



Factors Affecting Career Adaptability of Art College Students in Sichuan Province, China

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Abstract

Career adaptability is crucial for today's art college students because it equips them to handle uncertain, competitive, and rapidly changing creative industries. However, the factors affecting art college students' career adaptability remains unclear. The researcher of this study taken core self-evaluation, university and environmental factors as its factors to examine the relationships between those three factors and art college students' career adaptability in Sichuan Province, China. A quantitative method was employed, 390 art college students were selected from Sichuan Province with stratified sampling to participate in the five-point Likert questionnaire survey. The obtained data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). Three research hypotheses were supported at the 0.001 significance level, respectively: H1: Core self-evaluation significantly and positively affects career adaptability ($p \leq .001$), the same results also occurred for H2: University Factors significantly and positively affect career adaptability ($p \leq .001$), and H3: Environmental factors significantly and positively affect career adaptability ($p \leq .001$). This research findings not only identified the significant factors of career adaptability for Chinese art college students, but also pointed out the directions for college administrator and policy makers to better support art college students' career adaptability to ensure art college students' long-term career success and resilience in unpredictable art careers.

Keywords: Career Adaptability, Core Self-evaluation, University Factors, Environmental Factors, Art College Students

Introduction

Career adaptability is a key element in career development, reflecting an individual's ability to manage the uncertainties and changes of today's dynamic labor market (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020). With the rise of non-linear career paths and frequent transitions, career adaptability has become crucial for maintaining employability and achieving career satisfaction (Fu et al., 2023; Yen et al., 2023). Art college students face unique challenges, as creative industries are often project-based, unpredictable, and involve irregular incomes (Green et al., 2020). Their career adaptability is especially important for navigating these uncertainties, exploring varied opportunities, and sustaining long-term careers in the arts (Stebbleton et al., 2020). Additionally, societal biases in places like China often view creative jobs as less stable, making adaptability and proactive career management vital (Moss-Pech, 2021). However, research on the factors influencing career adaptability among Chinese art students remains limited, with most studies focusing on other fields or Western contexts (Boo et al., 2021; Parola & Marcionetti, 2022). There is a need to explore these determinants in the context of China, especially in regions like Sichuan Province, to better support art college students' career development (Sou, Yuen, & Chen, 2022). Thereby, this study aims to fill this gap by identifying the factors shaping the career adaptability of art college students in Sichuan Province, China, offering insights to enhance support systems and interventions through higher education institutes for their career success.

Research objectives

1. To explore factors affecting art college students' career adaptability.
2. To examine factors of art college students' career adaptability.

Literature review

Career Adaptability of Art College Students

Career adaptability is essential for art college students as it encompasses the capacities of career concern (future orientation and planning), control (self-discipline and agency), curiosity (exploration of opportunities), and confidence (self-efficacy and resilience), enabling them to navigate the unpredictable and competitive nature of creative industries (Savickas, 2013). Students with strong career adaptability are shown to be more proactive in building professional portfolios, participating in internships, and networking with industry professionals (Liu et al., 2023). For art students, curiosity fosters openness to fields such as digital media, arts entrepreneurship, or cross-disciplinary work, while control and confidence empower them to persist through creative blocks, criticism, and economic pressures

(Stebbleton et al., 2020). Moreover, adaptability improves career satisfaction and long-term employability, as it aligns individual aspirations with the rapidly evolving trends in the creative sector (Li & Yu, 2024). Ultimately, career adaptability not only enhances employability and well-being but also empowers art students to build sustainable, fulfilling careers amid continuous industry changes.

Core Self-Evaluation and Career Adaptability

Core self-evaluation (CSE) is a personality trait reflecting self-worth, self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control—influences how people respond to challenges (Chen et al., 2023). The relationship between core self-evaluation (CSE) and career adaptability is increasingly recognized as central to understanding how individuals manage complex career environments. For art college students, who face unique uncertainty and competition in creative fields, CSE is vital for fostering career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. High CSE promotes proactive planning, self-directed decisions, exploration of opportunities, and resilience—all critical in unpredictable creative careers (Judge et al., 2003). Students with high CSE are more likely to handle rejection constructively, seek growth opportunities, and persist in overcoming obstacles. Empirical studies confirm that CSE predicts higher career adaptability and proactive career behaviors across populations, including art students (Chen et al., 2023). In summary, CSE is a foundational factor for career adaptability, empowering art college students to navigate dynamic careers with optimism and resilience. Accordingly, the first hypothesis was set up: H1: Core self-evaluation significantly affects career adaptability.

