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Career Adaptability Research: A Bibliometric Analysis of Recent Trends and Future Directions (2022–2026)

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a bibliometric review of career adaptability research to examine global publication trends, major contributors and emerging thematic areas. Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database using the keyword "career adaptability". After applying the inclusion criteria of English-language journal articles published between 2022 and 2026, 623 publications were analyzed using Harzing's Publish or Perish, OpenRefine and VOSviewer. The findings indicate an increase in research output from 2022 to 2024, followed by a decline in 2025, with Social Sciences, Psychology and Business, Management and Accounting emerging as the dominant subject areas. Turkey was identified as the most productive country, while the most highly cited studies focused on career decision-making, employability, life satisfaction and career sustainability. Keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed four major thematic clusters: career development and employability, educational and career decision-making processes, demographic and contextual applications, and well-being and sustainable work outcomes. Overall, the findings demonstrate that career adaptability has evolved into a multidisciplinary construct with growing relevance to employee well-being, career sustainability and workforce retention. This study contributes to the literature by integrating recent career adaptability research themes across disciplines and identifying future research opportunities in employee engagement, well-being and retention. Practically, the identified themes can inform HR practitioners and educational institutions in designing career development, mentoring and career guidance programmes.

Keywords: Career Adaptability; Bibliometric Analysis; Employability; Career Sustainability; Workforce Retention; VOSviewer

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INTRODUCTION

Career adaptability has emerged as a central construct in contemporary career research, reflecting an individual's psychosocial resources for coping with current and anticipated vocational tasks, occupational transitions, and work-related challenges. Rooted in Career Construction Theory, career adaptability comprises four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, which collectively enable individuals to prepare for the future, make informed career decisions, explore alternative pathways, and overcome career-related obstacles (Savickas, 2013). In today's labour market, characterized by digital transformation, economic volatility, and changing employment relationships, career adaptability has become increasingly important for sustaining employability, enhancing career success, and promoting long-term workforce resilience (Tien & Wang, 2017; van Nguyen et al., 2021).

The significance of career adaptability extends beyond individual career development and aligns closely with broader sustainable development priorities. In particular, Sustainable Development Goal 8 emphasizes productive employment, decent work, and inclusive economic growth (UN, 2015). To thrive in such an environment, employees must possess the capacity to adjust to technological disruption, organizational restructuring, and shifting skill demands. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that career adaptability is positively associated with desirable outcomes such as employability, career satisfaction, psychological well-being, and work engagement, while negatively associated with burnout, job insecurity, and turnover intention (Rudolph et al., 2017; Santilli et al., 2020). These findings underscore the strategic relevance of career adaptability for both employees and organizations seeking to maintain sustainable and adaptable workforces.

Over the past decade, scholarly interest in career adaptability has expanded rapidly across multiple disciplines, including vocational psychology, human resource management, organizational behavior, education, and counselling (Maree, 2017; Chouhan et al, 2023; Cai, 2023; Drosos et al., 2023; A Turan et al., 2023). Research has examined career adaptability in diverse populations, such as students, graduates, early career professionals, and employees across a wide range of industries and national contexts (Brunhaver et al., 2024; Le et al., 2026; Santos & de Oliveira, 2020). This growing body of literature reflects the construct's interdisciplinary nature and its applicability to issues such as career decision-making, career transitions, employability, and employee retention. As the field continues to expand, it becomes increasingly important to synthesize the existing evidence and identify the major intellectual and conceptual developments shaping this research domain.

Although career adaptability has an established theoretical foundation, its recent applications span career decision-making, employability, well-being, and organizational outcomes. Prior evidence syntheses, including the meta-analysis by Rudolph et al. (2017) and the post-pandemic bibliometric study by Parrey and Kour (2024), have already examined important aspects of this literature. Therefore, this study does not present the first bibliometric mapping of career adaptability. Instead, it offers a time-bounded examination of Scopus-indexed English-language journal articles from 2022 to 15 May 2026, emphasizing recent publication patterns, disciplinary distribution, citation visibility, and keyword co-occurrence. This narrower scope helps identify contemporary thematic connections but cannot establish the field's full historical evolution.

