

Conceptualizing and Projecting the Future in the Post-Pandemic Era: Perspectives of Emerging Adults—A Narrative Review

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Abstract: Career guidance and counseling (CGC) aims to support individuals in reflecting on, planning, and building their future careers. Young adults are among the most burdened populations in the post-pandemic period, as they face the challenge of rebuilding their professional trajectories and envisioning their futures. The future is a key concept in the CGC field. Through a narrative review of recent scientific literature, guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses flowchart and executed through content analysis, this study sought to identify how the future is conceptualized in CGC by examining young adults' perspectives on their career futures in the post-pandemic context. The findings indicate that existing research does not center young adults' views on their career futures and rarely employs specific future constructs in analysis. The study concludes by emphasizing the need to expand and diversify study populations, develop a clear conceptualization of the future, and address the often-overlooked consequences of the post-pandemic period.

Introduction

To present the adopted conceptual basis, Career Guidance and Counseling (CGC) is defined as the process of assisting individuals in reflecting on, planning, and constructing their career paths (Guichard, 2022).

Work is defined as a person's relational action in the world that imparts meaning to life, and career is defined as the trajectory of this action through psychosocial processes that shape the individual's journey across life, learning, and work (Hooley, 2022).

Author's Note: This research was funded by CNPq – Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico, Brasil (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, Brazil) under grant number 307050/2021-1.

Young adults are among the most burdened groups in the post-pandemic period, as they

must rebuild their careers and shape trends for their future. The future is a key concept in the CGC field. Through a narrative review of recent scientific literature, guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart and content analysis, this study aims to identify the main conceptualizations of the future in the CGC field by examining young adults' perspectives on their career futures in the post-pandemic era.

Throughout the 21st century, several profound and rapid sociocultural and labor disruptions have emerged (Sultana, 2023). Young people have consistently faced challenges in the labor market. For instance, in the early decades of the current century, they encountered difficulties in school-to-work and university-to-work transitions, higher unemployment rates than other age groups, limited job opportunities, and a rise in informality and the gig economy. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017), some people from this group were not in

employment, education, or training (NEET), particularly in emerging and developing countries, where the majority reside.

The ILO (2017) also reported that young adults experienced uncertainty, fear, despair, and limited confidence in socioeconomic advancement through work in their future working lives. They did not regard employment as a source of stability and security and viewed technology as both a risk and an opportunity. In summary, they expressed a mixture of moderate optimism and pessimism about their future careers.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these feelings, leaving marks that continue to transform work and careers. It challenged everyone's life and work projects, two key dimensions, creating vulnerabilities in health and professions. The World Health Organization declared the end of the Public Health Emergency of International Concern in 2023; however, the economy, education, and the world of work have been experiencing the so-called post-pandemic period since 2021 (Vyas, 2022).

Since then, profound disruptions have continued to affect people's lives, with some groups more exposed than others. Among these are young adults, or emerging adults, who are at the beginning of their careers and must reinvent themselves to cope with transformations in the world of work as they rebuild their careers and shape future trends (Hopner, 2023; Keating & Melis, 2022). The age range of 18–29 years is selected to define the experiences of young adulthood and the concept of emerging adulthood, as proposed by Arnett (2023), to further characterize this stage of multiple transitions into adulthood.

Emerging adults begin their careers while being surrounded by uncertainties, insecurities, precarity, and misinformation (ILO, 2022). This situation creates distress about how to make choices, develop projects, make transitions, and build careers (Guichard, 2022). These adults must undertake multiple roles simultaneously and navigate paradoxical experiences, such as

balancing change and stability, maintaining optimism about technology and the future while being aware of associated threats, and acknowledging contrasts between “modern slavery and sustainable livelihoods” (Hopner, 2023, p. 5). These requirements intensify feelings of future uncertainty, expressed as thoughts of hope and opportunity on the one hand and despair and a sense of annihilation on the other (Keating & Melis, 2022).

Key contemporary challenges include technological and digital transformations; climate change; rising inequality and social injustice; the flexibilization and precarization of work; and the individualization of life, which leads to individualized careers and reinforces liminal work identities (Guichard, 2022; Ribeiro, 2021).

