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Cultivating Career Adaptability: An Interventional Study on MBA Students' Adaptability in the Modern Business Landscape

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of a skill-building intervention program, utilizing the 'G.R.O.W. model' of career adaptability training (McGuiness, 2017), on the career adaptability of MBA students. A convenience sample of 162 MBA students participated in the study, with 74 completing both pre-and-post intervention surveys. The intervention focused on critical thinking, teamwork, communicating in teams, and leadership, utilizing self-reflections and the 'Career Adapt-Abilities Scale – Short Form' (CAAS-SF) (Maggiori et al., 2017) for data collection. Statistical analysis using SPSS revealed significant improvements in three out of four sub-constructs of career adaptability – concern, control, and confidence. Notably, students reported increased control and confidence, a slight increase in concern, and a considerable decrease in curiosity post-intervention. The findings underscore the effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing career adaptability. The study concludes by advocating for future research to delve into strategies for addressing concern and curiosity, crucial elements in navigating evolving business dynamics. It calls for increased emphasis on career exploration training and intervention programs in Indian higher education institutions to bolster students' career adaptability in the face of rapid organizational changes.

Keywords: *Career Adaptability, CAAS-SF, GROW model, Critical Thinking, Teamwork, Leadership, Communication Skills*

1. Introduction

Given the inequities, social fragmentation, and depletion of resources that ironically accompanied the disruptive changes brought about by the rapid advances in science and technology, job security, consistent progress, and upward mobility have become myths (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014), not unlike the Great American Dream. This, therefore, translates into an increased need for continuous learning, upskilling, and awareness about opportunities for the youth, if they hope to be successful (Tomlinson et al., 2018). The youth need guidance in becoming adaptable towards managing career shocks, which is required for a sustainable future in this current world marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), where, due to the current economic uncertainty, even higher education degrees do not ensure employment any longer (Alawamleh & Mahadin, 2022; Asok Kumar et al., 2024). Scholars like Alawamleh and Mahadin (2022), therefore, argue for the need of specialized university courses that would help graduates to enhance their skills in preparation "for a challenging labor market" through "experiential learning" (pp. 491-492). In other words, there is a need for specially designed teaching interventions for helping graduates become more aware and for creating a growth mind-set, along with a sense of purpose and personal agency in them. Recent HR reports talk about absence of resilience and adaptability in Gen Z, which is visible through trends like quite quitting and moonlighting Teaching interventions can play a huge role in fostering in students the abilities, perspectives, and the qualities needed for creating a sustainable future in an uncertain world. Studies have shown that career adaptability of students, especially identity awareness, situational adaptability, and agency, which are necessary for adapting to changes (Hall et al., 2018), can be enhanced by targeted interventions (Heslin and Seibert, 2016; Shaffer and Zalewski, 2011; Hirschi, 2009). Thus, graduate students can be taught career adaptability by helping them align their personal values, interests, and personalities with the ever-changing, dynamic world of work in the 21st century. Briscoe & Hall (2006), for

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instance, argue that there is a positive relationship between agentic motivation fueled by intrinsic values, protean career orientation, and adaptability in the face of uncertainty and change. Therefore, preparing students for uncertainty and change would mean training them for life-long learning, situational flexibility, self-awareness, personal agency, resilience and career adaptability (Ebenehi et al., 2016; Heslin & Seibert, 2016; Stein et al., 2020).

Figuring out how to shape clear and deliberate objectives, discover untapped opportunities, and source multiple solutions for complex problems are going to be fundamental skills to possess for sustainable employability in the coming years (Schleicher, 2018). Besides domain-specific knowledge, college graduates today need to be adaptable, have an aspirational perspective towards their jobs, and be prepared to upskill continuously. Therefore, it is imperative that higher education institutions, educators, and curriculum developers recognize the importance of career adaptability and teach students accordingly, so that they can have a proper transitional plan before they graduate (Robles, 2012).

