

THE CAUSAL MODEL OF CAREER ADAPTABILITY FOR TEACHER EDUCATION GRADUATES IN SICHUAN PROVINCE, CHINA

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Abstract:

Objectives: This study aims to explore the causes of career adaptability among graduates of teacher education programs in Sichuan Province, China. Currently, there is a lack of data on the models and potential causal mechanisms of the influencing factors, which is crucial for developing targeted employment guidelines.

methodology: This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative survey data from 400 teacher graduates (selected via cluster and random sampling) with qualitative interviews from 23 experts. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics, PLS-SEM, and content analysis to respectively examine variable distributions, test causal relationships, and interpret qualitative themes.

Results: The theoretical model demonstrated a good fit with the empirical data (SRMR = 0.0397, dULS = 1.4244, dG = 0.5663). Personality traits, transformational leadership, and social support were found to have significant positive direct effects on both employability skills and career adaptability. Employability skills also exhibited a positive direct effect on career adaptability. All observed variable factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with the model explaining 52.93% of the variance in employability skills and a substantial proportion of variance in career adaptability.

Conclusions: This study advances Career Construction Theory by proposing and validating an integrated model that synthesizes dispositional, contextual, and skill-based determinants of career adaptability. It uniquely demonstrates the structural relationships and mediating mechanisms among these dimensions within China's regional teacher education context, extending the theory's cross-cultural applicability. The research provides an evidence-based, multi-level framework that bridges theoretical insights with practical interventions for enhancing teacher graduates' career readiness.

Keywords: Structural Equation Modeling, Career Adaptability, Employability skills, Teacher education graduates, Sichuan province

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, graduates of teacher education have been confronted with various employment opportunities and unknown challenges. This common social phenomenon mainly stems from changes in population structure, adjustments in educational policies, and the decline in the demand for teaching positions in the economic environment. Sichuan is a diverse and economically active region in southwestern China. The significant urban-rural gap, diverse educational resources, and continuous educational reforms in this province require graduates to be highly adaptable to different teaching environments and student needs. This is a crucial step for them to make significant contributions in their careers.

Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005, 2013)^{[4][5]} provides the foundational framework for understanding career adaptability, conceptualized as a self-regulatory capacity enabling individuals to navigate predictable vocational tasks and unpredictable work adjustments. This multidimensional construct encompasses both personal resources and environmental influences, particularly relevant for teacher education graduates facing complex transitions into the teaching profession.

Research demonstrates that career adaptability is influenced by multiple interconnected factors. Personality traits, particularly the Big Five dimensions, show consistent relationships with adaptation outcomes, where extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness positively correlate with adaptability while neuroticism demonstrates negative associations (VanVianen et al., 2012)^[7]. Transformational leadership emerges as another crucial factor, enhancing psychological resources through inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, though its specific connection to teacher career adaptability remains underexplored.

Furthermore, employability skills encompassing problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork (De Guzman & Choi, 2013)^[1], along with social support systems (Spurk et al., 2020), significantly predict adaptation outcomes.

However, existing research presents limitations: studies often examine these factors in isolation, lack regional contextualization, particularly in unique educational environments like Sichuan Province, and fail to develop integrated models that account for the complex interactions between personal characteristics, environmental influences, and skill development.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing a comprehensive framework that synthesizes personality traits, transformational leadership, employability skills, and social support as interconnected determinants of career adaptability within Sichuan's distinctive teacher education context. The research aims to provide both theoretical advancement and practical insights for enhancing teacher graduates' professional readiness and career resilience. In education, transformational leadership (TFL) is widely recognized as an ideal practice, especially for school reform (Hallinger, 2003). It empowers educators by reshaping values, fostering shared visions, and building collaborative school cultures, thereby driving improvements in school environments and teacher-staff dynamics (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). TFL enhances engagement, perceptions of change, and contributes to overall school improvement, yet its link with career adaptability in teacher education remains understudied. Limitations include insufficient individual teacher support and over-idealization, but its value lies in unlocking teachers' potential to advance educational goals.

Employability skills, including complex problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and communication, are a key predictor of career adaptability (De Guzman & Choi, 2013). Aligned with employer needs, these skills (combining technical and soft competencies) help fresh graduates navigate the global job market, cope with workplace changes, and secure employment. Teamwork also enhances job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance, further reinforcing adaptability. Social support from various sources is instrumental in fostering career adaptability, equipping individuals with the resources needed to navigate career decisions and uncertainties (Spurk et al., 2020)^[6]. It is a demonstrated predictor of adaptability among students, at times exceeding the predictive power of emotional tendencies and self-confidence. Key research gaps persist, however, regarding the differential effects of support types on various student demographics and the long-term consequences, which await longitudinal examination.

