



The Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence on the Relationship between Helicopter Parenting and Career Adaptability in Generation Z in the Artificial Intelligence Era

Chantika Aditya Prameswari^{1*}, Oktavina Rahmadani S

^{1*}Poltekkes Kemenkes Padang, Indonesia, ²Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol, Indonesia

*Co e-mail: cpameswari0712@gmail.com¹

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ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has created uncertainty in career trajectories, making career adaptability an essential competency for Generation Z entering an AI-disrupted labor market. However, helicopter parenting, characterized by excessive parental control and overinvolvement, may hinder the development of this capability. This study examined the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between perceived helicopter parenting and career adaptability among Indonesian Generation Z university students. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected from 326 students (M age = 21.4 years, SD = 1.8) using validated measures of helicopter parenting, emotional intelligence, and career adaptability. Structural Equation Modeling with bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was employed for data analysis. Results showed that helicopter parenting negatively predicted career adaptability both directly and indirectly through emotional intelligence, with emotional intelligence partially mediating the relationship and accounting for 34.2% of the total effect. These findings indicate that overprotective parenting reduces career adaptability partly by limiting the development of emotional competencies needed to navigate career transitions. The study highlights the importance of fostering emotional intelligence as a protective factor to strengthen career readiness among Generation Z in an AI-shaped workforce.

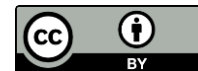


INTRODUCTION

The emergence of artificial intelligence has fundamentally reshaped the nature of work, introducing unprecedented volatility into career trajectories. Generation Z individuals broadly born between 1997 and 2012 are entering the labor market at a moment when traditional, linear career paths are dissolving into fluid journeys that demand continuous adaptation, reskilling, and openness to change (Lyons, 2023), a pattern reinforced by career-sustainability research showing that renewability and continuous skill development have become defining features of contemporary careers (Chin et al., 2022). Large-scale survey evidence corroborates this shift: a majority of Generation Z workers who use generative AI report that it is fueling anxiety about their career prospects, and most say AI's growing prevalence will require them to reskill and reconsider their career decisions altogether (Deloitte, 2024). At the organizational level, AI is simultaneously automating routine tasks and elevating distinctly human competencies including adaptability and emotional intelligence to the status of essential workplace skills, driving a parallel need for large-scale upskilling and reskilling initiatives (Morandini et al., 2023; Pandya & Wang, 2024). Employees' own attitudes toward incorporating AI into their work have, in turn, been shown to shape their career self-management behaviors (Presbitero & Teng-Calleja, 2023). Within this volatile environment, career adaptability the psychosocial resource individuals draw upon to manage career transitions, occupational tasks, and unforeseen disruptions has become an indispensable competency for long-term career success.

At the same time, a familial dynamic may be quietly working against the development of this competency: helicopter parenting. Defined by excessive parental involvement, close monitoring, and a tendency to intervene and remove obstacles from a child's path, helicopter parenting has grown increasingly visible among emerging adults, including in Indonesia (Prayoga, 2026; Widya, 2026). Although typically rooted in love and protective intent, this parenting style has been repeatedly linked to poorer autonomy, weaker self-efficacy, and diminished psychological well-being in the people it is meant to protect (Kocsis et al., 2025). The Indonesian setting adds a layer of cultural complexity to this picture. As a collectivist society that prizes close family bonds and intergenerational interdependence, ongoing parental involvement in young adults' academic, social, and career decisions is culturally normative and, in many families, actively expected (Prayoga, 2026). This cultural backdrop makes it difficult to distinguish supportive involvement from developmentally inappropriate over-involvement, and may obscure without eliminating the harmful downstream effects of helicopter parenting described in the broader literature (Cui et al., 2022).

Emotional intelligence the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and make use of emotions may be a critical mechanism linking these two phenomena. Parents who hover and over-protect can inadvertently deprive their children of the very experiences through which emotional competence is built: navigating setbacks, resolving interpersonal conflict, and coping independently with failure. Consistent with this reasoning, helicopter parenting that restricts autonomy has been shown to significantly impair emotion regulation among emerging adults, with poor impulse



control and reduced emotional clarity emerging as robust mediating mechanisms linking helicopter parenting to mental-health difficulties (Nguyen et al., 2024). Overprotective parenting has similarly been associated with heightened emotional volatility among Generation Z, with mental toughness operating as a key mediating pathway (Mehmood, 2026).