This empirical study, based on the basic philosophical premise of action research that "knowledge is always gained through action and for action" (Torbert, 1981, p. 145), describes the impact of Career Adaptability training induced by two soft-skill courses, namely, leadership and Teamwork (LTW) and Critical Thinking and Writing (CTW), in the MBA students of a university in Dehradun, India. The students were coached virtually during the Covid19 pandemic through virtual collaborations and reflective engagements, using the GROW model (Bishop, 2015), to address their concerns for future careers in stressed environment. The first and the second authors of the paper, who taught Leadership and Teamwork and Critical Thinking & Writing respectively, aligned their 15-weeks-long course curricula to collaboratively co-teach a group of 162 MBA students, most of whom have never worked before, with the common objective of creating awareness of personal resourcefulness in the students for developing adaptive attitudes towards career management and growth (Haratsis et al., 2015), and the same was tested later for effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

Career refers to the occupational progress and the actions taken by one for such progress throughout the working years of one's life (What is a Career? 2020). The preparation for one's career, however, starts way before one's first job, while one is still a student. As a student observes its environment curiously and sees an engineer on site or a doctor in her lab coat, she starts imagining, drawing inspiration from hundreds of various jobs around them, and starts developing their own ideas of a career. As such, career development is a lifelong process (Savickas, 2012), where one explores, becomes interested in, learns about, and develops skills to perform efficiently in their chosen profession.

The concept of career adaptability evolved from the core concepts of career development and career maturity (Super & Knasel, 1981). Career development is the process of exploring, learning, working, and transitioning towards a personally preferred future (Borgen and Hiebert, 2010), while career maturity implies the ability to make informed, pragmatic, and mature decisions. The term career adaptability implies a conscious and continuous exploration of one's self, as well as of one's professional environment with the eventual aim of achieving a synergy between one's personal and professional identity and the organizational environment.

Efficacy in dealing with one's environment is neither given, nor fixed. Rather, it involves a procreant competence for organizing one's cognitive, affective, social, and behavioural skills into an integrated action plan to serve varied purposes and to deal with different challenges in one's career (Bandura, 1982). This procreant competence for devising an appropriate and executable action plan to deal with the myriad challenges and for managing the various shocks in one's career is what the authors of this paper would like to posit as career adaptability. Career adaptability, therefore, is a fundamental career competency that empowers and ultimately improves the chances of one's success by concentrating on one's professional commitment and scholastic development (Akkermans et al., 2018).

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Career adaptability has several components, including confidence and self-esteem. Research (Nota et al., 2018) has established that one's self-esteem and perceived social support system enhances one's career adaptability, as a greater level of proactivity and self-esteem prompt career exploration (Cai et al., 2015), which, in turn, may help individuals to develop a relevant career related identity and adaptability (Savickas, 2002). Therefore, students with a positive outlook and a greater sense of personal control are more likely to be adaptable to their world of work (Duffy, 2010), and, hence, are also likely to feel more optimistic about their future. Individuals who are optimistic about their career possibilities in the near future tend to engage in learning directed towards that imagined future, encouraged by their perception of being on the shortest path to imminent career success (Haratsis et al., 2015). Career decision making, career mobility, career capital, employability, and proactive career behaviours are, thus, closely connected with personal agency, control over available resources through informed decision making, continuous learning for future (re)orientation as the basis for holistic career development, and ultimately career success (Akkermans et al., 2018).

However, Super & Knasel (1981) argue that occupational preferences and competencies depend on an individual's life-situations and professional exposures, and, therefore, can change with time. The 21st century global professional job market is highly volatile owing to the rapid technological and socio-economic changes brought about by globalization and neo-liberalization. Rapid changes in the global labour market can often lead to uncertainty and chaos in individual lives, as employees may often fail to keep up with the changes in their professional lives, which, consequently, may lead to career shocks ((Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). In the most recent times, the greatest and perhaps the most relatable example of this is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy, particularly to the service sector (Wen et al., 2020).