These challenges require the expansion and diversification of the target audience in intercultural and intersectional terms (Blustein et al., 2020; Sultana, 2023); a deeper understanding of contemporary possibilities and obstacles (Guichard, 2022); theoretical diversification (e.g., from the concept of career to that of livelihood planning, Hooley et al., 2024; Hopner, 2023); and the integration of social justice initiatives into CGC to support the development of dignified working trajectories (Bilon-Piórko et al., 2023; Blustein & Allan, 2024).

Liminal working identities refer to identity states wherein individuals find themselves between two or more identities for extended periods without consolidating any of them. Such in-between states are expected during times of change (transitional working identities) but become problematic when they form a persistent pattern of self-construction. This occurs because the interplay between continuity and change that is essential for identity stability is disrupted, leaving individuals without reference points and in a constant state of crisis (Ribeiro, 2021).

This process has been reshaping, and is expected to continue reshaping, the ways in which emerging adults build their careers,

thereby also influencing the CGC strategies designed to support them. This study rests on the central assumption that identifying young adults' perspectives on their future careers can guide updates to CGC theories and practices and enable more contextualized and appropriate interventions.

CGC's conceptualization of the future is another central issue highlighted in this study. In general, the future is framed as a temporal dimension, used adjectivally to qualify other key concepts (e.g., future career, future work plan, future perspectives), rather than treated as a standalone construct (Guichard, 2022).

Boutinet (2004), Delory-Momberger (2006), and Carstensen (2006) have attempted to conceptualize the future. The first author notes that the future represents both continuity and rupture, remaining partially indeterminate and, therefore, partially distressing. It carries an inherent sense of ambiguity in future orientation, as it encompasses the present and the past, is shaped by them, and allows room for the new. The second author argues that the future enables anticipation, which defines the causes of present actions, such as intentions, goals, and hopes. The third author states that, belonging to the domain of uncertainty and the unknown, the future is predictably indeterminate, which necessarily leads us to regard perspective as transcendent.

In the CGC field, the future has generated several associated constructs originating mainly from developmental psychology, including *future time perspective* (Carstensen, 2006), *future orientation* (Nurmi, 2005), *belief in the future* (Catalano et al., 2005), *hope and optimism* (Eva et al., 2020), and *possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

The concept of the future as a *time perspective* refers to the influence of future-oriented thoughts, feelings, and plans on daily decision-making and personal development (Parola & Marcionetti, 2022). *Future orientation* is defined as the ability to establish future goals and plans and comprises three components: expectations, aspirations, and

planning (Ginevra et al., 2024). *Belief in the future* refers to the internalization of hope and optimism, associated with the formulation of long-term goals (Li et al., 2023). *Hope* is the general perception that one's goals can be achieved, while *optimism* reflects a tendency toward positive expectations about the future (Eva et al., 2020). *Possible selves* are positive and negative images of oneself in a future state, representing a form of identity experimentation (Taber, 2015).

Given this background, the present study aimed to identify key conceptualizations of the future in the CGC field by examining young adults' perspectives on their career futures in the post-pandemic era. To this end, a narrative review of scientific literature from 2020 to 2024 was conducted to identify gaps and project trends.

While this review was based on a limited number of studies, primarily owing to the period examined and the focus on a specific age group, three main justifications support this scope.

First, the post-pandemic era has accelerated changes, creating uncertainties and instabilities that have distinctly affected individuals' future outlooks compared to the pre-pandemic period. Understanding the present moment is therefore essential, as it provides a perspective to reflect on possibilities for constructing the future.

Second, emerging adults have been identified as the group most exposed to future uncertainties, as they are expected to shape the future of work.

Third, although the field of CGC addresses projections about the future, the future itself remains underexplored as a theoretical construct, constituting a significant conceptual gap.

Accordingly, examining existing conceptualizations and identifying the potential for theoretical development of the future is an important undertaking for CGC. In this context, the presented literature review addressed two guiding questions: What are the future prospects for emerging adults in the post-pandemic period? How does the field of CGC conceptualize the future in its theories?

