The Influence of Proactive Personality, Social Support and Self-Esteem Towards Career Adaptability Among Full Time Postgraduate Business Faculty Students

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Abstract: This paper studies the relationship between proactive personality, social support and self-esteem on career adaptability among postgraduate business students, in a public university in Malaysia. The study used the quantitative approach and online survey questionnaires to collect data from the business doctoral students. Regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between proactive personality, social support and self-esteem with career adaptability among postgraduate students. The study collected from 214 postgraduate students reported that proactive personality and social support are significant in explaining career adaptability while self-esteem was found not significant in explaining career adaptability. This study sheds light on the factors contributing to postgraduate students' career adaptability. The main challenge lies in adjusting to the work environment, which is influenced by the workplace and the support from employers, especially the Human Resource (HR) teams. HR can develop strategies to help these students better adapt to their new roles, making their transition into the professional world smoother and more successful.

Keywords: *Proactive Personality, Social Support, Self-Esteem, Career Adaptability (concern, control, curiosity and confidence)*

1. Introduction and Background

The modern work environment has become increasingly challenging, particularly for fresh graduates. The continuous introduction of new skill sets, higher expectations, and more complex tasks has made it difficult for these individuals to adapt to the demands of the professional world. The global economic downturn, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has intensified competition for job positions, including in countries like Malaysia (Li, Guan, & Wang, 2020; Spurk & Straub, 2020). Career adaptability, a critical construct in the modern workplace, comprises a combination of attitudes, skills, and behaviors that individuals employ to navigate and succeed in their professional environments. It involves the resources necessary for effectively managing both current and unforeseen career transitions (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). These resources function as self-regulating strategies, enabling individuals to develop, refine, and implement their professional identities within occupational roles (Ohme & Zacher, 2021). Career adaptability is thus essential for individuals to formulate and execute strategies that help manage career-related tasks and challenges (Guan et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, the issue of graduate unemployment is complex, with various factors contributing to the problem. Recent studies indicate that many Malaysian graduates face significant challenges in adapting to the workplace. A lack of essential communication skills hinders their ability to work effectively in teams, and their limited knowledge in their chosen fields often delays their adaptation to the work environment (Douglass et al., 2021). To improve their employment prospects, graduates must demonstrate a willingness to learn and adapt to the evolving demands of the job market (Yu, Guan, & Wang, 2020). However, the inability to adapt sufficiently poses a significant barrier to sustained employment, particularly in a highly competitive and narrow labor market. Thus, it is crucial to explore the relationship between self-esteem, proactive personality, and social support to career adaptability among postgraduate students, considering both personal and contextual factors (Spurk et al., 2020).

The dynamic nature of work structures and environments, coupled with the continuous introduction of new skills and knowledge requirements, highlights the need for advanced career resources. These resources are essential for managing changes effectively in an increasingly competitive labor market (Ohme & Zacher, 2021). The evolution of the labor market and the economy necessitates the development of new skills, appropriate characteristics, and professional adaptability, aligning with individual goals and strengths in a knowledge-driven economy where technology and global services are paramount (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Thus, this

study aims at exploring the relationship between proactive personality, social support and self-esteem on career adaptability among postgraduate business students, in a public university in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Career Adaptability (Concern, Control, Curiosity and Confidence)
Career adaptability is a dynamic and multifaceted construct, integrating various individual metrics and dimensions. Hirschi (2009) describes it as an evolving configuration rather than a static one. This concept includes four critical dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Recent studies underscore that these dimensions help individuals maintain a future-oriented perspective, prepare strategically for career challenges, and develop a hopeful outlook toward their professional futures (Rossier et al., 2022). Additionally, career adaptability involves exploring potential career paths and adapting to various roles and scenarios. Professional trust, defined as the ability to effectively tackle and overcome career obstacles, is also essential for career adaptability (Kudisch & Miller, 2023).

