



Proactivity as a Predictor of Social Sensitivity in University Students

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Abstract: This study investigated the relationship between proactive personality and social sensitivity among university students. The sample comprised 543 participants (445 women, 98 men). Data were collected using the Social Sensitivity Scale and the Brief Proactive Personality Scale. Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between social sensitivity and proactive personality. Regression analysis further indicated that proactive personality is a significant predictor of social sensitivity. Additionally, findings showed that married participants exhibit significantly higher social sensitivity than those in dating relationships. T-test findings illustrated women had higher social sensitivity levels compared to men.

Keywords: Social sensitivity, Proactivity, Proactive Personality

1. Introduction

In order for society to exist, individuals are expected to have many common characteristics such as social, cultural, philosophical, lifestyle, economy, justice, and moral values. In this respect, individuals have many duties towards the society in which they live and are stakeholders. These tasks create individuals together and as a society. Just as the lifestyles of all individuals in society cannot be at the same level of welfare, individuals constantly need each other. There are areas in which every individual is expected to be sensitive towards society. Although many factors play a role in the formation of social sensitivity, one of the most important factors is considered to be education (Töremen, 2011). The quality of education also affects the quality of the individuals who make up the society (Bozkan, 2019). Thus, education can contribute to society becoming more conscious and increasing awareness of social problems. The achievements gained during the education process are also important in terms of making humans a social being (Bozkan, 2019). An individual's social sensitivity can be expressed as the reflection of the values he has in his life.

The aims of education include raising the individual as a good citizen. Being a good citizen is not just about being aware of one's own responsibilities; It can also be achieved by fulfilling its social responsibilities (Ercan, 2009). In addition to providing students with knowledge and skills in certain fields, educational organizations should also provide students with behaviors such as working, cooperating, being open to sharing, and helping those in need, which are the requirements of social responsibility and social sensitivity (Schlechty, 2005; Töremen, 2011).

In this regard, education is thought to be an important factor in improving the social sensitivity of individuals. One of the behaviors expected from university students is to be aware of social events and play an active role in the process of finding solutions to these events. It is believed that education on social sensitivity helps students develop social sensitivity and awareness, cooperation, solidarity, effective communication and self-evaluation skills, gain awareness of social responsibility, and learn individual and social values (Küçükoğlu, 2012).

Social life involves individuals interacting with each other to meet both their social and psychological needs and to support each other. It is important for people to be sensitive to each other in order to

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sustain this support process. In order to fulfill this need, people must be sensitive to each other. A socially sensitive individual cares about the well-being of other people. He feels personal responsibility in this regard (Staub, 2012). Sensitivity is defined as a motivational feeling that arises in individuals to help after observing the pain of others (Bozdağ & Bozdağ, 2021). Social sensitivity is an important part of interpersonal relationships, guiding the understanding of others' needs and assisting in understanding social environments (Magrì, 2022). At the same time, it also affects individuals' ability to understand and predict the behaviors of others (Hilmi & Apriawan, 2021). The term social sensitivity refers to the way individuals adapt to the emotional states of others and to social environments in general (Magrì, 2022). Research emphasizes that social sensitivity is a critical skill for individual development, especially for social adaptation and good social relationships (Liu et al., 2020). Individuals with social sensitivity are those who exhibit helpful behaviors, understand and perceive the emotions and perspectives of others, and demonstrate respect (Staub, 2012). In other words, having social sensitivity requires individuals to take a responsible approach to social events and understand others (Bender et al., 2012). It can be said that individuals who can relate to their own world and events around them and take responsibility in these matters have social sensitivity.