Despite the substantial growth in publications, the literature on career adaptability remains fragmented across disciplinary boundaries and methodological traditions. Existing reviews have largely used narrative or meta-analytic approaches that focus on specific antecedents

and outcomes of career adaptability (Rudolph et al., 2017). While these studies have generated important insights, they provide limited evidence on the field's overall structure and evolution. Specifically, recent bibliometric studies that systematically examine publication and citation performance, leading contributors, subject areas, and emerging thematic patterns in career adaptability research remain scarce. This gap restricts a comprehensive understanding of how the field has evolved and where future scholarly attention should be directed.

Bibliometric analysis offers a rigorous, transparent approach to mapping the development of a research field by examining publication trends, citation patterns, productive authors, influential journals, and keyword networks. Through techniques such as citation analysis and co-occurrence mapping, bibliometric studies reveal the intellectual foundations, conceptual structure, and emerging research frontiers of a domain (Walsh & Renaud, 2017). Given the increasing volume and diversity of career adaptability research, a bibliometric review is particularly well suited to synthesize recent developments and identify opportunities for future investigation.

Accordingly, this study examines recent career adaptability research indexed in Scopus during 2022–2026, with 2026 observations limited to records available on 15 May 2026. This window captures a recent snapshot of the field rather than its entire intellectual history. The research questions focus on publication and citation patterns, contributors and subject areas, thematic co-occurrence, and evidence-informed avenues for future investigation:

1. What are the publication and citation trends in career adaptability research from 2022 to 2026?
2. Who are the major contributors, and which subject areas and publications have exerted the greatest influence in the field?
3. What conceptual themes and emerging topics characterize the current research landscape?
4. What future research directions can be identified based on the bibliometric evidence?

METHODOLOGY

Search Strategy

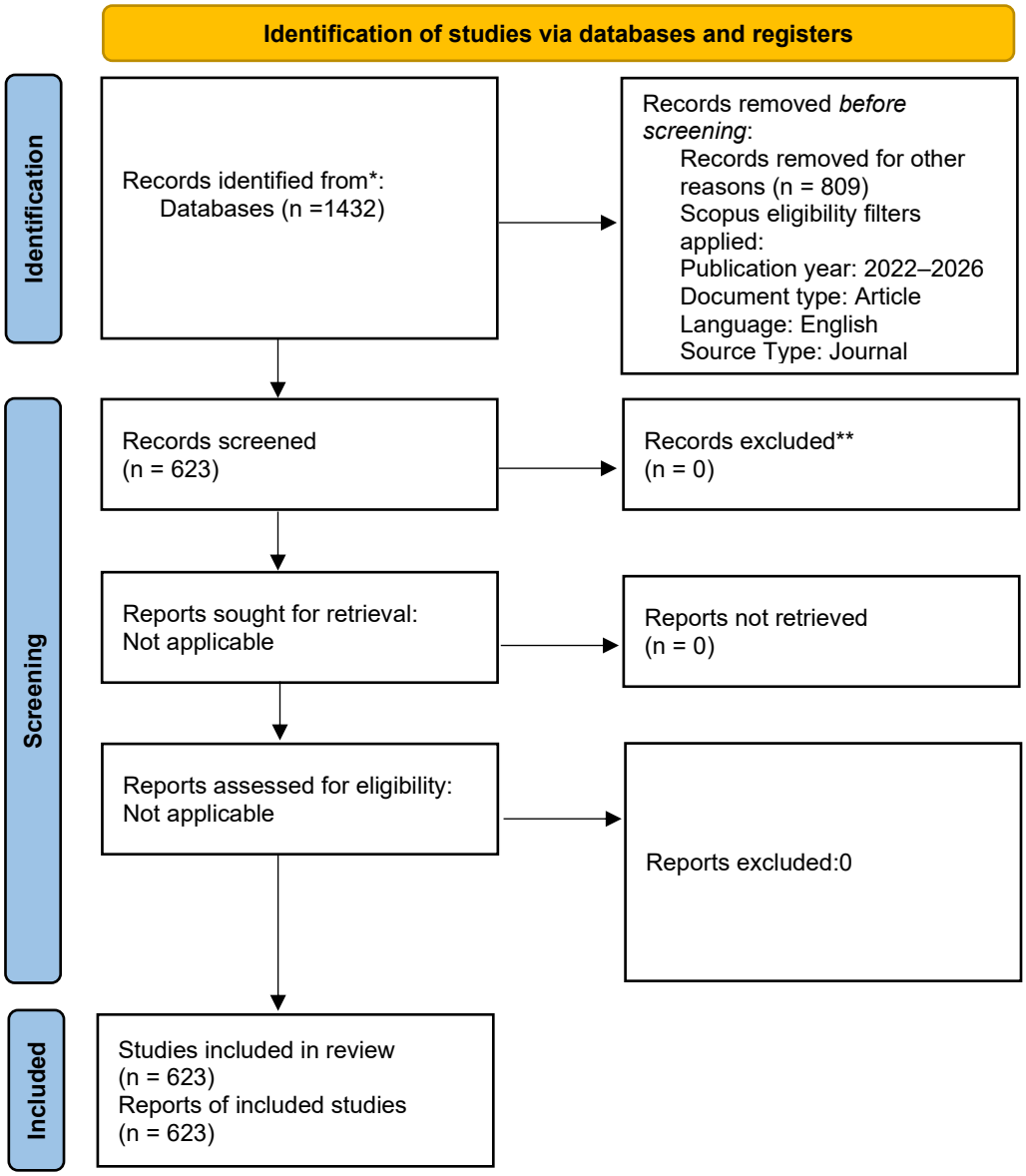
Data were collected on May 15, 2026, covering subject area, document type, source type, language, country, author affiliations, citation data, and keywords. Scopus database was chosen for its extensive coverage of scientific publications (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016) and broad inclusion of peer-reviewed literature beyond Web of Science, with greater accuracy than both Web of Science and Google Scholar (Franceschini et al., 2015; Visser et al., 2021).