These impaired emotional competencies, in turn, are theorized to be essential for career adaptability enabling individuals to manage the anxiety and ambiguity that accompany career transitions (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026). Notably, the direction of influence between parenting and emotional adjustment may not be unidirectional. Longitudinal evidence from Chinese emerging adults indicates that emotional problems in young people can themselves predict increased helicopter behavior from parents over time, with reduced autonomy acting as the mediating pathway suggesting a possible reciprocal or bidirectional dynamic rather than a simple one-way causal chain (Gao et al., 2022). This nuance underscores the value of testing the hypothesized directional model explicitly within a single, integrated sample, as undertaken in the present study.

Helicopter parenting refers to a parenting style marked by excessive involvement, control, and intervention in a child's life, frequently persisting well into emerging adulthood. Core features include intensive monitoring of a child's activities and decisions, solving problems on the child's behalf rather than allowing independent problem-solving, proactively removing obstacles and shielding the child from negative consequences, and intervening across academic, social, and increasingly, professional domains (Cui et al., 2022).

Person-centered research indicates that helicopter parenting is not a monolithic style: distinct maternal and paternal profiles exist ranging from "warm helicopter" to more "controlling helicopter" patterns that co-occur with parental warmth and psychological control to differing degrees (Padilla-Walker et al., 2021), and a systematic review spanning dozens of studies has linked helicopter parenting to elevated symptoms of anxiety and depression among emerging adults (Vigdal & Brønnick, 2022). A systematic review by Kocsis et al. (2025) identified consistent negative associations between helicopter parenting and autonomy, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being across the extant literature.

Directly relevant to the present study, LeBlanc and Lyons (2022) found that emerging adults who perceived higher levels of helicopter parenting reported significantly lower career adaptability and shallower career exploration. Extending this line of work, Park et al. (2025) demonstrated that helicopter parenting undermines career decision-making self-efficacy and heightens fear of failure, which together cloud the clarity of career decisions a mediation pathway distinct from, but complementary to, the emotional-intelligence pathway examined here. Overparenting more broadly has been associated with negative outcomes spanning the psychological, academic, and career domains of emerging adulthood (Cui et al., 2022), and has been shown to elevate career indecision through the mediating mechanisms of career-related expectation stress and reduced decision self-efficacy (Wang, 2023).

In the Indonesian context specifically, Prayoga (2026) observed that helicopter parenting is increasingly visible in urban areas, where parents remain deeply involved in their emerging-adult



children's academic decisions, social relationships, and career choices. Popular commentary echoes this pattern, describing a phenomenon of "career co-piloting" in which parents actively intervene in their children's career paths (Widya, 2026). A systematic review of parental involvement in career decision-making across Asian collectivist countries similarly concluded that emotional support, guidance, and direct parental participation can enhance career decision self-efficacy while simultaneously constraining autonomy because of prevailing cultural expectations (Damas & Kurniawati, 2025), a pattern echoed in Indonesian medical students, among whom parental influence was found to meaningfully shape self-efficacy and career exploration (Jasmon et al., 2020). Related work among Chinese vocational students likewise found that career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy serially mediate the relationship between parental autonomy support and academic engagement, underscoring that the quality not merely the presence of parental involvement matters for downstream career outcomes (Jiang et al., 2022). The collectivist cultural context, however, may normalize excessive involvement, making it more difficult for individuals themselves to recognize its potentially detrimental effects.

Career adaptability is understood as a psychosocial resource denoting an individual's readiness to cope with current and anticipated career tasks, transitions, and disruptions. The construct is commonly organized around four dimensions: concern for one's vocational future, control over one's own career decisions, curiosity in exploring career possibilities, and confidence in one's ability to pursue and attain career goals (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026). Within this framework, emotional perception is theorized to foster career concern, emotional understanding to support career curiosity, and emotional management to strengthen career control and confidence (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026).

In the AI era, career adaptability has taken on heightened importance. The accelerating pace of technological change means careers are no longer linear but instead require continuous learning, active skill development, and a willingness to pivot as roles are automated, redefined, or created anew (Lyons, 2023). Generation Z's capacity to adapt will substantially determine how successfully this generation navigates an increasingly uncertain labor market, and organizational factors such as emotional support and diversity management have themselves been found to shape how well Generation Z workers achieve person-job fit through career adaptability (Zhou et al., 2025).

