

## Does proactive personality matter? the moderating role of proactive personality in the relationship between vocational maturity and work readiness

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(Received: 09-03-2026; revised: 02-04-2026; accepted: 12-03-2026; published: 05-06-2026)

**Abstract:** Competition in the job market is increasing, requiring vocational high school graduates to possess adequate work readiness. This study aims to examine the effect of vocational maturity on work readiness, with proactive personality as a moderating variable. This quantitative study involved 235 12th-grade vocational high school students in Semarang who were selected using convenience sampling. Data were collected using scales measuring vocational maturity, work readiness, and proactive personality, and analyzed using Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). The results indicate that vocational maturity has a significant effect on work readiness ( $R^2 = 0,343$ ), while the moderating interaction increases the  $R^2$  value to 0,384 ( $p < 0,05$ ), representing a 41% increase. The novelty of this study lies in examining the moderating role of proactive personality among vocational high school students. These findings underscore the importance of career guidance services in vocational high schools in fostering students' proactive personality.

**Keywords:** vocational maturity; employability; proactive personality; vocational school.

**Abstrak:** Persaingan pasar kerja yang semakin kompetitif menuntut lulusan SMK memiliki kesiapan kerja yang optimal. Penelitian ini bertujuan menguji pengaruh kematangan vokasional terhadap kesiapan kerja dengan kepribadian proaktif sebagai variabel moderator. Penelitian kuantitatif ini melibatkan 235 siswa kelas XII SMK di Semarang yang dipilih menggunakan convenience sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui skala kematangan vokasional, kesiapan kerja, dan kepribadian proaktif, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan *Moderated Regression Analysis* (MRA). Hasil menunjukkan kematangan vokasional berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kesiapan kerja ( $R^2 = 0,343$ ), sedangkan interaksi moderasi meningkatkan nilai  $R^2$  menjadi 0,384 ( $p < 0,05$ ) sehingga mengalami peningkatan 41%. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada pengujian peran moderasi kepribadian proaktif pada siswa SMK. Temuan ini berimplikasi pada pentingnya layanan bimbingan karir di SMK untuk mengembangkan kepribadian proaktif siswa.

**Kata kunci:** kematangan vokasional; kesiapan kerja; kepribadian proaktif; smk.

## INTRODUCTION

Competition in today's labor market is increasing, as reflected in Government Regulation Number 34 of 2021, which allows companies in Indonesia to employ foreign workers in accordance with applicable regulations. Although the number of job vacancies in Indonesia is relatively high, these opportunities tend to become more limited due to increased competition from foreign workers entering and participating in the Indonesian labor market (Abduh, 2020). This phenomenon indicates that labor market competition arises not only from the number of domestic job seekers but also from highly competent foreign workers, thereby requiring local workers to improve their quality to compete globally. In line with this condition, recommendations have been made to improve the quality and competence of Indonesian human resources, thereby better preparing them to enter the world of work (Suhandi et al., 2021). Rosana (2018), stated that education is one way to prepare individuals for the world of work by producing competent graduates. Therefore, efforts to increase competitiveness through strong personal quality and superior competence need to be supported by a structured educational process.

Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) are educational institutions responsible for preparing human resources with the abilities, skills, and expertise needed to improve workplace performance, (Edi et al, 2017). Unlike senior high schools (Sekolah Menengah Atas/SMA), vocational schools place greater emphasis on direct implementation and work practice. Vocational high school graduates are expected not only to possess competencies relevant to their field but also to develop themselves in order to compete in the labor market (Ridwan, 2021). Based on this explanation, vocational schools are intended to prepare students to be capable and ready to enter the world of work.

In reality, however, vocational high school graduates still experience difficulties in obtaining employment. Statistics Indonesia (BPS, 2024) reported that vocational high school graduates had the highest open unemployment rate, namely 9, 01%, compared with graduates from other levels of education. These open unemployment data reveal a paradox: vocational schools, which are ideally projected to produce work-ready graduates, in

fact contribute to the highest unemployment rate. The aim of vocational schools to produce graduates ready to enter the workforce has not been fully realized, as many vocational school alumni have not yet been absorbed into the labor market (Sholihah & Listiadi, 2022).