The solution is to train students to adapt to career shocks by continuously learning, unlearning, and relearning to avoid redundancy (Seibert, Kraimer, and Heslin, 2016; Gube and Lajoie, 2020). The benefits of training students to become career adaptable are manifold. For instance, research (Cai et al., 2015; Guichard, 2018; Mansur and Felix, 2020; Othman et al., 2018) have found a positive connection between one's hope for her future and self-efficacy, as well as various positive educational outcomes, such as academic engagement and achievement. Career adaptability is a mediating psychosocial construct that helps individuals to align their personalities with their career engagements. There are four identifiable career adaptability dimensions, namely, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas. 2008). Savickas's (2008) dimensions have been operationalized in the 'Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory' that was the basis of an international study (Maggiori, C., Rossier, J., and Savickas, M.L., 2017), which sought to validate a career adaptabilities scale in a multinational context (Pal & Jena, 2021).

Research (Ebenehi et al., 2016; Haratsis et al., 2015) has further found that training the youth about goal orientation can help them develop adaptive readiness. Proactivity and optimism about future career perceptions, along with adaptability resources for concern, control, curiosity and confidence can prepare individuals for sudden professional changes or career shocks (Johnston, 2018).NEP 2020 mandates career guidance in schools, but it has a lot of implementation problems(How India's Schools Can Transform NEP 2020's Career Guidance Vision Into Classroom Reality | LinkedIn,2025.).The onus falls to the higher education institutes for professional career intervention programs, including career counselling, encouraging participants to narrate their life stories, thereby allowing them to claim authorship of their life's narratives, which, in turn, often exacerbates the agency of the participants (Stauffer et al., 2014).

However, despite the limited research on career development processes for Indians (Fouad et al., 2016), it can be assumed that the kind of individual career counselling that is customary in western countries might be irrelevant for the highly implicit and diversified cultures of India, where cultural values play an important role in differentiating between aspirations and expectations, and parents and other family members, as major stakeholders,

influence one's career decisions from the very beginning (Paralkar, 2021). Furthermore, a large youth population and a generally collectivistic culture, as opposed to a more individualistic culture in the West, complicate matters further for the Indian youth (Nair, Vivek G.; Chatterjee, 2020). For one instance, facilitating a large youth population with limited resources and technological support in a developing country like India could be operationally challenging (Marsella, 1998). The pricing of career support programs is also an equally important consideration for ensuring accessibility of learners from disadvantaged communities. As such, only group coaching and mentoring within formal higher education curricula could possibly work for such a large and diverse group of students in India.

Higher education students mostly express concern about their vocational identity that prompt them to explore their selves and their environment for making appropriate career choices (Ebenehi et al., 2016). Concern about the future helps individuals look ahead and prepare for what might come next, control refers to taking responsibility for one's career by using self-discipline, curiosity means having an inquisitive attitude toward possible future selves, and confidence refers a person being able to actualize choices to implement their life design (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012; Koen et al., 2012). Educators at higher education institutes can use these four dimensions dynamically within the teaching-learning process to help students improve their self-efficacy, build self-esteem, and better adapt their needs and capacities to different constraints imposed by the work environment (Nota et al., 2018). Savickas et al. (2009) view adaptability and willingness to act as required human traits in times of shock or transition. Therefore, both the willingness and the ability to act are required to adapt to an emergency (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). This means that in the event of a career shock, one's skills and meta skills are both required to mitigate the crisis. Training for career adaptability, therefore, requires addressing both skills and meta skills, such as 'knowing why,' 'knowing whom,' and 'knowing what,' which are required for transitioning, managing and mitigating career shocks.