The first dimension is concern characterized by an opportunity-oriented mindset, where individuals anticipate and plan for their career future. Those with high levels of concern engage in proactive career planning and are more likely to develop effective strategies for achieving their career goals. Recent literature reinforces that a strong sense of concern is associated with enhanced future orientation, job satisfaction, and both emotional and normative commitment to organizations (Kordy, 2021; Lee et al., 2022). The second dimension is control involves characteristics such as proactive decision-making, responsibility, and self-management. Recent studies show that control is positively associated with work satisfaction, life satisfaction, and overall well-being, while high control is linked to better subjective well-being and lower levels of negative emotions (Diener, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). The third dimension of career adaptability is curiosity. This dimension reflects an individual's professional curiosity and their tendency to engage in activities that explore various career opportunities. Recent research suggests that curiosity is particularly linked to entrepreneurship and is less associated with a stable organizational role (Bimrose & Hearne, 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). The fourth dimension of career adaptability is confidence, which involves believing in one's ability to achieve career goals (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Recent studies indicate that confidence is positively associated with career satisfaction, employability, job performance, and work engagement (Ng et al., 2023; Zhang & Liu, 2022).

Proactive Personality and Career Adaptability
Proactive personality is defined as a dispositional trait that reflects an individual's tendency to take initiative in influencing their environment and enacting change. Individuals with a proactive personality are self-starting, change-oriented, and persistent in overcoming obstacles. They are inclined to anticipate and act on future opportunities and challenges rather than reacting to events after they occur (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021; Li et al., 2020). Recent studies indicate that individuals with a proactive personality are more likely to engage in career development activities and exhibit greater career initiative. This includes participation in job fairs and involvement in professional networks and societies (Guan et al., 2020; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Moreover, proactive individuals are more inclined to engage in networking behaviors, such as organizing motivational discussions with industry experts to enhance career development among students (Ohme & Zacher, 2021). Due to these proactive behaviors, individuals with strong proactive personalities tend to develop higher levels of career adaptability, a relationship that is well-supported by empirical studies. Research consistently demonstrates a positive correlation between proactive personality and career adaptability (Yu et al., 2020; Spurk et al., 2020; Zacher, Robinson, & Rudolph, 2021).
H1: *There is a relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability among postgraduate students.*
H1a: There is a relationship between a proactive personality and a concern
H1b: There is a relationship between a proactive personality and a control
H1c: There is a relationship between proactive personality and curiosity
H1d: There is a relationship between proactive personality and confidence

Social Support and Career Adaptability
Recent research underscores the critical role of social support and relationships in shaping young people's career development. For instance, perceived social support has been identified as a valuable resource that assists individuals in making informed decisions regarding their professional future (Guan et al., 2020; Zacher

& Rudolph, 2021). Social support is grounded in the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which explains how social factors such as support systems influence career adaptability, particularly during transitional periods, like the shift from university to the workforce (Douglass et al., 2021; Ohme & Zacher, 2021). During this transition, students often encounter uncertainties and mixed perceptions about social support, which significantly impact their professional decisions and adaptability (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Empirical studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between social support and career adaptability. Social support is significantly correlated with enhanced career exploration and adaptability, helping recent graduates navigate the challenges of entering the workforce (Douglass et al., 2021; Spurk et al., 2020). Specifically, research on recent Chinese university graduates found that social support significantly improves career adaptability, underscoring its importance in career development (Yu et al., 2020).

H2: *There is a relationship between social support and career adaptability among postgraduate students.*
H2a: There is a relationship between social support and concern
H2b: There is a relationship between social support and control
H2c: There is a relationship between social support and curiosity
H2d: There is a relationship between social support and confidence

Self-Esteem and Career Adaptability
Self-esteem is the way individuals perceive themselves, encompassing perspectives such as self-approval, self-dismissal, and self-judgment concerning their capabilities and worth (Orth & Robins, 2022). It is often described as a socially constructed feeling that reflects various self-perceptions, shaped by intellectual needs for approval and acceptance within a group (Guan et al., 2020). These perceptions influence how individuals see themselves, which in turn impacts their confidence and ability to function effectively in challenging work environments. Recent research has established a positive correlation between self-esteem and career adaptability. Studies have shown that higher self-esteem is associated with greater career adaptability, as individuals with positive self-perceptions are better equipped to handle career transitions and challenges (Kim, Jang, & Lee, 2021; Spurk & Straub, 2020). Conversely, low self-esteem has been found to negatively impact career adaptability, suggesting that individuals with diminished self-worth may struggle to navigate their careers effectively (Yu et al., 2020; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Furthermore, it has been observed that career adaptability is enhanced when individuals possess high self-esteem, particularly in the context of economic uncertainty and labor market competition (Spurk et al., 2020; Douglass et al., 2021).

