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Adapting to the Unknown: Career Adaptability as a Predictor of Self-Efficacy in Teachers During Emergency Remote Teaching

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced educational institutions worldwide to shift abruptly to emergency remote teaching (ERT), placing unprecedented demands on teachers' psychological and professional resources. This quantitative study examined the levels of career adaptability and general self-efficacy among Greek secondary education teachers during the ERT period, as well as the relationship between these two constructs. A sample of 202 secondary school teachers (75.2% female; M age = 47.37, SD = 8.69) completed the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale – Short Form (CAAS-SF; Maggiori *et al.*, 2017 ^[15]) and the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE; Chen *et al.*, 2001 ^[12]). Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVAs, Pearson correlations, and reliability analyses

(Cronbach's α) were conducted using SPSS 26. Results indicated high mean levels of career adaptability (M = 3.98, SD = 0.65) and self-efficacy (M = 3.83, SD = 0.60). All four career adaptability dimensions (concern, control, curiosity, confidence) were significantly and positively correlated with self-efficacy ($p < .05$). Demographic and occupational variables (gender, employment status, school type, years of experience) showed differential effects on the examined constructs. These findings highlight the critical role of career adaptability in supporting teachers' self-efficacy during crisis-driven transitions and have implications for professional development programmes and educational policy.

Keywords: Career Adaptability, Self-Efficacy, Emergency Remote Teaching, COVID-19, Secondary Education Teachers, Greece

1. Introduction

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the spread of COVID-19 a global pandemic (WHO, 2020) ^[24]. Within days, governments around the world implemented emergency measures — lockdowns, school closures, and suspension of in-person activities — to contain the spread of the virus. For educational systems, the consequences were immediate and far-reaching: teachers were required to transition, with little or no preparation, from traditional classroom instruction to emergency remote teaching (ERT) via digital platforms (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Bao, 2020) ^[1, 8].

This unprecedented shift demanded that teachers rapidly acquire new digital competencies, redesign their instructional approaches, and manage students' academic engagement in an entirely new medium (Mahmood, 2020; König *et al.*, 2020) ^[16, 14]. The result was heightened workload, increased uncertainty, and significant professional challenges, particularly for teachers with limited prior experience in online instruction (Pressley, 2021; Sokal *et al.*, 2020) ^[18, 22].

Against this backdrop, two psychological constructs become especially relevant: career adaptability and general self-efficacy. Career adaptability — defined as the readiness and resources of individuals to cope with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, traumas, and challenges of occupational development (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) ^[19] — provides a framework for understanding how teachers mobilise their professional coping resources in the face of radical change. Self-efficacy, rooted in Bandura's (1977) ^[5] Social Cognitive Theory, refers to individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to execute behaviours necessary to produce specific performance attainments.

Although both constructs have been studied extensively in educational contexts, their relationship specifically within the ERT context in Greece has not previously been investigated. This gap is particularly significant given that the Greek educational system was unprepared for large-scale digital instruction and that Greek teachers faced unique technological, institutional, and psychosocial challenges during the pandemic (Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou *et al.*, 2018) ^[20].

The present study therefore aims to: (a) measure levels of career adaptability and self-efficacy among Greek secondary education teachers during ERT; (b) examine the relationship between the two constructs; and (c) explore the role of demographic and occupational variables in shaping these levels.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Career Adaptability

Career adaptability is conceptualised as a psychosocial resource that individuals use to manage vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) [19]. The construct is operationalised through four dimensions: Concern (future orientation toward one's career), Control (taking responsibility for one's career), Curiosity (exploring possible selves and future scenarios), and Confidence (belief in one's ability to pursue aspirations).

Research has consistently linked career adaptability to positive occupational outcomes, including job performance, work engagement, and resilience in the face of organisational change (Collie & Martin, 2016; Tladinyane & Van der Merwe, 2015) [13,23]. In educational settings, teacher adaptability has been identified as a predictor of well-being, instructional effectiveness, and students' academic outcomes (Collie & Martin, 2016) [13].

The sudden shift to ERT constitutes a form of occupational trauma (Bransford *et al.*, 2005) [10] that tests all four dimensions of career adaptability. Teachers with higher adaptability resources are expected to demonstrate greater concern for their professional trajectory, take control of their learning of new tools, explore novel pedagogical strategies, and maintain confidence in their teaching abilities.

