

# The dynamics of changes in self-efficacy in the first school-to-work transition – shortitudinal studies of graduates

Dynamika zmian w przekonaniu o własnej skuteczności podczas pierwszej tranzykcji szkoła–praca – badanie o charakterze powtarzanego pomiaru wykonane na absolwentach uczelni

**Słowa kluczowe:** przekonanie o własnej skuteczności, zatrudnialność, rozwój kariery, tranzykcja szkoła-praca.

**Streszczenie:** Osoby o wyższym poziomie przekonania o własnej skuteczności funkcjonują lepiej w różnych obszarach życia w odróżnieniu od osób charakteryzujących się niskim jego nasileniem. Jednym z takich obszarów jest aktywność zawodowa i budowanie ścieżek kariery. Zmiany zachodzące w życiu absolwentów uczelni wyższych w trakcie przechodzenia przez kolejne etapy tranzykcji z systemu edukacji na rynek pracy mogą skutkować zmianami w nasileniu przekonania o własnej skuteczności. Badanie miało charakter powtarzanego pomiaru i wzięło w nim udział 170 osób (108 kobiet i 62 mężczyzn) przy średniej wieku  $M = 25,29$  ( $SD = 0,98$ ). Pierwszy pomiar przeprowadzono na kilka tygodni przed ukończeniem studiów przez uczestników, drugi po półrocznym pobycie na rynku pracy. Wykorzystano Skalę Przekonania o Własnej Skuteczności w Rolach Życiowych i Skali Uogólnionej Własnej Skuteczności. Pomiędzy poszczególnymi etapami tranzykcji zachodzą zmiany w poziomie przekonania o własnej skuteczności w zależności od sytuacji zawodowej, w jakiej znaleźli się absolwenci. Dlatego w systemie edukacji i instytucjach rynku pracy, oprócz kompetencji formalnych, konieczne jest także kształtowanie przekonania o własnej skuteczności w tych rolach życiowych.

**Key words:** self-efficacy, employability, career development, school to work transition.

**Abstract:** People with higher self-efficacy function better in various life domains than people with low self-efficacy. One of such areas is professional activity and building career paths. Changes taking place in the lives of university graduates when going through the subsequent stages of transition from the education system to the labour market may bring about changes in self-efficacy. The study had a shortitudinal design, and the participants were 170 individuals (108 women and 62 men) with a mean age of  $M = 25.29$  ( $SD = 0.98$ ). The first measurement was performed a few weeks before the participants' graduation from the university, and the second one was performed when they had been in the labor market for half a year. We used the Life Roles Self-Efficacy Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale. There are also changes in the level of self-efficacy beliefs between different stages of transition. Therefore, in the education system and in labor market institutions, apart from formal competences, it is also necessary to form a conviction about their own effectiveness in these life roles.

## Introduction

### Role of school-to-work transition

Work is of key importance in people's lives (Marshall & Stewart, 2021). It has an impact on individual and general social assessment of the level of well-being. That is why issues related to the first experiences and dealing with the labour market are so important for both individuals and organisations (Takeuchi et al., 2021). In this context, the moment of transition from school to work is often indicated as a key element for the course of the entire career (Ng & Feldman, 2007; van der Horst et al., 2021; Vermeire et al., 2022). The first encounter with the labour market is an objective change of life situation and requires each individual to go through the adaptation process known as the school-to-work transition (STWT) (Alam & de Diego, 2019). The principal focus here is the process of moving from education or training to employment (ECDPM, 2019). The relevant literature states that this is a great challenge for young adults, requiring assistance (van der Horst et al., 2021) and support programs (Stremersch et al., 2021). Therefore, deeper understanding of the phenomenon of transition itself and finding new mechanisms to support young people at this time is still needed.

### What is transition?

Transition is understood as the psychological process that people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external, transition is internal (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). According to Schlosberg (1981), it is not only the actual changes that cause transition. In her opinion both, what happens and what, although supposed to happen, did not happen, necessitates going through the transition process, in other words, starting university education (DeClercq et al., 2018) and graduation (Benvenuti & Mazzoni, 2022). At the same time, failure to be admitted to a university or failure to be promoted will also be transitions (Lütke et al., 2011). In this article, we will focus on the transition connected with leaving the university.