University Factors and Career Adaptability

University factors, comprising teacher support, tailored educational programs, and effective career guidance, are critical in enhancing the career adaptability of art students by equipping them with essential skills and strategies for success in competitive and unpredictable creative industries. Teacher support through academic guidance, mentorship, and emotional encouragement is not only aids in future planning (concern) and self-direction (control) but also fosters exploration (curiosity) and self-confidence, particularly via portfolio development, constructive feedback, and real-world project experiences (Song et al., 2022). Art-focused educational programs further strengthen adaptability by offering creative and transferable skills, experiential learning opportunities like internships and exhibitions, and an emphasis on interdisciplinary coursework and soft skills vital for today's dynamic job market (Savickas, 2013; Liu et al., 2023). Additionally, comprehensive career guidance including counseling, workshops, and mentoring, prepares students to navigate non-linear career paths by cultivating future planning, a sense of agency, curiosity, and resilience, as well as enhancing portfolio

development, entrepreneurship, and networking (Gati & Kulcsár, 2021). Thus, the second research hypothesis was formulated as H2: University Factors significantly affect career adaptability.

Environmental Factors and Career Adaptability

Environmental factors, encompassing social support, economic conditions, and cultural values, play a critical role in shaping students' career adaptability by influencing their ability to navigate career challenges and transitions. Social support from family, peers, mentors, and institutions fosters emotional and practical resilience, enhances confidence, and provides a strong foundation for managing stress and planning for uncertain creative careers (Savickas, 2013; Khan et al., 2024). At the same time, economic factors such as employment rates, income levels, and access to financial resources directly impact opportunities and necessitate flexibility among art students, motivating them to innovate and develop market-relevant skills for sustainable career growth (Tang & Fu, 2024). Moreover, cultural values and societal attitudes determine the support and opportunities available in the arts, while also shaping risk tolerance, self-expression, and the value placed on different career paths (Boo et al., 2021). Together, these environmental factors significantly influence the career adaptability of art college students by equipping them with the resilience, flexibility, and resources needed to succeed in the dynamic landscape of creative industries. Hence, the third research hypothesis was established H3: Environmental factors significantly affect career adaptability.

In summary, core self-evaluation (CSE) is a personality trait that encapsulates how individuals perceive their own worth and abilities. Career adaptability, meanwhile, denotes an individual's capacity to manage career-related challenges and transitions both constructs are essential for effectively navigating today's complex career landscapes (Chen et al., 2023). University factors such as teacher support, educational programs, and career guidance, play a vital role in strengthening students' career adaptability (Song et al., 2022; Savickas, 2013). Moreover, environmental factors including social, economic, and cultural factors can serve as either supports or obstacles, thereby significantly impacting students' career success (Khan et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2022). Recognizing and understanding the effects of these factors is crucial for helping students adapt and thrive in their future professional paths, the researcher formulated the conceptual framework as following Figure 1 for Chinese art college students' career adaptability and its factors.