To capture the most recent developments in the field, the search used the keyword TITLE-ABS-KEY ("career adaptability"), which limits results to documents containing the term in the title, abstract, or author keywords. This focused search strategy ensured that all retrieved publications addressed career adaptability as a central concept rather than a peripheral topic.

The initial search identified 1,432 documents. To improve the dataset's relevance and consistency, we applied several inclusion criteria. The publication period was restricted to 2022–2026 to examine recent trends rather than the field's full historical development; 2026 data were incomplete at the extraction date. Only English-language journal articles were

retained. After applying these filters, 623 articles remained and were deemed eligible for bibliometric analysis. A total of 809 records were removed through Scopus filters. Titles and abstracts were checked for general relevance; no formal full-text eligibility assessment was undertaken. Figure 1 shows the process.

Figure 1
Flow Diagram of the Search Strategy



Source: Modified from PRISMA 2020 (Page MJ et al., 2021)

Tool and Analysis

This study employed a combination of Scopus, Harzing's Publish or Perish, OpenRefine, and VOSviewer to retrieve, clean, harmonize, analyse, and visualize the bibliometric data. Scopus was used as the primary source of bibliographic records, while Harzing's Publish or Perish generated citation indicators, including total citations, citations per paper, h-index, and g-index. OpenRefine was then employed to standardize author names, affiliations, countries, and author keywords to eliminate inconsistencies and duplicate entries. Subsequently, VOSviewer was used to construct and visualize keyword co-occurrence networks to identify

the conceptual structure, major research themes, and emerging topics in career adaptability research. A minimum keyword occurrence threshold of five was applied. In addition, descriptive analyses were conducted to examine publication trends, subject area distribution, country productivity, and highly cited publications. The integration of these tools provided a systematic, robust, and replicable approach to addressing the study's research questions (Donthu et al., 2021; van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

RESULTS

This study adopted established bibliometric methodologies (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015) to analyse 623 journal articles on career adaptability published between 2022 and 2026. The analysis examined publication trends, citation performance, subject areas, country contributions, highly cited publications, and keyword co-occurrence. It also identified key research themes and emerging directions in career adaptability research. The findings are presented according to the study's research questions.

Publication and Citation Trends in Career Adaptability

To answer the first research question about current trends in career adaptability, Table 1 presents an overview of the scholarly literature on career adaptability from 2022 to 2026. The analysis examines publication output, citation performance, and annual publication trends to summarise recent scholarly developments.

