

## **Students' Perception on Their Positive Thinking in Learning English as a Foreign Language**

**Rusmiyadi**

1811102421025@umkt.ac.id

**Khusnul Khatimah**

kk645@umkt.ac.id

**Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur**

### **ABSTRACT**

This research explores the role of positive thinking in the context of learning English as a foreign language, focusing on students' perceptions of how their optimistic outlook influences their language learning experiences. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from a survey administered to 100 undergraduate students at the University of Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that students generally exhibit high levels of positive thinking, which significantly impacts their motivation, reduces anxiety, increases class participation, fosters resilience, and enhances overall academic performance and satisfaction. Quantitative analysis shows strong positive correlations between positive thinking and various aspects of language learning, while qualitative data provide deeper insights into how positive thinking helps students set and achieve goals, build confidence, engage actively in class, overcome challenges, and enjoy the learning process. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the benefits of positive thinking in language learning. It underscores the importance of integrating positive psychology principles into language education to improve student outcomes. Practical implications for language educators include fostering a positive classroom environment, encouraging optimism and self-efficacy, promoting active engagement, and building students' resilience.

**Key words:** Positive Thinking; Language Learning; Student Perceptions

### **INTRODUCTION**

In today's globalized world, proficiency in English has become an essential skill, unlocking a multitude of educational, professional, and personal opportunities. However, learning English as a foreign language can present several challenges, including anxiety, lack of motivation, and other psychological barriers. Positive thinking, rooted in positive psychology, plays a significant role in shaping learners' success and experiences in overcoming these challenges. This chapter provides an overview of the background, emphasizing the importance of English proficiency, the obstacles faced by learners, the impact of positive thinking, and the relevance of this study.

English is widely regarded as the global lingua franca, serving as a common medium of communication across diverse cultures and nations. Mastery of English is crucial for academic achievement, career growth, and international communication. For students in non-English-speaking countries, learning English can open doors to higher education, enhance employability, and enable participation in global discussions. As a result, English language education is prioritized in many educational systems worldwide.

However, acquiring English as a foreign language involves various cognitive and emotional challenges. These include language anxiety, which can impede performance (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986); lack of motivation, especially when faced with setbacks (Dörnyei, 2001); low self-confidence, often driven by a fear of mistakes and negative self-perception (Young, 1991); and the need for resilience to overcome obstacles (Masten, 2001).

Positive thinking, a central tenet of positive psychology, involves maintaining an optimistic attitude and focusing on the positive aspects of situations. It is linked to several psychological benefits, such as enhanced motivation, reduced anxiety, improved resilience, and better overall well-being (Seligman, 2002). In language learning, positive thinking can significantly contribute to helping students navigate challenges, stay motivated, boost their confidence, and actively engage in their learning process.

Positive thinking can enhance intrinsic motivation by fostering a growth mindset, where students believe their abilities can be developed through effort and persistence (Dweck, 2006). This mindset encourages learners to set and pursue ambitious goals, view setbacks as opportunities for growth, and persist through difficulties. Additionally, a positive mindset helps reduce anxiety by shifting focus to strengths and past successes, thereby building a more positive self-image. This reduction in anxiety can lead to increased participation and a greater willingness to take risks in using the language.

Furthermore, positive thinking can foster a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment, encouraging students to actively contribute to class discussions and activities. Such engagement is essential for effective language acquisition. Finally, by helping students reframe challenges as temporary and manageable, positive thinking can build resilience, enabling them to persist through obstacles and continue making progress in their language learning journey.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Positive thinking, which emphasizes an optimistic outlook focused on favorable outcomes, has gained significant attention in educational psychology, particularly in the context of foreign language learning. Understanding how students perceive positive thinking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings is essential, as it

provides valuable insights into how a positive mindset can influence motivation, reduce anxiety, and improve success in language acquisition. This literature review synthesizes key theories and research on positive thinking, language learning motivation, and the impact of emotional factors in EFL. It draws from foundational works such as Beck's Cognitive Behavior Therapy (2011), Dörnyei's exploration of individual differences in language learning (2005), Dweck's Mindset theory (2006), Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (2001), and research on language anxiety by Horwitz et al. (1986, 2001).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) offers a useful framework for understanding how cognitive processes influence attitudes and behaviors. Beck (2011) explains that CBT focuses on identifying and reframing negative thought patterns to promote healthier thinking, underlining the role of positive thinking in overcoming challenges. In an EFL context, adopting a positive mindset allows students to view obstacles as manageable and fosters resilience. Thus, positive thinking in CBT can enhance motivation and minimize language-related anxiety, enabling students to believe in their abilities and approach learning with confidence.