Emotional intelligence encompasses the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and effectively deploy emotions in oneself and in others. EI functions as a kind of meta-capacity that facilitates adaptive behavior and supports personal adjustment to career-related challenges (Pong & Leung, 2023). Among Chinese youth, self-emotional appraisal and the appraisal of others' emotions emerged as the most predictive EI dimensions, together explaining 69.4% of the variance in career-related confidence (Pong & Leung, 2023). Generation Z, in particular, appears to display distinctive patterns of emotional openness and expression, shaped jointly by broader cultural trends and pervasive technology integration (Rothschadl, 2025). Emotional intelligence appears to be substantially shaped by lived experience particularly experiences of navigating conflict, coping with failure, and working through challenges without external rescue. Because helicopter parenting

removes many of these formative experiences, it plausibly impedes EI development; consistent with this, parental over-involvement that restricts autonomy has been linked to significantly poorer emotion regulation among emerging adults, with emotion dysregulation itself functioning as a robust mediator between helicopter parenting and mental-health outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Emotional intelligence is, in turn, a well-documented predictor of career adaptability. A two-wave study found that EI predicts career adaptability with a direct, causally-ordered positive effect (Parmentier et al., 2019, as synthesized in later work), and cross-sectional evidence among Chinese youth corroborates a significant positive EI–career adaptability association (Pong & Leung, 2023). Career adaptability itself has also been shown to partially mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and achievement motivation among Indonesian Generation Z students, with a mediation coefficient of 0.39 (Ginting, 2022) offering indirect but converging support for treating EI and career adaptability as closely interlinked constructs within Generation Z samples. Resilience has separately been identified as a mediator of the EI career adaptability relationship (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026), and career resilience has been shown to mediate the relationship between Generation Z's EI and broader career outcomes, although at least one study found this relationship ran counter to prior expectations, with EI negatively correlated with career resilience in that particular Gen Z sample (Barhate et al., 2024) a reminder that the EI career-adaptability link, while generally positive, may not be uniform across all Gen Z populations or measurement approaches.

This study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which holds that optimal psychological functioning depends on the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, each of which makes an independent and non-substitutable contribution to well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2022). A recent meta-review synthesizing findings across 60 published meta-analyses lends broad empirical support to SDT's central claims, including the robust role of psychological need satisfaction and frustration in shaping outcomes ranging from wellness to psychopathology across life domains such as parenting, education, and organizational settings (Ryan et al., 2022).

Helicopter parenting is theorized to undermine autonomy by restricting independent decision-making, to compromise competence by removing challenges and mastery experiences, and to distort relatedness by fostering dependency rather than genuine connection. These deprivations, in turn, are proposed to hinder the development of emotional intelligence particularly the capacity to manage emotions under difficulty. Resilience-buffering evidence lends further support to this framework: resilience has been shown to attenuate the adverse effects of helicopter parenting on emerging adults' mental health (Seki et al., 2023), suggesting that the psychological resources undermined by overparenting (of which emotional intelligence is one) may otherwise have protected against negative outcomes. Similarly, parental support the more adaptive counterpart to helicopter parenting has been found to exert both a direct effect on Generation Z career adaptability and an indirect effect mediated through future work-self clarity (Pratiwi & Salim, 2025), reinforcing the broader premise that the quality (not merely the quantity) of parental involvement shapes downstream career competencies through identifiable psychological mechanisms. Career



adaptability, as a psychosocial resource, is understood to rely heavily on these same emotional competencies: managing anxiety about the future underpins the concern dimension, emotional regulation supports decisive action within the control dimension, openness to novel experience feeds the curiosity dimension, and emotional resilience sustains persistence within the confidence dimension (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026). Emotional intelligence, rather than autonomy or competence measured directly, is proposed as the mediating mechanism here because it functions as a downstream, integrative marker of need frustration across all three SDT needs at once: an individual whose autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs have gone unmet under sustained parental over-involvement would be expected to show this deficit behaviorally as a reduced capacity to perceive, regulate, and use emotions, making emotional intelligence a more proximal and readily measurable precursor to career adaptability than any single need-satisfaction score. Nonetheless, because autonomy, competence, and relatedness were not measured separately in this study, the present design cannot determine which specific psychological need (or combination of needs) most strongly drives the observed helicopter-parenting–emotional-intelligence link, a question that future research using validated SDT need-satisfaction measures could test directly.