Current research on career adaptability in higher education has identified several influential factors, including personality traits, leadership influences, skills development, and social support systems. However, the existing literature remains fragmented, primarily due to insufficient analysis of variable interactions and limited consideration of specific regional contexts such as Sichuan Province. Within Sichuan's distinctive educational environment, the career adaptability of teacher graduates represents a critical factor for both individual career success and regional educational development. Nevertheless, relevant research remains scarce, with existing studies predominantly focused on macro-level career planning while failing to address localized challenges or develop integrated explanatory models.

This study aims to address these research gaps through systematic investigation of career adaptability among teacher education graduates in Sichuan Province. The research is guided by two fundamental questions:

1. What constitutes the causal model of career adaptability for teacher education graduates in Sichuan Province, China?
2. What is the guideline for career adaptability for teacher education graduates in Sichuan province China?

The purpose of formulating this guideline is to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for the graduates of teacher education programs in Sichuan Province, in order to systematically enhance their career adaptability. Specifically, it aims to strengthen individuals' career resources by cultivating positive personality traits and adaptability, while optimizing the environmental support for the education system by developing transformational leadership skills and a strong social network. Additionally, the formulation of this guideline is intended to enhance professional capabilities through systematically improving employment skills and establishing an evidence-based intervention mechanism that integrates personal, environmental, and skill development methods. By implementing this comprehensive framework, the teacher education system in Sichuan can build a sustainable career development transformation system, not only improving the employment outcomes of graduates but also promoting the improvement of educational quality in the region. This comprehensive approach will benefit numerous stakeholders - it can enhance the career adaptability of individual graduates, improve the vocational education capabilities of educational institutions, and ultimately cultivate a more adaptable and professionally competent teaching force for the constantly changing educational landscape in Sichuan.

2.METHODS:

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the professional adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan Province. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire survey of 400 graduates from seven teacher training institutions and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine relationships among personal characteristics, environmental factors, and professional adaptability. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 23 key informants from participating institutions. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled statistical validation

of theoretical relationships alongside contextual understanding of adaptation mechanisms, ensuring comprehensive insights through multiple methodological verifications.

2.1 Participants (Key Informants)

To guideline the development of career adaptability for teacher education graduates, there are 23 experts as sample to propose the guideline of this research about the adaptability and feasibility of the model which from the research, including 5 experts from Sichuan Normal University, 4 experts from Chengdu Normal University, 3 experts from Xihua Normal University, 3 experts from Mianyang Normal University, 3 experts from Neijiang Normal University, 3 experts from Leshan Normal University and 2 experts from Aba Normal University.

The interviewees should meet the following:

1. must have been engaged in teaching or management for at least 10 years
2. must have the title of professor and doctoral degree.
3. Participate in the subgroup meeting to develop guidelines.

This study selected 23 key informants following the principle of thematic saturation. The sample comprised administrators and professionals from seven teacher education universities in Sichuan Province, representing diverse institutional characteristics and geographical locations. Participants were purposively selected from three key domains: human resource management, employment services, and student career development. This approach ensured comprehensive data collection while maintaining analytical depth, providing a solid foundation for developing evidence-based career adaptability guidelines tailored to Sichuan's unique regional context.

2.2 Variables:

1. personality traits consists of observable variables: conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, extroversion, and neuroticism.
2. Transformational leadership, consists of observable variables: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.
3. Social support, consisting of school support, family support and friend support.
4. Employability skills consists of observable variables: complex problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, creativity skills, people management skills and coordinating with others skills.
5. Career adaptability for teacher education graduates in Sichuan province consists of the observable variables in terms of career adaptability: concern, control, curiosity and confidence.

2.3 Research Instrument:

The research instruments are questionnaires and in-depth interview guidelines, which contain the steps to create the tool by studying concepts and theories related to career adaptability, factors affecting career adaptability and from related research reviews to synthesize into a conceptual framework for research and conduct questionnaires and guidelines for in-depth interviews.