The high unemployment rate among vocational high school graduates may be due to low work-readiness among vocational students (Arif et al, 2021). Work readiness refers to the level of maturity in an individual's skills and knowledge needed to achieve success in the workplace, including the ability to accept and pay attention to work-related behavior, (Caballero et al, 2011); (Jafri et al., 2024). Based on Super's career development stages, vocational high school students are in the career exploration stage. Adolescents at this stage tend to become more aware of the world of work; therefore, a sense of readiness for work is needed (Kurniawan et al, 2023). According to Muspawi and Lestari (2020), individuals with work readiness are better able to adapt to new situations, maximize self-productivity, and adjust their work behavior in accordance with organizational values. In line with this Jafri et al., (2024), found that students' work readiness remains relatively low. Low student work-readiness indicates that there are still factors to be considered in the career preparation process for vocational high school students. One psychological factor that plays an important role in career planning is vocational maturity (Budiman, 2016). According to Hartiningtyas et al., (2016) vocational maturity is an essential aspect for vocational high school graduates, as it relates to the suitability of career choices and their readiness to enter the world of work. Vocational maturity was selected as the primary predictor of work readiness because it is directly related to individuals' readiness to transition from education to employment.

Vocational maturity is the ability to accomplish vocational developmental tasks and to make choices and progress in education and career (Amiruddin et al., 2022). According to Candra and Fenia (2019), the characteristics of individuals with vocational maturity include being steady in determining job criteria, being realistic in self-assessment, using the information they obtain appropriately, and being able to take responsibility. Eunike (2019), found that vocational maturity has a positive relationship with hardiness, meaning that higher

vocational maturity is associated with higher hardiness, and vice versa. Based on this explanation, vocational maturity plays an important role in shaping individual work readiness by supporting career goals that align personal abilities with the dynamics of the world of work.

The relationship between vocational maturity and work readiness is not necessarily linear, because the magnitude of its effect may vary across individuals. This variation can be explained by personality factors, including proactive personality. Proactive personality is defined as a stable disposition that is not limited to responding to situations but reflects an individual's tendency to act on personal initiative to improve the quality of what they do in their environment (Bateman and Crant, 1993); (Anggraeni and Izzati, 2024). Individuals with a proactive personality tend to show initiative, resilience, and adaptability, enabling them to actualize their vocational maturity into concrete work-related behaviors. Non-proactive individuals tend to be apathetic and less reactive, merely following circumstances without attempting to change them (Sudar, 2023). Adaptability at work strongly affects work quality by increasing the likelihood of finding suitable employment and achieving career success (Nurmasari, 2024). In line with the findings of Susilowati et al., (2021) proactive personality is positively and significantly associated with career success, indicating that more proactive individuals can change their work environment by overcoming challenges, improving performance, and creating new opportunities.

Based on the preceding explanation, it can be concluded that, amid an increasingly competitive labor market, vocational high school students' work readiness remains an important issue. Vocational maturity is an important internal component of work readiness because it helps individuals understand themselves, plan their careers, and make realistic career decisions. However, the effect of vocational maturity on work readiness may not be optimal if it is not supported by a personality characteristic that encourages active action.

Therefore, this study is urgent because it examines whether proactive personality strengthens or weakens the relationship between vocational maturity and work readiness. Previous studies have mostly focused on the direct effect of vocational maturity on

work readiness or the direct effect of proactive personality on work readiness, whereas the role of proactive personality as a moderating variable has not been widely examined, particularly among vocational high school students. This study aimed to analyze the effect of vocational maturity on work readiness and to test the moderating role of proactive personality in this relationship. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for developing career guidance programs and personality development for students, thereby improving the work-readiness of vocational high school graduates. The hypotheses were as follows: H1: vocational maturity has a positive effect on the work readiness of vocational high school students; and H2: proactive personality moderates the effect of vocational maturity on the work readiness of vocational high school students.

## METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design. This design measures variables at a single point in time; therefore, the findings can only explain statistical relationships or effects and cannot strongly establish causal relationships. This study measured three variables: vocational maturity, work readiness, and proactive personality.

The population in this study consisted of Grade XII students at the public vocational high school that served as the research site. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling, in which respondents were selected based on ease of access and the availability of research participants. The sample size was calculated using G\*Power 3.1.9.4 with an effect size of 0,15 and an alpha error of 0,05. The total sample consisted of 235 participants who met the following criteria: (1) active students at a vocational high school/SMK, (2) enrolled in a school in Semarang, (3) Grade XII students, (4) male or female, and (5) students of a public vocational high school.

Research data were collected using a questionnaire comprising the vocational maturity, work-readiness, and proactive personality scales. The vocational maturity scale developed by Crites (1973), which was modified by Budiman (2016) into a closed-ended questionnaire with four response options, consists of four aspects: exploration of occupational problems, occupational planning, self-assessment of ability in occupational

choice, and independence in occupational choice. This scale contains 20 items measured using a four-point Likert scale, with Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0,687$ .

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The work-readiness scale developed by Caballero et al., (2011) was adapted into Indonesian for the target participants and expanded to 27 items by Wijayanti (2019). The present study used all items from the previous study. The scale consists of four aspects: personal characteristics, organizational acumen, work competence, and social intelligence. This scale contains 27 items measured using a five-point Likert scale, with Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0,96$ .

The proactive personality scale developed by Bateman & Crant (1993) was taken from a previous study by (Pertiwi, 2021), It consists of four aspects: identifying

opportunities, demonstrating initiative, taking action, and achieving meaningful change. This scale uses 10 items measured using a six-point Likert scale, with Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0,865$ .

Data were collected by distributing questionnaires to participants who met the research criteria. The questionnaires were administered offline, with an estimated completion time of approximately 20 minutes. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, data confidentiality, and instructions for completing the instruments.

Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) was used to analyze the data in order to predict the effect of vocational maturity on work readiness and to test the interaction model of proactive personality as a moderating variable. The analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The characteristics of the respondents in this study are presented to provide an overview of the distribution of participants based on demographic categories relevant to the study. These characteristics include sex, age, and major of study, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Respondent Demographic

| Charateristic    | Demographic                          | Number<br>(n) | Percentage<br>(%) |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Sex              | Male                                 | 113           | 48,1              |
|                  | Female                               | 122           | 51,9              |
| Age              | 17 years                             | 183           | 77,9              |
|                  | 18 years                             | 52            | 22,1              |
| Major            | Mechanical engineering               | 44            | 18,7              |
|                  | Accounting                           | 63            | 26,8              |
|                  | Computer and network engineering     | 59            | 25,1              |
|                  | Building construction and saturation | 51            | 21,7              |
|                  | Broadcasting                         | 18            | 7,7               |
| Total Respondent |                                      | 235           | 100,0             |

Based on Table 1, the total number of respondents was 235, comprising 113 males (48,1%) and 122 females (51,9%). The sample

composition shows that the proportion of female respondents was slightly higher than that of male respondents. Thus, the

involvement of both male and female students in this study was expected to provide a comprehensive description of vocational

maturity, work readiness, and proactive personality among vocational high school students in Semarang.

Table 2. Theoretical Score Range

| Variable              | N   | Min | Max | Mean | SD  |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|
| Proactive personality | 235 | 10  | 60  | 35   | 8,3 |
| Work readiness        | 235 | 27  | 135 | 81   | 18  |
| Vocational maturity   | 235 | 20  | 80  | 50   | 10  |

Based on Table 2, the data categorization showed that most respondents had a high level of proactive personality (73,6%). Most respondents' work readiness was in the moderate category (94,9%), while most respondents' vocational maturity was in the high category (79,6%). These findings indicate that respondents tended to possess both proactive personality and vocational maturity. Nevertheless, respondents' work readiness,

which remained in the moderate category, indicates that students still need further development in work competencies, practical experience, and the ability to adapt to the work environment. These findings are also in line with Jafri et al, (2024), who found that students' work-readiness was not yet optimal, indicating the need for more effective educational support and career guidance services to prepare students for the world of work.

