

Optimism and pessimism in EFL learning: Causes and strategies from EFL learners' perspectives

التفاؤل والتشاؤم في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: الأسباب
والاستراتيجيات من منظور متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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الملخص: تركز البحوث الحالية على دراسة تأثير العوامل النفسية في الأداء الأكاديمي للمتعلمين في سياقات مختلفة. ومع ذلك، لا تزال هناك فجوة كبيرة في فهمنا لكيفية تأثير بعض السمات النفسية المحددة، ولا سيما التفاؤل والتشاؤم في تعلم اللغات على أداء متعلمي اللغات الأجنبية. لذا يسعى هذا البحث إلى سد هذه الفجوة من خلال دراسة تأثير التفاؤل والتشاؤم في تعلم اللغات الأجنبية على كفاءة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في السعودية. كما يتناول البحث الأسباب والعوامل التي تسهم في هذين المتغيرين، بالإضافة إلى تحديد الاستراتيجيات التي يمكن استخدامها لتعزيز التفاؤل في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من وجهة نظر المتعلمين أنفسهم. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف، تم استخدام منهجية البحث المختلط لجمع البيانات الكمية والنوعية. وشملت الدراسة 112 طالباً سعودياً من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في مرحلة البكالوريوس. وخضعت البيانات الكمية للتحليل الإحصائي، في حين تم تحليل البيانات النوعية باستخدام إطار تحليلي موضوعي. وأشارت النتائج إلى وجود ارتباط إيجابي ذو دلالة إحصائية بين التفاؤل والكفاءة اللغوية، في حين كان هناك ارتباط سلبي بين التشاؤم والكفاءة اللغوية. وتمثلت مصادر التفاؤل الرئيسية في التجارب العاطفية والموافق اللغوية والثقافية الإيجابية تجاه تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وفي المقابل، ارتبط التشاؤم بالتجارب العاطفية السلبية في بيئات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وتأثير البيئة التعليمية بشكل عام. وترتب عن هذه النتائج عدة دلالات مهمة لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفاؤل، التشاؤم، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، علم النفس الإيجابي، الكفاءة اللغوية.

Abstract:

Current investigations have concentrated on how psychological constructs influence learners' academic performance across various contexts. Nevertheless, a significant gap remains in our understanding of how specific psychological traits, particularly optimism and pessimism in language learning, affect the performance of foreign language learners (FLL). This research seeks to address this gap by examining the effects of optimism and pessimism in foreign language learning on the language proficiency of Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It delves into the causes and factors contributing to these two variables while also identifying strategies for fostering optimism in EFL learning from the perspectives of the learners themselves. To fulfil these objectives, a mixed- methods approach was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The study involved 112 Saudi EFL undergraduate learners as participants. Quantitative data were subjected to statistical analysis, whereas qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic framework. Results indicated that optimism had a positive and significant correlation with language proficiency, whereas pessimism was negatively correlated with it. The primary sources of optimism included experiences of positive emotions and favorable linguistic and cultural attitudes toward EFL learning. Conversely, sources of pessimism stemmed from negative emotional experiences within EFL settings and the overall learning environment's impact. These results offered several important implications for EFL educators.

Keywords: Key words: Optimism, pessimism, EFL learners, positive psychology, language proficiency.

1. Introduction

Learners' emotions play a crucial role in shaping their performance and success in language acquisition^(20, 37). As individuals engage with a foreign language, they often enhance their linguistic skills while using the language for intercultural communication⁽³⁶⁾. The process of foreign language learning exposes learners to a spectrum of emotional experiences, both positive and negative. Negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, and boredom can undermine motivation for language input, ultimately hindering academic achievement^(21, 35). In contrast, positive emotions—including motivation, enjoyment, engagement, hope, grit, and resilience—significantly contribute to learners' success and enhance focus across various educational tasks^(16, 21).

Numerous researchers in the field of applied linguistics have underscored the vital role of both positive and negative psychological factors in foreign language learning (FLL)^(16, 18, 20, 35). Among the positive emotions highlighted, optimism stands out as a psychological aspect deserving of thorough exploration⁽¹⁶⁾. Optimism has been defined as an individual's expectation of positive outcomes or events in the future⁽³⁷⁾. Typically, individuals with an optimistic outlook demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges⁽³⁴⁾. In contrast, pessimism has been defined as an expectation of failure or unfavorable results⁽³⁰⁾. Moreover, it refers to a predisposition towards adopting a negative outlook⁽⁵⁾. Therefore, pessimism represents a negative perspective on life, highlighting feelings of vulnerability and adverse attitudes⁽²⁴⁾. In educational contexts, optimism can enhance learners' ability to adapt to various educational challenges⁽¹⁹⁾ and positively influences both their performance and overall well-being⁽¹⁷⁾. Compared to their less optimistic peers, learners who maintain an optimistic outlook are more likely to engage with new knowledge, manage negative emotions effectively, and exhibit greater confidence in their abilities⁽³⁷⁾.