H3: *There is a relationship between self-esteem and career adaptability among postgraduate students.*
*H3a: There is a positive relationship between self-esteem and concern*
H3b: There is a positive relationship between self-esteem and control
H3c: There is a positive relationship between self-esteem and curiosity
H3d: There is a positive relationship between self-esteem and confidence

Based on the literature discussed above, the researchers have proposed a research framework as per Figure 1, which further explains the relationship between proactive personality, social support, self-esteem and career adaptability among postgraduate students.

Figure 1: Research Framework
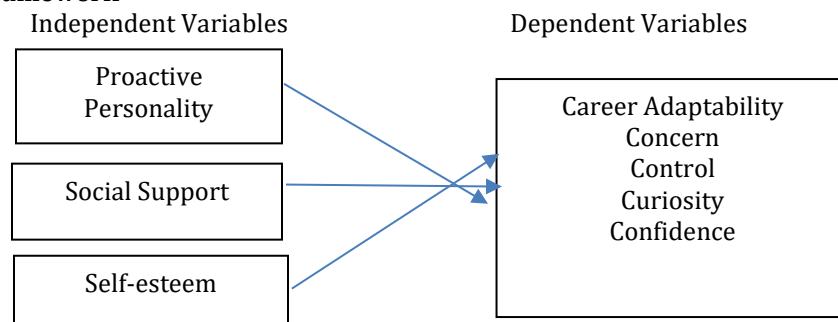
3. Research Methodology

A quantitative research study was conducted to collect primary data from postgraduate students at UiTM Shah

Alam. The study utilized a probability sampling method to ensure representative data from this population. Data were gathered through an online survey, which employed a self-administered questionnaire. The survey link was distributed via email, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms to reach the target respondents. The questionnaire is structured into several sections. Section A collects demographic information such as age, gender, year of study, and faculty. Section B assesses students' proactive personality and self-esteem concerning career adaptability. Section C explores the influence of social support on career adaptability, while Section D focuses on the career adaptability scale, measuring dimensions including concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. A 5-point Likert scale is employed throughout the study ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". All data was collected and analyzed using the Social Science Statistics Package (SPSS) version 26. Data analysis began with the characteristics of demographic data through descriptive analysis such as percentage, mean, frequency, and standard deviation. In this study, multiple regression analysis is used to determine the predictive values of social support, positive personality, self-esteem, and career adaptability.

4. Results and Discussion

Demographic information of the participants was analyzed through frequency analysis. Among the total 214 participants, 97 (45.3%) were female and 117 (54.7%) were male. Regarding age, 56 (26.2%) participants were below 24 years old, while the majority, 79 (36.9%), fell within the 25-29 years age bracket, with only 7 (3.3%) participants aged 40 years and above. Regarding academic programs, 66 (30.8%) students were enrolled in the Master of Human Resource Management program, while 32 (15%) were in the Master of Office System Management program. The majority, 132 (61.7%), were full-time students, with the remaining 82 (38.3%) being part-time students. Semester distribution showed that 58 (27.1%) students were in semester 3, whereas the fewest, 31 (14.5%) students, were in semester 5. All participants reported involvement in student activities during their study period, and the most influential figure in their studies and careers was identified as their parents by 109 (50.9%) students. The demographic details are summarized in Table 1.