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical evidence reviewed above, the following hypotheses were formulated: helicopter parenting negatively predicts career adaptability (H1) and emotional intelligence (H2) among Generation Z university students in Indonesia, emotional intelligence positively predicts career adaptability (H3), and emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between helicopter parenting and career adaptability (H4).

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design structured around a mediation framework. A cross-sectional design was appropriate given the study's focus on examining relationships among variables measured concurrently and testing a mediation model, rather than establishing strict causal ordering a limitation that is addressed further in Section 4.3. Participants were 326 Generation Z university students recruited from six universities across Indonesia. Inclusion criteria were: age between 18 and 26 years, consistent with the commonly used Generation Z age range; current enrollment in an undergraduate or graduate program; having at least one parent actively involved in the participant's life; and willingness to provide informed consent. The participant characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	98	30.1%
	Female	228	69.9%
Age	18–20 years	112	34.4%



	21–23 years	154	47.2%
	24–26 years	60	18.4%
Year of Study	1st year	41	12.6%
	2nd year	67	20.6%
	3rd year	89	27.3%
	4th year	101	31.0%
	Graduate	28	8.6%
University Type	Public	198	60.7%
	Private	128	39.3%

The predominance of female participants (69.9%) is broadly consistent with the gender distribution typically observed in psychology and social science programs in Indonesian universities, and mirrors patterns reported in comparable regional studies of Generation Z career development (Ginting, 2022). This gender imbalance means the sample is not representative of Generation Z university students as a whole, and the findings should be generalized to male students, non-university populations, or other cultural contexts with caution (see Section 4.3).

Three validated instruments were used to measure the key constructs. Helicopter parenting was measured using a 15-item adaptation of the Helicopter Parenting Instrument originally developed by Odenweller et al. (2014), assessing perceived parental over-involvement, control, and intervention across academic, social, and career domains, consistent with the conceptualization used in recent systematic reviews of the construct (Kocsis et al., 2025). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Sample items included "My parents try to solve problems for me before I have a chance to solve them myself" and "My parents are overly involved in decisions about my career." In this study, the scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

Emotional intelligence was measured using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), adapted for the Indonesian context. The WLEIS comprises 16 items spanning four dimensions self-emotional appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion consistent with the dimensional structure highlighted as most predictive of career-related outcomes in recent EI research on Asian youth samples (Pong & Leung, 2023). The instrument's four-factor structure and construct validity have been repeatedly confirmed in non-Western, non-original-language samples, including a recent validation in the Indian hospitality workforce that reported strong composite reliability and adequate convergent validity for all four subscales (Traymbak et al., 2022), supporting the scale's suitability for adaptation and use in the Indonesian sample of the present study. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), and the scale showed excellent internal consistency in this study (Cronbach's $\alpha =$