Method

This study employed a narrative review approach, which, according to Xiao and Watson (2019), does not aim to summarize the entire body of literature, as in a systematic review, but instead describes and discusses the current state of knowledge in a specific area or theme. It identifies key topics related to the research question and provides a descriptive report of the evidence supporting its conclusions.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria were as follows: publication dates from 2020 to 2024; original research articles published in English; studies involving participants aged 18 to 29 years (the target population); data collection conducted during or after the pandemic; and a focus on the future and/or temporal perspectives and career development and/or career construction.

Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria were as follows: articles published after 2020 that reported data collected before the pandemic period and publications that were not original research reports (e.g., conference proceedings, literature reviews, discussion articles, theoretical essays, editorials, and commentaries).

Database Search Process

This review focused on the post-pandemic period; therefore, the literature search was limited to publications from 2020 onward using the following databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and APA PsycINFO, where key journals in the CGC field are indexed. This search was conducted in November 2024.

To address the general objective of understanding the future career perspectives of emerging adults, the descriptors used were “young AND adult* AND future AND career” as found in titles and abstracts. The initial descriptor “emerging AND adult*” yielded only limited results, so it was expanded to “young AND adult*,” a more commonly used term. The truncation symbol * was applied to include both descriptors “adult” and “adults.”

Only publications in English were included to maintain consistency and support the study’s goal of international dissemination. The descriptors were not required to appear together within each publication. The Boolean operator “AND” was applied to enforce the inclusion criteria and avoid studies outside the scope of this narrative review.

We followed the PRISMA checklist and flowchart (Moher et al., 2009) for article selection and the publication quality assessment tool developed by Hawker et al. (2002) to evaluate the studies included in the narrative review. In particular, the checklist was used to extract and evaluate the abstract and title, introduction and objectives, methods and data, sampling, data analysis, bias, results, transferability, implications, and utility.

We followed the four stages proposed by Moher et al. (2009): identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Phase 1: Identification included all records from the proposed search, resulting in 633 articles, with 120 from Scopus, 197 from Web of Science, and 316 from APA PsycINFO.

Phase 2: Screening was based on titles and abstracts. This process eliminated articles that were not original research or not relevant to the research question, particularly those that did not address the future career perspectives of young adults in the post-pandemic era. This reduced the number to 62 articles. Duplicate entries were then removed, resulting in 48 articles.

Phase 3: Eligibility was assessed by two independent reviewers using the defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were excluded if participant groups fell outside the defined age range (18–29 years), except when fewer than 5% of participants were older than 29, or if the study data had been collected before the pandemic began in 2019. This resulted in 13 articles.

Phase 4: Inclusion yielded a final list of nine articles for the narrative review. During this process, articles focusing on instrument and

practice validation that did not address the pandemic or future perspectives were excluded.

Data Analysis

Once the nine articles were selected, scoring was conducted based on reviewer consensus. Following the approach of Hawker et al. (2002), each article was rated as very poor (1), poor (2), fair (3), or very good (4). All selected articles received satisfactory scores in the methodological rigor assessment.

Each article was further characterized by presenting the following elements: (1) authors and study location, (2) study design and year of data collection, (3) central theme, (4) key concepts analyzed, (5) whether a concept of future was used, (6) sampling, (7) major findings, and (8) consideration of the pandemic in the data analysis. This enabled a structured characterization of the studies in alignment with the review's main objective. Following this, a thematic content analysis was conducted to identify the main themes and categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic content analysis, a qualitative comprehension approach used to identify patterns of meaning in the data to generate themes and categories, was found to be suitable for synthesizing the study's findings. To this end, the guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed: (1) data transcription, (2) coding of data characteristics relevant to the study, (3) grouping codes using themes, (4) reviewing themes for relevance, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) constructing categories.

Consequently, we identified the future career perspectives of emerging adults in the post-pandemic era and developed categories to synthesize these perspectives, along with a systematization of the key future constructs employed in the studies.

Findings

The results are presented in two parts. In the first, data systematization according to the six previously proposed analysis dimensions is

presented (Table 1). In the second, thematic content analysis is discussed, including the construction of categories on emerging adults' future career perspectives in the post-pandemic era and the main concepts of the future employed in the studies.