Leaving the education system, including the university, means entering a "new world" – the world of work, which is very different from education (Savickas, 2012). The beginning of this transition is losing a student status, and its positive end is the permanent acquisition of an employee status (Halpern, 1994). In the case of a negative scenario, the end means joining a social segment called NEETs (Eurostat, 2019). Van der Horst et al. (2021) focused on the successful transition understood as obtaining "high quality employment", however, finding a job itself and meeting its requirements, i.e. keeping it for a long time, can be considered as achieving the main goal of the school-to-work transition (STWT) (Halpern, 1994). In doing so, they need to keep up with an increasingly dynamic and changing work environment, remain healthy and motivated, and adjust to having more complex careers (Vuori et al., 2012). It is therefore crucial that employees acquire relevant

resources and competencies to successfully manage their work and career. STWT is a drastic change in life situation. This is a key step in pursuing a professional career (Grosemans et al., 2017; Rożnowski, 2009).

### The course of the transition

Transition is a long-term and complex process (Vermeire et al., 2022). In the case of major transitions, it may take many years for an individual to adapt to the new situation. The total duration of the professional transition process is estimated for approx. 9 months (Hopson & Adams, 1976). However, there are studies showing that it may last longer – even 18-24 months (Young & Lockhard, 1995). Studies conducted on populations from different countries show that some social factors, such as parental joblessness, slow down STWT (Curry et al., 2019).

The basis for the description of professional transitions are studies by Kübler-Ross (1969) on major life transitions, such as the death of a close relative, and developed by her the so-called *Kübler Ross' Change Curve Model*. This model is also widely used in organisational (e.g. Chavan & Bhattacharya, 2022) and academic (e.g. Malone, 2018) contexts. With regard to the school-to-work transition, the most popular version of the model was proposed by Adams et al. (1976). They proposed a seven-stage model of a transitional cycle. It describes how people entering the labour market react to what they are faced with.

### Transition models

The model of transition provided by Adams et al. (1976) carefully traces the course of emotional and self-image changes from the moment of the transition-triggering event to the moment of reaching a new adjustment (Stabilization Stage according to Nicholson). According to Adams (1976), reacting to an event first causes a short-term reaction of the subject. It can take the form of a positive scenario, where the mood improves for a moment, hope dominates and the self-image improves as well. This phase is known as the honeymoon. However, it will change for the worse as the time goes by, until it reaches a critical point. Gradually, uncertainty will increase, self-confidence will drop, frustration will increase and the symptoms of subclinical depression will appear. The second scenario describes an immediate drop in the mood and self-image that will finally cause domination of negative emotions and loss of self-confidence. The coping mechanisms used by an individual in this scenario are based on denial and allow for a temporary, minor mood improvement.

Experiencing strong negative emotions triggers coping mechanisms. Their positive effect is gradual adjustment to the new situation. Strategies such as accepting the new situation, exploring the possibilities in a new situation and testing new strategies are indicated. In the positive scenario, this leads to transformation and regaining self-confidence. In the negative scenario, we can talk about escaping from a new situation, a prolonged crisis or partial recovery (Adams et al. 1976).

A different way of describing the transition process was proposed by Nicholson (1989, 1990). He distinguished 4 stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. In the studies by DeClercq et al. (2018), individual stages are assigned specific time periods. This was done in relation to the transition to the university, but by analogy it can also be applied to the work situation.

### Preparation Stage

Although Nicholson's (1990) model has the form of a closed cycle within a circle, it seems that the first stage for individual events is *preparation*. *This stage takes place before the triggering event occurs and that is why it is absent from other models. The primary goal of this stage is to collect the resources necessary for an effective transition to a new state.* The range of these resources is very wide, including self-image, providing social support and developing a strategy to function effectively (Schlosberg, 1981). This requires giving a lot of time, which usually does not happen in the case of young graduates (Rożnowski, 2009). One of the basic goals at this stage, as indicated by Nicholson (1990), is to build an attitude of openness to change, prepare realistic expectations, build motivation to change and a range of behaviours that help cope with the stress. All this will facilitate the transition course and allow an individual to better manage the process. On the other hand, difficulties can also appear at this stage: fear, resistance to change, non-defined life goals will hinder the implementation of subsequent stages and extend the time needed to make the transition, and increase psychological costs.