While the concept of sensitivity carries a broad meaning, social sensitivity especially includes the sense of responsibility towards the society in which an individual lives and positive social behaviors related to it. Individuals with social sensitivity are anticipated to mainly show positive behaviors, which necessitate empathy, tolerance, and self-confidence (Bozdağ & Bozdağ, 2020; Bozdağ & Ergün, 2020). Furthermore, the display of positive behaviors in line with their social sensitivity also depends on self-confidence (Küçükoğlu, 2012). Individuals with developed self-confidence can exhibit effective behaviors. Similarly, individuals with high social sensitivity are those who approach the people around them with love and respect, are honest with them, tolerate those who think differently from them, and are known for their kindness (Kalin & Nalçacı, 2017). It has also been noted that individuals in these societies have developed a strong inclination toward helping others (Asıcı & Akyavuz, 2021). Research indicates that societies with higher levels of social sensitivity tend to experience lower rates of depression compared to other societies (Way & Lieberman, 2010). Additionally, studies have shown that social sensitivity plays a significant role in fostering psychological harmony within a community (Chen et al., 2016). In a similar vein, Bender et al. (2012) found a strong correlation between social sensitivity and successful team performance, both in classroom and collaborative settings. The widespread adoption of social sensitivity, which is crucial for addressing social issues, is vital for the overall development of societies.

Factors affecting social sensitivity include family (Aydın, 2005; Balat & Dağal, 2006; Keskin & Eğitici, 2013; Vrasmas, 2001), culture and education (Banks, 2004), economic conditions (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), personal experiences. and empathy (Kocademir et al., 2023). In addition to these, the proactive personality trait can also have a positive effect on social sensitivity. Proactivity refers to effectively taking action to improve current situations or create new opportunities. A proactive individual is a person who tends to create environmental changes rather than being influenced by situational factors (Bateman & Crant, 1993). They strive to make an impact and create meaningful change in their environment (Fuller et al., 2006). Proactive individuals identify opportunities, take initiative, take action, and persist until meaningful changes occur. Proactive behaviors are actions taken despite obstacles and evaluating opportunities to reach goals (Judge & Robbins, 2013). These proactive behaviors are based on evaluating opportunities, taking initiative, and making necessary changes (Crant, 2000). There are different explanations of proactive personality behavior in the literature; Fay and Frese (2000) explain the proactive personality trait as the individual consciously creating his own goals and achieving them without any demands or orders from the environment. Another concept that explains the proactive personality trait is "self-efficacy". Self-efficacy is the individual's judgment about himself; It can be said as a person's inference regarding a specific

performance and organizational skill (Bandura, 1997). Individuals with proactive personalities do not hesitate to look for opportunities that will make their jobs easier in order to overcome the difficulties and limits imposed on them (Bateman & Crant, 1993). In short, individuals with proactive personality traits are generally more inclined and effective in identifying problems in their environment, addressing these issues, and seeking solutions.

In recent years, research conducted with university students has been increasing in the literature (Rodríguez Martínez et al., 2020). It is not enough to study theoretical and practical content in higher education; It has become an inevitable need of society that social relations and social values should be strengthened. In addition, it is important to investigate students' personality traits, the active methods they use, the characteristics they have acquired, and whether they can later apply their original evaluations to their environment. According to Delors (1996), proactivity implies positivity, thinking and reflection, and initiative. In other words, this term reflects Knowing, knowing what the method is, knowing how to be together and knowing how it is applied. Proactive behavior reflects complementary actions or tendencies that individuals take to shape themselves and their environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993). These features are thought to lay the foundation for being sensitive to the society. A person with high social sensitivity is sensitive to problems in their environment. He is the one who searches for solutions to solve them (Staub, 1979). Therefore, it can be said that proactivity provides space for this initiative.

When the research is examined, there are studies showing that social sensitivity enables individuals to take a responsible approach towards social events and create a more positive impact in society (Crant, 2000; Staub, 2012). These studies indicate that individuals with social sensitivity generally exhibit helpful behavior and are sensitive to the emotional needs of others (Staub, 2012). However, some studies have examined how education contributes to the development of proactive personality traits and how these traits affect social sensitivity levels. Judge and Robbins (2013) investigated how education helps individuals exhibit proactive behaviors and increase social sensitivity. In addition, in a study examining the impact of educational institutions on students' social responsibilities, it was concluded that education plays a very critical role, improving individuals' empathy skills and increasing their social sensitivity (Schlechty, 2005).

