Exploring the Relationship between Self-esteem and Optimistic-Pessimistic Attitudes in English Majors at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade

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Abstract

The relationship between self-esteem and optimistic and pessimistic attitudes is significant in individual behavioral patterns in society and studying, according to educational psychology. The study will be done on 70 English majors at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade (HUIT) with a quantitative research method and two scales: Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965) and Scheier, Carver, and Bridge's Life Orientation Test-Revised (1994) to determine this correlation. There are two hypotheses stated in this study: (1) Self-esteem and optimistic attitudes are positively correlated among English majors at HUIT, and (2) Self-esteem and pessimistic attitudes are negatively correlated among English majors at HUIT. To answer the above hypotheses, the study will employ SPSS 26.00 to perform descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient analysis, and Pearson correlation analysis. The data suggest that among HUIT English majors, there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and an optimistic attitude and also a positive correlation between self-esteem and a pessimistic attitude. These findings provide insight into the complicated link between self-esteem and optimistic and pessimistic attitudes, revealing that people with higher self-esteem might have both optimistic and pessimistic dispositions in academic life and daily life.

Keywords: *Self-esteem; pessimism; optimism; attitudes.*

Introduction

Exploring the relationship between self-esteem and optimistic and pessimistic attitudes is an attractive research area in educational psychology. College life frequently presents considerable academic and social hurdles; thus, it is critical to understand how self-esteem and optimistic and pessimistic views might impact students' experiences and psychological well-being, particularly to English majors.

In reality, studies on the relationship between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes in English majors are very sparse. As a result, the findings of this study help to emphasize the necessity of examining the relationship between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes in English majors who have received minimal attention in psychological studies. On the social side, the findings will inspire

educators to identify practical solutions to increase this group's ability to overcome problems and achieve specified goals in life and school.

With the above implications, the purpose of this study is to look at the relationship between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes among English majors at HUIT. By investigating the correlations between these variables, researchers can get significant insights into this target group's psychological dynamics to find appropriate intervention programs aimed at the benefits for them. Last but not least, this study also contributes to a greater understanding of the elements that influence the well-being of HUIT English majors while providing relevant information to encourage healthy psychological growth and academic performance for HUIT English majors.

Literature Review

Self-esteem

Self-esteem can be defined as people's appraisal of their own value - that is, the extent to which they believe they are good, capable, and decent (Aronson et al., 2010). Confidence, a sense of security, identity, a sense of belonging, and competence are all important components of self-esteem. According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem is an attitude toward an object, where "attitude" is defined as facts, ideas, values related to the individual, and judgments, as well as positive and negative tendencies toward oneself. Self-esteem can also be defined as a subjective evaluation of one's own value (Donnellan et al., 2011).

Aronson et al. (2010) classified self-esteem into three types: healthy self-esteem, low self-esteem, and overly high self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem can motivate people to pursue their goals because people know that they can accomplish what they choose to do. Additionally, when people have healthy self-esteem, they can set appropriate boundaries in their relationships and maintain healthy relationships with others. Low self-esteem has the potential to contribute to a variety of mental illnesses, including anxiety disorders and depressive disorders, which can negatively impact quality of life and increase the risk of suicide. This conclusion is similar to the study of Schmeichel et al. (2009); Accordingly, people with high self-esteem have less trouble with thoughts about death than people with low self-esteem. Overly high self-esteem can lead to relationship problems, difficulty in social situations, and an inability to accept criticism. One of the most negative manifestations of overly high self-esteem is narcissism, the combination of excessive self-love leading to a lack of empathy for others (Aronson et al., 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between self-esteem and narcissism because the two personalities both involve a positive evaluation of oneself (Orth et al., 2016; Paulhus et al., 2004). It can be seen that self-esteem is the feeling of completely accepting oneself and respecting oneself. On the contrary, narcissism is the feeling of loving and valuing

oneself excessively, giving oneself authority over others, and placing oneself at the center of the universe (Ackerman et al. 2011).

Optimistic and pessimistic attitudes

Optimism, or optimistic attitude, according to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, is the attitude of believing that good things will happen and hope that one's aims will be met in the end. Optimism is also defined as "a feeling of confidence or doubt about the attainment of a goal value" (Carver & Scheier, 1999). In other words, optimism is the proclivity to anticipate favorable results (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995), or the assumption that positive events outnumber negative ones (Yates, Yates, & Lippett, 1995).