Systematization of Data Based on the Analysis Dimensions

Regarding the study design, six were quantitative, two were qualitative, and one was mixed-methods. Among the quantitative studies, the majority used standardized scales or questionnaires and performed descriptive statistics analysis using a variety of analytical methods (e.g., covariance, latent variables, multiple regression, structural equation modeling). Meanwhile, the qualitative studies relied on semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and written narratives. Their data analysis methods included consensual qualitative research and thematic content analysis. The study locations were Australia and Italy, with two publications each, and Bangladesh, Finland/Sweden, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, and Turkey, with one publication each. Most of the studies were quantitative and conducted in the Global North in high-income countries (HICs).

Table 1
Summary of Articles Included in the Literature Review

Authors and country	Study design	Central theme	Key concepts	Concept of future	Sampling	Major findings	Pandemic in the analysis
Daeninck et al. (2023)—United Kingdom	Quantitative Data Collection: 2022	University-to-work transition	Climate anxiety, coping strategies, future planning	Future: Treated as an adjective, not as a concept (e.g., future planning or future plan)	Youth or Young Adults 473 university students (206 men, 254 women, and 13 non-binary individuals), aged 18–29 years (5% over 30 years)	Future career planning is strongly affected by climate anxiety Feelings of personal responsibility to address the climate crisis influence career decisions	Yes
Felaco et al. (2023)—Italy	Qualitative Data Collection: 2022	University-to-work transition	Meaning of work, career choice, future career planning	Future planning: “It involves setting long-term goals, creating a roadmap, and making decisions based on the desired outcomes” (p. 7)	Young Adults and/or Emerging Adults 58 university students (20 men and 38 women), aged 18–25 years	Social contribution of work is highly valued Labor market conditions do not necessarily inhibit future planning Environmental conditions hinder future career development Vocational calling is seen as necessary	No
Gunawan et al. (2024)—Australia	Quantitative Data Collection: 2022	University-to-work transition	Career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, perceived future employability, future occupational selves	Future: Treated as an adjective, not as a concept (e.g., future career selves)	Youth or Young Adults 449 university students (99 men and 350 women), aged 17–30 years	Perceived future employability is linked to outcome expectations	Yes

Kan (2023)— Hong Kong	Quantitative Data Collection: 2022	University-to- work transition	Future expectation, social capital	Future expectation: A cognitive temporal belief, or a ‘bias’ toward the future about their likely attainable goals” (p. 623)	Youth or Young Adults 293 university students (114 men and 179 women), aged 18–27 years	Online social capital plays a key role in shaping future expectations Internet-based connections serve as indicators of future expectations Transcending distance and time restrictions, the internet maximizes the function of social capital	No
Mahmud et al. (2021)— Bangladesh	Quantitative Data Collection: 2020	University-to- work transition	Career anxiety	Future: Treated as an adjective, not as a concept (e.g., future career)	Youth 232 university students (127 men and 105 women), aged 18–25 years (5% over 26 years)	Global events such as health crises increase fears and concerns about career prospects (career anxiety)	Yes
Nerona et al. (2024)— Australia	Quantitative Data Collection: 2023	University-to- work transition	Career optimism	Future: Treated as an adjective, not as a concept (e.g., future career prospects)	Young Adults 256 university students (41 men and 215 women), mean age 20 years	Career optimism is enhanced by access to study resources and educational training Students face challenges in linking academic experience with future careers	Yes
Nuckols et al. (2023)— Finland and Sweden	Qualitative Data Collection: 2020/2021	University-to- work transition	Life course, employability, professional agency	Future: Treated as an adjective, not as a concept (e.g., future career prospects)	Youth or Young Adults 43 university students (8 men and 35 women)	A growing divide between secure and insecure career paths is observed, reflecting a mismatch between students’ expectations and actual experiences Key contributing factors include: - Advancement of digital technologies - Intensifying labor market competition - Difficulty in securing employment - Pessimistic perception of career competencies	Yes