The study utilized a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive statistics reveal that career adaptability and social support had the highest means, at 4.29 and 4.30 respectively, while proactive personality and self-esteem had means of 4.13 and 3.72 respectively. Career adaptability comprises four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to assess the distribution of responses. Concern, control, curiosity, and confidence dimensions of career adaptability all exhibited negative skewness values (-2.07, -2.16, -1.91, and -1.90 respectively) and high kurtosis levels (7.77, 8.00, 7.87, and 8.00 respectively), indicating non-normal distributions.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Profile

Demographic Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	117	54.7
	Female	97	45.3
Age	Below 24 years old	56	26.2
	25-29 years old	79	36.9
	30-34 years old	57	26.6
	35-39 years old	15	7
	40 years old and above	7	3.3
Semester	Semester 2	44	20.6
	Semester 3	58	27.1
	Semester 4	48	22.4
	Semester 5	31	14.5
	Semester 6	33	15.4
CGPA	3.00-3.25	34	15.9
	3.26-3.50	59	27.6
	3.51-3.75	69	32.2
	3.76-4.00	52	24.3

Proactive personality had a standard deviation of 0.44, with skewness and kurtosis values of -1.99 and 7.84 respectively, suggesting a distribution that is too peaked. Similarly, social support had a standard deviation of

0.89, with skewness and kurtosis values of -1.69 and 5.67 respectively, indicating a highly peaked distribution. In contrast, self-esteem exhibited a standard deviation of 0.56, with skewness and kurtosis values of -0.27 and -0.57 respectively, indicating a more normally distributed response pattern.

Table 2: Results of Normality Test for Independent and Dependent Variables (n=214)

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Career Adaptability		
Concern	-2.07	7.77
Control	-2.16	8.00
Curiosity	-1.91	7.87
Confidence	-1.90	8.00
Proactive Personality	-1.99	7.84
Social Support	-1.69	5.67
Self-Esteem	-0.27	-0.57

Cronbach's Alpha was employed to assess the reliability or internal consistency of career adaptability, proactive personality, social support, and self-esteem. As indicated in Table 5, all Cronbach's Alpha coefficients fell within the range of .66 to .92, surpassing Nunnally's (1978) minimum threshold of .60. The reliability coefficients for the four dimensions of career adaptability, concern, and control were both 0.84. Similarly, confidence and control demonstrated reliability values of 0.81 and 0.80, respectively. Each of these dimensions comprises six items. Regarding the independent variables—proactive personality, social support, and self-esteem—their reliability values ranged from .80 to .89. Proactive personality and social support exhibited identical reliability values of 0.89, while self-esteem had a reliability coefficient of 0.80.

The descriptive analysis in Table 4 includes mean and standard deviation scores. Control and social support have the highest mean scores, while self-esteem has the lowest mean scores among all variables. Overall, the variables fall within the moderate range on a scale of 4. Concern scored a mean of 4.30 (SD=0.54), control scored 4.31 (SD=0.54), curiosity scored 4.27 (SD=0.53), and confidence scored 4.30 (SD=0.51). Proactive personality scored a mean of 4.13 (SD=0.44), and social support scored 4.31 (SD=0.49). Lastly, self-esteem scored a mean of 3.72 (SD=0.56).

Table 3: Reliabilities (Cronbach Alpha) of the measures: (n=214)

Scales	Original Items	Reliability Cronbach Alpha (n=214)
Career Adaptability		
Concern	6	0.84
Control	6	0.84
Curiosity	6	0.81
Confidence	6	0.80
Proactive Personality	17	0.89
Social Support	12	0.89
Self-Esteem	10	0.80

Table 4: Descriptive Statistic of All Study Variables (n=214)

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Career Adaptability		
Concern	4.30	0.54
Control	4.31	0.54
Curiosity	4.27	0.53
Confidence	4.30	0.51
Proactive Personality	4.13	0.44
Social Support	4.31	0.49
Self-Esteem	3.72	0.56