Numerous studies have established a positive correlation between optimism and overall academic success^(11, 19, 22, 32). However, research exploring the significant role of optimism within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts is limited^(16, 19, 37). Additionally, the effects of optimism versus pessimism on EFL learners' language proficiency in foreign language learning environments remain underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by examining the optimistic perspectives of EFL learners regarding foreign language learning and analyzing levels of optimism and pessimism among Saudi EFL learners in relation to their language proficiency.

1.1. The Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses a critical gap in the existing literature concerning the influence of

psychological constructs, specifically optimism and pessimism, on the foreign language performance of EFL learners. While previous investigations have explored various psychological factors affecting learners across different contexts^(16, 20, 35), there has been limited focus on how these specific traits impact foreign language proficiency, particularly among Saudi EFL learners. By examining the effects of optimism and pessimism on foreign language learning and achievement, this research aims to illuminate the influence of these variables through a mixed-methods approach, providing valuable insights into how these psychological traits can shape learners' experiences and outcomes in foreign language learning.

Understanding the dynamics of optimism and pessimism in language learning is vital, as these traits can significantly influence learners' motivation, engagement, and overall academic success^(11, 19, 22, 32, 34). The findings from this study will not only contribute to the theoretical framework surrounding positive psychology in language learning but also offer practical implications for enhancing foreign language performance and success. By identifying the causes and factors that contribute to optimism and pessimism, as well as effective strategies for fostering optimism from the learners' perspectives, this research can inform the development of targeted interventions designed to enhance language proficiency and improve the learning environment. The results will enrich the existing literature on positive psychology and EFL learners' psychology while providing practical insights to support EFL learners in achieving greater success in their language studies. Ultimately, the significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance the understanding of EFL learning and provide actionable insights that can help educators better support their students in navigating the emotional landscape of language learning.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the influence of psychological traits—specifically optimism and pessimism—on the EFL proficiency of Saudi EFL learners. This study aims to address the existing gap in the literature regarding these psychological constructs in language learning contexts. To achieve this, the research will assess how varying levels of optimism and pessimism affect the EFL proficiency of Saudi EFL learners. Additionally, it will explore the underlying causes and factors contributing to the development of these psychological traits within language learning environments. Another key objective is to identify effective strategies from the learners' perspectives that can promote optimism in EFL contexts. To fulfill these objectives, a mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. This approach

will enrich the understanding of how optimism and pessimism influence EFL learners' experiences and outcomes in foreign language learning.

1.3. The Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of psychological factors in educational settings, there remains a significant gap in understanding how specific traits like optimism and pessimism influence foreign language learning, particularly among Saudi EFL learners. Previous studies have highlighted the correlation between optimism and academic success^(19, 22); however, research focusing on the implications of both optimism and pessimism within EFL contexts is notably limited. Furthermore, the distinct effects of optimism versus pessimism on foreign language proficiency have not been adequately explored, leading to a lack of comprehensive insights into how these psychological constructs affect learners' experiences and outcomes in foreign language learning. This study seeks to address these issues by investigating the relationship between optimism, pessimism, and language proficiency, thereby contributing valuable knowledge to the field of positive psychology in language learning and offering practical implications for EFL educators.

2. Literature Review

The concepts of optimism and pessimism are theoretically rooted in several frameworks, including the broaden-and-build theory⁽¹⁰⁾, the social cognitive hypothesis⁽²⁾, and the control-value theory⁽²⁵⁾. Moreover, Positive Psychology (PP) theory emerged in the late 1990s as a response to the traditional focus of psychology on mental illness and dysfunction^(8, 33). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2011) championed this movement, advocating for a balanced approach that emphasizes the study of positive emotions, strengths, and factors that contribute to human flourishing. This paradigm shift has led to a greater understanding of how positive traits and experiences can enhance well-being and performance across various domains, including education. Central to the PP framework are three key pillars: positive emotions, positive characteristics or traits, and positive institutions.

The first pillar, positive emotions, encompasses feelings such as joy, gratitude, and contentment. Research indicates that positive emotions can broaden an individual's thought-action repertoire, leading to increased creativity, problem-solving abilities, and adaptive coping mechanisms⁽¹⁰⁾. The second pillar highlights positive characteristics or traits, such as optimism and resilience. Optimism, defined as the expectation of positive outcomes, has been linked to higher levels of motivation, engagement, and academic success⁽²⁶⁾. Resilient individuals demonstrate the

capacity to bounce back from setbacks, which is crucial for learners facing challenges in language acquisition. The third pillar emphasizes the importance of positive institutions, which include supportive families, schools, and communities. These environments can nurture positive traits and provide the necessary resources for individuals to thrive⁽²⁶⁾. For instance, educational institutions that promote a growth mindset and foster supportive peer relationships can enhance students' optimism and overall academic performance.

Peterson and Chang (2003) argued that the concepts of optimism and pessimism are complex and cannot be easily classified. Therefore, academic optimism emerges as a contemporary construct that reflects an individual trait varying among people⁽²⁶⁾. This view posits that optimism is an inherent psychological attribute, with individuals exhibiting different levels of optimism or pessimism based on their life experiences. Those with lower levels of optimism tend to be more susceptible to depressive symptoms⁽⁶⁾ and elevated stress^(3, 4). Moreover, previous research has empirically supported the notion that optimism positively influences coping mechanisms^(4, 26).

