



The Relationship Between Proactive Personality and Career Adaptability Among College Students: A Mediating Analysis of Career Decision-Making Self Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of proactive personality on career adaptability among students and the moderating role of career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE) in this relationship, using PROCESS Macro analysis. The focus of this study is to deepen the theoretical understanding of the conditions that strengthen or weaken the relationship between proactive personality and student career adaptability. The participants were 175 students at Semarang State University. This study employed a quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected through self-report questionnaires using three standardized instruments: the Proactive Personality Scale Short Version (PPS-SV) to measure proactive personality, a CDMSE scale adapted from the Career and Educational Decision Self-Efficacy Inventory (CEDSI) to measure career decision-making self-efficacy, and the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) to measure career adaptability. The data were analyzed using moderated regression analysis with the PROCESS Macro (Model 1), in which proactive personality was specified as the independent variable, CDMSE as the moderator, and career adaptability as the dependent variable. Moderation was tested by examining the significance of the interaction term between proactive personality and CDMSE. The results show that proactive personality has a positive and significant effect on career adaptability ($B = .4013$; $p < .001$), and CDMSE also has a significant positive effect ($B = 2.0365$; $p < .001$; $r = .870$). However, the interaction test indicates that CDMSE does not significantly moderate the effect of proactive personality on career adaptability ($F(1,171) = 3.2734$; $p = .0722$). This confirms that CDMSE functions as a strong direct predictor rather than a moderating variable. These findings enrich the literature on Indonesian students' career adaptability and open up further research directions to explore other mediator or moderator variables.

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INTRODUCTION

The global labor market is undergoing structural shifts accelerated by automation and artificial intelligence, which are projected to replace 85 million jobs while creating 97

million new roles that demand a high degree of adaptability (World Economic Forum, 2023). In Indonesia, these consequences are reflected in the open unemployment rate for college graduates, which

stood at 6.23% in February 2025, with an absolute number of 1,010,652 the highest in the past four years (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). This phenomenon indicates that career readiness cannot rely solely on academic competencies but requires the psychological capacity to adapt to non-linear changes in the workplace (Savickas, 2021).

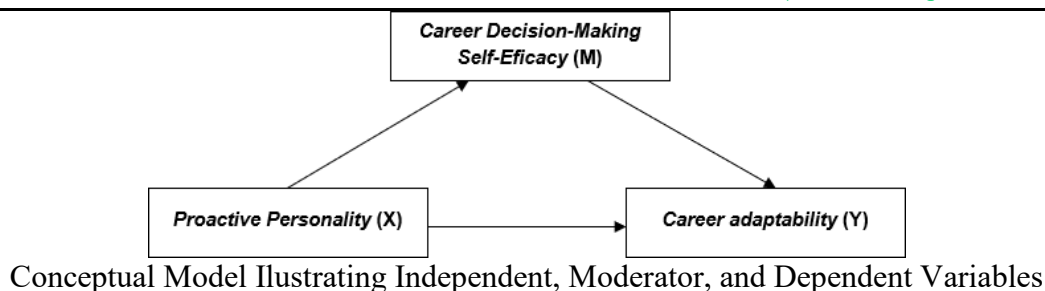
Conceptually, an individual's ability to face, manage, and adjust to dynamic career changes is referred to in career psychology as career adaptability. This study uses Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2021) as its primary theoretical framework, which views career adaptability as a psychosocial resource (adaptive readiness) that helps individuals accomplish career development tasks and adapt to unexpected transitions. This construct encompasses four dimensions: concern (concern for the future), control (self-responsibility), curiosity (exploration of opportunities), and confidence (confidence in overcoming obstacles). Students with high career adaptability are generally more proactive, have well-thought-out future plans, and are optimistic about the post-college phase; conversely, low career adaptability is associated with anxiety about the future, self-doubt, and procrastination in making career decisions.