.92). Career adaptability was measured using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS), Indonesian version, comprising 24 items across four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence the same four-dimensional structure applied in recent Gen Z career-adaptability research (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026) and formally documented as a cross-nationally valid meta-competency framework for career construction (Hartung & Savickas, 2023). The short-form variant of the CAAS has likewise demonstrated a factor structure and internal consistency equivalent to the full-length version among early-career university graduates in China, supporting the broader cross-cultural robustness of the instrument (Song et al., 2023). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not strong to 5 = strongest), and the scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Data collection took place between January and March 2026. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Health Research Ethics Committee of Poltekkes Kemenkes Padang (approval no. 2026/KEPK-PKP/003) prior to data collection. Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Online questionnaires were distributed via university student groups on WhatsApp, Line, and Instagram. Each questionnaire began with an informed-consent page explaining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality assurances; no identifying information (e.g., name, student ID, or contact details) was collected, and each response was linked only to a system-generated numeric code to preserve participant anonymity. Because the survey touched on sensitive family and psychological content, a closing debriefing note reminded participants that they could skip any item or withdraw at any point without penalty and provided contact information for a university counseling service should any item cause discomfort; no adverse events were reported during data collection. Data collection yielded 326 valid responses after screening for incomplete data and verifying eligibility against the inclusion criteria; an additional 14 responses were excluded during this screening because of substantial missingness (more than 10% of items left blank) or failed attention checks, and no further missing values were present in the final analytic sample, so no imputation procedure was required. Data analysis proceeded in three stages using SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 26.0. First, descriptive statistics and preliminary analysis were conducted, including means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability coefficients. Univariate normality was assessed via skewness (ranging from -0.41 to 0.58) and kurtosis (ranging from -0.52 to 0.71) values, all within the recommended ± 2 threshold, and multivariate normality was evaluated using Mardia's coefficient of multivariate kurtosis; no multivariate outliers were identified using Mahalanobis distance ($p < .001$ criterion). Because all three constructs were assessed using self-report measures completed by the same respondents, Harman's single-factor test was also conducted to evaluate the potential for common method bias: an unrotated exploratory factor analysis extracted eight factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, and the first (largest) factor accounted for 28.7% of the total variance, below the 50% threshold conventionally used to suggest that common method bias is not a serious concern, although this test alone cannot rule out shared-method variance entirely (see Section 4.3). Second, measurement model assessment was performed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the fit of the measurement model, including factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance

extracted (AVE). Third, structural model and mediation testing employed structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation to test the hypothesized relationships. Mediation was assessed using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples to generate 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effect.

RESULTS

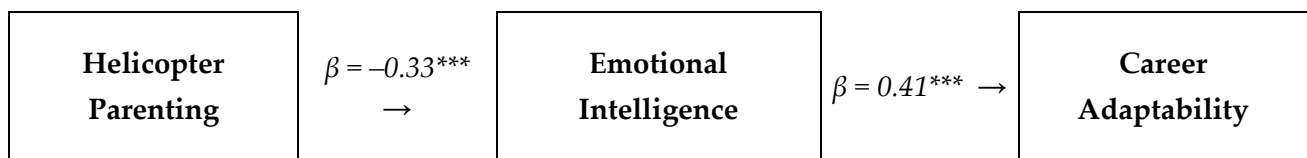
1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Helicopter Parenting	3.34	.72	(.89)		
2. Emotional Intelligence	4.56	.95	-.38**	(.92)	
3. Career Adaptability	3.78	.68	-.41**	.52**	(.94)

Note. Values in parentheses on the diagonal represent Cronbach's α . ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

The structural model was estimated to test the hypothesized relationships among helicopter parenting, emotional intelligence, and career adaptability. Fit indices indicated good model fit: $\chi^2(89) = 198.67$, $p < .001$; CFI = .95; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .06 (90% CI [.05, .07]); SRMR = .05.



Direct path (dashed): Helicopter Parenting $\rightarrow$ Career Adaptability, $\beta = -0.22^{**}$

Figure 1. Mediation Model Results

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$. All coefficients are standardized regression weights.

The results supported all four hypotheses. H1 predicted that helicopter parenting negatively predicts career adaptability; the direct path from helicopter parenting to career adaptability was significant and negative ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < .01$), supporting H1. H2 predicted that helicopter parenting negatively predicts emotional intelligence; the path from helicopter parenting to emotional intelligence was significant and negative ($\beta = -0.33$, $p < .001$), supporting H2 a finding that converges with evidence that autonomy-restricting helicopter parenting significantly impairs emotion regulation in emerging adults (Nguyen et al., 2024) and heightens emotional volatility in Generation Z specifically (Mehmood, 2026). H3 predicted that emotional intelligence positively predicts career adaptability; the path from emotional intelligence to career adaptability was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$), supporting H3 and reinforcing prior evidence that trait emotional intelligence positively predicts career adaptability among Asian youth samples (Pong & Leung, 2023).



H4 predicted that emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between helicopter parenting and career adaptability. The indirect effect through emotional intelligence was significant ($\beta = -0.135$, $SE = .031$, 95% CI $[-0.196, -0.078]$, based on 5,000 bootstrap resamples). The total effect of helicopter parenting on career adaptability was $\beta = -0.355$ ($p < .001$). The percentage of mediation (34.2%) was calculated as the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect ($-0.135 / -0.355 \times 100$), representing the proportion of helicopter parenting's total effect on career adaptability that is transmitted through emotional intelligence, rather than a proportion-mediated (PM) index computed relative to the direct effect. Because the direct path from helicopter parenting to career adaptability remained significant after accounting for the indirect path, the pattern is consistent with partial, rather than full, mediation. H4 was therefore supported.