Pessimism, or pessimistic attitude, on the other hand, is the belief that things will go wrong and that one's goals are unlikely to be met. Pessimism can alternatively be characterized as the expectation of failure (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995), the forecast of negative consequences, or the disposition to be pessimistic (Scheier & Carver, 1985).

As can be seen, optimism and pessimism are just the expectations of a positive or negative future; they are diverse modes of thinking that are better conceived as a continuum with varying degrees of optimism and pessimism, rather than strictly. According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, most people fall somewhere between the extremes of pure optimism and pure pessimism, but they all have a preference for the direction of a situation that is reasonably steady in one direction or the other.

Both optimism and pessimism have been linked to the coping strategies that individuals use (Chang, 1996; Helton, Dember, Warm, & Matthews, 1999; Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). Optimism is associated with adaptive behaviors such as problem-solving and looking for the positive elements of difficult situations. Thus, optimists feel that good things will occur throughout time, whereas pessimists believe that unpleasant things will occur (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Optimists also have optimistic result expectations, which allow them to re-energize their attempts to attain their goals in the face of setbacks (Puskar, Sereika, Lamb, Tusaie-Mumford, & McGuinness, 1999; Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). Pessimists, on the other hand, tend to give up when confronted with difficulties and may develop depressive or even suicidal inclinations (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995; O'Connor & Cassidy, 2007). In general, optimism and pessimism can have a significant impact on overall results in situations in which the individual has no prior experience.

Self-esteem and social relationships

In a comprehensive study, Orth et al. (2020) discovered a favorable relationship between self-esteem and social relationships. People with high self-esteem are more likely to form positive social interactions through traits such as interpersonal attraction, initiating new partnerships, and maintaining social ties

(Srivastava & Beer, 2005). Furthermore, people with high self-esteem have better physical health, and they are often more contented and successful at work. In contrast, those who have poor self-esteem are more likely to develop mental health issues and engage in antisocial conduct because they frequently blame failures on external factors, on others. Self-esteem, on the other hand, is positively connected with academic accomplishment at school, which means that students with higher academic achievement have higher self-esteem and vice versa (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2013).

Hoa's (2022) study on self-esteem and social network usage behavior in Vietnam reveals a two-way association. Self-esteem will improve if individuals use social networks to share new news, happy events, and positive images of themselves, but the results of in-depth interviews and previous studies show that social network users should be cautious of the downside of sharing online, even if it is positive information about themselves. This study also accords with Dat's (2022) study on the detrimental influence of social comparison on self-esteem on the negative impact of using social networks on self-esteem when comparing oneself to those around him/her. As a result, buying behavior is activated to compensate for feelings of inferiority. Anh's (2000) study on the relationship between self-esteem and empathy in adolescents likewise found a positive correlation; self-esteem can predict variations in empathy.

The relationship between self-esteem and optimistic and pessimistic attitudes

Although there have been no in-depth studies on the relationship between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes in Vietnam, some overseas studies have looked into this area.

In a survey of 508 students at the University of California, researchers discovered a positive association between self-esteem and optimistic attitude, and a negative correlation between self-esteem and pessimistic attitude (Cheek & Melchior, 1990). The findings of this study are also consistent with some of the findings of Scheier et al. (1994); those with high self-esteem tend to be optimistic, whereas those with low self-esteem tend to be pessimistic.

The study on the association between self-esteem, stress, and depression conducted by Orth, Robins, and Meier's (2009) showed that low self-esteem is a predictor of depression, and people with low self-esteem often have more pessimistic expectations. Similarly, Sowislo and Orth (2013) discovered a robust link between low self-esteem and increased sadness and anxiety symptoms. According to the findings, low self-esteem contributes to pessimistic views and negative emotional experiences.

Marshall et al. (2015) investigated the link between self-esteem, optimistic attitude, and happiness. High self-esteem was found to be connected with increased optimistic attitude and contentment over time. According to Heinonen et al. (2015), self-esteem in early and late adolescence has a crucial influence in predicting optimistic-pessimistic attitudes in adults. This study sheds light on the relationship between self-

esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes, emphasizing the necessity of fostering self-esteem to encourage a positive outlook on daily life.