There are studies examining social sensitivity and proactive personality traits according to education level (Chen et al., 2018; Garcia & Lopez, 2019; Martinez & Garcia, 2020; Smith & Jones, 2017). Chen et al. (2018) examined in their study how the social sensitivity and proactive behaviors of individuals with different education levels change. The research has revealed that individuals with higher education levels generally show higher levels of social sensitivity and take a more active role towards society. In the study of Smith and Jones (2017), the relationship between proactive personality traits and social sensitivity of students with different education levels was examined. The research has shown that individuals with higher education exhibit more proactive behavior and that these behaviors increase their level of social awareness. Garcia and Lopez (2019) examined the effects of education levels of individuals in different professional groups on their social sensitivity and proactive personalities. Research results have revealed that those with higher education levels generally show higher social sensitivity and proactive behavior. In the study of Martinez and Garcia (2020), the effect of education level on the relationship between social sensitivity and proactive behaviors was widely examined. The study stated that individuals with lower education levels generally exhibit less proactive behavior and have lower levels of social sensitivity.

Topics such as proactive behavior (Bolino et al., 2010; Crant, 2000), proactivity (Tyman & Batistic, 2016), and proactive personality (Joo et al., 2015; Kale, 2019; Kim et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2016; Tang, 2015) have been addressed in many studies. In these studies, the relationships with topics such as proactive work behavior (Uncuoğlu Yolcu & Çakmak, 2017), self-efficacy and openness to change

(Bozbayındır & Alev, 2018), and attitude towards the teaching profession (Demir & Arabacı, 2021) have been examined. There is no study examining the relationship between social sensitivity and proactivity when looking at the conducted research.

The purpose of this study is to examine the concept of proactivity as a predictor of social sensitivity. The importance of this study is to understand how proactivity affects the level of social sensitivity and to determine the potential effects of this interaction on social relationships, cooperation, and general social welfare. The research aims to test the hypothesis that proactive behaviors can increase individuals' levels of social sensitivity and thus create a more positive impact on society. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the literature by understanding the relationship between social sensitivity and proactivity and developing strategies for social improvement in this context.

2. Method

This study aimed to examine whether the level of proactivity is a predictor of social sensitivity. A descriptive-correlational survey design was used in this study. A descriptive survey design is a systematic method used to collect data from a variety of individuals or settings in order to accurately describe a population, group or phenomenon (Toyin et al., 2021). The correlation method is a method for the identification of relationships between two or more variables (Büyüköztürk et al., 2021).

2.1. Participants

The study data were obtained from the participants through the link created online. The sample group consists of a total of 543 voluntary individuals, with 445 (82%) being female and 98 (18%) being male. The ages of the participants in the study range from 16 to 60. 37 of the participants were at high school or below, 402 were at university and 104 were at postgraduate level. 216 participants stated that they were not in a relationship, 165 were in a dating relationship, and 162 were married.

2.2. Data collection tools

2.2.1. Shortened proactive personality scale

Developed by Bateman and Crant (1993), the scale was adapted into Turkish by Akin et al. (2011). It comprises 10 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale. To assess the scale's validity, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, revealing acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2/df= 1.65$, $N= 332$, $p= 0.01$, $RMSEA= .044$, $NFI= .99$, $CFI= .99$, $IFI= .99$, $RFI= .97$, $GFI= .97$, $AGFI= .95$, and $SRMR= .033$). The reliability evaluation during the adaptation study found an internal consistency coefficient of .86, with item-total correlations ranging from .50 to .66.

2.2.2. Social sensitivity scale

The Turkish adaptation study, conducted by Bozdağ and Bozdağ (2021), developed a tool to measure individuals' levels of social sensitivity. This scale consists of 12 items divided into four sub-dimensions and is based on a five-point Likert scale, yielding scores from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating greater social sensitivity. The sub-dimensions include "sensitivity to security-related issues," "sensitivity to the immediate environment," "sensitivity to discrimination," and "sensitivity to victimized individuals." To determine the criterion validity, a study examined its relationship with the Toronto Empathy Scale and the Positive Social Behavior Intentions scale, reporting Cronbach's alpha values of .80 and .75, respectively. For the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .80 for the total scale, .88 for sensitivity to security, .78 for sensitivity to the immediate environment, .76 for sensitivity to discrimination, and .68 for sensitivity to victimized individuals. The identified factors explained 72.04% of the total variance, with factor loadings of the items ranging from 0.709 to 0.926. As a result of the CFA analysis of the scale, the fit indices were found as χ^2/sd : 2.10, $RMSEA$ 0.07, $SRMR$ 0.06, GFI 0.93, CFI 0.90.