Table 3. Classical Assumption Test

| Test Type               | Variable                  | Statistic Value                  | Criterion           | Conclusion                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Normality test          | -                         | Sig. = 0,200                     | Sig. > 0,05         | Normality distributed data |
| Multicollinearity test  | Vocational maturity (X)   | Tolerance = 0,892<br>VIF = 1,121 | Sig. > 0,10<br>< 10 | No multicollinearity       |
| Heteroscedasticity test | Vocational maturity (X)   | Sig. = 0,226                     | Sig. > 0,05         | No heteroscedasticity      |
|                         | Proactive personality (M) | Sig. = 0,072                     | Sig. > 0,05         | No heteroscedasticity      |

Table 3 shows that this study underwent a series of classical assumption tests and that the data met the requirements for regression analysis. The heteroscedasticity test

results indicated that the regression model did not exhibit heteroscedasticity; therefore, the model was considered appropriate and met the assumptions for further analysis.

Table 4. Moderated Regression Analysis

| Variable            | $\beta$ | t      | Sig.   | R <sup>2</sup> | Std error | F       | Sig.               | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
|---------------------|---------|--------|--------|----------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Vocational maturity | 0,586   | 11,027 | <0,001 | 0,343          | 6,908     | 121,593 | <,001 <sup>b</sup> | ,778        | 1,116       |

Based on Table 4, the results showed that the significance value of the vocational maturity variable was 0,000, which is smaller than 0,05, and the R-squared value was 0,343. The regression analysis results indicate that vocational maturity had a positive and significant effect on the work readiness of

vocational high school students. This finding indicates that the higher the students' vocational maturity, the higher their work readiness. In addition, the regression model test showed that the model was significant ( $F = 121,593$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ), indicating that it was appropriate for explaining the effect of vocational maturity on

the work readiness of vocational high school students.

Table 5. Moderated Regression Test

| Model Variable                              | Unstandardized B | Std. Error | Standardized Beta | t      | Sig. |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|------------|-------------------|--------|------|
| (Constant)                                  | 184,393          | 50,628     | –                 | 3,642  | ,000 |
| Vocational maturity                         | -1,706           | 0,765      | -1,055            | -2,31  | ,027 |
| Proactive personality                       | -3,454           | 1,070      | -2,004            | -3,229 | ,001 |
| Vocational maturity * Proactive personality | 0,055            | 0,016      | 3,050             | 3,417  | ,001 |

The results of the Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) showed that the interaction variable between vocational maturity and proactive personality had a positive and significant effect on work readiness ( $b = 0,055$ ,  $t = 3,417$ ,  $p = 0,001$ ). This indicates that proactive personality serves as a moderating variable, strengthening the effect of vocational maturity on the work readiness of vocational high school students. Thus, the higher the proactive personality possessed by vocational high school students, the stronger the positive effect of vocational maturity on work readiness.

Vocational maturity and proactive personality showed negative, significant effects, namely vocational maturity ( $b = -1,706$ ;  $p = 0,027$ ) and proactive personality ( $b = -3,454$ ;  $p = 0,001$ ). However, in the moderation model, the primary focus lies on the interaction variable. The positive value of the interaction variable indicates that proactive personality strengthens the relationship between vocational maturity and work readiness. In other words, the effect of vocational maturity on work readiness becomes stronger when individuals have a high level of proactive personality.

Table 6. Effective Contribution of Moderation

| Model                                       | R Square |
|---------------------------------------------|----------|
| Vocational maturity * Proactive personality | .384     |

Based on the data analysis, the R-squared value was 0,384, indicating that after the moderating variable, proactive personality, was included, the effect of vocational maturity on work readiness increased by 4,1%.