### Encounter Stage

*The Encounter* stage is quite short. It takes place in the first weeks of a new situation. The subject's main goal at this stage is to capture the meaning of the new situation (Nicholson & West, 1989). During the Encounter stage, the subject needs to understand what is going on, what are the frameworks of their possible activity and what should be the priority. To achieve that, it is necessary to: understand the new situation and take up the challenge of creating a sense of new meaning, confirm having control over the situation and self-efficacy, and establish relationships with others to ensure social support (Nicholson, 1990; Stanisławski, 2019).

### Adjustment Stage

This stage is referred to as *the adjustment* stage because its main task is to adjust to the new situation. It is not about achieving a temporary state of balance, but about long-term changes resulting in achieving adjustment to physical and social requirements in a new situation – *"consonant relationship between the self and the environment"* (Nicholson, 1990, p. 88). To meet this goal, it is necessary to implement a set of actions involving the search for information about the new situation, direct action aimed at changing the situation, delaying actions to better navigate in the new context, change perceptions and attitudes in order to eliminate inconsistencies (Schlosber, 1981). The result is a transformation of the subject's self

and actions to meet the demands of the new situation (Nicholson & West, 1989). Failure at this stage consists in keeping discrepancies between the requirements and the subject, which will result in collecting negative experiences (Nicholson, 1990). According to the model of coping with a crisis situation, this stage should be completed within 9-12 months from the starting moment of the transition (Kibler Ross, 1969; Purnell, 2002).

### Stabilization Stage

The last stage of Nicholson's model is called *stabilization*. *At this stage, the individual's goal is to achieve "sustained trust, commitment and effectiveness with tasks and people... to realize their potential in their roles"* (Nicholson, 1990; p. 89). This is achieved through effective adjustment. This stage is further adjusting to the situation, but it concerns less and less important details and allows for maximising well-being rather than achieving basic fitting. At the same time, an individual moves on to the phase of preparing for the next transition.

### Self-Efficacy

One of the key resources needed in the transition process is career management because in the context of the important changes taking place in the labour market, individuals' responsibility for the planning and pursuit of their career is increasing (Briscoe et al., 2006; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015; Wanberg et al., 2019). With the situation in the labour market being uncertain, what becomes increasingly important is career competencies associated with the ability of planning and pursuing one's career in a situation of constant change (Thompson et al., 2019). One of individuals' career competencies associated with functioning in various conditions is self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012). Self-efficacy is considered to be an important resource in coping with difficult situations that require functioning in new conditions (Bandura, 2000); one of such situations is the transition from the familiar education system into the labour market. Perceiving oneself as a person possessing sufficient career competencies to cope with the difficulties and barriers occurring in the labour market may increase the chance of effective transition (Lent, 2005). Self-efficacy in this area refers to self-confidence in performing career-related tasks (Thompson et al., 2019). It is also an important predictor of successful transition (Kot et al., 2020; Situmorang & Salim, 2021).

Self-efficacy as understood by Bandura (2001) refers to self-perceived ability to perform a particular task or to achieve a particular level of performance. Bandura (2012) recommended measuring self-efficacy in specific situations; consequently, he believed that measurement results should be interpreted with reference to specific tasks and particular situations. Adopting the most specific self-efficacy rating – limited to a particular domain – makes it possible to accurately explain and predict the individual's behavior (Bandura, 2000).

A response to the specification of self-efficacy is the proposal of measuring general self-efficacy (cf. Prifti, 2020; Schwarzer et al., 2006). General self-efficacy is an individual's generalized and relatively stable belief that he or she has sufficient skills to act effectively regardless of the situation (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). This concept makes it possible to explain the broader context of the individual's functioning based on cross-situational similarities in behavior (Schwarzer, Jerusalem, 1995).

Confirmed in many studies (e.g., Choi, 2005; Kot & Rożnowski, 2012), the usefulness of general and specific self-efficacy encourages scholars to try to combine the advantages of these two approaches. Like other self-beliefs, such as self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1989), self-efficacy beliefs may have a hierarchical structure: from general self-efficacy independent of the situation, through domain-specific self-efficacy, to self-efficacy in coping with very specific tasks (Kot & Rożnowski, 2012). In this study, we consider both generalised self-efficacy proposed by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995) and the domain-based self-efficacy postulated by Bandura (2000). In the study we analyze domain-specific self-efficacy in the performance of the social roles distinguished by Super (1994): Student, Worker, Homemaker, Leisureite, and Citizen.