2.4 Data collection:

The researcher collects data with the following steps:

1. The researcher wrote a letter from the education administration programmed, South-East University, to propose to the university in Sichuan province China. There are 7 institutions: Sichuan Normal University, Xihua Normal University, Chengdu Normal University, Mianyang Normal University, Neijiang Normal University, Leshan Normal University and Aba Normal University for the courtesy of gathering information using questionnaires and in-depth interviews.
2. The researcher submits questionnaires and in-depth interview guidelines together with a letter requesting cooperation to each university in Sichuan province China as specified and follows up the results of data collection from the coordinator of each university in order to obtain questionnaires and key informants according to the number and qualifications specified.
3. The researcher uses the questionnaire obtained from the data collection to check the completeness of the questionnaire and then analyzes the data using statistical data analysis program.
4. The researcher used data from in-depth interviews to analyze to create guidelines for proposed guidelines for the casual model of career adaptability for teacher education graduates in Sichuan province China.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS:

3.1 Data analysis

This study employed ADANCO 2.3 for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis, which demonstrates robust performance under non-normal distribution conditions through bootstrap testing. The analytical procedure comprised four main components:

Descriptive Analysis: Frequency and percentage distributions were used to examine respondents' personal characteristics and individual measurement items.

Variable Analysis: Arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for all key constructs, including employability skills, personality traits, transformational leadership, social support, and career adaptability.

Causal Modeling: The analysis followed a systematic approach:

Conducted multicollinearity assessment using Pearson correlation coefficients and VIF values

Evaluated overall model fit through standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)

Assessed measurement model reliability and validity using factor loadings, composite reliability indices (ρ_A , ρ_c), average variance extracted (AVE), and heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Examined structural relationships through path coefficients, determination coefficients (R^2), and effect sizes (f^2)

Qualitative Analysis: Interview data underwent content analysis, with information categorized according to the research framework while maintaining inductive openness to emergent themes regarding career adaptability enhancement strategies.

Analysis of data from in-depth interviews to study the guidelines enhancing career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China Content Analysis was used, grouping data according to the research framework and using an inductive approach to identify approaches to enhancing career adaptability of teacher education graduates.

3.2 Data Results:

Descriptive Statistics: The sample consisted of 400 teacher education graduates from seven universities in Sichuan Province. The gender distribution was relatively balanced with 208 males (52.00%) and 192 females (48.00%). University representation showed Xihua Normal University (18.75%), Aba Normal University (15.25%), Neijiang Normal University (15.00%), Mianyang Normal University (13.50%), Leshan Normal University (13.50%), Sichuan Normal University (12.75%), and Chengdu Normal University (11.25%).

All measured variables demonstrated normal distribution characteristics, with skewness values ranging from -0.3148 to 0.199 and kurtosis values from -1.011 to -0.184, well within acceptable limits for structural equation modeling. Multicollinearity assessment revealed VIF values between 1.7197 and 3.4072, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

part1 Analysis of factors affecting career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China

Analysis of factors affecting career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China. includes personality traits, transformational leadership, social support, and employability skills. Using frequency, percentage, mean (Mean), standard deviation (SD), skewness, and kurtosis, the results are analyzed as shown in **Table 3.1** Mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of factors affecting career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China.

3.1 Personality Traits

(n = 400)

Personality Traits	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Conscientiousness	3.33	0.889	0.0375	-0.68
Agreeableness	3.27	0.841	0.1115	-0.713
Openness to experience	3.22	0.907	0.1314	-0.594
Extroversion	3.26	0.906	0.0186	-0.468
Neuroticism	3.27	0.926	-0.037	-0.574
Total	3.27	0.793	0.1317	-0.559

Table 3.1 shows that factors affecting career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China. The average values of the five dimensions are as follows, from high to low: Conscientiousness (Mean=3.33, SD=0.889), Agreeableness (Mean=3.27, SD=0.841), Neuroticism (Mean=3.27, SD=0.926), Extroversion (Mean=3.26, SD=0.906), and Openness to experience (Mean=3.22, SD=0.907), with skewness between -0.037 and 0.03754, kurtosis between -0.713 and -0.468.