There are two prominent frameworks for understanding optimism: a) dispositional optimism and b) explanatory style^(26, 31). Dispositional optimism, as introduced by Scheier and Carver (1992), characterizes optimism as a personality trait that embodies the overall expectation of favorable outcomes in the future while anticipating fewer negative occurrences. This perspective links optimism with self-regulation, where individuals reflect on potential barriers to achieving their established goals^(26, 58). The constructs of dispositional optimism and pessimism have been assessed using a concise self-report instrument known as the Life Orientation Test (LOT), developed by Scheier and Carver in 1985, which was later refined into the LOT-R, acknowledged for its enhanced measurement capabilities⁽²⁶⁾. In contrast, Seligman's (1995) concept of explanatory style pertains to how people interpret the causes of adverse events, thereby framing their sense of optimism or pessimism⁽²³⁾. For this study, the first approach—dispositional optimism—was employed, as measured by the LOT-R—due to its simplicity and effectiveness in assessing expectations about future events⁽²⁶⁾. Consequently, this tool was also utilized to assess EFL learners' optimistic outlook regarding their success in learning EFL.

Optimism has been recognized by numerous scholars for its vital connections to various psychological constructs, including self-regulation⁽¹⁴⁾, self-efficacy⁽¹⁶⁾, hope^(16, 37), well-being^(1, 22), and empathy^(12, 16). Recent studies in educational settings have provided compelling evidence that learners with a high level of optimism exhibit greater motivation to engage in learning and problem-

solving activities^(21, 37). These optimistic individuals also demonstrate higher levels of hope, empathy, and creative self-efficacy⁽¹⁶⁾, along with high academic performance⁽¹³⁾.

In their research, Khodarahmi and Zarrinabadi (2016) examined the relationship between academic optimism and self-regulated language learning strategies among Iranian EFL learners. Their results indicated that optimism serves as a positive predictor of learners' adoption of self-regulated language learning techniques, effectively differentiating between low-achieving and high-achieving learners. Moreover, Miranda and Cruz (2020) explored the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between optimism and well-being. Their results revealed that optimism had indirect effects on well-being through resilience. In the context of foreign language learning, Lei and Lei (2022) found that optimism indirectly influenced creative self-efficacy by mediating factors of hope and empathy among Chinese learners of foreign languages.

Overall, optimism was recognized as a fundamental component of individuals' positive psychology^(23, 33), contributing to the development of personal resources in learners^(7, 8). It significantly enhanced learners' motivation and broadened their cognitive skills⁽²¹⁾. Additionally, optimism and pessimism, as psychological traits, had a considerable impact on learners' academic achievements and performance across various educational environments⁽¹³⁾. Despite this, research on optimism and pessimism within EFL learning contexts remained limited, particularly as learners often navigated a spectrum of positive and negative emotions during their language learning journeys. Consequently, this study aimed to illuminate the influence of these variables through a mixed-methods approach. Theoretically, this study was grounded in the PP framework proposed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2011), which emphasized the role of positive characteristics and traits, such as optimism, in fostering individual well-being and success. By focusing on optimism and pessimism as key psychological traits, this framework provided a valuable lens for examining their impact on language proficiency among Saudi EFL learners. More specifically, in exploring the disposition of Saudi EFL learners, this study assessed the levels of optimism and pessimism among learners and their direct implications for language proficiency. Understanding these traits within the PP framework helped elucidate their influence on academic performance in language learning contexts. Consequently, based on the PP framework, it can be hypothesized that higher levels of optimism would positively correlate with language proficiency among Saudi EFL learners, while higher levels of pessimism would negatively correlate with language proficiency.

2.1. Research questions:

This research seeks to explore four primary questions:

- RQ1:** What is the disposition of Saudi EFL learners towards their EFL learning—are they generally optimistic or pessimistic?
- RQ2:** Is there any relationship between optimism, pessimism, and EFL proficiency of Saudi EFL learners?
- RQ3:** From the perspective of learners, what factors contribute to feelings of optimism and pessimism in their EFL learning?
- RQ4:** What strategies do Saudi EFL learners employ to foster a sense of optimism in their EFL learning process?

2.2. Research Hypotheses

This study formulated two hypotheses based on the PP framework and existing literature on optimism and pessimism in relation to language proficiency among Saudi EFL learners. The following hypotheses were proposed:

- H1:** There is a positive correlation between optimism and language proficiency among Saudi EFL learners. It is anticipated that learners with higher levels of optimism may demonstrate greater proficiency in English due to their enhanced motivation and effective coping strategies.
- H2:** There is a negative correlation between pessimism and language proficiency among Saudi EFL learners. This hypothesis suggests that learners who exhibit higher levels of pessimism are likely to experience lower language proficiency, as pessimism may hinder motivation in the learning process.

3. Methods

This research employed a framework that integrated both quantitative and qualitative theoretical approaches, aiming to validate results from these two perspectives⁽⁹⁾. The mixed-methods design facilitated the collection of evidence from both quantitative and qualitative sources, offering a comprehensive understanding of the significance of optimism and the perspectives of language learners on the primary factors influencing their optimism or pessimism in learning English. Furthermore, it explored key strategies that learners employ to foster optimism throughout their learning journey.