A meta-analysis (Knight et al., 2017) showed that although the effects are usually modest, specific interventions can enhance student engagement. For example, a four-month, individual cognitive-behavioural intervention program, building on Social Cognitive Theory, appeared to have increased students' engagement, self-efficacy, and performance (Bresó et al., 2011). Although positive interventions are beneficial to all participants, some strategies might prove more beneficial for those who lack work engagement, compared to those who are already engaged (Ouweneel et al., 2013). Hence, educators should keep in mind that this might also be true for higher education settings, as the majority of Indian higher education students do not have prior work experience. Therefore, it is important to tailor the interventions for different students, with varying levels of educational engagement. Therefore, to help students attain career sustainability, it is imperative to reimagine the higher education curriculum for an uncertain world of work (Stein, 2021).

The goal of higher education institutions is not only to prepare students for their first job, but to prepare them for life, ensuring that students are able to manage the complexities of the professional world, along with their personal life, beyond their first job. Maintaining or retaining employment or staying employable is a key indicator of career adaptability (Johnston et al., 2016; Santra and Giri, 2019). Therefore, besides training students in domain-specific knowledge, Indian higher education institutions need to redefine and recalibrate their educational goals to account for the development of students' social, emotional, and metacognitive competencies, while also functioning as sandboxes for the students to test themselves out for their careers ahead.

However, while many higher education institutions offer career services to students to support them in finding jobs and to prepare them for placements (Nair, 2018; Nair & Chatterjee, 2020), in the routine curricula of most higher education institutions in India, there is a discernable lack of alignment of the course content with information and skills required for students to be career adaptable (Abelha et al., 2020; Boer & Giessen, 2020; Holzapfel, 2018; Report, 2020; *The Future of Jobs Report,* 2018; *Insight Report Centre for the New Economy and Society*, 2018).

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2.1 Problem Statement

In the demographical and cultural context of India, youth dividend can only be leveraged if the youth is guided and directed intentionally through an evolved education system. Harnessing the demographic dividend of India depends upon the employability of the working age population, their health, education, vocational training and skills (Pal & Jena, 2021). Besides domain knowledge, life skills, adaptability, and resilience are crucial for filling the skill gap pointed out by various recent economic reports like the World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report* (2018). However, Santra & Giri (2019) and Nimmi et al. (2022) argue that early enough preparation for certain aspects of one's career, namely career adaptability for positive self-perception, developing psychological capital, and general well-being for a sustainable career is not happening as much in India as it should, while other aspects of one's career like preparation for subject knowledge, for instance, is happening. And this is causing our early career professionals to be ill-prepared or skewed for the current volatile economy and labour market as their ability to adapt does not match their growing career expectations (Nimmi et al., 2022). However, the sheer number and the demographic and cultural heterogeneity of students of employable age in India, as well as the varying financial, human, and infrastructural resources available to various higher education institutions in India, create certain unsurmountable constraints for training students in anything more than basic disciplinary knowledge(Khanna et al., 2022). The lack of know-how is also a problem: a large number of instructors in the higher education institutions in India are not trained for delivering such instruction to students; and neither do we have any home-grown employability development model that can be replicated by teachers (Khanna P, 2019; Nimmi et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

The current research explores the potential advantages of training students for career adaptability for developing greater autonomy and control in students over their careers. More specifically, the research aims to highlight whether or not educators, through exploration of theory and practice, can help students become more career adaptable and build their social, emotional, and cognitive meta-capacities through career-oriented teaching-interventions within classroom instructions on life skill subjects, where the learning outcomes include skills, interests, knowledge, beliefs, preferences, sensitivities, emotions, and future actions with reference to the students.

Career adaptability resources namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence act as important mediators for career exploration, career planning and career self-efficacy. Concern refers is a positive inkling for the future. More concern fosters more career planning as concern is directed to the future and connected with the consideration of upcoming tasks and challenges. Concern supplements curiosity as a mediator for career exploration as nudge a person to learn more about available options to control future through decision making leading to career self-efficacy. Occupational self-efficacy is impacted by confidence. Individuals who reported higher confidence also reported higher occupational self-efficacy in a study conducted in Austria (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2017).