Table 1
Main Information

Metrics	Data
Papers	623
Number of Citations	4784
Years	4
Citations per Year	1196
Citations per Paper	7.68
Authors_Paper	3.65
h_index	29
g_index	39

Table 1 presents the main bibliometric indicators for the 623 articles on career adaptability published between 2022 and 2026. These publications accumulated 4,784 citations in total, averaging 1,196 citations per year and 7.68 citations per article. The dataset also shows an average of 3.65 authors per paper, indicating that research in this field is typically conducted through collaborative efforts rather than by individual scholars. In terms of citation impact, the dataset achieved an h-index of 29 and a g-index of 39. These indicators reflect the publication performance and citation impact of career adaptability research during the selected period.

Figure 2 illustrates annual publication trends from 2022 to 2026. As the data were extracted on 15 May 2026, the publication count for 2026 represents a partial year and should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 2

Total Publications by Year

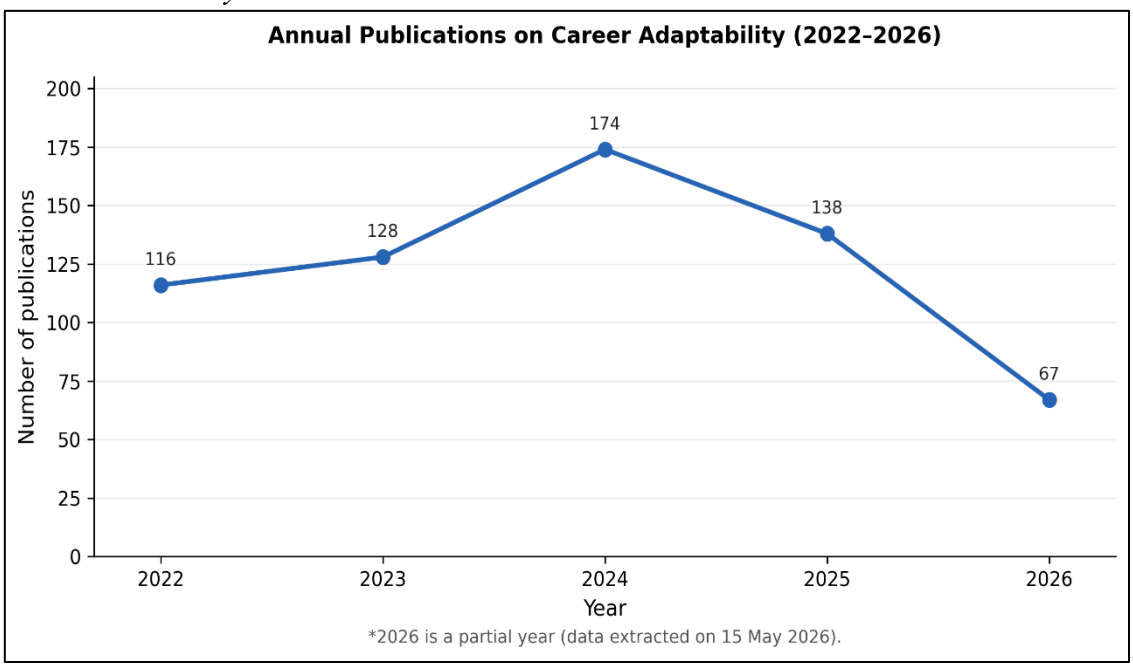


Figure 2 shows that publications increased from 116 articles in 2022 to 128 in 2023, peaking at 174 articles in 2024. Publication output subsequently declined to 138 articles in 2025 and 67 articles in 2026. This steady increase reflects growing academic interest in career adaptability, likely driven by heightened concerns regarding employability, career resilience, and workforce sustainability amid rapid technological advancement, economic uncertainty, and changing employment patterns.

Publication output declined to 138 articles in 2025 and 67 articles in 2026. The lower number of publications in 2026 should be interpreted with caution, as the year was still in progress at the time of data extraction and many articles had not yet been indexed in Scopus. Overall, the publication trend suggests that career adaptability has attracted sustained scholarly attention and remains a highly relevant research domain across disciplines such as vocational psychology, human resource management, education, and organizational behavior. The continued growth in both publication volume and citation impact indicates strong momentum for future research in this field (Rudolph et al., 2017).