The quantitative part utilized scales to measure levels of optimism and pessimism, as well as to investigate the relationship between these variables and English

language proficiency. In contrast, the qualitative approach employed open-ended surveys to explore the reasons behind participants' feelings of optimism and pessimism in EFL classrooms while also identifying predominant strategies for cultivating an optimistic mindset. Thus, this study focused on EFL learners' perceptions of optimism as a constructive psychological attribute that may enhance their EFL learning process.

3.1. Participants

A total of 112 female undergraduate learners of EFL from King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia participated in the survey. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 27 years, with a mean age of 22.16 years ($SD = 1.59$). All participants were native Arabic speakers and had no prior experience studying abroad. They were enrolled in the university's English language department, which offers a four-year Bachelor's program. Notably, the participants had completed between three and eight semesters of college-level study, with an average of 6.79 semesters ($SD = 0.72$).

3.2. Instruments

The research employed a combination of standardized scales and open-ended questions integrated into an online survey.

Demographic Variables. Participants provided demographic information, including gender, age, academic level, and English language proficiency. To assess their proficiency in English, respondents reported their grade point averages (GPA) from English courses completed in the previous semester. Those with GPAs ranging from 4.50 to 5.00 were classified as having high levels of English proficiency. The EFL proficiency scores among participants varied from 2.1 to a perfect 5.0, with the majority demonstrating upper-intermediate capabilities.

Optimism and Pessimism in EFL Learning. To assess optimism and pessimism in relation to EFL learning, the Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) developed by Scheier et al. (1994) was utilized. This concise self-assessment tool consisted of ten items that measure individual dispositional optimism and pessimism; six items were scored, while four items served as filler questions that did not contribute to the final score. The items were adapted for the EFL context based on the study of Khodarahmi and Zarrinabadi (2016). Among the six scored items, three focused on optimism (e.g., "Overall, I expect more good things to happen than bad in my learning English"), while three addressed pessimism (e.g., "I hardly ever expect my English language learning to go my way"). Participants rated their responses on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the LOT-R scale was

satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.81$), indicating a strong level of reliability.

Open-Ended Questions. At the conclusion of the online survey, participants responded to three open-ended questions designed to elicit qualitative insights from EFL learners. The first two questions explored participants' views on the factors contributing to their optimism or pessimism in EFL learning. The third question invited them to share strategies they employed to maintain an optimistic outlook during their EFL learning.

3.3. Data collection

Participants were recruited from the English department at KKU via their university email addresses between April and July 2024. Those who consented to participate received a link to an anonymous online survey, along with information regarding the study's objectives and scope. Participation was confidential, and measures were implemented to ensure data protection. No incentives were offered for participation in this study.

3.4. Data analysis

To assess the normality of quantitative data distribution, a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed, revealing that the LOT-R scale values follow a normal distribution ($p = .098$). Consequently, parametric tests, including Pearson correlational analyses, were utilized for quantitative data evaluation. All statistical computations were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 23).

The analysis of qualitative data followed an iterative approach that involved repeated cycles of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusion drawing based on emerging results⁽⁹⁾. This process continues until no new ideas, themes, or categories arise from the data; this phenomenon is referred to as "saturation" (9: 244), signifying that sufficient breadth of data has been captured at the given level of analysis. The thematic content analysis method was applied to open-ended questionnaires to identify and code relevant themes. Information was categorized according to its nature and the size of verbal units—such as individual words, phrases, thoughts, or overarching themes—with significant terms highlighted. Subsequently, the qualitative data were quantified by tallying the frequency of each code within the texts to facilitate conclusions and organize information based on frequently cited topics.

The final coding resulted in five theme categories pertaining to causes of optimism: positive emotions (38.80%), cultural and linguistic factors coupled with attitudes towards English language learning (29.85%), language learning environment (10.44%),

learning strategies and styles (11.94%), and support from teachers (8.95%). For pessimism-related causes, four theme categories emerged: negative emotions (48.88%), language learning environment (31.11%), insufficient support from teachers (15.55%) and cultural and linguistic factors along with negative attitudes towards English language learning (4.44%). Additionally, two theme categories identified strategies participants commonly employ to sustain their optimism in EFL learning included linguistic strategies (53.33%) and non-linguistic strategies (46.66%) (refer to Table 3). Comments originally expressed in Arabic were translated into English for inclusion in the results section.

4. Results

4.1. Statistical analysis of optimism and pessimism levels among EFL learners:

Table 1 presents the average scores and standard deviations for each item on the LOT-R scale. To assess the variations in optimism ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.6$) compared to pessimism ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 0.97$), a one-sample *t*-test was performed. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between these levels ($p < .001$) (refer to Table 2).