Career adaptability resources are socio-psychological abilities that affect self-regulation in handling transitions and traumas (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). For career development, personal agency, self-efficacy and adaptability are important for transitions from education to work. Career adaptability is related to actions like perception of career environment suitability, career exploration and job search perceptions (Guan et al., 2013, 2014; Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013; Pouyaud, Vignoli, Dosnon, & Lallemand, 2012; Rossier et al., 2012; Zacher, 2015). For this purpose, the authors experimented with developing leadership qualities in students through critical reflections on their career competencies in order to make the students career adaptable. Students' concerns for their future were explored in the classroom, evoking curiosity in students **t**o explore personal values, interests, skills, passions, and purpose through self-profiling. The self-profiling led the students to identify their career-related strengths and weaknesses, thereby prompting them to take control of themselves and their future careers

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through decision making, which in turn positively impacted their confidence**.**

Table 1: Conceptual Model to induce conversations to ask questions and creating culture for collaborative continuous learning for career adaptability in classroom

	Concern	**Curiosity**	**Control**	**Confidence**
Conversations	addressing worries through open dialogue	Asking questions to explore and understand	Embracing change and continuous learning	Cultivating a culture of support and trust
Courage to ask questions	Overcoming fear to seek information	Fostering a desire for knowledge	Adapting and evolving for improvement	Building confidence through shared values
Craving New Knowledge	Channeling concerns into seeking knowledge	Nurturing a mindset of exploration	Mastering change through knowledge	Nurturing self-assuredness through learning
Culture	Encouraging open discussion and support	Building a culture of inquisitiveness	Embracing change as a shared endeavor	Fostering values through actions

In the virtual classroom, we employed a multifaceted approach to cultivate leadership and critical thinking for career adaptability. Conversations were facilitated to openly address concerns, encouraging students to share and tackle worries collectively. The courage to ask questions was emphasized, empowering students to overcome fears and foster a genuine curiosity for knowledge. Craving new knowledge was promoted, redirecting concerns into a pursuit of learning and adaptability. Additionally, a supportive culture was nurtured, fostering open discussion and values that contribute to students' confidence. By integrating these strategies, the classroom aimed to create an environment where concerns were openly discussed, curiosity flourished, change was embraced, and confidence was built through shared values. This holistic methodology sought to equip MBA students with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of a dynamic career landscape.

Authors employed the GROW coaching model (Whitmore, 2014)to structure their class engagements. The GROW coaching model (Kunos, 2017; McGuiness, 2017; Whitmore, 2014.) is a simple framework for structuring group coaching. GROW is an acronym that stand for goal, current reality, options and way forward. It provided for a framework to reflect on self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem solving essential for self-efficacy for career decision making(Török et al., 2017). The GROW Model assumes that the facilitator is not an expert, is only assisting the learners in choosing the best options without giving advice or direction. Coach/facilitator use some probes to induce reflective thinking and introspection at each step. The components of GROW do not always follow that sequence, and a group coaching dialogue typically begins by examining Goal and Reality before veering off into any of the other two. As this study happened in remote setting during pandemic, GROW model facilitated group coaching in virtual mode (Bishop, 2015).

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Table 2 : Alignment of GROW Model to adaptability resources and expected adapting resources

GROW model for facilitation	**Adaptability Resources**	**Adapting Responses**
Goal	Concern	Career Planning
Current **R**eality	Curiosity	Industry and Domain Exploration
Options available and **O**bstacles identified	Control	Career decision making difficulties
Way forward/**w**ill	Confidence	Career Self Efficacy

As such, in the two life-skill courses on LTW(leadership & Teamwork) and CTW(Critical Thinking & writing), the students were first taught to identify their career goals. Through designing of personal development plans they were asked to assess the current market scenarios to identify the available career opportunities and means to avail them. Next, they were asked to create scaffolds through reflective prompts to design action plans to reach their goals. Reflective journals were the teaching tool to record introspections along with collaborative group projects to explore and research the industry, domain and market conditions building a support community and network to build confidence. Finally, they were equipped with video resume and interview skills to present them remotely to the recruiters.