Major Contributors and Influential Publications

To address the second research question, which seeks to identify the major contributors, subject areas, and influential publications in career adaptability research, this section examines the disciplinary distribution of publications, geographical contributions by country, and the most highly cited articles in the field.

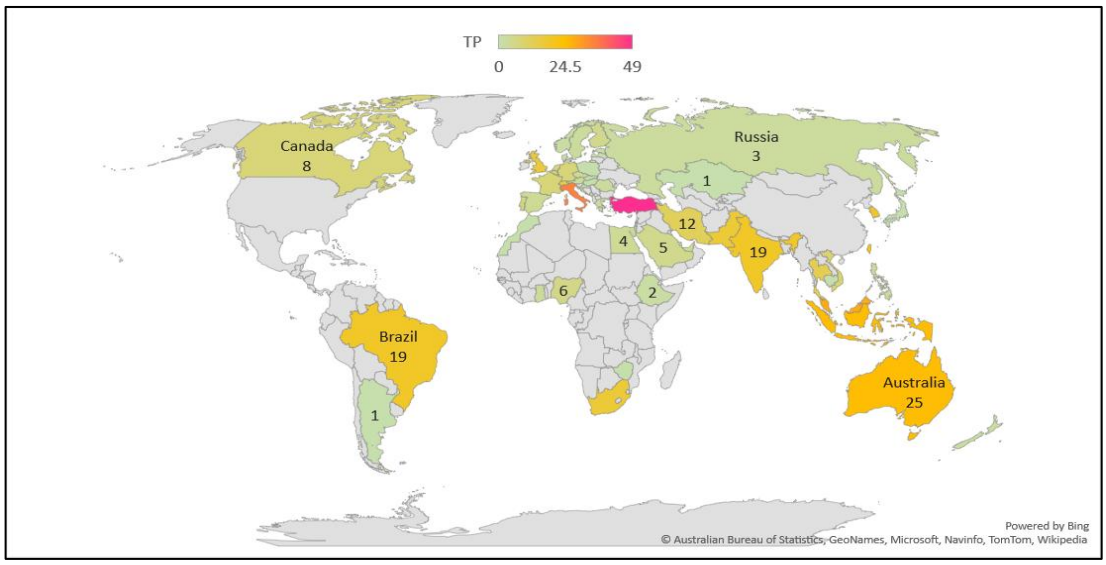
Table 2
Subject Area

Subject Area	Total Publications	Percentage (%)
Social Sciences	287	46.07
Psychology	270	43.34
Business, Management and Accounting	169	27.13
Arts and Humanities	59	9.47
Medicine	42	6.74
Computer Science	25	4.01
Environmental Science	22	3.53
Nursing	20	3.21
Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology	16	2.57
Agricultural and Biological Sciences	15	2.41
Decision Sciences	13	2.09
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	13	2.09
Neuroscience	13	2.09
Energy	12	1.93
Multidisciplinary	8	1.28
Health Professions	6	0.96
Engineering	5	0.8
Mathematics	3	0.48
Earth and Planetary Sciences	1	0.16
Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmaceutics	1	0.16

Table 2 shows that career adaptability research is strongly interdisciplinary, although it remains anchored primarily in the Social Sciences and Psychology. Social Sciences emerged as the most prominent subject area, accounting for 287 publications (46.07%), followed closely by Psychology with 270 publications (43.34%). These findings highlight the strong representation of career adaptability research in social and psychological disciplines. Business, Management and Accounting also contributed 169 publications (27.13%), indicating the relevance of career adaptability research across management-related disciplines. Additional contributions from disciplines such as Arts and Humanities, Medicine, Nursing, and Computer Science further demonstrate the representation of career adaptability research across different academic fields.

Figure 3 presents the geographical distribution of publications, highlighting the major contributing countries in career adaptability research.

Figure 3
Countries Contributing to the Publications



Türkiye was the most productive country, contributing 49 publications, followed by Australia (25 publications), Indonesia (22 publications), Brazil and India (19 publications each), and China and South Africa (16 publications each). Other notable contributors include Iran (12 publications), Canada (8 publications), and Germany (8 publications). The broad geographical spread of publications demonstrates that career adaptability is increasingly recognized as a globally relevant construct for understanding how individuals respond to career uncertainty, labor market changes, and evolving skill demands across different national and cultural settings.