Within the framework of Career Construction Theory, adaptive readiness is shaped by both dispositional and cognitive resources. On the dispositional side, a proactive personality is positioned as an individual's adaptive readiness to actively identify opportunities, take initiative, and reshape their environment to achieve desired career goals, as explained in Proactive Personality Theory (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Students with a high proactive personality tend not to be passive in the face of career uncertainty but rather actively seek information, participate in self-development activities, and prepare strategies for entering the workforce. A number of recent studies have consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between a proactive personality and career adaptability among students, although the underlying mechanisms vary ranging from the mediating role of the college experience, the use of personal strengths and job crafting, parental support, to career pessimism (Fang et al., 2024; Hartanto & Salim, 2021; Li et al., 2024; Mercan & Öztemel, 2023; Pandu Pradana et al., 2022).

In addition to dispositional aspects, adaptive readiness is also determined by an individual's cognitive beliefs about their own abilities, as explained in Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura Albert, 1997). In the career domain, this belief is conceptualized as career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks related to career exploration, planning, and decision-making (Taylor & Betz, 1983). A number of recent studies and meta-analyses have convincingly demonstrated that this self-belief is one of the most consistent predictors of career adaptability across populations (Agoes Salim et al., 2023; Hamdani & Satwika, 2026; Wang et al., 2021). The question, then, is not merely whether CDMSE influences career adaptability, but rather how a proactive personality fosters career adaptability whether its influence is direct or occurs through the self-confidence individuals build throughout the process.

Recent evidence suggests that personality traits are a key factor in the development of CDMSE (Wang et al., 2021), consistent with Bandura's (1997) notion that self-confidence develops through mastery experiences which are more readily attained by individuals who actively seek opportunities and take initiative (Bandura Albert, 1997). In other words, students with high proactive personality tend to engage more frequently in explorations and experiences that build their confidence in making career decisions, and it is this confidence that ultimately drives higher career adaptability. This logic is consistent with the findings of Fang et al., (2024), which indicate that the relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability may occur through a mediating variable (Fang et al., 2024). Thus, CDMSE is positioned not as a condition that strengthens or weakens the influence of proactive personality, but rather as a psychological mechanism or mediator that explains how proactive personality translates into career adaptability. The conceptual model illustrating the relationships among the variables in this study is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.



This study examines the extent to which CDMSE mediates the relationship between proactive personality (independent variable) and career adaptability (dependent variable). Empirical evidence regarding the role of CDMSE as a mediator in this relationship, however, has not been entirely consistent. On the one hand, Fang et al. (2024) found that proactive personality influences career adaptability through an intervening variable, and Hamdani & Satwika, (2026) found a strong positive relationship between career decision self-efficacy and career adaptability among college students (Fang et al., 2024; Hamdani & Satwika, 2026). On the other hand, Afero et al. (2023) found that self-efficacy did not have a significant effect on career adaptability and did not mediate the relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability (Afero et al., 2023). These differing results indicate empirical inconsistencies that require further testing. Furthermore, studies that specifically position CDMSE as a mediating variable rather than merely a parallel predictor or a moderating condition remain limited, particularly in the context of Indonesian college students.

Based on this discussion, there are several research gaps that require further investigation. First, findings regarding the mediating role of CDMSE in the relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability still show conflicting results (Afero et al., 2023; Fang et al., 2024; Hamdani & Satwika, 2026). Second, previous studies have not extensively tested the $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$ pathway explicitly using the bootstrapping method, which is more precise for detecting indirect effects compared to the conventional Baron and Kenny approach. Third, the psychological mechanisms explaining how proactive personality leads to career adaptability through the reinforcement of self-confidence have not been extensively tested directly within an integrated model based on Career Construction Theory. Based on these gaps, this study tests (H1) the relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability; (H2) the relationship between proactive personality and CDMSE; (H3) the relationship between CDMSE and career adaptability; and (H4) the mediating role of CDMSE in the relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability. Theoretically, this study is expected to expand the application of Career Construction Theory in the context of higher education in Indonesia by integrating Proactive Personality Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory to explain the mechanisms underlying the development of adaptive readiness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a correlational design with a quantitative approach, involving one independent variable proactive personality (X) one dependent variable career adaptability (Y) and one mediator variable CDMSE (M). The study was conducted online and targeted active students at Semarang State University (UNNES) during the 2025/2026 academic year. Participants were selected, and the Psychological s scale served as the primary data collection instrument. Prior to the main data collection, the instrument was tested for validity and reliability; the results indicated satisfactory internal consistency, making it suitable for use in the main study. The scale was distributed online via Google Forms, and after data cleaning, 175 respondents who met the criteria for completeness of responses were included. Participants were aged 20–23 years, consisting of 68 male students and 107 female students.