						- Career uncertainties - Difficulty in generating income and achieving financial independence The findings also underscore the importance of fostering professional agency and the need for greater parental support.	
Parola (2020)—Italy	Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection: 2020	University-to-work transition	Career development, career plans, career planning, future time perspective	Future planning; “Future projects and aspirations” (p. 4)	Youth or Young Adults 20 university students (6 men and 14 women), aged 22–29 years	A sense of stagnation and bleakness characterized students’ outlooks, as they reported “feelings of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety about the post-pandemic future” (p. 1)	Yes
Sarsıkoğlu (2024) - Turkey	Quantitative Data Collection: 2021/2022	University-to-work transition	Time perspective Career decision-making difficulties Career indecision	<i>Time perspective:</i> “individuals’ opinion on their psychological future and past” (p. 2545) <i>Future time orientation:</i> “time orientation that associates past experiences and current behaviors with one’s expected future” (p. 2546)	Young Adults 331 university students (88 men and 243 women) aged between 18 and 25 years	Different time perspectives lead to distinct career decision-making difficulties	No

Regarding the central theme, all studies focused on the university-to-work transition, as their participants were college students. Concerning the key concepts analyzed, no single dominant trend was observed; the only constant was the study of diverse career dimensions (e.g., development, self-efficacy, choice, anxiety, optimism, planning, and indecision) in relation to the future dimension (e.g., planning, outcome expectations, and perspectives) through constructs such as *future career planning*, *perceived future employability*, *future professional selves*, and *future time perspective*.

Regarding the concept of future, five studies used future as an adjective for other constructs (e.g., perceived future employability and future career) without offering a conceptual definition. Four studies provided a conceptual definition of future (i.e., future planning, future expectation, time perspective, and future time orientation) but did not explore the topic in depth, indicating a potential conceptual gap in the CGC field, where future is a central dimension.

In terms of sampling, most studies considered young people or young adults. The participant groups primarily consisted of college students, with a predominance of women.

The main findings highlight uncertainty and contextual factors, such as technological and digital transformations, climate change, and global crises (e.g., the pandemic), that hinder career futures. This situation leads to anxiety, fears, and increased reliance on parental support, as well as career decisions involving calling and the meaning of work, linked to the possibility of social contribution. Finally, reinforcing the importance of the conceptual study of future, the findings emphasize that different time perspectives lead to distinct difficulties in career decision-making. Six studies considered the pandemic for data analysis, although only three did so directly.

Content Analysis

Based on the thematic content analysis, three categories were constructed as axes of analysis: expanding the CGC target audiences, coping with contextual changes and crises, and making the future one of the central axes of CGC in a direct manner.

Expanding the CGC Target Audiences

Most of the selected studies analyzed the career futures of young adults in the post-pandemic context, with a focus on the university-to-work transition. These studies were conducted in the Global North and relied on samples of university students. This indicates that the conceptualization of future in the field of CGC has primarily been based on samples from developed countries, where the conditions for projecting the future are markedly different from those in developing countries. Consequently, the findings indicate that CGC professionals should expand their target audiences in both research and practice to better understand and support emerging adults in a more effective and contextually grounded manner.

Coping with Contextual Changes and Crises

Our narrative review identified a duality in how emerging adults project their future careers. On one hand, projecting one's career into the future is viewed as a negative and challenging experience, marked by climate anxiety, concerns about the future of careers, difficulty linking work experiences to education and future plans, the widening gap between secure and insecure career options, and a sense of deceleration and bleakness. On the other hand, projecting one's career into the future offers possibilities stemming from technological development, enhanced training, and career sustainability. Thus, the current context simultaneously presents both constraints and risks, as well as opportunities for innovation and potential.

Making the Future One of the Central Axes of CGC in a Direct Manner

Our findings indicate that research on CGC generally does not conceptualize future as an independent construct; instead, it is treated as a descriptive dimension (e.g., future planning, future plan, future career selves, future career, and future career prospects). Among the reviewed studies, four offered some form of definition for future (i.e., *future planning*, *future expectation*, *time perspective*, and *future time orientation*), although these definitions were neither fully developed nor directly applied in the analysis. As future is a foundational construct in CGC, it is crucial to establish it explicitly as a central axis for both theoretical and practical development.