2.3. Ethical principles

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee. In this context, ethical permission was obtained from Sakarya University Ethics Committee. Document Date and Number: 13/04/2023-18/25

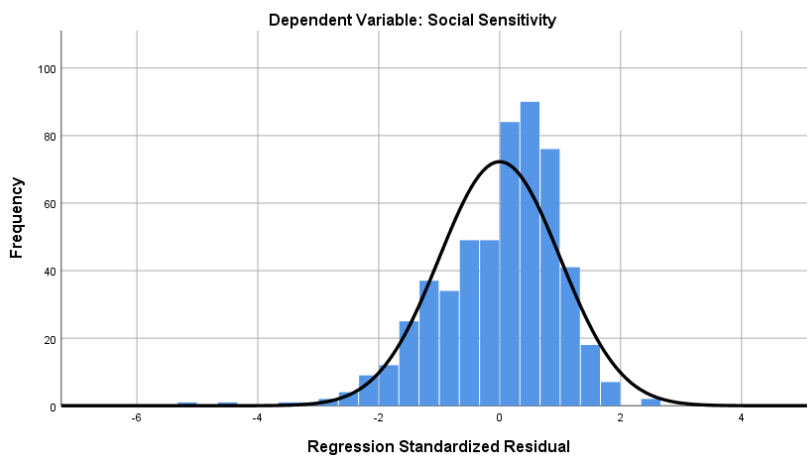
2.4. Data analysis

In this study, correlation and regression analyses were conducted to determine whether social sensitivity predicts proactivity. Additionally, one-way analysis of variance was used to examine whether social sensitivity differs depending on the type of relationship, and t-tests were used to investigate whether social sensitivity differs by gender. The results regarding normal distribution and regression assumptions are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Skewness and kurtosis values were examined for normal distribution, and it was observed that these values were within an acceptable range.

Figure 1

The Normal Distribution Graph Created for the Standardized Dependent Variable Social Sensitivity



3. Results

The relationships between variables were examined through correlation analysis, and the results obtained are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Findings of Correlation Analysis

	1	2	VIF	CI	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Sensitivity	1		1000	11.816	-1.09	2.29
Proactivity	.331**	1			-.70	1.1
\bar{x}	52.20	52.33				
SD	5.854	8.930				

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Upon examining Table 1, it is observed that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between social sensitivity and proactivity ($r = .33$). Considering the results of the correlation analysis in the study, whether proactivity predicts social sensitivity was examined through simple linear regression analysis. The results obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2*Regression Analysis Results*

Predictor Variables	<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	r^2
(Constant)	40.851	1.412		28.933	.000	
Proactivity	.217	.027	.331	8.156	.000	.109

Upon examining Table 2, it is observed that proactivity predicts social sensitivity ($\beta = .331$). To examine whether social sensitivity varies depending on the relationship status, an ANOVA analysis was conducted. The results obtained are presented in Table 3.

Table 3*ANOVA Results for Social Sensitivity by Relationship Status*

	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	Sd	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Significant Difference
Social Sensitivity	543	52.20	.251	4.419	.012	3-2
No Relationship	216	52.01	.407			
Dating	165	51.40	.491			
Married	162	53.27	.394			

Upon examining Table 3, it is concluded that there is a significant difference in the social sensitivity of married individuals compared to individuals in a dating relationship. Married individuals showed higher social sensitivity than those in a dating relationship. The study conducted a t-test analysis to investigate whether social sensitivity varies by gender. The results obtained are presented in Table 4.