Proactive personality was measured using the Proactive Personality Scale Short Version (PPS-SV), a 10-item version of the original 17-item scale by Bateman and Crant (1993) developed by Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer (1999), using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree). One example of an item is “I am able to identify opportunities.” The adaptation and psychometric property testing of the Indonesian version were based on Fridayanti et al., (2025), who tested its validity and reliability among 232 college students in Bandung using confirmatory factor analysis, with results confirming a single-factor structure and a good model fit (CFI = 0.964; RMSEA = 0.069) and excellent internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.901$).

Self-efficacy was measured using the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE), which is based on Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura Albert, 1997) and the concept of career decision-making self-efficacy proposed by Taylor & Betz, (1983). The instrument used was an 8-item adaptation of the Career and Educational Decision Self-Efficacy Inventory for Secondary Students (CEDSIS; Ho & Sum, 2016), which had been validated among 2,631 students in Hong Kong (overall reliability $\alpha = 0.92$), using a five-point Likert response scale (1 = Very Unconfident; 5 = Very Confident). One example of an item is “I am capable of choosing a career that suits my abilities,” which is included in the “About Future Career” subscale and reflects an individual’s confidence in aligning their career choices with their own capabilities. In the pilot study for this research, the instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.824$, and was therefore used in the main data analysis.

Career adaptability was measured using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), consisting of 24 items across four subscales, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (6 items each) using a five-point Likert response format. One example of an item is “Planning for my future” (concern subscale). The adaptation and construct validation of the Indonesian version were based on the work of Sulistiani et al., (2018), who tested the psychometric properties of the CAAS-Indonesia on 281 college students in Surabaya, yielding an overall reliability of 0.91.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the variables, and Pearson’s product-moment correlation was used to test the relationships among the variables. The mediating role of CDMSE was tested using the Hayes PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2013) with the bootstrapping method, which yielded the direct and indirect effects of proactive personality on career adaptability through CDMSE. The mediating effect was considered significant if the 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not cross zero.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between proactive personality, CDMSE, and career adaptability was analyzed using the Hayes PROCESS Macro with moderation testing. Preliminary assumption tests confirmed that the data met the key statistical assumptions, including normality, linearity, absence of multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity; thus, the regression model used was deemed appropriate. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for the main variables of the study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.
Preliminary Results of Direct Correlations Among Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. PP (X)	50.89	6.936	-		
2. CDMSE (M)	30.92	4.238	0.718**	-	
3. CA (Y)	93.34	12.21	0.735**	0.870**	-

Note: N = 175. PP = *Proactive Personality*, CDMSE = *Career Decision-Making Self-*

*Efficacy, CA = Career Adaptability. *p<0.05; **p<0.01.*

Bivariate correlation analysis showed that proactive personality was positively and significantly correlated with the CDMSE ($r = 0.718, p < 0.01$) as well as with career adaptability ($r = 0.735, p < 0.01$). In addition, the CDMSE showed a very strong positive correlation with career adaptability ($r = 0.870, p < 0.01$). A mediation analysis using the Hayes PROCESS Macro Model 4 then tested two hierarchical regression models, summarized in Table 2.

Table 2.

Results of Regression Analysis and Interaction (Moderation) Tests on Career Adaptability

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>Direct Effects</i>			
	B	SE	t	P
<i>Outcome: CDMSE (M)</i>				
<i>Constant</i>	8.5930	1.6605	5.1751	< 0.001
<i>Proactive Personality (X)</i>	0.4387**	0.0323	13.5699	< 0.001
<i>Outcome: Career Adaptability (Y)</i>				
<i>Constant</i>	9.9445	3.4543	2.8789	0.005
1. Proactive Personality (X)	0.4013**	0.0899	4.4626	< 0.001
2. CDMSE (M)	2.0365**	0.1472	13.8371	< 0.001
<i>Indirect Effect</i>				
	B	SE	Bootstrapping BC 95% CI	
			<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Mediator: CDMSE	0.8935	0.0975	0.7096	1.0848
Total Effect	1.2948	-	-	-