Using a null hypothesis that teaching-interventions through life skill courses using the GROW model, where the learning outcomes include skills, interests, knowledge, beliefs, preferences, sensitivities, emotions, and future actions with reference to the students imagined/potential career trajectories, DOES NOT lead to any changes - positive or negative - in the career adaptability of students, we did a double, paired T-test: once before and once after the teaching interventions in two life skill courses (respectively, LTW and CTW) for 162 MBA students, using a Likert-scale based questionnaire that asked students to self-evaluate their mental preparedness and adaptability on four categories related to the career adaptability scale, namely, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Pal & Jena, 2021).

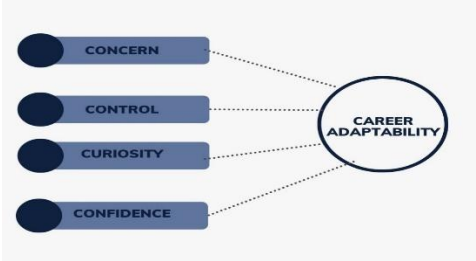

Figure-1

The teacher-researchers aligned the delivery of their respective course contents to encourage students to collaboratively reflect on their vocational identities and work on their skill sets with their peers, while defining specific exploratory projects to prepare themselves for their respective careers ahead. Students' concerns for their future were channelized to motivate them to research their preferred domain and industry, and to critically evaluate their respective skill-gaps for being successful therein. After assessing their preferred domain and industry, and identifying their respective skill gaps, students were encouraged to work in peer-groups to strategize how to plug those gaps. Additionally, their curiosity was channelized to help them figure out current market scenarios and changes which was designed to help them in their decision making, thereby, enhancing their control over their job prospects and their confidence in themselves to present to employers/recruiters.

The impact of the training intervention was tested pre and post course delivery. Data was collected in two phases before and after the training using the CAAS-SF scale (Maggiori et al., 2017). A

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convenience sample of 162 MBA students, who were subjected to the aforementioned training intervention, were initially selected. However, despite reaching out to all of these 162 students several times, responses could be obtained only from 74 students, which, therefore, became the primary sample for the study.

The following null hypotheses were framed to test and analyze the data:

H1= *There is no significant impact of training on Concern, in developing Career Adaptability among students.*

H2= *There is no significant impact of training on Control, in developing Career Adaptability among students*

H3= *There is no significant impact of training on Curiosity, in developing Career Adaptability among students*

H4= *There is no significant impact of training on Confidence, in developing Career Adaptability among students*

A repeated measures t-test was conducted to observe the changes in career adaptability of respondents after career focused intervention through two life skill courses. The test compared the mean of a single group, examined at two different points in time (Ross, A., & Willson, V.L., 2017). At the beginning of the semester,162 final year students of MBA, who took both the above-mentioned life-skill courses, recorded their responses through a Likert-scale-based questionnaire on sub constructs of career adaptability namely, Concern, Control, Curiosity and Confidence.