It can be seen that studies on the relationship between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes have practical applications in life; however, reality reveals a research gap in Vietnam, particularly since there have been no studies conducted on English majors. As a result, the goal of this study is to discover the relationship between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes in English majors at HUIT to make practical recommendations to encourage a positive attitude toward academic life for this target group.

This research is mainly based on Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale and Scheier, Carver, and Bridges' (1994) life orientation test-revised scale with two following research questions:

Research question 1: Is there a correlation between self-esteem and optimism among English majors at HUIT?

Research question 2: Is there a correlation between self-esteem and pessimism among English majors at HUIT?

The following are the research hypotheses for the aforementioned study research questions:

H1: Self-esteem and optimism are positively correlated among English majors at HUIT.

H2: Self-esteem and pessimism are negatively correlated among English majors at HUIT.

Methodology

Research approach and design

Scientific study is based on identifying and solving a specific problem. There are two primary approaches to data collection and interpretation in research: qualitative research and quantitative research. Quantitative research will be used to achieve the goals of this study.

To answer both research questions, two scales will be used: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) proposed by Rosenberg (1965) and the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) proposed by Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994). Following the collection of data, the correlation between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes will be determined using data analysis and SPSS 26.0.

Participants

The researcher chose the participants in this study using the convenience sampling approach. A survey of 70 students majoring in English language at HUIT was undertaken for the study. The Google Forms platform was used to collect research data online.

Regarding considerations for ethics, the Google Forms survey will include an email option to notify participants of the research findings. When the results are ready, the researcher will send them to the email

address supplied by the participants. Furthermore, participants have the option of participating or not participating in the study.

Research instruments

There are two scales used in this study: (1) the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) proposed by Rosenberg (1965) and (2) the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) proposed by Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994).

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) by Rosenberg (1965) includes ten items; Each item is an affirmation of personal worth and satisfaction with oneself. Each item is scored from 0 to 3. For items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7, the mean scores are as follows: 0: Strongly disagree; 1: Disagree; 2: Agree; 3: Totally agree. For items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10, the rating points in the opposite direction, that is, 0: Strongly agree; 1: Agree; 2: Disagree; 3: Completely disagree. Scores are calculated by total score (SUM); Accordingly, the total score < 15 points shows low self-esteem; 15 < total score < 25 is a normal level of self-esteem; 26 < total score < 30 shows high self-esteem. The items in the Rosenberg self-esteem scale are as follows:

Table 1. Statements and codes of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

#	Code	Statements	Scores			
			0	1	2	3
1	RSES1	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	0	1	2	3
2	RSES2	At times I think I am no good at all.	0	1	2	3
3	RSES3	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	0	1	2	3
4	RSES4	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	0	1	2	3
5	RSES5	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	0	1	2	3
6	RSES6	I certainly feel useless at times.	0	1	2	3
7	RSES7	I feel that I am a person of worth.	0	1	2	3
8	RSES8	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	0	1	2	3
9	RSES9	All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.	0	1	2	3
10	RSES10	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	0	1	2	3

The Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)

The Life Orientation Test–Revised (LOT-R) scale of Scheier, Carver and Bridges (1994) was used to determine each individual's pessimistic or optimistic personality traits. The LOT–R test is designed to assess differences between individuals in terms of optimism and pessimism in viewing life. LOT-R is very suitable for use in research related to behavior and emotions. LOT-R includes 10 items, of which 03 items 1, 4, 10 assess optimism and 03 items 3, 7, 9 assess pessimism. Items 2, 5, 6, and 8 are items with a "filling" function, avoiding letting subjects know they are being evaluated for optimism. Each item has 5 levels of

choice from "completely agree" to "completely disagree". The items in Scheier's Optimism-Pessimism scale are as follows:

Table 2. Statements and codes of the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)

#	Code	Statements	Scores				
			0	1	2	3	4
OPTIMISM							
1	OPT1	In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.	0	1	2	3	4
2	OPT4	I'm always optimistic about my future.	0	1	2	3	4
3	OPT10	Overall, I expect more good things to happen.	0	1	2	3	4
PESSIMISM							
4	PES3	If something can go wrong for me, it will.	0	1	2	3	4
5	PES7	I hardly ever expect things to go my way.	0	1	2	3	4
6	PES9	I rarely count on good things happening to me.	0	1	2	3	4
FILLING ITEMS							
7	I2	It's easy for me to relax.	0	1	2	3	4
8	I5	I enjoy my friends a lot.	0	1	2	3	4
9	I6	It's important for me to keep busy.	0	1	2	3	4
10	I8	I don't get upset too easily.	0	1	2	3	4

