworthy that the Connection and Continuous Learning component maintains relatively stable scores across all years of study, suggesting that this dimension constitutes a foundational competency that forms early and shows little fluctuation over time. In contrast, self-regulation and autonomy is the competency group that shows the slowest rate of growth, reflecting the ongoing difficulties students face in regulating their emotions and adjusting their professional behavior in practical situations.

Overall, the differences observed across years of study highlight the role of the training process in developing career adaptability. The findings suggest the need for more systematic support measures, particularly during the first year of study, in order to develop students' self-regulation and autonomous adjustment capacity, thereby fostering more sustainable career adaptability over time.

This study thus focuses on identifying the factors that influence career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students. Based on a competency-oriented approach, these factors are categorized into two main groups: subjective factors and objective factors.

Subjective factors

Subjective factors include personal characteristics of students that play a direct role in the formation and development of career adaptability.

Professional awareness and attitude. The findings indicate that students hold relatively positive views and maintain stable professional attitudes toward the teaching profession in early childhood education, as reflected in their care for children and their sense of professional responsibility. This constitutes an important foundation for sustaining learning motivation and for enhancing the capacity to adapt in the face of occupational change.

Emotional regulation and situation management capacity. Students' capacity to regulate their emotions and respond to situations that arise in professional practice is not yet fully developed. This reflects a certain limitation in the ability to self-regulate behavior and emotions, which may in turn affect the degree of career adaptability in the early childhood education context.

Self-directed learning and career development orientation. Students have demonstrated a degree of initiative in self-directed learning and in keeping up with professional knowledge. However, the clarity and consistency of individual career development goals varies across students, highlighting the need for enhanced support in establishing long-term professional objectives and career pathways.

Objective factors

Objective factors encompass the conditions of the training environment and the broader social context, both of which significantly influence the development of students' career adaptability.

Training environment and curriculum. The training curriculum, along with practical activities and teaching practicums, has provided students with opportunities to engage with real professional situations. Through these experiences, students have gradually developed professional skills and collaborative competencies within educational settings.

Social demands and school-family relationships. The professional context places increasingly high expectations on students from parents and society at large, creating a degree of pressure during professional practice. This underscores the importance of preparing students more thoroughly in terms of communication skills, social interaction, and social adaptability, in addition to subject-matter competence.

The findings show that Early Childhood Education students hold positive professional attitudes; however, limitations persist in areas of emotional regulation, situation management, and career development orientation. These limitations reflect an uneven level of professional readiness, pointing to the need for enhanced support measures focused on psychological well-being, professional skill development, and career guidance, with the aim of developing career adaptability in a more proactive and sustainable manner.

3.3. Recommendations for Developing Career Adaptability Among Early Childhood Education Students

Based on the research findings on career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students, this study proposes a set of recommendations aimed at developing this competency in a comprehensive and sustainable manner, consistent with the practical demands of current teacher education programs. These recommendations are oriented around two main directions: developing students' individual competencies and improving the training environment to be more supportive, flexible, and grounded in professional realities.

First, strengthening career awareness education and professional development orientation for students. Teacher training institutions should integrate career awareness education from the very first year of study, helping students develop a clear understanding of occupational characteristics, professional requirements, and ongoing changes in the field of early childhood education. At the same time, career counseling activities and individual development planning should be organized to support students in establishing clear professional goals, thereby enhancing their preparedness for changes in the labor market.

Second, developing students' emotional regulation capacity and situation-response skills. The research findings indicate that limited emotional autonomy is one of the factors affecting students' professional adaptability. Training programs should therefore increase the number of modules and experiential activities aimed at building emotional management skills, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity to handle pedagogical situations, particularly in high-pressure contexts.

Third, expanding practice-oriented training approaches. Increasing opportunities for practical training, practicums, and professional situation simulations will help students gain early exposure to real working environments, thereby cultivating flexibility and adaptability in professional activities. Experiential, project-based, and collaborative teaching methods should be implemented in a coordinated manner to strengthen students' teamwork and professional collaboration skills.

Fourth, strengthening career counseling, support, and mentoring activities for students. In addition to subject-matter training, institutions should develop a system of ongoing and continuous career counseling and support to assist students in adapting to academic and professional demands. Providing information on workforce needs, working conditions, and career development opportunities, combined with exchanges with experienced teachers and alumni, will help reinforce students' professional confidence and enhance their readiness for employment after graduation.

Fifth, building a training environment that supports and encourages the development of career adaptability. The training environment plays an important role in shaping and developing students' adaptive competencies. Institutions should create an open, friendly, and flexible learning environment in which students are encouraged to experiment and be creative, and in which making mistakes is accepted as part of the learning process. Lecturers should take on the role of guides and mentors, while also expanding the use of information technology and diversifying instructional and assessment methods in order to facilitate the development of students' career adaptability in the current context of educational reform.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals that career adaptability among Early Childhood Education students at Ba Ria - Vung Tau Teacher Training College is characterized by a gap between positive professional attitudes and the practical action-oriented competencies required in real professional settings. Although students demonstrate clear professional motivation and a strong commitment to the profession, competencies related to self-regulation, emotional management, and the handling of pedagogical situations remain limited, reflecting an imbalance between awareness and the capacity to respond in actual professional contexts.

In terms of theoretical contributions, the study proposes a structural framework for career adaptability tailored to pre-service early childhood education students, developed by integrating Savickas's theoretical model with current professional teaching standards. This framework translates the psychosocial components of career adaptability into measurable competency indicators. In terms of practical contributions, the findings provide a basis for adjusting training programs in the direction of increasing practical experiential activities, pedagogical situation simulations, and training in self-regulation capacity, with the aim of enhancing students' professional readiness.

The study has certain limitations, including a focus on a single training institution and the use of self-reported data, which means that the mechanisms of interaction among the various factors have not been fully examined. Future studies should expand the sample, diversify the contexts of investigation, and apply more sophisticated analytical models in order to more clearly identify the relationships among individual characteristics, the training environment, and the development of career adaptability.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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