Out of total 222 students enrolled for classes, 162 took the initial questionnaire at the beginning of the semester. The questionnaire contain questions based on the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale-short form (CAAS-SF; measuring concern, control, curiosity, confidence), developed by Maggiori, Rossier, and Savickas(Maggiori et al., 2017). The scale represents a second- order higher construct of career adaptability, consisting four first-order latent dimensions of (a) concern, (b) control, (c) curiosity and (d) confidence. Each dimension consists of three items. A sample item on group characteristics includes (a) I wonder what new skills I would require to thrive in the uncertain economy in the post-pandemic time.; (b) I am aware of my values, interests, and purpose and they are aligned with my domain skills.; (c) I always look up industry news and economic updates in national and international scenarios from various print and electronic sources and (d) I am confident of my skills being relevant across domains and job roles in different industries. Respondents` rated against each item on a 5-point Likert scale—from ‘not strong’ = 1 to ‘strongest’ = 5. The statements were curated keeping in mind the concern of students during pandemic. We averaged these items to create an overall score for career adaptability, with good internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha value = 0.76). Upon completion of courses, the copy of same questionnaire was resend using google forms after a time gap of 4 months. After initial study of data, it was found that only 74 students responded to both the questionnaires. A repeated measures t-test was conducted to compare career adaptability of respondents’ pre and post training using SPSS Statistics 21.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Analysis

Table-3 Paired Samples Statistics

Th		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	B_Concern	4.257	74	.6837	.0795
	A_Concern	4.054	74	.7919	.0921
Pair 2	B_Control	3.568	74	.6638	.0772
	A_Control	4.230	74	.6934	.0806
Pair 3	B_Curiosity	4.230	74	.7128	.0829
	A_Curiosity	4.095	74	.7793	.0906
Pair 4	B_Confidence	3.716	74	.6928	.0805
	A_Confidence	4.432	74	.5987	.0696

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Table-4 Paired Samples Test

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	B_Concern & A_Concern	74	.354	.002
Pair 2	B_Control & A_Control	74	.219	.061
Pair 3	B_Curiosity & A_Curiosity	74	.355	.002
Pair 4	B_Confidence & A_Confidence	74	.201	.086

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	B_Concern - A_Concern	.2027	.8437	.0981	.0072	.3982	2.067	73	.042
Pair 2	B_Control - A_Control	-.6622	.8485	.0986	-.8587	-.4656	-6.713	73	.000
Pair 3	B_Curiosity - A_Curiosity	.1351	.8492	.0987	-.0616	.3319	1.369	73	.175
Pair 4	B_Confidence - A_Confidence	-.7162	.8196	.0953	-.9061	-.5263	-7.517	73	.000

The test was done in four pairs as per the factors, i.e., concern (Pair-1), control (Pair-2), curiosity (Pair-3), and confidence (Pair-4). The p-values of the test Pair-1 (concern), test Pair-2 (control), test Pair-3 (curiosity), and test Pair-4 (confidence) are, respectively, .002, .000, .175, and, .000. Therefore, the result reveals that except for curiosity (Pair-3), all the other three factors, namely, concern, control, and confidence were positively impacted to a significant extent, thereby largely improving the career adaptability of the students, by the teaching intervention in Career Adaptability through the soft-skill courses named LTW and CTW, as can be seen below.

Table-5

Eta Squared = $t^2 / t^2 + (N-1)$

Concern = 4.27/4.27+73

= 0.06 (Medium Effect)

Control=45.06/45.06+73

= 0.4 (Large Effect)

Curiosity = 1.87/1.87+73

= 0.02 (Small Effect)

Confidence = 56.50/56.50+73

=0.43 (Large Effect)

Where,

η^2 = 0.01 indicates a small effect;

η^2 = 0.06 indicates a medium effect;

η^2 = 0.14 indicates a large effect.

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The Eta Squared values have been calculated to measure the effect of change after providing training to the students in their Career Adaptability (Richardson, J. T. (2011). The values show the largest effect in Confidence, medium effect in Concern, and small effects in Curiosity and Control in students' Career Adaptability. In interpreting these results, it's important to note that Eta Squared values of 0.01, 0.06, and 0.14 correspond to small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively. In this context, the largest effect is observed in Confidence, followed by a medium effect in Concern, and small effects in Curiosity and Control. These findings collectively suggest that the training program has had a considerable and meaningful impact on specific dimensions of Career Adaptability among the students, particularly in terms of confidence and concern.