Table 3.2 Mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of factors affecting career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China

3.2 Transformational leadership

(n = 400)

Transformational leadership	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Idealized influence	3.42	0.829	-0.0312	-0.555
Inspirational motivation	3.41	0.865	-0.2127	-0.409
Intellectual Stimulation	3.47	0.883	-0.3028	-0.464
Individualized consideration	3.47	0.922	-0.3148	-0.673
Total	3.44	0.775	-0.16	-0.706

Table 3.2 shows that factors affecting career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China. The average values of the four dimensions are as follows, from high to low: Intellectual Stimulation (Mean=3.47, SD=0.883), Individualized consideration (Mean=3.47, SD=0.922), Idealized influence (Mean=3.42, SD=0.829), and Inspirational motivation (Mean=3.41, SD=0.865), with skewness between -0.3148 and -0.0312, kurtosis between -0.673 and -0.409.

3.3 Social support

(n = 400)

Social support	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
School support	3.31	0.922	0.0403	-0.759
Family support	3.33	0.898	-0.2041	-0.799
Friend support	3.27	0.958	0.0809	-0.826
Total	3.31	0.836	0.091	-0.822

Table 3.3 shows that factors affecting career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China. The average values of the three dimensions are as follows: Family support (Mean=3.33, SD=0.898), School support (Mean=3.31, SD=0.922), and Friend support (Mean=3.27, SD=0.958), with skewness between -0.2041 and 0.0809, kurtosis between -0.826 and -0.759.

Table 3.4

3.4 Employability skills

(n = 400)

Employability skills	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Complex problem-solving skills	3.25	0.95	-0.16761	-0.724
Critical thinking skills	3.27	0.94	-0.03372	-0.428
Creativity skills	3.24	1.041	0.00976	-0.72
People management skills	3.19	0.917	-0.03485	-1.011
Coordinating with other skills	3.25	0.878	0.01116	-0.743
Total	3.24	0.842	0.05178	-0.844

Table3.4 shows that factors affecting career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China. The average values of the five dimensions are as follows, from high to low: Critical thinking skills (Mean=3.27, SD=0.94), Complex problem-solving skills (Mean=3.25, SD=0.95), Coordinating with other skills (Mean=3.25, SD=0.878), Creativity skills (Mean=3.24, SD=1.041), and People management skills (Mean=3.19, SD=0.917), with skewness between -0.16761 and 0.01116, kurtosis between -1.011 and -0.428.

An analysis of career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China, which includes concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis, the results are analyzed as shown in Table 4.5

3.5 Career Adaptability

(n = 400)

Career Adaptability	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Concern	3.28	0.882	0.0432	-0.517
Control	3.13	0.946	0.0662	-0.588
Curiosity	3.16	0.909	-0.022	-0.601
Confidence	3.24	0.907	0.0466	-0.568
Total	3.2	0.809	0.1433	-0.726

Table 3.5 shows that career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China. The average values of the four dimensions are as follows, from high to low: Concern (Mean=3.28, SD=0.882), Confidence (Mean=3.24, SD=0.907), Curiosity (Mean=3.16, SD=0.909), and Control (Mean=3.13, SD=0.946) with skewness between -0.022 and 0.0662, kurtosis between -0.601 and -0.517.

Part2 Causal model analysis of career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China
Causal model analysis of career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China has the following variables:

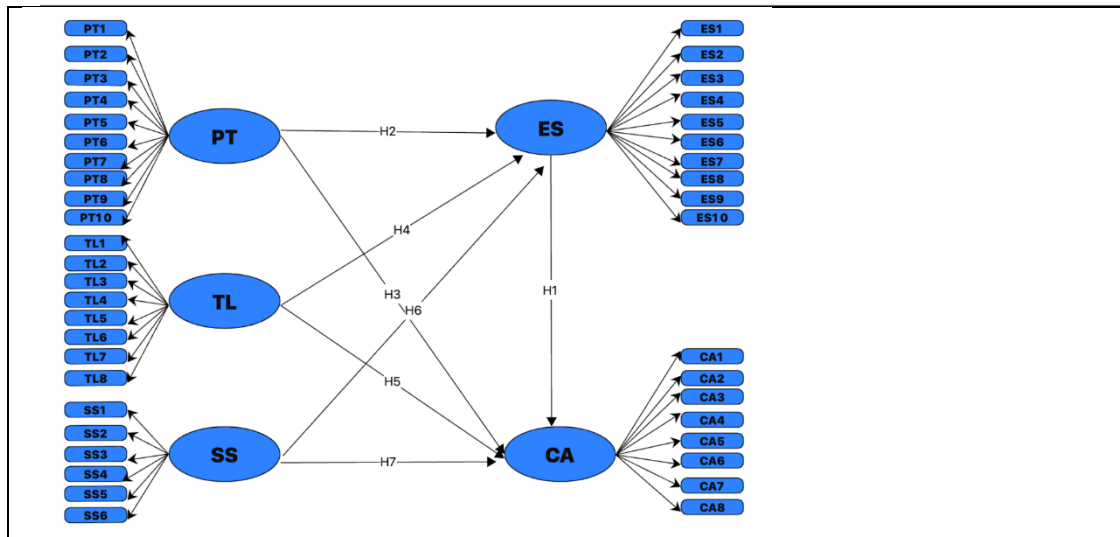


Figure 3.1 Relationships between variables in structural equation models.