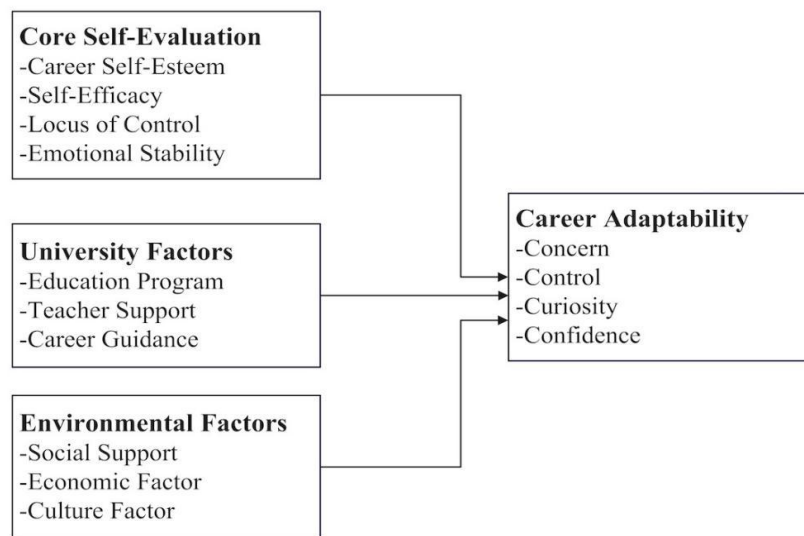


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

The population for this study was 15,434 art college students, respectively were 4569 (29.6%) art college students from public universities and 10865 (70.4%) art college students from private universities, who were expected to graduate in 2025 from 10 art colleges, or the secondary colleges related with art-related programs including fine arts, design, music, performing arts, and other creative fields across multiple art colleges and universities in the Sichuan province. The sample size was calculated by Yamane's (1973) formula, resulting in a required sample of 390 students. To ensure representativeness of population, stratified sampling method was adopted with university type as the stratification criteria, as a result, 115 samples (29.6%) were selected from public universities and 275 samples (70.4%) from private universities. Of the 390 student participants, 68.5% were female and 75.9% were aged 21-23. Most of the research students majored in design (36.2%), with others in drama, film, television (25.4%), and smaller proportions in arts-related fields. The sample was mainly from private universities (42.8%), with fewer from public universities and vocational colleges. Career interests centered on design (23.6%), freelance/emerging fields (19.7%), and creation/performance (18.7%). Most of the research participants expected a monthly salary of 6,001-10,000 RMB (38.2%) or 3,001-6,000 RMB (37.5%). Overall, the group was predominantly young, female, design-focused, and career-oriented toward creative sectors with moderate to high salary expectations.

A questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was developed based on literature and interview analysis, covering four dimensions: core self-evaluation, university factors, environmental factors, and career adaptability. Each dimension contained relevant sub-dimensions, totaling 59 items. Content validity was confirmed by five experts, with IOC values ranging from 0.8 to 1, all statements were above 0.6. In a pilot test with 30 participants, Cronbach's alpha values for all dimensions were ranged from 0.91 to 0.99, greater than 0.7, demonstrating excellent internal consistency.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed in this study to analyze complex relationships among multiple variables. Model fit was assessed by the indices such as CFI, RMSEA, TLI to validate the adequacy of the measurement model. Meanwhile, the researcher used SPSSAU statistical analysis platform to conduct SEM analysis to find how core self-evaluation, university, and environmental factors impact career adaptability.

Research results

Results of KMO

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity are two preliminary statistical tests used to assess the suitability of obtained data for factor analysis techniques. The Table 1 showed the result of KMO and Bartlett's Test in this study, The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was found to be 0.975, which was greater than 0.7, demonstrating excellent suitability of the sample for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.000$), indicating that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and thus meets a key requirement for factor analysis. Together, these findings confirmed that the data were appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 1 Results of KMO and Bartlett's Test.

Test	Value
KMO	0.975
Approx. Chi Square	49626.676
Df	2346
Sig	0.000

Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is a statistical technique commonly used to assess construct validity in psychometric and social science research. Construct validity refers to how well a test or instrument measures the theoretical construct it is intended to measure. EFA helps researchers uncover the underlying structure of a set of observed variables, identifying the number and nature of latent factors, or constructs, that explain the patterns of correlations within the data. EFA analysis was performed to uncover the underlying dimensions in the questionnaire of this study, utilizing Varimax rotation to clarify the factor structure. The Variance Extraction Ratio (VER) was employed to evaluate the proportion of variance each factor accounted for. As shown in following Table 2, the analysis revealed four extracted factors, each representing a distinct dimension: Career adaptability (29.234%), Environmental factors (18.812%), Core self-evaluation (16.410%), and University factors (13.077%), the cumulative variance contribution rate of 77.533 from this table, indicating that these four dimensions effectively expound the original information, with a total information coverage of 77.533 percent, surpassing the 60 percent benchmark.