Discussion

Some initial findings of our narrative review warrant discussion. First, the topic of future career perspectives among young adults has not been a central focus in CGC research during the post-pandemic era, as indicated by the limited number of studies identified during our search. However, it is important to acknowledge that the review covered a relatively short period (2020–2024).

Second, the future is not yet a well-integrated concept within the field, with only a few constructs developed to conceptualize and analyze career futures.

Third, most studies are quantitative and conducted in the Global North in HICs.

Fourth, while the pandemic is mentioned in most studies, few incorporated it explicitly into their data analysis.

Fifth, the CGC field has largely focused on young college students and tends to frame the future in terms of the university-to-work transition.

Finally, global issues, such as technological and digital transformations, climate change, and the increasing flexibilization of labor, have gained growing prominence in the field.

The content analysis identified three categories of challenges encountered by CGC professionals in understanding and supporting emerging adults in their career futures. These categories are discussed in relation to the findings of the present review and the existing literature. The first issue highlights the need to broaden CGC's target audiences to better address future career challenges.

Adolescents in schools and youth in universities have traditionally been the primary focus of CGC research (Blustein et al., 2020), as confirmed by this narrative review, wherein all selected studies examined the future through the lens of the university-to-work transition. Furthermore, most studies have been conducted in the Global North, where HICs with high school enrollment rates are concentrated. In contrast, low- and middle-income countries, which are primarily located in the Global South, remain underrepresented in the research (ILO, 2022).

Baruch and Sullivan (2022), Blustein et al. (2020), and Hooley et al. (2024) emphasized in their respective analyses of career studies and CGC practices that expanding the field's target audiences, both through intersectional and intercultural diversification, and decentralizing research beyond the Global North are urgent and indispensable tasks for the future of CGC. Accordingly, the present narrative review reinforces existing evidence in the literature highlighting this pressing need within the field.

As Bilon-Piórko et al. (2023) and Sultana (2023) highlighted, CGC should be an emancipatory and dignity-generating practice, respecting people for who they are and what they do and, therefore, seeking social justice and addressing inequalities. Thus, our theories and practices should be grounded in the diversity of groups and individuals worldwide, reinforcing the notion that plurality promotes greater inclusion.

The experience of being a young adult and of conceiving and planning one's future varies across contexts. Thus, context matters, and

including diverse audiences in research enables us to understand the multiple ways of existing and envisioning the future. Consequently, the CGC field should develop situated practices for distinct groups of young adults around the world.

In summary, we should recognize that CGC is considerably political and must actively take on this role, rather than avoid it, as we risk otherwise acting in support of the systems that create injustice, inequality, and oppression in multiple and varied ways. In this light, expanding the CGC target audience is an urgent task, as highlighted by the findings of this literature review.

The second issue concerns how emerging adults have been coping with contextual changes and crises. Our narrative review highlighted a duality in how these individuals project their career futures.

On one hand, uncertainties, personal perceptions, and contextual barriers, such as climate anxiety, concerns about the future of careers, difficulty linking work experiences to education and future plans, the widening gap between secure and insecure career options, and a sense of deceleration and bleakness, have been identified as significant obstacles (Daeninck et al., 2023; Felaco et al., 2023; Mahmud et al., 2021; Parola, 2020). These issues have fostered a sense of powerlessness and a growing need for external support in navigating career decision-making, transitions, and development, particularly in the form of increased parental involvement (Nuckols et al., 2023).

On the other hand, the pursuit of vocational fulfillment and meaningful work linked to the potential for social contribution (Felaco et al., 2023), the perception of present abilities as indicators of future success (Gunawan et al., 2024), the development of identity and relationships in digital contexts contributing to online social capital (Kan, 2023), and continued engagement in education (Nerona et al., 2024) have been identified as potential promoters of future careers. Simultaneously, the present context can be viewed both as a space of

constraints and risks and as one of possibilities and innovation. This duality invites reflection on how young adults imagine and build their lives and career futures in social and working contexts, as well as on the future of CGC theory, research, and practice.