According to Bandura (2000), self-efficacy beliefs develop on the basis of the following: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional stimulation. A source of new experience may be new or unfamiliar life roles taken on as well as the situations and tasks involved in them (Super, 1990; et al., 2020). In early adulthood, one of these roles is the role of Worker. The process of taking on this role is connected with transition from the education system to the labor market, which entails many changes in the young person's functioning (Briscoe et al., 2006).

To investigate the changes taking place in particular stages, we used the model of transition proposed by Nicholson and West (1987), with four phases of transition: preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization. The preparation phase coincides with the period of education; its purpose is to collect the career capital necessary for effective transition to the job market. The encounter stage is the confrontation of the career capital the person has collected and the beliefs concerning the degree to which the person perceived himself or herself as effective and competent to function in various roles with the reality of the job market.

According to the model proposed by Adams et al. (1976), describing the process of life transitions, in particular stages of this process there may be changes in self-esteem. Similarities between self-esteem and self-efficacy (Rosenberg et al., 1995) make it legitimate to suspect that successive stages of transition from education to the labor market are accompanied by changes in self-efficacy, manifesting themselves in different levels of self-efficacy beliefs at different stages of the transition. With two measurements performed on the same sample, it is possible

not only to observe differences in self-efficacy level in the same individuals between different stages of transition, but also analyze the role of experienced circumstances.

The now classic linear career pattern, in which the individual first completes the chosen path education and then gets a post that will be his or her job until retirement, is now definitely becoming a thing of the past, particularly in the case of people entering the labor market in recent years (Briscco et al., 2006). Globally, difficulties in entering the job market and the increasingly "discontinuous", destabilized nature of contemporary careers results in individuals experiencing many transitions and changes connected with them (Alam & de Diego, 2019; Benvenuti & Mazzoni, 2022). In view of the significant changes that accompany transition, the main research hypothesis 1 should be formulated: Changes in the level of self-efficacy take a different course in individuals who are in different situations in the labor market during transition. We therefore formulated four specific hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1.1 The levels of role-specific and general self-efficacy will increase in the subjects who worked during preparation for transition and are still employed at the encounter stage. It is a result of collecting new positive experience linked with self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 1.2. The levels of role-specific and general self-efficacy will increase in the subjects who did not work during preparation for transition but are employed at the encounter stage. The dependence is expected because they have found new proofs of their self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 1.3. The levels of role-specific and general self-efficacy will not change in the subjects who did not work during preparation for transition and are still unemployed at the encounter stage. They always have the same experience of efficacy in taking up employment.

Hypothesis 1.4. The levels of role-specific and general self-efficacy will decrease in the subjects who worked during preparation for transition but are unemployed at the encounter stage. Their actions proved to be ineffective, even though they had previously had positive experiences in taking up employment

## Method

### Research procedure - on-line study of graduates

The study procedure was planned as a short-term study involving collecting opinions from the respondents at selected stages of the transition process. The total duration of the process is estimated for approx. 9 months (Hopson & Adams, 1976) or even 18-24 months (Young & Lockhard, 1995). The stages were identified based on Nicholson's model (1989, 1990). In the studies by DeClercq et al. (2018), individual stages are assigned specific time periods. Preparation – time before the event, without specifying its duration, Encounter – the first week after the event,

Adjustment – the first year, Stabilisation – subsequent years after the event, without specifying the end of this period. Obtaining employment by graduates is stretched over time, which is why it turned out to be impossible to reach respondents with another survey within a week from the event. Therefore, we planned individual stages as a two-phase study. The first measurement was carried out in the period preceding graduation, the second one around 6 months after leaving the university (the middle of the adaptation period indicated by DeClercq et al. (2018), and at the same time within the range specified by Hopson and Adams (1976). This allows for obtaining data that illustrates the dynamics of changes in the respondents' psychological state for longer transition periods identified in Nicholson's model.

Studies are shortitudinal surveys with an interval between measurements of approx. 6 months (Dormann & Griffin, 2015). The return rate is sufficient to perform an in-depth analysis ( $N = 170$ ).

We performed two measurements: the first one took place in June, a month before the completion of graduate (M.A.) studies, and the second one was held half a year later, in January.