2.2 Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1977, 1997) [5, 7], refers to people's judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. In the educational domain, teacher self-efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs in their capacity to successfully perform professional duties and overcome challenges related to instruction (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) [11, 21].

Teacher self-efficacy is shaped by four key sources of information: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1994) [6]. High self-efficacy is associated with increased effort, persistence, innovation, and emotional resilience — qualities that are particularly critical in crisis contexts such as pandemic-driven remote teaching (Pressley, 2021; Baroudi & Shaya, 2022) [18, 9].

Research conducted during the COVID-19 period has found that teachers with higher self-efficacy reported lower burnout (Sokal *et al.*, 2020) [22], greater satisfaction with digital instruction (Bao, 2020) [8], and better student outcomes in online environments (Aliyyah *et al.*, 2020) [3].

2.3 The Relationship Between Career Adaptability and Self-Efficacy

Theoretical and empirical links between career adaptability and self-efficacy have been established across various professional contexts. Atitsogbe *et al.* (2019) [4]

demonstrated that career adaptability positively predicted self-efficacy in samples of students and job-seekers. Similarly, Collie *et al.* (as cited in Mpoubaras *et al.*, 2022 [17]) found that teacher adaptability was associated with higher self-efficacy beliefs and more optimistic career orientations.

The relationship is theoretically coherent: individuals who perceive themselves as able to manage occupational transitions (high adaptability) are more likely to believe in their capacity to execute the required tasks associated with those transitions (high self-efficacy). In the context of ERT, this suggests that teachers who mobilise their adaptability resources are better positioned to maintain robust self-efficacy beliefs despite the disruption caused by the pandemic.

To date, however, this relationship has not been empirically tested among Greek secondary school teachers during ERT. The present study fills this gap.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was employed. The choice of this design was appropriate for the aims of the study, which sought to describe levels of the target constructs and examine associations between them at a single point in time.

3.2 Participants

The sample comprised 202 secondary education teachers (N = 202) working in state schools in Greece. Of these, 75.2% were female (n = 152) and 24.8% were male (n = 50). Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 65 years (M = 47.37, SD = 8.69). The majority were married (72.8%), held postgraduate qualifications (55.9%), and were permanently employed (79.7%). In terms of school type, 40.6% taught in general lower secondary schools (Gymnasio) and 33.7% in general upper secondary schools (Lykeio), with the remainder working in special education institutions. Years of teaching experience ranged from 1 to over 27 years, with the largest group having 13–20 years of experience (31.2%). Sampling was conducted through convenience sampling, with questionnaire links distributed across multiple secondary schools.

3.3 Instruments

Career Adapt-Abilities Scale – Short Form (CAAS-SF). The CAAS-SF (Maggiori *et al.*, 2017) [15] is a 12-item measure assessing the four dimensions of career adaptability: Concern (3 items), Control (3 items), Curiosity (3 items), and Confidence (3 items). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not strong to 5 = strongest). The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties in international and Greek samples (Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou *et al.*, 2018) [20]. In the current study, Cronbach's α values were: Concern = .88, Control = .74, Curiosity = .84, Confidence = .83, and total scale = .90.

New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE). The NGSE (Chen *et al.*, 2001) [12] is a unidimensional 8-item scale assessing general self-efficacy beliefs (e.g., 'I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself'). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The scale has demonstrated validity and

reliability in Greek populations (Alexopoulos & Asimakopoulou, 2009) [2]. Internal consistency in the current study was $\alpha = .89$.