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviations (SD) of optimism and pessimism

Statements	Mean	SD
<i>Optimism</i>		
In uncertain times, I usually expect the best English language learning outcome.	3.20	1.132
I'm always optimistic about my English language learning in the future.	4.39	0.89
Overall, I expect more good things to happen than bad in my learning English.	4.24	1.01
<i>Pessimism</i>		
If something can go wrong while I'm learning English, it will.	3.04	1.06
I hardly ever expect my English language learning to go my way.	2.40	1.39
I rarely count on good things happening for me in learning English.	2.67	1.45

Table 2: The differences between optimism and pessimism scores

	Test Value = 0					
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Optimism	63.651	111	.000	3.61	3.50	3.73
Pessimism	29.327	111	.000	2.70	2.52	2.89

strategies for sustaining optimism. Responses provided in Arabic were subsequently translated into English. Through qualitative data analysis, five key themes consistently emerged as sources of optimism in EFL learning: positive emotions, cultural and linguistic influences, the learning environment, diverse learning

4.2. Statistical relationship between optimism, pessimism, and EFL proficiency:

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between optimism and pessimism ($r = -0.768$, $p < .0001$), indicating that participants with a positive outlook on their EFL learning tend to experience lower levels of pessimism. Additionally, the analysis identified a significant positive correlation between optimism and EFL proficiency levels ($r = 0.185$, $p < .01$), along with a negative correlation between pessimism and EFL proficiency levels ($r = -0.173$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that both optimism and pessimism significantly influence EFL learners' language proficiency.

4.3. Qualitative results

The third research question investigated participants' perspectives on the sources of optimism and pessimism in EFL learning. The fourth research question focused on the most commonly employed strategies by participants to maintain a positive outlook throughout their EFL learning journey. Among the 112 EFL learners, sixty-seven shared insights on the factors contributing to optimism, while forty-five addressed those related to pessimism. Additionally, fifteen participants offered

strategies and styles, and support from teachers. The thematic codes derived from this qualitative data are presented in Table 3.

Most participants (38.80%) emphasized the significance of positive emotions in sustaining an optimistic

Table 3: Thematic codes generated from participants' feedback of the causes of optimism and pessimism and the strategies used to promote optimism in EFL classes

Category (Number of responses)	Theme categories	codes	Frequency (%)
Optimism (67 responses)	Positive emotions	Motivation, determination, support, ambition, love, intrinsic drive, eagerness to learn English, self-confidence, instrumental motivation	26 (38.80%)
	Cultural and linguistic factors and attitudes towards English language learning	Intercultural communication, cultural awareness, global language, opportunities for cultural immersion, engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds worldwide, facilitating daily interactions, and promoting ease of learning and application.	20 (29.85%)
	Learning strategies and styles	Metacognitive strategies, social strategies, self-learning and practice	8 (11.94%)
	Language learning environment	A supportive educational atmosphere, hopeful individuals, a supportive family, and encouraging peers who maintain an optimistic outlook.	7 (10.44%)
	Teachers' support	Demonstrating empathy and consideration for their needs, fostering mutual respect, providing clear and direct guidance, expressing gratitude and motivation, implementing diverse instructional techniques and materials	6 (8.95%)
Pessimism (45 responses)	Negative emotions	Learning anxiety, depression, dissatisfaction about learning outcomes, desperation in mastering English language, shyness, speaking anxiety, amotivation, fear of failure, lack of confidence	22 (48.88%)
	Language learning Environment	Pessimistic peers, bad experience, repeated failures, limited oral practice, feeling overwhelmed by the abundance of resources and learning methods available, difficult exams, lack of peer cooperation, impoverished learning environment	14 (31.11%)
	Teachers' lack of support	Lack of effective teaching practices, inadequate support for learners, traditional educator roles, minimal interaction between teachers and learners.	7 (15.55%)
	Cultural and linguistic factors and negative attitudes towards English language	Lack of recognition for foreign language cultures, prevalent negative perceptions of English culture, cultural clashes, insufficient exposure to the language, complex grammar and vocabulary challenges, limited opportunities for language practice, unrealistic expectations regarding fluency and precision	2 (4.44%)
Strategies to maintain optimism in EFL learning (15 responses)	Linguistic strategies	Engaging with the language through exposure and practice, reading aloud and delivering oral presentations, utilizing diverse learning resources, applying vocabulary in context, seeking daily communication opportunities	8 (53.33%)
	Non-linguistic strategies	Effective metacognitive learning strategies (e.g., planning, monitoring, and organization), fostering relationships with positive peers, practicing effective time management, and enhancing self-regulation	7 (46.66%)

perspective toward English language learning. Among the various positive emotions identified, motivation emerged as the most frequently cited, closely followed by perseverance, self-confidence, and encouragement. Several participants articulated that both instrumental and integrative motivations, along with self-confidence, served as critical elements that bolstered their optimism in the face of challenges. One participant remarked:

Despite the obstacles I encounter in my life and in learning English—balancing my roles as a wife and mother—my driving motivations to master the language, combined with my passion

for education and self-confidence, have been pivotal in my ongoing journey in EFL learning, enabling me to achieve this level of proficiency.