Table 2 Total Variance Explained.

Factors	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
Career adaptability	43.801	63.480	63.480	43.801	63.480	63.480	20.171	29.234	29.234
Environmental Factors	4.121	5.972	69.452	4.121	5.972	69.452	12.980	18.812	48.046
Core self-evaluation	3.441	4.987	74.439	3.441	4.987	74.439	11.323	16.410	64.455
University factors	2.134	3.093	77.533	2.134	3.093	77.533	9.023	13.077	77.533

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is a statistical technique used to verify whether observed variables accurately represent the underlying latent constructs as proposed by theory. It is particularly valuable for testing convergent validity, which refers to the degree to which multiple items intended to measure the same construct are strongly related. In CFA, convergent validity is supported when items exhibit high standardized factor loadings on their respective factors, and when measures such as Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) exceed recommended thresholds (AVE ≥ 0.5 , CR ≥ 0.7). As the following Table 3 showed, the absolute values of the standardized factor loadings are all greater than 0.6 and are statistically significant, indicating strong measurement relationships. All AVE (Average Variance Extracted) value were greater than 0.5, and all the CR (Composite Reliability) value were higher than 0.7. This suggests that the data analyzed in this study demonstrated a good convergent validity.

Table 3 Result of Convergent Validity.

Factors	Measured Sub-factors	Loadings	CR	AVE
Core self-evaluation	Self-esteem	0.851	0.952	0.832
	Self-efficacy	0.932		
	Locus of control	0.939		
	Self-esteem	0.925		
University factors	Teacher Support	0.854	0.937	0.833
	Education Program	0.986		
	Career guidance	0.893		
Environmental factors	Social Support	0.707	0.668	0.856
	Economic factors	0.942		
	Cultural Factors	0.784		
	Concern	0.895		
Career adaptability	Curiosity	0.932	0.964	0.871
	Confidence	0.964		
	Control	0.940		

Results of Structural Equation Modeling

In Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), model fit refers to how well the specified model reflects the data collected from a sample. A good model fit indicates that the hypothesized relationships among variables, as represented by the model's paths and structure, are consistent with the observed data. Evaluating model fit is essential because it helps determine whether the model is an adequate representation of reality. As shown in following Table 4, the results indicated that the questionnaire data and the model demonstrated a reasonable level of fit, with all measured values falling within the recommended ranges.