Data collection and Data analysis procedures

The survey was designed and conducted via Google Forms. Participants will be provided with a link to take the survey. The time to close the link will be one week from the time the link is opened. Collected data will be entered and processed through SPSS 26.0 software. After coding all data, the researcher conducted the following analysis steps: (1) Descriptive statistics, (2) Assessing the reliability of the scale using Cronbach's Alpha, and (3) Analysis of Pearson correlation.

Findings

Descriptive analysis

Seventy participants came into the survey on the correlation between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes. Seventy answer sheets were collected; all are valid, reaching a rate of 100%. From the collected data and descriptive statistics on frequency through SPSS 26.0 software, some general comments about the participants can be made as follows:

Regarding gender, among the 70 participants, 51 are female, accounting for 72.9%; 19 people are male, accounting for 27.1%; The difference between the two genders is 45.8%.

Regarding cohort, among the 70 participants, 7 participants were freshmen, accounting for 10.0%; 20 participants were sophomores, accounting for 28.6%; 24 participants were juniors, accounting for 34.3%; 19 participants were seniors, accounting for 27.1%.

Regarding the number of years studying English, the majority of the participants have studied English for 8 years and above, accounting for 41.4%. The number of participants with less than 5 years studying English is 7, accounting for 10.0%.

Details of general information of the survey sample, after processing with SPSS 26.0, are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3. Summary of descriptive analysis

Items	Frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
1. Gender			
Male	19	27.1	27.1
Female	51	72.9	100.0
Total	70	100.0	
2. Cohort			
Freshmen	7	10.0	10.0
Sophomores	20	28.6	38.6
Juniors	24	34.3	72.9
Seniors	19	27.1	100.0
Total	70	100.0	
3. Number of years studying English			
< 5 years	7	10.0	10.0
5 – < 6 years	15	21.4	31.4
6 – < 8 years	19	27.1	58.6
8 years and above	29	41.4	100.0
Total	70	100.0	

(Source: From SPSS 26.0)

Reliability statistics using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient

The reliability of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

RSES includes 10 items. *Cronbach's Alpha coefficient = 0.781* (> 0.7) and the total correlation of the 09 variables is > 0.3; there is 1 variable RSES8 = 0.186 < 0.3. Thus, RSES is sufficiently reliable. Because Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is > 0.7, reliable enough, there is no need to remove the RSES8. Detailed results of the reliability analysis of RSES are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The reliability of RSES

RSES	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
RSES1			0.414	0.768
RSES2			0.425	0.769
RSES3			0.598	0.742
RSES4			0.368	0.772
RSES5	10	0.781	0.527	0.752
RSES6			0.386	0.770
RSES7			0.576	0.748
RSES8			0.196	0.800
RSES9			0.616	0.737
RSES10			0.490	0.757

(Source: From SPSS 26.0)

The reliability of the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)

LOT-R includes 02 groups of factors with 06 items in which the Optimism factor group has 03 items and the Pessimism factor group has 03 items. In the Optimism factor group (OPT), *Cronbach's Alpha coefficient = 0.770* (> 0.7) and the total correlation of the three variables is over 0.3; thus, the Optimism factor group (OPT) qualifies as reliable. In the Pessimism factor group (PES), *Cronbach's Alpha coefficient = 0.734* (> 0.7) and the total correlation of the three variables is over 0.3; hence, the Pessimism factor group (PES) also qualifies for reliability. In summary, the entire Optimism-Pessimism scale has *Cronbach's Alpha coefficient > 0.7*, meeting the conditions for reliability. Detailed results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The reliability of LOT-R

LOT-R	Factor groups	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
OPT1	Optimism (OPT)	03	0.770	0.595	0.703
OPT4				0.577	0.720
OPT10				0.643	0.649
PES3	Pessimism (PES)	03	0.734	0.452	0.761
PES7				0.635	0.562
PES9				0.623	0.579

(Source: From SPSS 26.0)

It can be seen that both the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) proposed by Rosenberg (1965) and (2) the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) proposed by Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994) have Cronbach's Alpha coefficient > 0.7, which is reliable enough to analyze the next steps of this study.