Structural equation modeling has the following analysis steps: 1. Examination of hypothesis in the analysis of structural equation models. 2. Analysis of measurement models. 3. Analysis of causal models of career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China,

1. Examination of hypothesis in the analysis of structural equation models

Hypothesis testing in structural equation model analysis includes multivariate testing of the normal distribution hypothesis using skewness and kurtosis, and analysis of the relationship between observed variables using Pearson correlation coefficient.

Based on the statistical tests conducted, the dataset demonstrates acceptable properties for structural equation modeling. All observed variables show skewness values ranging from -0.512 to 0.199 and kurtosis values from -0.962 to -0.184, falling within the established thresholds of ± 2 for skewness and ± 7 for kurtosis, thus supporting the assumption of normal distribution. Furthermore, variance inflation factor (VIF) analysis reveals values between 1.7197 and 3.4072 across all 42 variables, well below the critical threshold of 10, confirming the absence of multicollinearity concerns in the measurement model. These results collectively validate the fundamental assumptions for proceeding with subsequent structural equation modeling analysis.

2. Measurement model analysis

The measurement model analysis of personality traits (PT) consists of 10 observed variables: conscientiousness (pt1, pt2), agreeableness (pt3, pt4), openness to experience (pt5, pt6), extroversion (pt7, pt8), neuroticism (pt9, pt10).

The transformational leadership (TL) contains 8 observed variables: idealized influence (tl1, tl2), inspirational motivation (tl3, tl4), Intellectual Stimulation (tl5, tl6), individualized consideration (tl7, tl8).

The social support (SS) contains 6 observed variables: school support (ss1, ss2), family support (ss3, ss4), friend support (ss5, ss6).

The employability skills (ES) contains 10 observed variables: complex problem-solving skills (es1, es2), critical thinking skills (es3, es4), creativity skills (es5, es6), people management skills (es7, es8), and coordinating with other skills (es9, es10).

The career adaptability (CA) contains 8 observed variables: concern (ca1, ca2), control (ca3, ca4), curiosity (ca5, ca6), curiosity (ca7, ca8).

Table 3.6 The overall model evaluation

Fit Index	criterion	value
SRMR	<0.05	0.0397
d_{ULS}	HI95= 1.2759 HI99= 1.3598	1.4244
d_G	HI95= 0.5171 HI99= 0.5496	0.5663

SRMR= 0.0397, d_{ULS} =1.4244, d_G = 0.5663

3. Analysis of structural equation models

Analysis of Structural Equation Model No. 1 Analysis of Structural Equation Model to Study Causal Factors of career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China. There are personality traits (PT) latent variable, transformational leadership (TL) latent variable and social support (SS) latent variable are

external passive variables. The underlying employability skills (ES) latent variable and career adaptability (CA) latent variable are internal latent variables, resulting from the analysis of the structure equation model No.1 as shown in Table 4.21 to Table 4.23.

Table 3.7 Path coefficient, Indirect effect and total effect of structural model

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	β	Indirect effect	Total effect	f^2	stat	p	R^2
PT	ES	0.3029		0.3029	0.1526	7.7655	0.000	0.5293
	CA	0.3043	0.0656	0.3699	0.2029	10.7901	0.000	
TL	ES	0.3473		0.3473	0.2032	8.2558	0.000	0.5293
	CA	0.2874	0.0752	0.3626	0.1756	11.057	0.000	
SS	ES	0.303		0.303	0.159	7.5818	0.000	0.5293
	CA	0.2729	0.0656	0.3385	0.1688	10.8468	0.000	
ES	CA	0.2165		0.2165	0.0712	4.8894	0.000	

Personality traits (PT) has a significant effect on employability skills (ES) at a significant level of 0.05 with a total effect of 0.3029.