The data analysis showed that the significance value for vocational maturity was 0,000 ( $p < 0,05$ ), indicating a significant effect on work readiness. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that vocational maturity affects work readiness was accepted. Eunike (2019) also found a similar result, namely a significant relationship between vocational maturity and work readiness ( $p < 0,05$ ). The consistency of these findings indicates that the effect of vocational maturity on work readiness is relatively stable, even across different contexts, sample characteristics, and time periods.

The findings showed that the higher the level of vocational maturity, the higher the level of work readiness. Individuals who are vocationally mature tend to have better self-understanding, clearer career planning, and the ability to make realistic career decisions, thereby being better prepared to face the demands and dynamics of the world of work. This finding indicates that vocational maturity is an important internal factor in shaping work readiness, particularly among vocational high school students in the transition from school to work.

Furthermore, the analysis showed an R-squared value of 0,343. Thus, vocational maturity explained 34,3% of the variance in work readiness, while the remaining 65,7% was influenced by other components not examined

in this study, such as personality characteristics, motivation, work experience, environmental support, and other psychological factors. This indicates that work readiness is multidimensional and influenced by various factors. This finding is supported by Eunike (2019), who found that vocational maturity is positively related to hardiness.

Moreover, after including the moderating variable, proactive personality, the R-squared increased by 4,1%. This indicates that the combination of vocational maturity and proactive personality accounted for 38,4% of the variance in work readiness. This increase suggests that proactive personality strengthens the effect of vocational maturity on work readiness by helping individuals actualize their potential and plan their careers more optimally. This finding is consistent with Pratama and Ramadhani, (2025) and Tjung et al., (2025) who stated that proactive personality plays a significant role in increasing career adaptability and individual readiness to face the challenges of the world of work. It is also in line with Sari and Mulyana, (2025), who found a positive relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability, categorized as strong and positive in direction. Individuals with a proactive personality tend to be more initiative-taking, able to identify opportunities, and active in planning and developing their careers. Although several previous studies have been conducted among university students, the psychological phenomenon is relevant to vocational high school students preparing to enter the world of work.

This study is also consistent with Trait Activation Theory (TAT), proposed by Tett and Burnett (2003), which states that the impact of individual characteristics on behavior becomes stronger when a situation provides cues for the expression of certain traits. Vocational maturity reflects students' readiness to plan and make career decisions; however, this readiness requires an internal drive to be manifested as work readiness. Proactive personality is a trait that becomes activated when students have opportunities to explore careers, make decisions, and prepare for the world of work. Therefore, the stronger the students' proactive personality, the greater the effect of vocational maturity on work readiness.

Overall, the results of this study show that all research hypotheses were accepted, including the direct effect of vocational

maturity on work readiness and the moderating role of proactive personality. These findings emphasize that vocational maturity is an important component in shaping students' work readiness, but it cannot stand alone. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach to vocational education is needed by integrating the development of vocational maturity and a proactive personality, along with other supporting factors such as self-efficacy, internship experience, soft skills, motivation, and social support. This approach is expected to produce vocational high school graduates who are technically, psychologically, and socially prepared to compete in the world of work.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the discussion and research findings, it can be concluded that proactive personality clarifies the psychological condition that strengthens the relationship between vocational maturity and work readiness among vocational high school students. Proactive personality contributed 4,1% and served as a moderating variable, strengthening this relationship, indicating that students with high vocational maturity will have better work readiness when their proactive personality is supported. The findings show that students' work-readiness is not solely determined by technical abilities or career planning, but also emerges from the relationship between career-readiness and personal characteristics.

This study has a limitation in that it did not obtain in-depth findings. Future researchers are encouraged to use mixed-methods designs to produce more comprehensive results. As a recommendation for schools, guidance and counseling teachers can design career exploration services that help students develop initiative and the courage to make career choices.

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