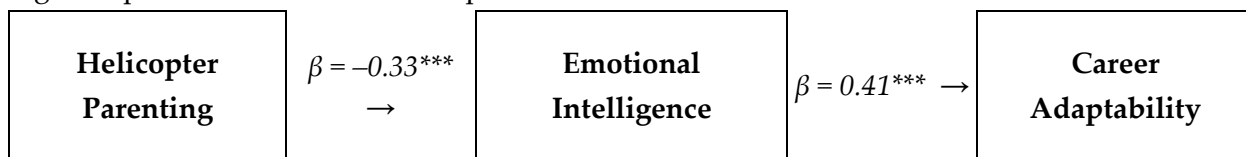
2. Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the fit of the three-factor measurement model. The model demonstrated acceptable fit: $\chi^2(87) = 192.34$, $p < .001$; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .06 (90% CI $[.05, .07]$); SRMR = .04. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .62 to .89, all exceeding the conventional .50 threshold. Composite reliability values ranged from .88 to .95, exceeding the .70 threshold, and average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from .55 to .72, exceeding the .50 threshold. Taken together, these indices indicate adequate convergent and discriminant validity for all three constructs.

3. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

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Figure 1 presents the standardized path coefficients for the mediation model.



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In addition to the standardized path coefficients reported above, squared multiple correlations (R^2) were examined to index the effect sizes of the structural relationships. Helicopter parenting accounted for 10.9% of the variance in emotional intelligence ($R^2 = .109$), and the full model helicopter parenting and emotional intelligence together accounted for 29.6% of the variance in career adaptability ($R^2 = .296$), which corresponds to a medium-to-large effect by conventional benchmarks (Cohen, 1988). These R^2 values indicate that, notwithstanding the significant paths reported above, a substantial share of the variance in both emotional intelligence and career adaptability remains unexplained by the present model.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between helicopter parenting and career adaptability among Generation Z university students in Indonesia. The findings provide empirical support for the proposed mediation model and carry several theoretical and practical implications.

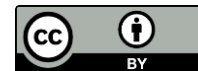
First, the significant negative relationship between helicopter parenting and career adaptability (H1) aligns with prior research documenting the detrimental career consequences of overprotective parenting, including reduced career exploration and adaptability (LeBlanc & Lyons, 2022) and heightened career indecision (Wang, 2023). This finding extends earlier work by confirming the relationship within the Indonesian context, which remains underrepresented in the literature relative to Western samples. The results suggest that even within a collectivist culture where parental involvement is normative and often expected (Prayoga, 2026), excessive control and intervention continue to undermine career development consistent with Self-Determination Theory's proposition that autonomy is a universal psychological need whose frustration carries costs regardless of cultural context.



Second, the finding that helicopter parenting negatively predicts emotional intelligence (H2) contributes to a growing body of literature linking overprotective parenting to poorer emotional outcomes among emerging adults. Helicopter parents, by shielding their children from challenges, failures, and conflict, may deprive them of experiences essential for developing emotional competence a pattern echoed in evidence that autonomy-restricting parenting significantly impairs emotion regulation via emotion-dysregulation pathways (Nguyen et al., 2024) and drives emotional volatility through reduced mental toughness (Mehmood, 2026). At the same time, longitudinal evidence suggesting that emerging adults' own emotional difficulties can prospectively elicit more helicopter behavior from parents, with reduced autonomy acting as the mediating pathway (Gao et al., 2022), is a useful reminder that this relationship may, over the life course, run in both directions a possibility the present cross-sectional design cannot rule out. Because of this, the significant H2 path reported above is best interpreted as an association consistent with, rather than proof of, the hypothesized helicopter-parenting-to-emotional-intelligence direction; future longitudinal work in this Indonesian sample is needed to test the direction (or bidirectionality) of this relationship directly (see Section 4.3 for further discussion of this and other limitations).