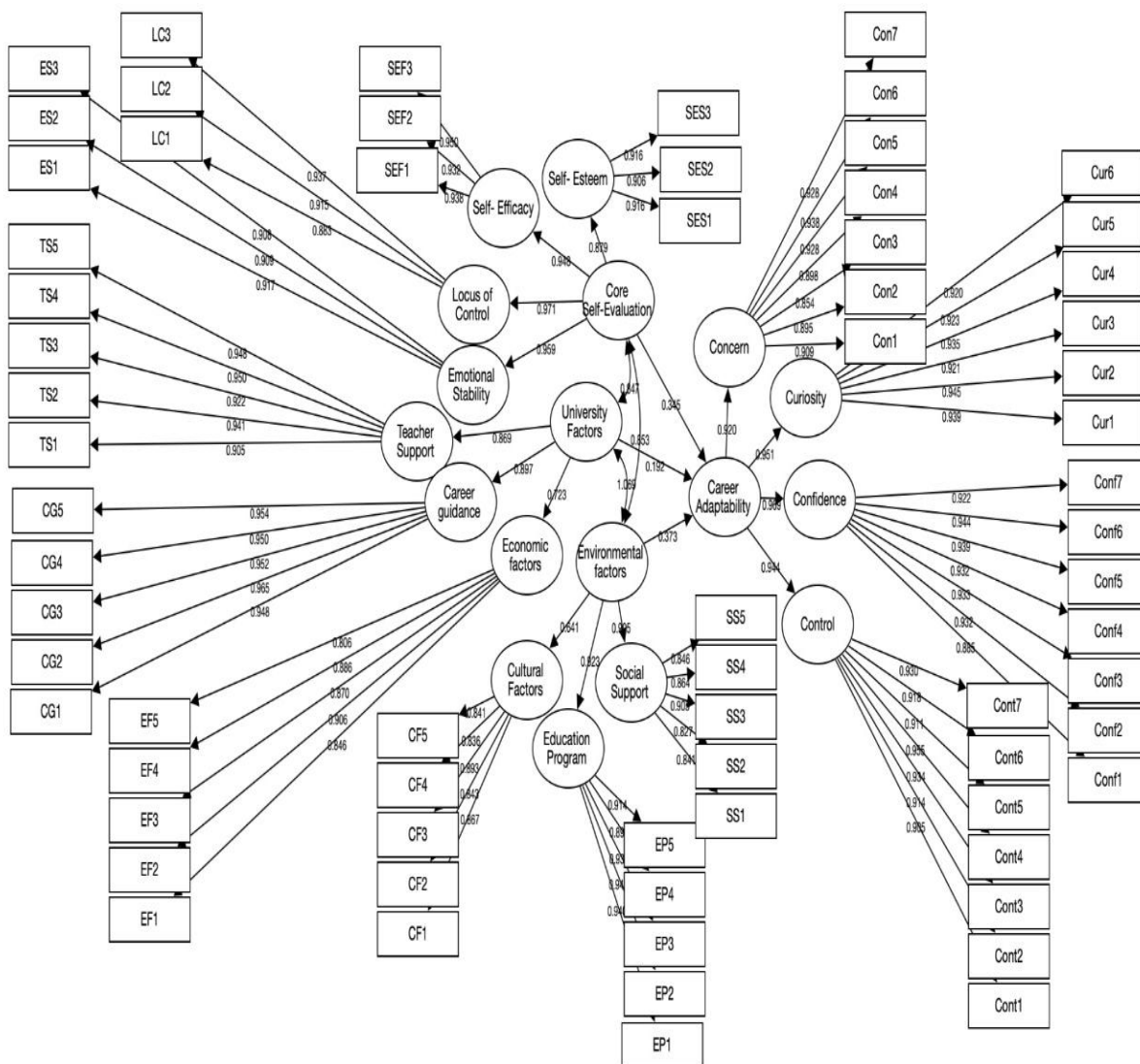
Table 4 Result of Goodness-of-fit Indices.

Key index	Adaptation standard	Value	Result
CMIN/DF	< 5	3.591	Acceptable
RMSEM	< 0.10	0.076	Acceptable
RMR	< 0.05	0.032	Acceptable
CFI	> 0.8	0.883	Acceptable
NFI	> 0.8	0.846	Acceptable
NNFI	> 0.8	0.879	Acceptable
PNFI	> 0.5	0.814	Acceptable
PCFI	> 0.5	0.850	Acceptable
SRMR	< 0.1	0.053	Acceptable

Path analysis is a foundational technique within Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) that is used to evaluate hypothesized relationships among observed variables. In SEM, path analysis enables researchers to quantify both direct and indirect effects between variables based on a specified theoretical model, it serves as an essential step in the broader SEM framework. The following Table 5 showed the results of path analysis in the SEM analysis of this study at 0.001 significance level, as the findings showed that H1: Core self-evaluation significantly and positively affects career adaptability ($p \leq .001$), the same results also occurred for H2: University Factors significantly and positively affects career adaptability ($p \leq .001$), and H3: Environmental factors significantly and positively affect career adaptability ($p \leq .001$). Hence, the SEM model was drawn and showed as following Figure 2.

Table 5 Result of Path Analysis.

Hypotheses	Path	Estimate	SE	CR	p	Results
H1	Core Self-Evaluation → Career Adaptability	0.345	0.046	6.412	0.00	Accepted
H2	University Factors → Career Adaptability	0.192	0.065	2.801	0.00	Accepted
H3	Environmental factors → Career Adaptability	0.373	0.071	5.214	0.00	Accepted

**Figure 2** SEM Model

Discussion

The present study employed path analysis within Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to empirically investigate the respective impacts of core self-evaluation, university factors, and environmental factors on the career adaptability of art college students. The findings not only support all three hypothesized relationships (H1, H2, and H3), but also provide nuanced evidence of how these foundational constructs jointly contribute to the development of career adaptability in the creative context.