Other participants (29.85%) emphasized the significance of linguistic and cultural factors, as well as their perceptions of the English language and its associated culture, as vital elements that promoted a positive attitude toward EFL learning. For example, many participants observed that learning English improved their opportunities for international communication and expanded their cultural awareness. One individual expressed it clearly:

Achieving proficiency in English opens doors to diverse cultures, opportunities, and relationships, fostering a profound sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Another participant highlighted the importance of English as a global lingua franca, showcasing her positive view of the language. She stated:

English has become a universal language, with a significant portion of the global population achieving proficiency in it. This widespread use enhances communication and interaction with others in English. As one of the most spoken languages in the world, it offers numerous opportunities for practice and cultural immersion. My passion for learning English arises from its status as a key language, essential both professionally and personally. It allows me to connect with individuals from diverse regions.

The participants identified various language learning strategies and preferences as significant contributors to their sense of optimism. Among these, metacognitive strategies were particularly highlighted, including techniques such as strategic planning and ongoing reflection on the learning process, as well as monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of their EFL learning. Establishing plans and setting small, achievable goals were noted to foster a positive mindset.

Additionally, participants recognized the influence of contextual factors—such as a supportive learning environment and encouragement from educators—as vital in cultivating feelings of optimism. One participant remarked:

The teaching style and personality of the instructor, along with collaboration among peers, are primary factors that enhance feelings of well-being and optimism. Observing personal progress and surrounding oneself with positive individuals further contribute to this uplifting sentiment.

Another participant emphasized the importance of teachers' responses to learners' abilities and needs, stating:

Feedback is crucial for fostering an optimistic outlook. The methods employed by teachers for evaluation also play a significant role in influencing learners' sense of optimism.

The participants identified several factors contributing to pessimistic attitudes toward EFL learning, including psychological, linguistic, cultural, and contextual influences. The most common negative emotions reported were anxiety, depression, shyness, lack of motivation and confidence, along with fears of failure. Many respondents (48.88%) indicated that their efforts to communicate in English were hampered by a fear of

making mistakes, which resulted in significant reluctance and anxiety. Additionally, some participants noted that their shyness limited their willingness to engage in speaking and participation during activities. Two individuals specifically mentioned feelings of embarrassment related to errors—especially concerning pronunciation or reading aloud—as particularly harmful. One participant expressed that when learners struggled to understand content in English classes, it triggered anxiety that fostered pessimism and dissatisfaction with their ability to achieve proficiency in the language.

Lack of motivation emerged as a significant negative emotion among participants. One explanation provided was the adverse experiences within their families and repeated failures in academic settings. Contextual elements, such as the learning environment and insufficient support from teachers, were also identified as contributors to feelings of pessimism. A recurring theme among participants was the influence of discouraging friends and family members who had faced setbacks or lacked aspirations in language acquisition. As a result, participants experienced diminished confidence in their ability to become fluent in English.

The absence of teacher support further exacerbated these feelings of pessimism among participants. They highlighted issues such as teachers' limited teaching experience, the lack of explicit instruction, and ineffective teaching methodologies. One participant articulated the following:

The ridicule from teachers regarding my mistakes and the challenging examinations led to low grades, which made me feel stagnant in my progress. I believe that when English educators lack experience and effective teaching strategies, it fosters an atmosphere of negativity and adds additional pressure on learners.

Some of the participants (4.44%) identified both linguistic and cultural factors as significant contributors to their negative perceptions of success in language acquisition, which in turn fostered feelings of pessimism. Linguistic challenges included a lack of oral practice, insufficient opportunities for meaningful input and authentic engagement, and the differences between English and their native language, Arabic. These differences encompassed similar vocabulary with varying meanings, complex grammatical structures, and the establishment of unrealistic expectations regarding fluency and accuracy.

Furthermore, participants emphasized the cultural factors that influenced their attitudes toward English. They expressed discomfort with aspects of English-speaking culture that they found to be at odds with their own Arabic traditions, leading to a sense of cultural dissonance that complicated their acceptance of English

as more than just an academic subject, but as a practical means of communication.

Feelings of pessimism about English language learning can stem from various sources. A common obstacle is the complexity of the language itself, characterized by intricate grammar rules, irregular verbs, and an extensive vocabulary that can overwhelm learners and lead to frustration. Additionally, cultural and linguistic disparities can create further challenges, particularly for those whose native languages have substantial structural differences compared to English.

The final open-ended question aimed to explore the strategies participants commonly employed to cultivate optimism and mitigate pessimistic perspectives in their EFL studies. The analysis of their responses revealed two primary themes: linguistic and non-linguistic strategies. Participants (53.33%) identified several effective linguistic strategies for language acquisition, including regular practice and exposure to the language, reading aloud, and delivering oral presentations. They also highlighted the significance of utilizing a variety of learning materials, applying vocabulary in meaningful contexts, and actively seeking daily communication opportunities. These strategies were emphasized by participants as vital for sustaining their English learning journey, facilitating progress, and enhancing satisfaction with their learning outcomes, ultimately contributing to heightened levels of optimism and positive emotions.

One participant shared:

Consistently practicing the language and embracing my mistakes, especially since it's a second language, along with continuous learning and reading, fuels my optimism. I dedicate an hour each day to reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities, and I spend an additional two hours focused on expanding my vocabulary, phrases, and dialogues.