Measurement 1: The aim of the study was to investigate the changes taking place in the level of general self-efficacy and in the levels of role-specific self-efficacy beliefs as well as in the functioning of individuals in the labor market after leaving the higher education system. The subjects were to be a population of individuals about to graduate from a university (fifth-year graduate students). This required purposive sampling based on the stage of transition: the approaching entry into the labor market. In order to select this kind of sample, the Authors of the present article wrote an e-mail to members of mailing groups in their fifth year of graduate studies, inviting them to take part in the study. The task of the students who wished to participate was to access the website at the address provided in the e-mail, where the questionnaire was available. After entering the website, the participant read the instruction and learned the participation rules; after giving informed consent, he or she completed the questionnaires provided.

The respondents were asked to give their e-mail address to be contacted about the second part of the study, half a year later. At the same time, the e-mail address provided served the purpose of pairing up the responses from the same person given in the first and second stages of the study. Giving one's e-mail address in the first stage of the study was understood as the participant's consent for the address to be used for research purposes, in order to send the second part of the study. The total sample consisted of 356 subjects who decided to take part in the study.

Measurement 2: After six months, in January, we turned to the 356 participants from the first stage of the study by sending them an e-mail message with a request to complete the on-line questionnaires again. The message was sent to the e-mail addresses given by the participants in the first stage. Finally, we received responses



from 170 participants, which means that the return rate in the second part of the study was 47.75%.

The study was conducted in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

### The methods

We used the General Self-Efficacy Scale by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) to measure general self-efficacy, and we administered our own the Life Roles Self-Efficacy Scale to measure self-efficacy in the main life roles.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), adapted into Polish by Juczyński (2001), measures the level of the individual's general belief regarding his or her own effectiveness in coping with difficult situations and obstacles. The scale consists of 10 diagnostic items, making up one factor. The sum score is the general self-efficacy index and may range from 10 to 40 points. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability of the Polish version of the method is  $\alpha = .78$ .

The next method is the Life Roles Self-Efficacy Scale (LRSES) (Kot et al., 2020), which serves to measure self-efficacy in the five social roles distinguished by Super (1990): Student, Worker, Homemaker, Leisurite, and Citizen. The tool was developed for the purpose of testing university graduates and individuals in a situation of transition into the labor market, and therefore we used it in the present study. It consists of the following scales measuring role-specific self-efficacy: Student – this scale consists of items related to self-efficacy in gaining knowledge, learning new material, and passing exams; Worker – the items making up this scale concern self-efficacy in looking for a job, pursuing a career, and functioning in the work environment; Homemaker – the items making up this scale refer to self-efficacy in performing tasks and duties connected with home and family; Leisurite – this scale consists of items referring to self-efficacy in recreation as well as planning and organizing free time; Citizen – the items making up this scale are related to self-efficacy in the domain of public, social, and political duties.

The reliability of the questionnaire, understood as the consistency of scores on particular subscales measured as Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient, was as follows:  $\alpha = .86$  for the Student scale,  $\alpha = .83$  for the Worker scale,  $\alpha = .88$  for the Homemaker scale,  $\alpha = .85$  for the Leisurite scale, and  $\alpha = .86$  for the Citizen scale.

Apart from the above instruments, we also used a personal data survey to collect information concerning selected demographic variables (age, sex, university, place of residence) and work experience.

### Participants

The sample consisted of individuals in the process of transition from a university to the labor market. In the first part of the study, the participants were 356 fifth-year graduate students of various higher education institutions; 170 of them decided to take part in the second stage of the study as well.

There were more women than men in the sample in the first stage of the study: 224 women and 132 men (62.9% and 37.1%, respectively). Also in the second stage of the study there were more women than men among the participants: 108 women and 62 men (63.5% and 36.5%, respectively). The respondents came from 4 major academic centers in Poland: Warsaw, Gdansk, Lublin and Bialystok. They also represented universities of different profiles: polytechnics, universities, medical universities and agricultural universities.

The participants' age for the sample in the first stage ranged from 23 to 28 years. Their mean age was  $M = 24.53$ , with a standard deviation of  $SD = 0.91$ . By the time of the second measurement, for natural reasons, mean age increased to  $M = 25.29$ , with a standard deviation of  $SD = 0.98$ .