Table 4*T-Test Results for Social Sensitivity by Gender*

	Gender	<i>N</i>	Average	Standard Deviation	t-Test
Social Sensitivity	Female	445	52.55	5.621	<i>P</i>
	Male	98	50.63	6.618	.003

Upon examining Table 4, it is found that there is a statistically significant difference in the social sensitivity of women compared to men, with women having higher social sensitivity.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this research is to examine whether social sensitivity is predicted by proactivity. In the research, it was determined that there is a significant, positive relationship between proactive personality and social sensitivity and that proactive personality traits predict the social sensitivity of individuals. Accordingly, it can be said that individuals with proactive personalities also have high social sensitivity. It is possible to say that individuals with proactive personalities feel responsible for the problems in society and the people around them (Butler, 2009), so they are more socially sensitive, motivated to know the society more closely, responsible for social problems, and have a more active role in problem solving. An individual who is not proactive may tend to be shaped reactively by the environment. He can avoid finding solutions to the problems around him and accept the situation as it is (Bateman & Crant, 1993). A study found that individuals with proactive personality traits generally exhibit higher levels of social sensitivity. It has been observed that proactive individuals tend to show sensitivity to the social problems around them and take active action against these problems (Bozdağ

& Bozdağ, 2020). Similarly, Joo et al. (2015) stated in their study that proactive personality traits increase individuals' social responsibilities and solution-oriented approaches. It has been emphasized that proactive individuals are more willing to show sensitivity to social events and actively intervene against these events (Joo et al., 2015). Another study found that proactive personality traits support effective leadership and collaboration abilities at work and in the social environment. In this context, it can be said that proactive individuals are more effective in fulfilling their social responsibilities and supporting the people around them. Kim and Lee (2016) stated in their study that proactive behaviors increase the integration of individuals into their social environment and make more positive contributions to social relations. It has been found that individuals with proactive personality traits are more successful in showing sensitivity to the people around them and cooperating with them.

According to another finding of the research, individuals' social sensitivities differ depending on their gender; It has been found that women's social sensitivity is higher than men. There are studies supporting the results of the research in the literature (Bozkan, 2019; Coşkun et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021). In his study investigating social sensitivity according to different factors, Loban (1953) explained that women's social sensitivity levels are generally higher. In the experimental study of Ocal and Altunok (2016), who found that the level of social sensitivity did not vary according to gender, it was stated that although there was no difference, the sensitivity of girls towards the environment and society increased as a result of the interventions. In a study conducted by Balcı and Öztürk (2023), the social sensitivity levels of university students do not differ according to their gender. Since women's feelings of protection, compassion and self-sacrifice come to the fore (Tarhan, 2015), it can be said that their sensitivity to the negativities experienced in society provides a positive privilege in terms of gender. In this study, women's high levels of social sensitivity may be related to their greater emotional sensitivity to society's problems.

In the research, it was determined that individuals' social sensitivity levels differ depending on their relationship status. It has been found that married women show higher levels of sensitivity. In a study conducted with classroom teachers, it was explained that, contrary to these results, the level of social sensitivity does not differ according to marital status (Bozkan, 2019). Findings parallel to the results of the research have not been found in the literature. In this study, the high level of social sensitivity of married individuals may be related to the fact that the responsibilities brought by the family institution formed with marriage make married individuals more sensitive and responsible towards social problems. Because responsibilities in the family overlap with responsibilities in society (Turğut, 2017). The fact that the majority of individuals participating in the study were women may have caused the difference in married women. However, it can be said that the fact that married women are more sensitive to social problems than men is parallel to the result of the high level of social sensitivity of women in this research.

This study addressed the issue of proactivity as a predictor of social sensitivity in university students. The findings showed how proactive personality traits affect the social sensitivity levels of university students. The results of the research revealed that proactive behaviors increase individuals' tendency to take on social responsibilities and strengthen their social sensitivity. However, research has shown that university students' proactive personality traits are low (Rodríguez Martinez et al., 2020; Russel, 2017). Proactive personality trait can be learned and developed (Grant & Ashford, 2008). The importance of training to further strengthen proactivity in people is inevitable. Because individuals with this feature have the strength to face difficulties, have a more positive attitude towards situations and are more active in generating solutions. Judge and Robbins (2013) researched that education has a significant impact on individuals exhibiting proactive behaviors and increasing social sensitivity. Regarding this, trainings and seminars can be organized to increase individuals' social responsibility awareness and proactivity as a member of society and to approach the problems around them

sensitively. Additionally, in future studies, the social sensitivity and proactivity variables can be examined in different cultures; It is believed that individuals' cultural values affect their social sensitivity and attitude towards society's problems.

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