Given the current ambiguity and ambivalence, the goals of CGC should be broadened. While traditionally focused on helping individuals adapt to existing opportunities, CGC must also foster transcendence and emancipation, particularly when these existing opportunities do not promote inclusion and belonging. As Bilon-Piórko et al. (2023) and Blustein and Allan (2024) noted, the right to CGC constitutes a challenge for social justice.

Assuming that the future and its projection or construction are indeed central to CGC, as emphasized by Baruch and Sullivan (2022) and Guichard (2022) and supported by the studies reviewed, this study draws attention to the lack of conceptual and empirical development in this area. This absence is especially concerning amid extensive global transformations and crises, during which the future is being critically questioned, as discussed by Felaco et al. (2023) and Parola (2020).

Professionals in CGC must develop their own conceptualizations for the future, rather than merely adapting constructs from developmental psychology, such as *future planning* (Felaco et al., 2023; Parola, 2020), *future expectation* (Kan, 2023), *time perspective*, and *future time orientation* (Sarsıkoğlu, 2024), and investigate future career perspectives, especially in light of sociocultural, economic, climatic, and technological transformations and crises (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022; Guichard, 2022), which increasingly undermine the possibility of constructing the future by reproducing present models (Sultana, 2023).

Under these circumstances, the future has become progressively more uncertain and indeterminate, as highlighted by Carstensen (2006). This necessitates a focus on perspectives,

given the transcendent nature of the future. Researching the future is especially valuable for young adults entering the workforce, who are simultaneously shaping and being shaped by their working realities, as noted in the existing literature (Blustein et al., 2020; ILO, 2022) and the articles analyzed in this review (Felaco et al., 2023; Parola, 2020). Sarsıkoğlu (2024) emphasized the importance of studying conceptualizations of the future, arguing that differing time perspectives lead to distinct challenges in career decision-making, an essential concern for CGC research and practice.

The concept of future is a cornerstone of the CGC field, as it underpins the notion of a career project, which is central to both its theories and practices. Understanding how individuals construct projects and perceive career trajectories is essential. Without conceptual clarity, the future is treated generically, offering limited guidance for informed career decision-making and the development of successful career paths, revealing a major conceptual gap.

Limitations

A narrative review can be conducted when a potential gap in the literature is identified, drawing attention to a topic that warrants further exploration. However, the diversity of datasets, study contexts, cultural influences, and the differing methodologies of quantitative and qualitative studies may have influenced the results, limiting the interpretation and generalization of the findings. For example, the use of the concept of career future and the experiences related to the university-to-work transition vary across contexts due to social and cultural factors. Additionally, the limited number of articles analyzed, although justified, constitutes a limitation of the study, as does the inclusion of only English-language texts to support engagement with an international audience. Caution is therefore recommended in interpreting and applying the findings.

Implications for Research and Practice

The review's findings have some implications for practice. First, diversifying research samples and contexts, particularly from intersectional and intercultural perspectives, is essential for theoretical and conceptual contextualization and for developing situated practices that incorporate principles of social justice and dignity at work, which are principles frequently cited in the literature but still lack practical implementation. Second, practitioners and researchers should more explicitly acknowledge the implications of the future for CGC, integrating this dimension directly into their practices. Finally, developing a research agenda on the conceptualization of the future is essential to deepen understanding of this temporal dimension and to inform the design of tools and strategies in CGC.

Conclusions

This study identified three main conclusions, presented as recommendations for advancing the field of CGC. First, expanding and diversifying the populations being studied is essential to promote social justice within CGC. Second, there is an urgent need to develop a conceptualization of the future to establish a theoretical foundation for tools and strategies that support individuals in reflecting on and planning their futures, a central task of CGC practices. Third, it is critical to acknowledge the often-overlooked consequences of the post-pandemic context.

This narrative review underscores that CGC engages with the dimension of the future, which remains under-researched and insufficiently integrated into existing studies, particularly those involving young people and young adults, where future is frequently used only descriptively. Therefore, we recommend further incorporating and expanding the future dimension in CGC research, emphasizing the importance of developing a corresponding conceptual framework grounded within the field.

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