We conducted statistical analyses (including  $\chi^2$  test with Yates's correction, significance of difference tests), which revealed no statistically significant differences between the subjects who took part in only one stage of the study and those who participated in both stages (significant differences were found neither in demographic data nor in scores on particular scales).

## Results

At this point, it is worth noting how self-efficacy in different life roles and general self-efficacy change depending on the changing situation in the job market. According to the situation that graduates could find themselves in after leaving the university, we distinguished four groups of subjects: not employed at either of the two measurements, employed at both measurement, employed at the first measurement but not at the second one, and not employed during preparation to leave the university but having a job at the time of the second measurement half a year later. Because conditions were not met in every group, it was necessary to use nonparametric tests to analyze the relations (Z statistic for the Wilcoxon T Test). The significance of differences between the results of the first and the second self-efficacy measurements in the four groups of graduates with different situations on the labor market after leaving the education system is presented in Table 1.

The largest group – 87 (51.20%) of the 170 subjects whose scores were taken into account in the second measurement – were employed both before leaving the education system and half a year after leaving it. The stability of employment status was reflected in the lack of statistically significant changes in the level of self-efficacy in any of the social roles or in the level of general self-efficacy (see Table 1).

The next largest group consists of 33 individuals (19.40%). They are graduates who did not work at the time of the first measurement but found employment after leaving the university. In the case of this group, there was a statistically significant increase in the level of self-efficacy in several life roles. The analysis using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed statistically significant differences in the case of the following roles: Worker  $Z = 2.43$ ,  $p = .01$ ; Homemaker,  $Z = 2.71$ ,  $p = .01$ .

**Table 1. The Significance of Differences Between the Results of the First and Second Measurements (z statistic for the Wilcoxon T Test) of Self-Efficacy Level in Four Groups of Graduates**

Self-efficacy	Measurement	employed – employed			not employed – employed			not employed – not employed			employed – not employed		
		M	Z	p	M	Z	p	M	Z	p	M	Z	p
Student	1	14.47	-1.55	.12	12.75	-1.73	.08	9.22	-0.08	.95	11.87	-0.64	.52
	2	14.88			13.82			9.51			12.17		
Worker	1	13.66	-0.18	.86	11.12	-2.43	.01	7.63	-1.23	.22	9.65	-0.89	.37
	2	14.87			12.58			8.85			10.47		
Homemaker	1	15.60	-1.58	.11	13.60	-2.71	.01	11.55	-0.65	.51	12.61	-0.15	.88
	2	15.97			14.78			12.59			11.96		
Leisureite	1	12.26	-0.88	.38	11.58	-0.61	.52	6.18	-2.72	.01	7.90	-1.94	.04
	2	12.58			10.99			9.03			9.13		
Citizen	1	13.07	-0.21	.83	11.81	-0.64	.52	9.93	-0.43	.67	8.56	-1.93	.05
	2	13.24			12.73			10.48			9.86		
GSEES	1	31.60	-1.98	.06	28.70	-2.32	.03	26.74	2.13	.03	26.21	-2.72	.01
	2	32.58			30.64			23.33			28.91		

There was also a statistically significant increase in the level of general self-efficacy,  $Z = 2.32, p = .03$ .

The employment situation of 27 subjects (15.90%) did not change – they worked both towards the end of their university education and at the time of the second measurement. However, the analysis using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed statistically significant differences in the case of general self-efficacy,  $Z = 2.13, p = .03$ , and only one role-specific self-efficacy – in the role of Leisurite,  $Z = 2.72, p = .02$ . Compared to the measurement performed in the period preceding transition to the labor market, there was a decrease in the level of general self-efficacy. Meanwhile, the level of self-efficacy in the role of Leisurite in this group significantly increased.

Twenty-three subjects (14.10%) who had been employed at the time of graduation gave up work by the time of the second measurement. In the case of individuals who lost their jobs between the first measurement and the second one, there was a significant increase in the level of self-efficacy in the roles of Leisurite,  $Z = 1.94, p = .04$ , and Citizen,  $Z = 1.93, p = .04$ . There was also a significant increase in the level of general self-efficacy,  $Z = 2.72, p = .01$ .

## Discussion

Hypothesis 1 emphasized the impact of change in employment status on changes in self-efficacy level. When testing it, apart from transition from the role of Student preparing for transition to complete functioning in the labor market, we also took employment status into account. According to the possible changes in employment status, we distinguished four groups in which we analyzed changes in self-efficacy level.