The results in Table 5 reveal strong positive correlations between proactive personality and the dimensions of career adaptability: confidence (r = 0.76, p < 0.01), control (r = 0.79, p < 0.01), curiosity (r = 0.82, p < 0.01), and concern (r = 0.83, p < 0.01). Similarly, social support shows strong positive correlations with concern (r = 0.66, p < 0.01), confidence (r = 0.67, p < 0.01), control (r = 0.76, p < 0.01), and curiosity (r = 0.76, p < 0.01), with particularly strong associations with control and curiosity. In contrast, self-esteem demonstrates moderate positive correlations with concern (r = 0.40, p < 0.01), control (r = 0.35, p < 0.01), curiosity (r = 0.37, p < 0.01), and confidence (r = 0.31, p < 0.01), indicating weaker relationships compared to proactive personality and social support. Additionally, proactive personality is strongly correlated with social support (r = 0.77, p < 0.01), and moderately correlated with self-esteem (r = 0.40, p < 0.01). Social support and self-esteem also show a moderate positive correlation (r = 0.40, p < 0.01). Overall, proactive personality and social support have strong positive relationships with career adaptability dimensions, whereas self-esteem's correlations are more moderate.

Table 5: Pearson correlation analysis of the variables

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable Career Adaptability						
	Concern	Control	Curiosity	Confidence	Proactive Personality	Social Support	Self-Esteem
Concern	1						
Control	.824**	1					
Curiosity	.728**	.778**	1				
Confidence	.753**	.783**	.773**	1			
Proactive Personality	.762**	.793**	.816**	.825**	1		
Social Support	.662**	.759**	.762**	.667**	.770**	1	
Self-Esteem	.395**	.349**	.385**	.306**	.396**	.399**	1

(*p<0.05; **p<0.001)

Table 6: Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable Career Adaptability (β)			
	Concern	Control	Curiosity	Confidence
Proactive Personality	.60**	.51**	.56**	.77**
Social Support	.16*	.36**	.32**	.09
Self-Esteem	.09	00	.04	-.04
F Value	105.42**	150.69**	172.48**	151.70**
R square	.60	.68	.71	.68
Adjusted R square	.60	.68	.71	.68

The study found that proactive personality has a significant positive relationship with all four dimensions of career adaptability: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Specifically, proactive personality was strongly related to concern (β = .60, p <0.01), control (β = .51, <0.01), curiosity (β = .56, <0.01). Overall, these findings highlight the important role of a proactive personality in enhancing career adaptability across these four key dimensions. Therefore, H1a, 1b, 1c and 1d are supported.

The results also show that social support showed a positive relationship with all four dimensions of career adaptability: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Specifically, social support showed a significant positive relationship with concern (β = .16, <p 0.01), control (β = .36, <p 0.01), curiosity (β = .32, <p 0.01), confidence but weaker (β = .09, p <0.01). Overall, the findings suggest that social support plays an important role in enhancing career adaptability across these four dimensions, though its influence varies in strength. Therefore, H1a, 1b, 1c and 1d are supported

Self-esteem does not have a significant relationship with any of the four dimensions of career adaptability: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Specifically, there was no significant relationship between self-esteem and concern (β = 0.09, p<0.01), control (β = 0.00, p <0.01), curiosity (β = 0.04, p <0.05) and confidence (β = -0.04, p< 0.05). Overall, these findings suggest that self-esteem does not play a significant role in enhancing career adaptability across these dimensions. Therefore, H1a, 1b, 1c and 1d are not supported

Discussion and Implications
The study investigates the relationships between proactive personality, social support, self-esteem, and career adaptability among postgraduate students, with a focus on research conducted from 2020 onwards. This study hypothesizes that proactive personality is positively related to all four dimensions of career adaptability: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. The result indicates that hypothesis H1 on the relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability was found to be fully supported. This is because a proactive personality has a positive significant relationship with all the dimensions of career adaptability. Hence, all the hypotheses were supported. The proactive personality of graduates is more adept at anticipating and adapting to unexpected career challenges, as demonstrated by recent findings (Fiori, Bollmann, & Rossier, 2020; Rudolph et al., 2020). Specifically, a proactive personality was found to have a positive relationship with concern. Concern refers to the degree to which people are chance-oriented, have career-related thoughts, and strategize for upcoming career tasks, changes, and challenges (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Zacher, 2014). This trend aligns with findings that proactive individuals are more successful in adapting to changes and challenges throughout their career trajectories (Hirschi et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2023). The second dimension of career adaptability is control. Control allows people to feel in control for self-governing and creating their careers.