Table 3 presents the ten most highly cited publications in the dataset, highlighting influential contributions to career adaptability research.

Table 3
Top 10 Highly Cited Publications

No.	Authors	Title	Year	Cites
1	Parola A., Marcionetti J.	Career Decision-Making Difficulties and Life Satisfaction: The Role of Career-Related Parental Behaviors and Career Adaptability	2022	89
2	Chui, Hazel Li, Hui Ngo, Hang-Yue	Linking Protean Career Orientation with Career Optimism: Career Adaptability and Career Decision Self-Efficacy as Mediators	2022	80
3	Stead, Graham BStead, Graham B LaVeck, Lindsey M. Hurtado Rúa, Sandra M.	Career Adaptability and Career Decision Self-Efficacy: Meta-Analysis	2022	76
4	Zeng, Qing He, Yingshi Li, Jia Liang, Zhengyan Zhang, Minqiang	Hope, future work self and life satisfaction among vocational high school students in China: The roles of career adaptability and academic self-efficacy	2022	53

5	Chen, Huaruo Liu, Fei Wen, Ya	The Influence of College Students' Core Self-evaluation on Job Search Outcomes: Chain Mediating Effect of Career Exploration and Career Adaptability	2023	50
6	Wei, JingyiWei, Jingyi Chan, Sow Hup Joanne Autin, Kelsey	Assessing Perceived Future Decent Work Securement Among Chinese Impoverished College Students	2022	49
7	Jia, Yin Hou, Zhi-Jin Zhang, Hang Xiao, Yitao	Future Time Perspective, Career Adaptability, Anxiety, and Career Decision-Making Difficulty: Exploring Mediations and Moderations	2022	47
8	Talluri, Surendra Babu Schreurs, Bert Uppal, Nishant	How do individual factors affect career sustainability? An investigation of cascading effects through the career construction model ofHow do individual factors affect career sustainability? An investigation of cascading effects through the career construction model of adaptation	2022	46
9	Pirsoul, Thomas Parmentier, Michaël Sovet, Laurent Nils, Frédéric	Emotional intelligence and career-related outcomes: A meta-analysis	2023	45
10	Liu, Xinqiao Ji, Xinyu Zhang, Yifan Gao, Wenjuan	Professional Identity and Career Adaptability among Chinese Engineering Students: The Mediating Role of Learning Engagement	2023	43

Citation counts ranged from 43 to 89 citations, with the most cited article by Parola and Marcionetti (2022), titled Career Decision-Making Difficulties and Life Satisfaction: The Role of Career-Related Parental Behaviors and Career Adaptability, receiving 89 citations. This was followed by Chui et al. (2022), with 80 citations, and Stead et al. (2022), whose meta-analysis on career adaptability and career decision self-efficacy received 76 citations. Collectively, these highly cited studies focus on themes such as career decision-making, life satisfaction, future orientation, decent work, emotional intelligence, and career sustainability. Their prominence underscores the central role of career adaptability in explaining a wide range of educational, psychological, and organizational outcomes and highlights the foundational scholarship that has shaped recent developments in this rapidly evolving field.

Conceptual Structure and Emerging Themes

To address the third research question, a co-occurrence analysis of authors' keywords was conducted using VOSviewer. This technique examines the frequency with which keywords appear together within publications, revealing thematic relationships and the conceptual structure of the field (Parrey & Kour, 2024; Yılmaz, 2026).