In the specific Hypothesis 1.1 we postulated that the level of self-efficacy in individuals who were employed when preparing for transition and who were also employed at the time of the second measurement would remain the same or increase. In the case of the largest group of graduates, who worked both at the stage of preparation and half a year after leaving the university, we found no statistically significant changes. Stable employment situation resulted in the maintenance of role-specific self-efficacy levels as well as general self-efficacy level, which confirmed Hypothesis 1.1.

Because these people had already worked before they left the education system, they may not perceive this transition as important enough to involve a change in self-efficacy beliefs (Marshall & Stewart, 2021). More and more students are individuals who already have some experience in the job market (Takeuchi et al., 2021). As employers nowadays expect not only formal education, but also – more and more often – documented work experience, young people decide to gain experience already during their studies by various kinds of traineeships, internships, or various forms of voluntary work. This leads to the blurring of the stages of transition

from the system of education to the world of work (Vermeire et al., 2022), since young people continue to work, the difference being that they additionally have to attend classes. The scores obtained by employed subjects in the first and second measurements were above the mean scores for the total sample, and according to Rosenberg (1989) the level of self-esteem does not increase indefinitely but remains satisfactory. Therefore, even in the case of a series of successes, the increase in self-efficacy will be weaker, until it reaches the level appropriate for the individual. An excessively high or excessively low level of self-efficacy is not adaptive and does not have the desired effect (Bandura, 2000).

We expected an increase in self-efficacy also in the group of graduates who took up employment after graduation (Hypothesis 1.2). This hypothesis was confirmed, and we observed an increase in the level of self-efficacy beliefs in the case of the roles of Worker, Homemaker, and Student as well as general self-efficacy between the first measurement and the second one.

In the graduates who took up work after completing their university education there was an increase in self-efficacy in the role of Worker. The experience of success in finding a job despite unemployment, frequent among graduates in Poland, constitutes a powerful source of self-efficacy. Looking for a job required engagement in activity and a belief that one was competent enough to find and keep it. This suggests the possibility of the investigated self-beliefs being modified under the influence of life experiences connected with the need to determine one's future (Lent, 2005). On the other hand, finding a job, that is difficult especially for young people, worked as feedback and additionally enhanced self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000). Taking up work and the resources gained in this way make it possible to pursue other roles characteristic of early adolescence (Super, 1990; Jokinen, 2010; Vermeire et al., 2022).

An increase in the level of self-efficacy also occurred in the case of the role of Homemaker. Leaving the education system involves taking on greater responsibility for oneself; it is a transition from the role of Student, dependent on others, to the role of independent Worker (Super, 1990; Kot & Rożnowski, 2012). This independence manifests itself also in taking on responsibility for one's duties not directly related to doing paid work. Housekeeping and taking care of other household members is an important element in the development of a mature and responsible individual too (Rękosiewicz, 2015). Until recently, this role was mainly women's domain, but younger generations have a more partnership-based approach to household duties (Wilkinson et al., 2017).

A small increase occurred in the case of self-efficacy in the role of Student and in the case of general self-efficacy. As mentioned above, many "newcomers" entering the role of Worker directly from the university need a period of preparation and adaptation. They need it to acquire the new knowledge and skills indispensable in their job which they did not acquire at the university or which have become

outdated (Jokinen, 2010). Proper adaptation to the culture of the organization in which the young person will be working and mastering the required skills is necessary to be recognized as a valuable member of the organization (Hartman et al., 2013). Therefore, contrary to appearances, despite leaving the university walls, in the present times of progress graduates need to learn and develop further (Benvenuti & Mazzoni, 2022; Haseski & Odabaşı, 2017; Kanar & Bouckenooghe, 2021).

The fact that individuals achieved professional tasks confirmed by successes in other main life roles translated into their perception of themselves as more effective. Positive experience and successes enhance general self-efficacy and contribute to the person perceiving themselves as competent to cope with further challenges awaiting them not only in the job market but also in other life roles.