Third, the significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and career adaptability (H3) confirms the importance of emotional competencies for navigating career transitions, corroborating cross-sectional evidence among Chinese youth (Pong & Leung, 2023) and studies identifying resilience as a further mediating pathway between EI and career adaptability (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026). In the AI era, where career paths are increasingly uncertain and require continual adaptation, emotional intelligence appears to help individuals manage anxiety, sustain positive affect during job transitions, and draw on supportive professional relationships. Not all evidence points in a uniformly positive direction, however: at least one study found emotional intelligence negatively correlated with career resilience in a Generation Z sample (Barhate et al., 2024), a result at odds with the broader pattern and a reminder that the EI-career-adaptability relationship may be sensitive to sample, measurement, or cultural context in ways this study cannot fully disentangle.

Fourth, and most importantly, the partial mediation effect (H4) clarifies one mechanism through which helicopter parenting affects career adaptability. Emotional intelligence functions as a pathway through which overprotective parenting undermines career development, echoing the broader mediation logic identified in adjacent Generation Z research for instance, career adaptability's role as a partial mediator between emotional intelligence and achievement motivation in an Indonesian Gen Z sample (Ginting, 2022), and future work-self clarity's role as a mediator between parental support and career adaptability (Pratiwi & Salim, 2025). The partial mediation observed here (34.2% of the total effect) indicates that other mechanisms are also likely at play; candidate pathways suggested by related research include career decision self-efficacy and fear of failure (Park et al., 2025), career-related expectation stress (Wang, 2023), and general resilience, which has been shown both to mediate EI-career-adaptability links (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026) and to buffer the negative mental-health effects of helicopter parenting more broadly (Seki et al., 2023).



The findings carry several practical implications for different stakeholders, although given the modest, partial mediation effect reported above, these should be treated as starting points for intervention design rather than as guarantees of impact (see Section 4.3). For parents: results suggest that while supportive parental involvement is valuable, excessive intervention that forecloses independent problem-solving and emotional learning may be counterproductive. Parents may benefit from adopting a more autonomy-supportive style that balances involvement with room for independence a distinction that is especially important in the Indonesian context, where collectivist family values can obscure the line between supportive involvement and helicoptering (Prayoga, 2026; Widya, 2026). Concretely, this could take the form of brief (e.g., two- to three-session) psychoeducational workshops delivered during university parent-orientation events, using concrete behavioral checklists (e.g., distinguishing “helping a child prepare for a job interview” from “contacting the employer on the child's behalf”) rather than abstract advice, so parents can recognize specific helicopter-parenting behaviors and practice autonomy-supportive alternatives such as asking coaching questions instead of solving problems directly. For educators and career counselors: understanding the link between helicopter parenting and career adaptability can inform more effective interventions. Career counseling should extend beyond exploration and planning to include the deliberate cultivation of emotional competencies that underpin adaptability, potentially incorporating emotion-focused or resilience-building components such as structured reflection exercises on past setbacks, guided goal-setting under uncertainty, or brief mindfulness-based emotion-regulation modules delivered across four to six sessions alongside traditional career-guidance content (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026; Seki et al., 2023).

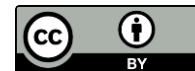
Counselors should also be attentive to the possibility that students from high-helicopter-parenting backgrounds may need additional support in building career-related confidence and independent decision-making skills for example, through low-stakes practice opportunities such as mock job interviews or supervised informational interviews in which the student, rather than a parent, initiates and manages contact consistent with evidence that overparenting elevates fear of failure and undermines decision self-efficacy (Park et al., 2025). For universities and policymakers: higher-education institutions might consider concrete programs such as first-year seminar modules on independent career decision-making, structured internship or exchange placements that limit routine parental contact points, and family-orientation sessions co-facilitated by career-services and counseling staff that address parental over-involvement directly, alongside workshops on emotional-intelligence development for career success and, where appropriate, guidance around limiting parental intervention in academic and career decisions. Given the cultural context, such programs are likely to be most effective when framed positively, as promoting student success, rather than as a critique of parenting styles. For Generation Z individuals: the findings underscore the value of self-awareness about one's relationship with one's parents and its potential downstream effects on career development. Individuals who perceive high levels of helicopter parenting in their own upbringing may benefit from proactively seeking out experiential opportunities internships, mentoring relationships, and career counseling that build both emotional intelligence and career



adaptability for example, by independently applying for and managing at least one internship or part-time role without parental involvement in the application or negotiation process, and from cultivating proactive career-networking behaviors of the kind observed among emerging adults navigating uncertainty (Wang & Lin, 2023).