Figure 4
Co-occurrence of Author's Keywords

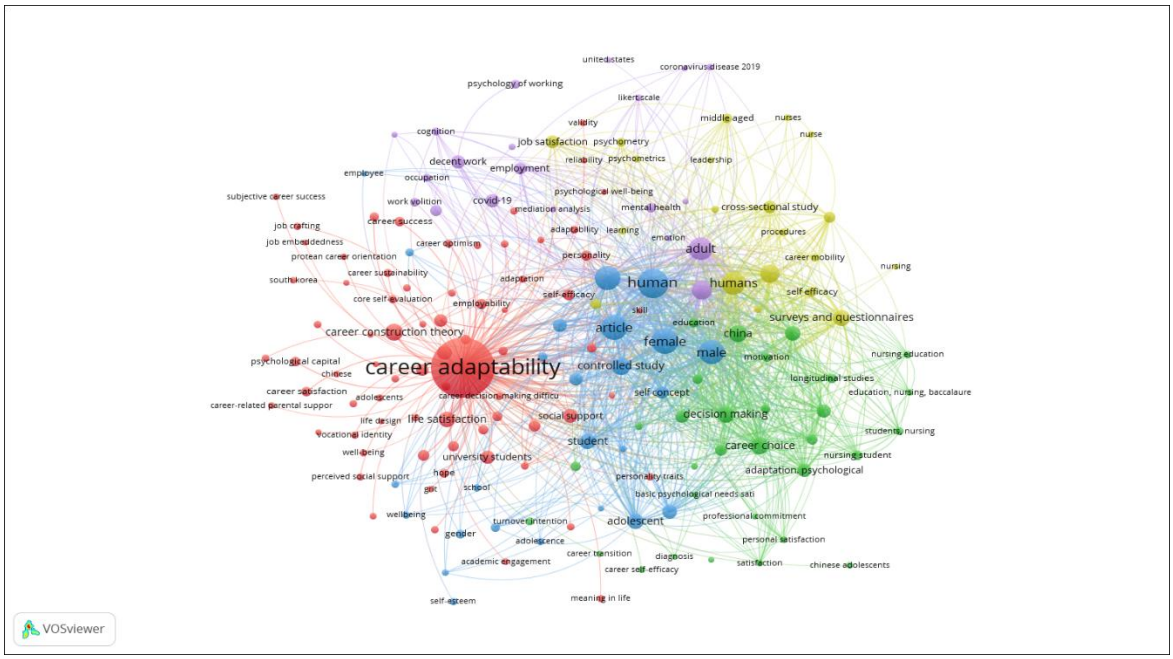


Figure 4 presents the network visualization of authors' keywords with a minimum occurrence threshold of five, generated using VOSviewer to examine the conceptual structure of career adaptability research. In the map, node size represents keyword frequency, link thickness indicates the strength of relationships between keywords, and colours denote thematic clusters. As expected, career adaptability appears as the largest and most central node, confirming its role as the field's core construct. The analysis identified four major thematic clusters, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of career adaptability research and its expanding application across educational, psychological, and organizational contexts (Sweileh et al., 2017). The four clusters are discussed below:

Cluster 1: Career Development, Employability, and Career Sustainability

The red cluster centres on the theoretical foundations and career-related outcomes of career adaptability. Prominent keywords include career construction theory, employability, career optimism, career success, career sustainability, job crafting, and psychological capital. This cluster reflects research examining how career adaptability supports career transitions, employability, and sustainable career outcomes. This theme is closely related to the educational and career decision-making processes discussed in Cluster 2, as both clusters address different aspects of career preparation and development.

Cluster 2: Educational and Career Decision-Mak ing Processes

The green cluster focuses on educational settings and developmental processes, featuring keywords such as career choice, decision-making, adaptation, self-concept, students, and professional commitment. This cluster indicates that much of the literature examines how career adaptability supports students and young adults in making informed career decisions and preparing for future occupational roles. The prominence of student-related terms suggests that higher education remains an important context for career adaptability research. While

Clusters 1 and 2 emphasize career-related resources and decision-making processes, Cluster 3 provides a broader perspective by highlighting the demographic groups and research contexts in which career adaptability has been examined.

Cluster 3: Human Development and Demographic Contexts

The blue cluster contains broad demographic and methodological keywords, including human, article, female, male, adolescent, and university students. Although these terms are descriptive, their central position indicates that researchers have examined career adaptability across diverse populations and research contexts. The inclusion of academic engagement and turnover intention also suggests increasing attention to both educational and organizational outcomes. These demographic and contextual perspectives complement Cluster 4, which extends the discussion towards psychological well-being and work-related outcomes.

Cluster 4: Well-Being, Decent Work and Psychological Outcomes

The purple and yellow clusters emphasize the relationship between career adaptability and well-being-related constructs. Keywords such as job satisfaction, decent work, psychological well-being, mental health, self-efficacy, and career mobility show that recent studies increasingly link career adaptability to quality of work life and positive psychological functioning. The presence of nursing and health professions further indicates the growing application of career adaptability research in healthcare and other high-demand occupational settings. This thematic domain extends the career-related and educational perspectives of the preceding clusters by highlighting career adaptability's relevance to employee well-being and sustainable work outcomes.