The mediation test results confirmed all three paths in the model. First, proactive personality had a positive and significant effect on CDMSE ($a = 0.4387; p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Second, CDMSE had a positive and significant effect on career adaptability ($b = 2.0365; p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Third, proactive personality continued to show a significant direct effect on career adaptability after CDMSE was included in the model ($c' = 0.4013; p < 0.001$), supporting H1. The bootstrapping results (5,000 samples) showed an indirect effect of proactive personality on career adaptability via CDMSE of 0.8935, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.7096 to 1.0848 that does not include zero; thus, the mediating effect is significant, supporting H4. Since the direct effect remained significant after CDMSE was included in the model, this pattern indicates partial mediation: CDMSE explains part, but not all, of the mechanism through which proactive personality influences career adaptability.

The finding that a proactive personality has a direct, positive, and significant effect on career adaptability, even after the CDMSE was included in the model, supports the theoretical assumption of Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2021), which posits career adaptability as a psychosocial resource shaped by an individual's readiness to actively engage in career tasks and transitions (adaptive readiness). Proactive personality, as described in Bateman and Crant's Proactive Personality Theory 1993, (Seibert et al., 1999), is one dispositional manifestation of this adaptive readiness: Proactive individuals are naturally more motivated to explore career opportunities (curiosity), take responsibility for their choices (control), and demonstrate concern for their future (concern), without first needing to undergo self-confidence reinforcement. The persistence of this

direct effect indicates that a proactive personality makes a unique contribution to career adaptability beyond the cognitive pathway of the CDMSE, consistent with the perspective of conservation of resources theory, which views a proactive personality as a personal resource that independently drives the accumulation of other career resources (Wang et al., 2021). These results align with a number of recent studies that consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability among both college students and young workers (Fang et al., 2024; Hartanto & Salim, 2021; Li et al., 2024; Mercan & Öztemel, 2023; Pandu Pradana et al., 2022), and are consistent with the findings of Tolentino et al., (2014), who demonstrated that proactive personality is one of the most consistent dispositional predictors of career adaptability across cultures, as well as those of Wen et al., (2022), who found a similar pattern among female teacher candidates in China, suggesting that the relationship between these two constructs is relatively stable across populations and cultural contexts. This persistent direct effect is also consistent with the findings of Zhao et al., (2022), who confirmed that proactive personality serves as a key strategy for achieving sustainable employment through the enhancement of career adaptability.

This study also demonstrates how part of this influence occurs, namely through the reinforcement of CDMSE. The strong and significant influence of proactive personality on CDMSE supports the idea in Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory 1997, in Wang et al., (2021) that self-efficacy develops through mastery experiences, proactive students naturally engage more frequently in exploration, take initiative, and confront career challenges head-on, thereby gaining more experiences that build their confidence in making career decisions, specifically, CDMSE, which Taylor and Betz 1983, as cited in Ho & Sum, (2016) conceptualized as an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks related to career exploration, planning, and decision-making. The extent of proactive personality's contribution to the formation of CDMSE in this study is consistent with the meta-analysis by Wang et al., (2021), which identified dispositional characteristics as one of the key antecedents of CDMSE, and reinforces the findings of Cai et al., (2015), who respectively demonstrated that proactive personality contributes to the development of psychological resources such as the future work self and thriving at work, which in turn support an individual's self-confidence in facing career demands. This pattern is also consistent with the findings of Sheng & Caiga, (2024) among Chinese college students, which showed that a proactive personality is positively correlated with both career social support and self-confidence in career decision-making, as well as with Xin et al., (2020), who emphasized the importance of strengthening CDMSE as part of preparing students for the transition from college to the workforce.