Personality traits (PT) has a significant effect on career adaptability (CA) at a significant level of 0.05 with a direct effect of 0.3043, indirect effect of 0.0656 and total effect of 0.3699.

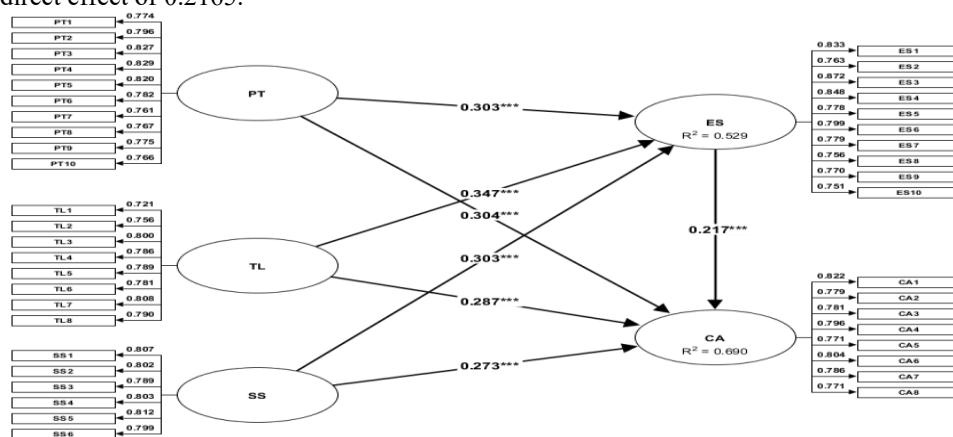
Transformational leadership (TL) has a significant effect on employability skills (ES) at a significant level of 0.05 with a total effect of 0.3473.

Transformational leadership (TL) has a significant effect on career adaptability (CA) at a significant level of 0.05 with a direct effect of 0.2874, indirect effect of 0.0752 and total effect of 0.3626.

Social support (SS) has a significant effect on employability skills (ES) at a significant level of 0.05 with a direct effect of 0.303.

Social support (SS) has a significant effect on career adaptability (CA) at a significant level of 0.05 with a direct effect of 0.2729, indirect effect of 0.0656 and total effect of 0.3385.

Employability skills (ES) has a significant effect on career adaptability (CA) at a significant level of 0.05 with a direct effect of 0.2165.



Note * $p < .05$ = statistically significant

Figure 3.2 Causal model of career adaptability of teacher education graduates in Sichuan province, China.

Part 3 Interview information analysis

Interview analysis identified four critical factors influencing career adaptability: personality traits (conscientiousness, emotional stability), transformational leadership (mentorship, role modeling), social support (school, family, peers), and employability skills (problem-solving, creativity).

Three-level recommendations emerged:

Individual: Develop self-awareness and professional skills

Institutional: Integrate assessment and training programs

Policy: Establish support systems and certification standards

Findings demonstrate career adaptability requires integrated development of personal characteristics, environmental support, and professional competencies.

4.CONCLUSION

This study successfully constructed and verified a comprehensive causal model of the professional adaptability of teachers' education graduates in Sichuan Province, China. The research results indicate that professional adaptability is jointly shaped by personality traits, transformational leadership, social support, and employment skills, among which employment skills play a crucial mediating role.

The results of the structural equation model confirmed all the hypothesized relationships, revealing that personality traits ($\beta=0.304$), transformational leadership ($\beta=0.287$), social support ($\beta=0.273$), and employment skills ($\beta=0.217$) have significant direct effects on professional adaptability. Moreover, employment skills partially mediate the relationship between the three antecedent variables and the professional adaptation outcome.

The qualitative insights obtained from expert interviews enriched these research results, highlighting the actual manifestations of each factor in the educational environment. This study contributes to the theory of career construction, as it empirically validates a comprehensive framework that integrates personal traits, environmental factors, and skill capabilities into the unique teacher education environment in China.

Based on these findings, multiple-level recommendations are proposed: at the individual level, cultivate self-awareness and professional skills; at the institutional level, incorporate personality assessment and leadership training into the curriculum system; at the policy level, establish support systems and certification standards. Future research should expand the geographical scope, adopt a longitudinal design, and examine cross-cultural differences to further advance the understanding of the professional adaptation mechanism.

This study not only provides theoretical contributions to the literature on career development but also offers practical significance for improving the professional readiness of teacher graduates through comprehensive and multi-dimensional intervention measures.

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