Taken together, the four thematic domains provide complementary perspectives on the conceptual structure of career adaptability research. Cluster 1 emphasizes career development, employability, and career sustainability, while Cluster 2 focuses on educational and career decision-making processes. Cluster 3 highlights the demographic and contextual dimensions of the research, whereas Cluster 4 extends these perspectives to psychological well-being and work-related outcomes. Collectively, these themes suggest that career adaptability research encompasses career preparation, occupational transitions, and individual well-being across educational and organizational contexts. This thematic integration provides a broader understanding of how career adaptability is examined across different stages and settings of career development.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

This bibliometric review offers a concise overview of the recent development and intellectual structure of career adaptability research from 2022 to 2026. During this period, 623 articles were published and accumulated 4,784 citations, reflecting considerable scholarly interest in the field. Annual publication output increased from 116 articles in 2022 to a peak of 174 articles in 2024, before declining in 2025. This pattern is broadly consistent with Haryadi et al. (2024), who reported increasing research activity in career adaptability during earlier periods. Similarly, Parrey and Kour (2024) highlighted the development of career adaptability research in the post-COVID-19 period. These findings suggest continued scholarly interest in the field, although publication growth has not been consistent throughout

the study period. The lower publication count observed in 2026 should be interpreted with caution, as the year was still underway when the data were collected.

The subject area analysis confirms the multidisciplinary nature of career adaptability research. While Social Sciences and Psychology remain the dominant disciplinary foundations, many studies were also published in Business, Management and Accounting. This pattern aligns with Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013), which conceptualizes career adaptability as psychosocial resources that help individuals manage career transitions. The representation of management-related publications suggests that career adaptability is also being examined within organizational contexts. However, disciplinary distribution alone does not show how extensively researchers have investigated specific workplace outcomes.

Geographically, Turkiye emerged as the most productive country. In contrast, Haryadi et al. (2024) identified the United States as a leading contributor, while Parrey and Kour (2024) highlighted China and the United States. These differences may reflect variations in publication periods, database coverage, and search criteria rather than a definitive shift in geographical research leadership. This comparison highlights the importance of considering methodological differences when interpreting country-level publication patterns.

The citation analysis shows that the most influential studies focused on themes such as career decision-making, life satisfaction, future work self, decent work, and career sustainability. Complementing these findings, the keyword co-occurrence analysis identified four major thematic domains: career development and employability; educational and career decision-making processes; demographic and contextual applications; and well-being and sustainable work outcomes. These findings are consistent with Haryadi et al. (2024), who also identified career development, employability, and life satisfaction as important research themes. The presence of similar themes in the current study suggests their continued relevance in career adaptability research.

Practical Implications

The findings suggest that career adaptability is an important area of consideration in relation to employability, job satisfaction, work engagement, and employee retention. Drawing on the identified themes of career development and educational decision-making, educational institutions and career counsellors can design career guidance programmes that build individuals' concern, control, curiosity, and confidence to better prepare them for career transitions and labour market uncertainty. For organizations, particularly in dynamic sectors such as healthcare, education, and technology, investments in training, mentoring, coaching, and career development initiatives may support employees in managing career transitions and adapting to changing work demands. These recommendations provide potential applications of the identified research themes rather than direct evidence of intervention effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric review provides an overview of recent research trends in career adaptability from 2022 to 2026. The findings reveal an increase in publication output from 2022 to 2024, followed by a decline in 2025, indicating continued but fluctuating scholarly interest in career adaptability as a key construct for understanding how individuals navigate career transitions, uncertainty, and evolving work demands. The analysis shows that career adaptability research is multidisciplinary, with strong contributions from the Social Sciences, Psychology, and

Business disciplines, and significant participation from countries across Asia, Europe, and other regions. The identification of highly cited publications and four major thematic domains highlights the connections between career adaptability and areas such as employability, career decision-making, psychological well-being, and employee retention. Overall, this study consolidates recent bibliometric evidence and offers a structured foundation for future theoretical and empirical research, particularly in organisational and healthcare contexts where the relationships between career adaptability, employee engagement, resilience, and retention warrant further investigation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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