The significant positive relationship between core self-evaluation and career adaptability (H1) reinforces the position that internal psychological resources are a primary determinant of adaptability across contexts and cultures. Previous research by Savickas (2013) and related studies has consistently highlighted core self-evaluation encompassing self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability as a driver of proactive career planning, resilience in the face of uncertainty, and openness to exploration (Xu & Yu, 2021). The result findings of this study extend it specifically to art majors, suggesting that artists who possess stronger internal convictions and positive self-perceptions are more likely to perceive and capitalize on emerging opportunities within the unpredictable creative industries. This propensity for self-directed adaptation is essential in artistic fields, where career trajectories are often non-linear and require a high tolerance for ambiguity.

Similarly, the confirmation of H2 underlines the centrality of university support structures including teacher support, career guidance, and specialized educational program in cultivating career adaptability. This aligns with Song et al. (2022) and Liu et al. (2023), who identified the importance of supportive academic environments in fostering adaptability through both interpersonal support and the development of transferable skills. In line with Zhang et al. (2021), the findings of this study indicate that teacher support provides not only academic and technical guidance but also essential agency and motivation for students as they prepare to enter creative industries. Programs that prioritize experiential learning such as internships, exhibitions, and collaboration opportunities, prepare students for the realities of the labor market and foster a commitment to lifelong learning and self-improvement. This is especially pertinent in the arts, where new skills and innovative thinking are continually required.

The significant role of environmental factors (H3) as identified in this research corroborates and extends the work of Zhao et al. (2022), Khan et al. (2024), and Boo, Wang, & Kim (2021), who identified that social support networks, cultural attitudes, and economic resources collectively shape students' ability to adapt to occupational changes and navigate complex job markets. For art students, whose career paths often entail higher perceived risk, freelancing, and entrepreneurial ventures, social and

institutional support acts as a buffer against uncertainty and stimulates adaptive behaviors such as persistence, skill diversification, and market awareness. Socio-economic challenges can also become catalysts for creativity and innovation, supporting Tang and Fu (2024)'s argument that adversity can encourage the development of market-responsive strategies. Furthermore, the results echo Tandrayen-Ragoobur and Gokulsing (2022) in revealing the importance of cultural attitudes toward the arts—not only in terms of public support and funding but also in shaping individual students' willingness to pursue unconventional or creative roles.

Taken together, these results reinforce the multidimensionality of career adaptability, consistent with the theoretical model proposed by Savickas (2013). They highlight the importance of strengthening both internal and external resources—through targeted interventions aimed at self-evaluation, robust educational experiences, and the optimization of environmental supports. The alignment of our findings with the extant literature underscores the generalizability of these relationships beyond specific demographics or regional settings, further validating the significant, mutually reinforcing roles played by personal attributes, university-based resources, and broader environmental influences in students' career development processes.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the significance of career adaptability among art college students in Sichuan Province, revealing that core self-evaluation, university factors, and environmental factors all have a significant positive impact on art college students' career adaptability. By validating these relationships through structural equation modeling, the findings underscore that strengthening these areas can enable students to better plan their futures, embrace opportunities, overcome challenges, and develop the lifelong skills required for sustainable careers in the creative industries. Based on the findings, it is recommended that art colleges prioritize fostering students' core self-evaluation abilities by embedding workshops and personalized counseling into the student experience. Higher education institutions should also focus on strengthening institutional support through dynamic career advising, mentorship programs, and interactive, and student-centered educational programs that foster a positive learning environment. Collaborations with industry, alumni, and community organizations can provide students with greater social and economic support, exposing them to real-world cultural experiences and professional challenges. For example, launching a semester-long career development initiative pairing students with industry projects and alumni mentors, allowing students to apply their skills in authentic settings. These actions can enhance students' adaptability and long-term success. Furthermore,

students should be encouraged to engage in continuous skill development by participating in internships, extracurricular activities, and learning opportunities related to emerging fields in the creative industries. Finally, future research could further explore the interactions among these factors and investigate intervention strategies to optimize adaptability in other creative or non-traditional professional domains.

Ethics Committee Approval

The research article was approved by the ethics review committee of Rangsit University (COA. No. RSUERB2025-139).

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