Pearson correlation

The Pearson correlation coefficient (*r*) was employed by the authors to examine the tightness of the linear association between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes. SPSS 26.0 software analysis findings show:

(1) ***Correlation between self-esteem and optimistic attitudes***: *Sig value. (2-tailed) = 0.005 < 0.05,* significant correlation. The coefficient *r = 0.333 > 0* shows that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and optimistic attitudes. The absolute value of *r = 0.333 < 0.5* shows that although there is a correlation, this correlation is not strong.

(2) ***Correlation between self-esteem and pessimistic attitudes***: *Sig value. (2-tailed) = 0.015 < 0.05,* significant correlation. The coefficient *r = 0.290 > 0* shows that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and pessimistic attitudes. The absolute value of *r = 0.290 < 0.5* shows that although there is a correlation, this correlation is not strong.

When the data are compared, it is clear that the correlation between self-esteem and optimistic attitudes is stronger than the correlation between self-esteem and pessimistic attitudes. Detailed results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Pearson correlation

		SUM_RSES	SUM_OPT	SUM_PES
SUM_RSES	Pearson Correlation	1	0.333**	0.290*
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.005	0.015
	N	70	70	70
SUM_OPT	Pearson Correlation	0.333**	1	0.548*
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.005		0.000
	N	70	70	70
SUM_PES	Pearson Correlation	0.290*	0.548*	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.015	0.000	
	N	70	70	70

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

(Source: From SPSS 26.0)

Results of testing the research hypotheses

The following is a summary of the findings of testing the research hypotheses:

Table 7. Results of testing hypotheses

Hypotheses	Results
H1: Self-esteem and optimism are positively correlated among English majors at HUIT.	Accepted
H2: Self-esteem and pessimism are negatively correlated among English majors at HUIT.	Rejected

The findings of the research hypotheses testing demonstrate that hypothesis H1 is accepted, namely that English language students at HUIT with high self-esteem have comparable optimistic attitudes. However, contrary to the original hypothesis that English language students with high self-esteem have lesser pessimistic attitudes, the research findings demonstrate that, despite high self-esteem, English language students in HUIT have a significant chance of pessimistic attitudes. As a result, hypothesis H2 is rejected.

Discussions

The results demonstrate a positive relationship between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes among HUIT English majors. This shed light on the complex relationship between self-esteem and optimistic-pessimistic attitudes, indicating that people with higher self-esteem can be both optimistic and pessimistic in life.

Previous studies have shown that those with higher self-esteem are more prone to adopt positive and hopeful perspectives on daily life. Their confidence and resilience allow them to approach obstacles with confidence and self-worth. This correlation emphasizes the significance of developing self-esteem as a strategy of promoting optimism and overall psychological well-being in HUIT English majors.

The positive correlation between self-esteem and pessimistic tendencies, on the other hand, emphasizes the complexities of human psychology. Even persons with strong self-esteem might have negative or gloomy thoughts that are impacted by a variety of factors such as academic pressure, social interactions, or personal situations.

Understanding both the positive correlation between self-esteem and optimistic as well as pessimistic attitudes provides a more comprehensive view of the psychological context of English majors at HUIT. It emphasizes the importance of considering the multidimensionality of attitudes and the need for targeted interventions to promote positive thinking and resilience while also addressing negative thinking patterns. To promote more optimistic thinking in this population, interventions should focus on enhancing self-esteem, providing resources to cope with challenges, and building a supportive environment. Strategies such as cognitive-behavioral interventions and positive psychology exercises can help this population develop a positive outlook and effectively manage pessimistic tendencies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the observed positive link between self-esteem and both optimistic and pessimistic attitudes emphasizes the importance of comprehensive support systems that meet the different perspectives of English majors at HUIT. By nurturing self-esteem, promoting positive thinking, and providing resources to cope with negative thoughts, HUIT may contribute to the overall health and resilience of the English majors. Additionally, this can also be meaningful for these English majors to enhance each individual's academic learning and development.

Despite many efforts, this study still has many limitations, specifically the number of participants, the sampling method as well as the inability to establish conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships. Therefore, future research can overcome the above limitations to provide a deeper understanding of the interactions between self-esteem and optimism-pessimism not only for English majors but also for many other target groups in various universities./.

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