On the other hand, the very strong influence of CDMSE on career adaptability reaffirms CDMSE's position as the cognitive pathway most closely linked to adaptive career behavior. This belief directly represents the confidence dimension of career adaptability as defined in the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Savickas, 2021; Sulistiani et al., 2018), while also underpinning the other three dimensions, as belief in one's own abilities is necessary for concern, control, and curiosity to be truly translated into concrete actions. This pattern aligns with the meta-analysis by Rudolph et al., (2016), which showed that self-efficacy consistently ranks among the strongest correlates of career adaptability compared to other dispositional variables, as well as with the findings of Guan et al., (2013) on university graduates in China, which showed that self-efficacy in job search plays a crucial role in bridging psychological resources with adaptive career outcomes. Thus, among the dispositional and cognitive resources that constitute adaptive readiness, self-efficacy appears to be the determinant most closely linked to readiness to act, in line with a number of recent studies and meta-analyses (Agoes Salim et al., 2023; Hamdani & Satwika, 2026; Wang et al., 2021). This central role of CDMSE was further confirmed by Zhao et al., (2022) among vocational students in China, who found that CDMSE, along with social support and proactive personality, consistently predicted career adaptability, with social support being the strongest predictor and CDMSE and proactive personality contributing nearly equally.

This finding of significant mediation differs from the results reported by Afero et al., (2023), who did not find a mediating role for self-efficacy in the relationship between proactive personality

and career adaptability in the general early-adult population. This discrepancy is likely due to several factors, such as differences in mediation testing methods; this study employed Hayes's (2013) bootstrapping approach, which is statistically more reliable in detecting indirect effects compared to conventional approaches like Baron and Kenny's, which tend to be more conservative and prone to failing to detect mediation effects that actually exist (Type II error); differences in sample characteristics, as the study by Afero et al., (2023) targeted the general early-adult population, whereas this study specifically targeted college students who are in the active transition phase toward the workforce; and differences in the CDMSE measurement instrument used. Conversely, these findings are relevant and reinforce the results of Cai et al., (2015), who also found that psychological resources mediate the relationship between proactive personality and future work self among college students, as well as those of Guan et al., (2013), who emphasized the crucial role of self-efficacy as a mediating variable in the career adaptation process of college graduates. These differences underscore the importance of further replication in diverse sample contexts, while also indicating that the role of CDMSE in the causal chain between proactive personality and career adaptability is likely contextual, depending on an individual's stage of career development, rather than entirely universal. The complexity of CDMSE's role as a mediator is further reflected in the findings of Chen et al., (2026), which show that CDMSE can act as a serial mediator alongside job search clarity, and that its effect is moderated by an individual's level of proactive personality, thereby reinforcing the argument that the role of CDMSE in the causal chain leading to career outcomes is contextual and dependent on other accompanying variables.

The relevance of these findings must also be understood within the specific context of higher education in Indonesia, where students face structural pressures in the form of high unemployment rates among college graduates and a labor market transition accelerated by automation (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025; World Economic Forum, 2023). Under these conditions, the research findings confirm that self-confidence in career decision-making is not merely a byproduct of an individual's personality but rather a target for intervention that can be systematically developed, in line with the recommendation by Agoes Salim et al., (2023) that social support and the strengthening of CDMSE should be institutionally facilitated. This is particularly relevant for students with low proactive tendencies, so that they do not rely solely on relatively stable personality dispositions to achieve optimal career adaptability but can still be assisted in achieving it through targeted self-confidence enhancement. These findings are also consistent with Liu & Liang, (2025), who demonstrated that proactive personality and CDMSE jointly mediate the influence of social support on students' career adaptability, confirming that the benefits of proactive personality for career outcomes always depend on the accompanying psychological and social factors possessed by the individual

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the CDMSE partially mediates the relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability among college students. Proactive personality was found to have a positive and significant effect, both directly on career adaptability and indirectly through the reinforcement of the CDMSE. These findings confirm all four research hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, and H4), while also affirming that self-confidence in career decision-making is one of the key psychological mechanisms explaining how proactive personality translates into students' adaptive readiness to face career transitions. Career development programs in higher education are therefore advised not only to cultivate students' initiative and proactive behavior but also to explicitly facilitate the process of transforming these proactive experiences into robust self-confidence. Future research is recommended to test this model on a larger and more diverse sample, consider a longitudinal design to confirm the causal direction among variables, and explore other relevant mediating or moderating variables in the process of career adaptability formation.

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