The situation on the job market was totally different in the case of individuals who left the system of education as employed already and became unemployed during the six months they spent in the job market, by the time of the second measurement. This is the smallest group of subjects, but unemployment at the beginning of career and – to an even greater degree – job loss may have affected self-efficacy. Unexpectedly, also in this group we found a statistically significant increase in self-efficacy in the roles of Leisurite and Citizen as well as an increase in general self-efficacy. The obtained results argue in favor of rejecting the specific Hypothesis 1.4, which postulated a decrease in role-specific and general self-efficacy in the group of subjects who have experienced job loss between the two measurements.

Self-efficacy in the roles of Citizen and Leisurite, just like the remaining roles, is strictly related to general self-efficacy responsible for the entirety of human functioning (Kitching et al., 2011) and to other self-efficacy beliefs. Consequently, an increase in self-efficacy in these roles, important for individuals who have ceased to work, was accompanied by an enhancement of general self-efficacy. It is comforting that, despite failure in the job market, self-efficacy in other roles (including the role of Worker) retains its level from the time when the person was employed. Perhaps graduates perceive their new situation as temporary, since people from the young generation are aware of the precarious nature of employment, considering it to be a natural element of professional career (Briscoe et al., 2006). Therefore, temporary difficulties on the job market are not a factor so negative for them as to lower their self-efficacy.

The situation on the job market is most difficult for individuals who did not work during preparation for transition and still remain unemployed. While in the case of subjects experiencing positive outcomes of their actions the level of self-efficacy in various domains increased, in the case of subjects with no such experience we observed a decrease in self-efficacy level. This was the only group in which there was a decrease in the level of general self-efficacy compared to the measurement

performed before their leaving the education system. No experience of paid employment or experience of failure in the job market lead to a decrease in global self-efficacy (Lent, 2005). It seems this may be adaptive, since the decrease in the possibility of personally influencing the course of various events may be conducive to more realistic estimation of the possibility of controlling one's situation (Rosenberg et al., 1995). Remaining outside the labor market for more than a year is considered to be long-term unemployment, which further decreases the chance of finding a job (Stremersch et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2019). Unemployment makes it more difficult to obtain resources necessary for proper functioning and may lead to dependence on parents or employed partners (Benvenuti & Mazzoni, 2022). It should be added that this group of subjects made attempts to find employment similar to those that were effective in employed subjects: responding to job advertisements, sending out CVs, and attending job fairs.

As in the case of subjects who lost their jobs in the encounter phase, also in the case of subjects unemployed at the time of both measurements there was an increase in the level of self-efficacy in the role of Leisurite. Unemployment is connected with having more free time, which increased even more after the completion of education. Having free time may seem to be leisure in itself, but what matters is, above all, the right management of free time and organizing it in such a way as to rest most effectively (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Moreover, even if individuals do not currently have jobs, this does not mean they are not active in other roles (e.g., in the role of young parent); competently managing one's free time can therefore be a source of self-efficacy in this domain. The obtained results argue in favor of rejecting Hypothesis 1.3 postulating the lack of change in the levels of role-specific and general self-efficacy beliefs in this group.

### Limitation of the study

The present study had certain limitations that should be considered when planning further research. Reis and Judd (2000) stress that a study should reveal more than a significant change in the level of some variable between two measurements if it is to determine the patterns of change. From the perspective of longitudinal research, most psychological variables have a discontinuous pattern. It can be assumed that self-efficacy beliefs (particularly the specific ones that concern functioning in specific roles) will behave in the same way, which makes it so important to perform further measurements with the same sample in order to determine the pattern of changes in self-efficacy beyond the stages of preparation and encounter. Accordingly, the studies described should be considered shortitudinal with an interval of about 6 months between two measurements (Dormann & Griffin, 2015). Consequently, the full dynamics of the transit cycle proposed by Nicholson & West (1989) have not been illustrated.

Moreover, in the case of many theoretical models, the phases and stages distinguished are often arbitrary and redundant, since it is difficult to pinpoint the

crucial breakthrough moments constituting clear-cut borders between the phases (Reis & Judd, 2000). In the case of transition into the labor market, due to the increasingly frequent combination of education and work, the borders of the first transition often become blurred, and career patterns frequently include a return to earlier stages of transition, which stems from the need to supplement career capital (Jokinen, 2010). In future studies the sample should therefore be broadened to increase the proportion of subjects with less experience on the job market, and the frequency of measurements should be increased. It would also be important to conduct tests with multiple measurements, capturing the full dynamics of the transit process.

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