This is supported by research that indicates proactive students, in particular, show greater resilience in overcoming challenges and exercising control over their career trajectories (Ohme & Zacher, 2021; Spurk et al., 2020). Curiosity, which drives the exploration of future career opportunities and engagement in opportunity-focused activities, is another dimension positively influenced by proactive personality. Lastly. A proactive personality was tested to have a positive relationship with confidence. Confidence, reflecting individuals' optimism in their ability to achieve career goals, is also positively associated with a proactive personality. This trait enables individuals to maintain a positive future orientation and self-assurance, critical for navigating career challenges (Guan et al., 2020; Rudolph et al., 2020).

The finding related to social support and career adaptability indicates that the hypothesis on the relationship between social support and career adaptability was found to be supported as social support has a positive relationship with all the four dimensions of career adaptability which are concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Firstly, social support was tested to have a positive relationship with the first dimension of career adaptability which is a concern. When these postgraduate students feel supported by others, most especially parents, siblings and friends, they will be motivated to make the right career decision as a result of career exploration, as they will gain confidence and properly explore their career options, resulting in a high level of career adaptability. This is supported by previous research by Li, Guan, & Wang (2020), which found that individuals who feel supported by family and friends demonstrate more informed and confident career decision-making (Li, Guan, & Wang, 2020). Secondly, based on the result, social support was found to have a positive relationship with the second dimension of career adaptability which is control. This is aligned with research by Perera & McIlveen (2020); and Douglass et al., (2021), that individuals with robust social networks are better equipped to take charge of their career paths and make effective decisions (Perera & McIlveen, 2020; Douglass et al., 2021). Thirdly, based on the result, social support also has a positive relationship with career adaptability which is curiosity. This is supported by Yu, Guan, & Wang (2020); Zacher & Rudolph (2021) stated curiosity is positively influenced by social support, with those having strong social connections more likely to explore potential career opportunities and maintain an inquisitive outlook towards their future. Lastly, there is a positive relationship between social support and the fourth dimension of career adaptability, which is confidence. This result is supported by previous research according to Guan et al., (2020); Yu et al., (2020). Confidence is reinforced by social support, with supported individuals better able to face the competitive labor market with self-assurance and resilience.

The final result of hypothesis H3 on the relationship between self-esteem and career adaptability was found to be not supported as in this study, social support has no positive relationship with the four dimensions of career

adaptability which are concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Self-esteem traditionally plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions of their abilities and value, the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted this relationship. The pandemic has led to significant stress, anxiety, and disruptions to daily routines, negatively affecting self-esteem. This decline in self-esteem has, in turn, hindered individuals' career adaptability, as they struggle to maintain motivation and meet career-related challenges (Kim et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020; Spurk & Straub, 2020). Consequently, the study concludes that self-esteem does not significantly influence the four dimensions of career adaptability in the current context. On trust, the study finds no positive relationship between self-esteem and career adaptability. Despite the importance of self-esteem in shaping individuals' perceptions of their capabilities, the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted many people's self-esteem. The shift to remote work and online learning, along with the disruption of daily routines, has led to increased stress, anxiety, and a decline in self-confidence. As a result, self-esteem did not significantly influence the four dimensions of career adaptability in this study.

5. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the study is done to determine the relationship between proactive personality, social support self-esteem and career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, confidence) factors. Data collected from 214 postgraduates reveal that productivity personality and social support are significant with career adaptability, while self-esteem is not significant toward career adaptability. To enhance and sustain a proactive personality, it is essential for career counselors, academic staff, and human resource professionals to actively engage in career education and extracurricular activities. These stakeholders should facilitate opportunities for postgraduate students to engage in proactive behaviors that foster anticipation of their career and future professional environments. Moreover, the integration of career education and counseling services can significantly benefit postgraduate students by fostering supportive interpersonal connections, guiding them to avoid detrimental social comparisons, and providing targeted activities that enhance career-related competencies.

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