Non-linguistic approaches significantly influenced the participants' responses (46.66%), prompting them to use phrases like 'time management,' 'focus on learning,' 'steering clear of negative individuals,' 'tracking my progress,' and 'appreciating learning outcomes.' One participant shared her perspective:

I believe that setting realistic goals, breaking my educational objectives into smaller, achievable tasks, and celebrating my progress are essential. By emphasizing my strengths and acknowledging my accomplishments in English—no matter how small—they greatly contribute to maintaining an optimistic outlook.

Overall, the participants recognized optimism and positive emotions as crucial elements in their success with EFL learning. They demonstrated an understanding

of the factors that led to both optimistic and pessimistic attitudes. The results highlighted the prevalent linguistic strategies employed by participants to foster optimism in their EFL learning experience.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the impact of optimism and pessimism on EFL learning among Saudi EFL learners, particularly examining how these psychological traits influence their proficiency in English. The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The first research question addressed the varying levels of optimism and pessimism within EFL learning contexts. The results of the descriptive analysis from the online questionnaire revealed that participants tended to exhibit a greater inclination towards optimism regarding their EFL learning. This result suggests that most respondents maintain a positive outlook and confidence in their ability to succeed in EFL learning. Furthermore, statistical evaluations indicated significant differences between levels of optimism and pessimism, emphasizing that EFL learners generally demonstrate a more optimistic perspective while showing lower levels of pessimism regarding their educational experiences.

The second research question investigated the connection between optimism, pessimism, and language proficiency. The results demonstrated a significant positive impact of optimism and a noteworthy negative impact of pessimism on language proficiency. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that EFL learners exhibiting optimistic attitudes generally achieve higher levels of English proficiency. This outcome aligns with previous research^(21, 37), which suggested that optimism can positively affect learners' academic performance and overall success. Specifically, the findings support the hypothesis (H2) that higher levels of optimism correlate positively with language proficiency among Saudi EFL learners. This relationship underscores the importance of fostering a positive psychological environment in educational settings, as learners who maintain an optimistic outlook are likely to engage more deeply with the learning material and persist through challenges. The results of this research align with the PP framework^(8, 33) as it suggests that fostering optimism can lead to improved language proficiency among learners. Conversely, the presence of pessimism may hinder academic achievement, emphasizing the need for educational strategies that promote positive psychological traits in EFL contexts. In contrast, the study also found a significant negative correlation between pessimism and language proficiency, supporting hypothesis H3. Learners who exhibited higher levels of pessimism tended to struggle more with their English proficiency, likely due to decreased motivation and engagement in the learning process. These findings highlight the detrimental effects of a pessimistic outlook, which can

lead to self-doubt and a lack of confidence in language abilities. This aligns with previous research indicating that negative emotions, such as anxiety and frustration, can impede academic performance^(18, 37).

Thus, addressing the psychological barriers associated with pessimism is crucial for enhancing language learning outcomes. While earlier studies have analyzed the link between optimism and general academic achievement across various fields, this study specifically highlighted the significance of optimism within the EFL context. It appears that elevated levels of optimism facilitate learners' acquisition of linguistic skills in a foreign language. Thus, optimism is not only associated with psychological aspects such as motivation, hope, empathy, and well-being^(16, 17) but also correlates with language proficiency and performance. This extends the existing literature by emphasizing the necessity of understanding and investigating positive psychological attributes among foreign language learners to support their development in language proficiency and achievement.

The third research question explored the viewpoints of participants regarding the factors contributing to optimism and pessimism in EFL learning. Based on the responses gathered from the open-ended questions in the online survey, several key sources of optimism among EFL learners were frequently cited. These included experiencing positive emotions, maintaining favorable linguistic and cultural attitudes towards the English language and its associated culture, employing effective language learning strategies, benefiting from a supportive learning environment, and receiving encouragement from teachers. The influence of positive emotions, particularly motivation, has been substantiated. A majority of participants acknowledged that motivation, engagement, self-confidence, love, and encouragement are pivotal in fostering optimistic perspectives regarding their EFL performance. This suggests that the positive psychological state of learners is crucial for their academic success and highlights their recognition of the significance of affective factors in their educational endeavors. The insights provided by learners concerning the function of positive emotions in cultivating optimism within EFL contexts offer compelling evidence—on behalf of the learners—that optimism contributes to a more comprehensive framework for integrating various elements of learner psychology into research^(18, 19, 20, 37).

Furthermore, the qualitative results suggest that optimistic EFL learners may be more inclined than their pessimistic counterparts to articulate their positive emotions and attitudes towards foreign languages and cultures. While this study did not evaluate participants' cultural attitudes directly, they indicated that cultural influences have played a role in shaping their optimism about EFL learning. They expressed a belief that

acquiring proficiency in English would open doors to intercultural communication and would enhance their cultural awareness. Consequently, they hold a more favorable outlook on the anticipated results of this learning journey. This issue concerning the influence of cultural perspectives on EFL learning and its relationship with optimism merits additional exploration.