3.4 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

An online questionnaire protocol was developed using Google Forms and distributed to teachers in secondary schools across Greece. Participation was entirely voluntary. The protocol included an informed consent section detailing the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, data confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw at any time without consequence. No deception was employed. Data were exported to Excel and subsequently analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the main study variables are presented in Table 1. Teachers reported high mean levels across all dimensions of career adaptability and for general self-efficacy.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency for Main Study Variables (N = 202)

Variable	M	SD	Cronbach's α	Range
Career Adaptability (Total)	3.98	0.65	.90	1–5
Concern	3.72	0.88	.88	1–5
Control	3.90	0.84	.74	1–5
Curiosity	4.05	0.73	.84	1–5
Confidence	4.26	0.73	.83	1–5
General Self-Efficacy	3.83	0.60	.89	1–5

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

4.2 Demographic and Occupational Differences

Independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant gender differences on career adaptability or self-efficacy ($p > .05$). Regarding employment status, permanently employed teachers did not significantly differ from supply teachers on either construct ($p > .05$). One-way ANOVA indicated that school type had a significant effect on certain dimensions of career adaptability, with teachers in special education institutions reporting higher mean scores on Concern and Confidence compared to those in mainstream schools. Years of experience showed a small but significant positive correlation with career adaptability total score ($r = .18, p < .05$), suggesting that more experienced teachers reported marginally higher adaptability. No significant effect of marital status or educational level was found on the main study variables.

4.3 Relationships Between Career Adaptability and Self-Efficacy

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlations between all four dimensions of career adaptability and general self-efficacy (all $p < .05$). Results are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Correlations Between Career Adaptability Dimensions and Self-Efficacy

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-Efficacy	—				
2. CA – Concern	.31**	—			
3. CA – Control	.38**	.52**	—		
4. CA – Curiosity	.29**	.48**	.55**	—	
5. CA – Confidence	.44**	.47**	.61**	.58**	—
6. CA – Total	.43**	.77**	.82**	.79**	.82**

Note. CA = Career Adaptability. ** $p < .01$.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated career adaptability and general self-efficacy among Greek secondary education teachers during the emergency remote teaching period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Three main findings emerged.

First, teachers reported high overall levels of both career adaptability ($M = 3.98$) and self-efficacy ($M = 3.83$). This is consistent with research suggesting that experienced teachers may draw on accumulated professional knowledge and skills to maintain a sense of competence even under challenging conditions (Collie & Martin, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) [13, 21]. The highest adaptability subscale score was recorded for Confidence ($M = 4.26$), which may reflect teachers' general trust in their professional capabilities, even if their specific digital skills were limited. Second, career adaptability was significantly and positively correlated with self-efficacy across all four dimensions. This finding aligns with existing theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence (Atitsogbe *et al.*, 2019; Mpoubaras *et al.*, 2022) [4, 17], and extends them to the specific context of pandemic-driven ERT. Teachers who demonstrated higher concern for their professional futures, took control of their development, explored new pedagogical possibilities, and expressed confidence in their abilities were also more likely to hold strong self-efficacy beliefs. This supports the notion that career adaptability functions as a psychological resource that underpins effective professional functioning under conditions of radical change.

Third, demographic and occupational factors showed selective effects. Notably, years of experience was positively — albeit modestly — related to career adaptability, suggesting that professional socialisation and accumulated experience may contribute to adaptability over time. School type also differentiated teachers on some adaptability dimensions, with special education teachers reporting higher scores on certain subscales. This may reflect the greater degree of individualisation and flexibility inherent in special education settings, which could cultivate adaptive dispositions in teachers.

These findings have practical implications. School leaders and policymakers should invest in professional development initiatives that explicitly target career adaptability skills — not only technical training in digital tools but also the reflective and metacognitive competencies associated with concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Furthermore,

fostering self-efficacy through mastery experiences, peer modelling, and institutional support can be expected to strengthen teachers' capacity to manage future crises effectively.

5.1 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, both measures relied on self-report, which is susceptible to social desirability bias and limited self-insight. Second, the sample was drawn through convenience sampling, limiting generalisability to the broader population of Greek secondary education teachers. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences: while career adaptability was treated as a predictor of self-efficacy, the reverse direction or mutual influence cannot be ruled out. Future longitudinal studies using objective performance measures and random sampling would strengthen the evidence base.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Greek secondary education teachers maintained high levels of career adaptability and self-efficacy during the emergency remote teaching period, and that the two constructs were significantly and positively linked. Career adaptability — particularly the dimensions of control and confidence — emerged as a robust correlate of self-efficacy in this crisis context. These findings underscore the importance of supporting teachers' adaptive professional identities as a foundation for resilient and effective teaching in the face of unprecedented disruption.

7. References

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