Several limitations warrant consideration when interpreting these findings and should temper any causal claims drawn from them. First and most importantly, the cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal precedence among the study variables. Although bootstrapping is an appropriate procedure for testing indirect effects within a single-wave dataset, it cannot, by itself, rule out reverse or bidirectional influence. This concern is not merely hypothetical: longitudinal evidence from Chinese emerging adults indicates that emotional problems can themselves prospectively elicit increased helicopter parenting, with reduced autonomy acting as the mediating pathway (Gao et al., 2022), raising the possibility that the helicopter-parenting-to-emotional-intelligence pathway modeled here is reciprocal rather than strictly unidirectional. Because the present data cannot adjudicate between these directional possibilities, the results reported above should be interpreted as evidence of association among helicopter parenting, emotional intelligence, and career adaptability, rather than as proof of a one-way causal chain; the language used throughout the Results and Discussion sections has been framed accordingly. Longitudinal or experimental designs that track these constructs across multiple time points, ideally beginning in adolescence, are needed to establish the direction (or bidirectionality) of these relationships with greater confidence. Second, although Harman's single-factor test (Section 2) suggested that common method bias is unlikely to have severely distorted the pattern of relationships, this test is a relatively conservative check, and the reliance on self-report measures for all three constructs means that shared-method variance cannot be fully excluded as an alternative explanation for the observed associations. Future studies could strengthen construct validity by incorporating multi-informant designs (e.g., parent-reported helicopter parenting) or behavioral and performance-based indicators of emotional intelligence and career adaptability.

Third, the sample was disproportionately female (69.9%) and was drawn through convenience and snowball sampling from six Indonesian universities, which limits the generalizability of the findings to male Generation Z students, to non-university populations, and to other cultural or national contexts; replication with more gender-balanced and probability-based samples is warranted. Fourth, because this study did not directly measure the three basic psychological needs specified by Self-Determination Theory (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), it cannot determine which specific need, or combination of needs, most strongly accounts for the link between helicopter parenting and emotional intelligence; future research incorporating validated SDT need-satisfaction measures would allow this theoretical account to be tested more directly. Finally, the indirect effect of emotional intelligence accounted for approximately one-third of the total effect of helicopter parenting on career adaptability, and the structural model explained only a moderate share of the variance in either mediator or outcome (see Section 3.2), indicating that other, unmeasured mechanisms such as career decision self-efficacy and



fear of failure (Park et al., 2025), career-related expectation stress (Wang, 2023), and general resilience (Doğrusever & Padır, 2026; Seki et al., 2023) are also likely at play. The present findings should therefore be regarded as identifying one plausible mechanism among several, rather than a complete explanatory account, and the practical implications outlined above should be read with this modest, partial effect size in mind.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between helicopter parenting and career adaptability among Generation Z university students in Indonesia. The findings reveal that helicopter parenting negatively predicts career adaptability both directly and indirectly through emotional intelligence. These results point to a specific mechanism: overprotective parenting undermines career adaptability partly by impeding the development of emotional competencies that are essential for navigating career transitions in an increasingly uncertain labor market.

The study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it extends research on helicopter parenting and career development into the Indonesian context, addressing a notable gap in non-Western research on this topic. Second, it identifies emotional intelligence as a significant, though partial, mediating mechanism, offering insight into how parenting practices translate into career outcomes. Third, it offers practical guidance for parents, educators, career counselors, and policymakers seeking to support Generation Z's career development during a period of rapid, AI-driven labor-market change.

As artificial intelligence continues to reshape the world of work, career adaptability will only grow in importance as a competency for career success. The finding that helicopter parenting may undermine this capability in part through its effects on emotional development carries meaningful implications for how families, educators, and institutions support emerging adults. Ultimately, preparing Generation Z for careers in the AI era requires more than technical skill-building: it requires cultivating the psychosocial resources including career adaptability and emotional intelligence that enable continuous learning, resilience, and the successful navigation of an uncertain future.

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