The following are the observations from the result of the paired sample t-test. The focus was on four crucial dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence.

Pair-1 (Concern):

The statistically significant decrease in concern ($p = 0.002$) indicates that the life skills training had a substantial effect on reducing students' concerns regarding their career trajectory. This result aligns with the projected outcome of the intervention, indicating that targeted programs can ease concerns related to career uncertainties, arising from career shocks like the pandemic.

Pair-2 (Control):

The most notable finding is the highly significant decrease in perceived lack of control ($p = 0.000$). This result means that the training effectively empowered students with a sense of control over their career paths. This heightened sense of control could be an important factor in developing their adaptability, enabling them to navigate challenges more effectively.

Pair-3 (Curiosity):

Interestingly, the results for curiosity did not show statistical significance ($p = 0.175$). This outcome shows that while the training has not led to curiosity levels, it's essential to delve deeper into the nature of the intervention and the specific life skills facilitated. Further qualitative analysis might provide insights into the nuances of cultivating curiosity in the context of career adaptability.

Pair-4 (Confidence):

The large decline in reported lack of confidence ($p = 0.000$) is a positive indicator of the training's efficacy in strengthening students' confidence. Confidence is a key component of adaptability, influencing one's willingness to take risks and explore new opportunities. The training appears to have successfully encouraged a greater sense of self-assurance among the participants.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The study clearly suggests that a well-designed training intervention in life skill classrooms can help increase students' concern, control, and confidence regarding their future selves. Concern is a prerequisite for action. Therefore, evoking concern for one's future through self-reflections supports goal orientation. Measuring goals on the yardstick of current reality opens avenues for exploration of the industry and the domain. It also helps with resetting one's goals if the present context doesn't support the current goals of any career choice. This study was conducted at the onset of a major career shock induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, when each of the 162 first-semester MBA students, who constituted the population of this study, was preparing for employment with heightened anxiety about the future. In fact, the initiation of the project is credited to the initial expression of emotions of stress and anxiety by the students to their teachers.

The results collectively suggest that a targeted life skills training intervention can impact specific dimensions of career adaptability among learners. This is particularly relevant in the current global landscape, where adaptability is crucial for navigating the uncertainties posed by external factors .

5.1 *Contribution & Limitations*

The study contributes to the ongoing work of career researchers in developing career adaptability in Generation Z. In an implicit culture where career decision-making is complex and stressful, the career

adaptability of Gen Z can help them be more effective and confident in career choices.

The study could potentially help higher education institutions in curricular interventions for career preparation through group coaching and collaborative projects in large enrollment classes, where individual coaching is not viable.

However, it's essential to acknowledge the study's limitations. The sample size of 162 students, while respectable, has not captured the diversity of experiences within the Gen Z cohort. A major limitation of the study is its limited reach and small sample size. This, therefore, necessitates further research in the area, particularly in the Indian context, which is currently under-researched in career adaptability interventions for career development.

The training intervention, which formed the basis of the present study, happened remotely in virtual classrooms due to the COVID-19 protocols. The study could not consider the emotional or psychological impact of the training on the career preparedness of the students. Breakdown in communication due to health and family priorities in the pandemic also led to a limited turnaround rate in students' responses. Additionally, the non-significant result in the curiosity dimension prompts further investigation into the specific elements of soft skills that contribute to curiosity enhancement.

However, considering all aspects, the study suggests that focused curricular interventions for goal orientation, keeping the current reality and opportunities for the future work in mind, can support students in developing their self-esteem and confidence for decision making. Availability of institutional support in higher education institutions can help in bridging the wide skill gap being observed in the present labor market by helping students become career-adaptable.

In conclusion, these findings contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on the effectiveness of life skills training in preparing the younger workforce for dynamic and unpredictable career landscapes. Future research should explore the long-term effects and generalizability of this study, as well as the nuanced aspects of life skills development.

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