Moreover, the participants indicated that their utilization of various language learning strategies (LLS), including metacognitive and social approaches, appeared to enhance their optimism in EFL learning. This highlights the pivotal role of optimism in bolstering learners' coping mechanisms and strategic approaches^(22, 34). It is plausible that optimism fosters the development of effective language learning strategies by encouraging learners to explore new methods for improving their EFL skills. Nonetheless, the relationship between these variables remains ambiguous. Specifically, it is not clear whether optimism promotes the adoption of LLS or if engaging with LLS heightens levels of optimism, thus presenting avenues for further empirical investigation into the interplay between these elements. Additionally, participants acknowledged the significance of a positive language learning environment and support from educators as contributors to their sense of optimism. This aligns with quantitative results from prior research that underscored the importance of these contextual factors in supporting learners' emotional well-being and fostering positive psychological outcomes^(19, 20, 24).

The qualitative analysis revealed that EFL participants experienced several negative emotions—such as anxiety, depression, dissatisfaction with their learning outcomes, lack of motivation, and diminished self-confidence—which contributed to a pessimistic outlook on their language learning experiences. These insights suggest that such negative emotions not only impede learners' academic performance^(18, 36) but may also foster discouraging perceptions regarding the overall efficacy of language learning. Beyond personal feelings of negativity, external factors within the language learning environment—such as pessimistic peers, repeated failures in EFL studies, challenging assessments, and a lack of collaborative atmosphere—can further diminish optimism among EFL learners. Prior research^(11, 19) has demonstrated that these contextual elements significantly impact learners' psychological well-being and success in language education. Moreover, participants noted that inadequate support from teachers was another critical factor contributing to their pessimism. While previous studies have emphasized the importance of EFL teachers' positivity in enhancing learners' academic achievements^(19, 24), the results from this study highlight that learners' optimism may also be influenced by the quality of teacher support, instructional methods, and interactions with educators. Cultural and linguistic elements were identified as contributing factors to the sense of pessimism expressed by participants. These

elements may encompass a lack of appreciation for EFL culture or negative perceptions towards English culture and its speakers. Such attitudes can stem from limited opportunities to engage with EFL outside the classroom environment, alongside learners' anxieties regarding their potential failure to master the language. Additionally, unrealistic expectations concerning the outcomes of EFL learning may also play a role.

The fourth research question examined the techniques that participants frequently employ to foster optimism in their EFL studies. Linguistic strategies highlighted by participants include engaging with EFL in diverse contexts, which affords learners additional chances to practice the language. Consequently, future research should investigate how LLSs influence learners' optimism within EFL environments. Participants also noted non-linguistic factors that they believed contribute to a positive outlook in EFL learning, such as employing metacognitive strategies involving planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own progress. This suggests that both linguistic and non-linguistic approaches are crucial, indicating that positive psychology is influenced by multiple facets that warrant consideration when assessing factors affecting language learner success^(16, 18, 19, 20, 37).

Several implications arise from these results. Firstly, it is essential for EFL educators to recognize optimism as an individual learner trait⁽¹⁶⁾ within the context of language acquisition. Secondly, instructors should actively promote optimistic attitudes among learners regarding their anticipated success in learning endeavors. Furthermore, creating a supportive and collaborative learning atmosphere is vital. Educators must also be attuned to the various emotional experiences of learners within the classroom setting. Encouraging learners to adopt diverse language learning strategies and styles can significantly enhance their optimism and subsequently lead to improved language proficiency. Recognizing the complexity of optimism and pessimism as psychological traits, this study explored how individual differences in these attributes can influence language learning outcomes. Such insights can inform targeted interventions that support learners in developing a more optimistic outlook, which may enhance their language proficiency.

6. Conclusions and limitations

This study presents several limitations. **Firstly**, it relied on self-report measures for quantitative data collection, which can introduce response biases. Consequently, definitive conclusions regarding the relationship between optimism and language proficiency cannot be established. While participants reported positive outcomes associated with optimism in FLL, there is a likelihood that higher optimism levels could correlate with more advantageous academic results; however, further empirical research is necessary to validate

this hypothesis. Future investigations should consider employing various sources and tools to assess the potential impacts of optimism within academic FLL settings. **Secondly**, the study utilized an open-ended question format for qualitative data collection, which lacked interviews. This absence limited the ability to capture learners' perspectives on the evolving nature of optimism in FLL scenarios. **Thirdly**, the research focused on a narrow range of variables—primarily optimism and foreign language achievement—overlooking other factors that may affect levels of optimism, such as emotional regulation, hope, enjoyment, anxiety, and stress. Given that previous studies have yielded conflicting results concerning the influence of both positive and negative psychological constructs on language learners' experiences, future research should adopt a more rigorous empirical approach across diverse populations and educational environments to enhance the generalizability of results.

Despite these limitations, the outcomes were promising. This investigation assessed the impact of optimism and pessimism on EFL learners' proficiency through a mixed-methods framework. The results suggest that elevated levels of optimism are linked to enhanced language proficiency, underscoring a beneficial aspect of this construct. In addition to quantitative insights, qualitative data indicated that fostering self-confidence and motivation while mitigating negative emotions may help sustain optimism among EFL learners. These learners are likely adept at employing various strategies to cultivate their optimistic outlook regarding EFL learning achievements. However, it is essential for educators to motivate learners to preserve their positive emotions and develop effective coping strategies throughout their journey in mastering a foreign language.

Conflict of Interest

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Data Availability Statement

The Data used in the course of this study are available on request from the author.

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