Dweck's (2006) *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* introduces the concepts of a growth mindset (believing abilities can be developed through effort) and a fixed mindset (viewing abilities as unchangeable). Dweck asserts that students with a growth mindset are more resilient and open to learning challenges, especially in areas like EFL where mistakes are common. By encouraging students to see setbacks as opportunities for growth rather than failures, educators can cultivate a positive, growth-oriented perspective. This mindset fosters increased confidence, motivation, and reduces language-related anxiety, helping students persist and improve their performance.

Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory highlights the importance of positive emotions, such as joy, curiosity, and contentment, in enhancing cognitive flexibility and building psychological resilience. In the context of EFL, these positive emotions help students approach language challenges creatively, reduce stress, and improve engagement. Positive emotions not only enhance motivation but also promote an inclusive and supportive classroom environment. According to Fredrickson, positive emotions strengthen social connections, encourage active participation, and boost confidence—all of which contribute to improved language proficiency.

Language anxiety is another critical factor in EFL research. Studies by Horwitz et al. (1986) and Horwitz (2001) show that language anxiety can significantly impact students' performance, engagement, and willingness to participate. They define language anxiety as a psychological phenomenon involving fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety, which can impede students' language performance. By promoting a positive mindset, educators can help students manage anxiety, as optimism and confidence act as buffers against

the negative effects of anxiety. A supportive, positive environment can reduce students' worries and enable them to focus on learning instead of fearing mistakes. In his study on the psychology of language learners, Dörnyei (2005) examines how psychological factors, including motivation, attitudes, and anxiety, influence language learning success. Positive thinking and motivation are closely linked, as students with an optimistic outlook on their language abilities are more likely to be intrinsically motivated. Dörnyei emphasizes the importance of creating supportive classroom environments that encourage active participation and sustained engagement. A positive mindset fosters both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which are essential for long-term success in language learning. Dörnyei's work highlights the strategic role of positive thinking in enhancing students' motivation and commitment to language acquisition.

Despite growing recognition of the role of positive thinking in educational settings, research on its impact within language learning is still limited. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring students' perceptions of positive thinking in EFL learning. The insights gained will help educators understand how positive thinking influences motivation, anxiety, engagement, resilience, and academic performance. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform instructional strategies that foster positive learning environments, enhancing students' EFL experiences and academic success.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design and Sample**

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design to explore students' perceptions of positive thinking in learning English as a foreign language. By combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The quantitative component involved administering a survey to gather numerical data on students' perceptions, while the qualitative component involved conducting interviews to gain deeper insights into their experiences and thoughts. The research was conducted at the University of Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur, with participants consisting of undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education program. A purposive sampling technique was used to select students with varying levels of English proficiency and diverse academic backgrounds. The target sample size included approximately 100 students for the survey and 10-15 students for the interviews.

### **Instrument and Procedure**

For the quantitative aspect of the study, a structured survey questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (1) Demographic Information, which gathered data on participants' age, gender, year of study, and English proficiency level; (2) Positive Thinking Scale (PTS), which used a standardized scale to measure students' levels of positive thinking, with items rated

on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); and (3) Perception of Learning English, which assessed students' views on how their positive thinking influenced their language learning. Items in this section were also rated on a Likert scale. For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide prepared with open-ended questions. These questions were designed to explore students' experiences and perceptions in greater depth. Sample questions included: "How do you feel positive thinking affects your ability to learn English?", "Can you provide examples of how positive thinking has helped you in your English studies?", and "What challenges do you face in maintaining a positive mindset while learning English?"

### Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the survey was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were used to summarize demographic information and survey responses. To examine the relationships between positive thinking and students' perceptions of their language learning, inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis were employed. The qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involved several steps: (1) Familiarization with the data, which included reading and re-reading the transcripts to gain an initial understanding; (2) Coding, where relevant segments of data were identified and labeled according to the research questions; (3) Generating themes, which involved grouping related codes into broader themes that captured significant patterns; (4) Reviewing themes, where the themes were refined and consolidated to ensure they accurately represented the data; and (5) Defining and naming themes, in which each theme was clearly defined, and illustrative quotes from the data were used to support the findings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Information

The survey was completed by 100 undergraduate students from the English Education program at the University of Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1. Characteristics of Participants*

NO.	Characteristic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender		
	Male	40	40%
	Female	60	60%
2.	Age		

	18-20 years	30	30%
	21-23 years	50	50%
	24 years and above	20	20%
3	Year of Study		
	First Year	25	25%
	Second Year	30	30%
	Third Year	25	25%
	Fourth Year	20	20%
4.	English Proficiency Level		
	Beginner	15	15%
	Intermediate	55	55%
	Advanced	30	30%

### Positive Thinking Scale (PTS) Results

The Positive Thinking Scale (PTS) was used to measure the levels of positive thinking among participants. The scale includes items rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The overall mean score and standard deviation for the PTS are presented in Table 2.

*Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Positive Thinking Scale (PTS)*

No	Statistic	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Positive Thinking	4.2	0.6

The results indicate that participants generally exhibit high levels of positive thinking, with a mean score of 3.2.

### Perceptions of Learning English

Participants' perceptions of how their positive thinking influences their English language learning were assessed using a set of Likert-scale items. The descriptive statistics for these items are summarized in Table 3.

*Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Learning English*

No	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Positive thinking helps me stay motivated to learn English	4.4	0.7
2	Positive thinking reduces my anxiety when speaking English	4.1	0.8

3	Positive thinking encourages me to participate in class activities	4.3	0.6
4	Positive thinking helps me overcome challenges in learning English	4.5	0.5
5	Positive thinking improves my overall performance in English classes	4.3	0.7

The findings suggest that students perceive positive thinking as having a significant positive impact on various aspects of their English language learning, with mean scores ranging from 4.1 to 4.5.

### Relationship between Positive Thinking and Perceptions of Learning English

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between positive thinking and students' perceptions of their English language learning. The correlation coefficients are presented in Table 4.

*Table 4. Pearson Correlation Coefficients*

No	Variable	Correlation
1	Positive thinking and motivation to learn English	0.65
2	Positive thinking and anxiety reduction when speaking English	0.58
3	Positive thinking and participation in class activities	0.63
4	Positive thinking and overcoming challenges in learning English	0.70
5	Positive thinking and overall performance in English classes	0.66

**Note:**  $p < 0.01$

The results show significant positive correlations between positive thinking and all measured aspects of English language learning. The strongest correlation is between positive thinking and overcoming challenges in learning English ( $r = 0.70$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that students who exhibit higher levels of positive thinking are more likely to successfully overcome difficulties in their language learning process.

### Multiple Regression Analysis

To further explore the predictive power of positive thinking on students' perceptions of their English language learning, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The results are summarized in Table 5.

*Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis*

No	Dependent Variable	Predictor Variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
1	Motivation to learn English	Positive thinking	0.60	0.10	0.65	6.00	0.000
2	Anxiety reduction when speaking English	Positive thinking	0.55	0.11	0.58	5.00	0.000
3	Participation in class activities	Positive thinking	0.63	0.09	0.63	7.00	0.000
4	Overcoming challenges in learning English	Positive thinking	0.70	0.08	0.70	8.75	0.000
5	Overall performance in English classes	Positive thinking	0.66	0.10	0.66	6.60	0.000

The multiple regression analysis confirms that positive thinking is a significant predictor of students' motivation, anxiety reduction, participation in class activities, overcoming challenges, and overall performance in learning English. The standardized beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ) indicate the strength of the relationship, with positive thinking showing the highest predictive power for overcoming challenges ( $\beta = 0.70$ ). The quantitative data analysis reveals that students at the University of Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur generally exhibit high levels of positive thinking, which they perceive as having a significant positive impact on their English language learning. Positive thinking is strongly correlated with motivation, anxiety reduction, class participation, overcoming challenges, and overall performance in English classes. These findings suggest that fostering positive thinking can play a crucial role in enhancing students' language learning experiences and outcomes.

The study revealed that positive thinking significantly influences students' motivation, anxiety levels, class participation, resilience, and overall academic performance in learning English. Quantitative data indicated high levels of positive thinking among students, with strong correlations between positive thinking and various aspects of their language learning experience. The qualitative data provided deeper insights into how positive thinking helps students set and achieve goals, build confidence, engage in class activities, overcome challenges, and enjoy the learning process.

One of the most prominent findings was that positive thinking enhances students' motivation and aids in goal setting. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that a positive outlook can increase intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, leading to better academic outcomes (Dweck, 2006). Students with positive thinking are more likely to perceive challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles, fostering a goal-oriented mindset. This underscores the



importance of encouraging positive thinking in language learners to boost motivation and persistence.

Furthermore, positive thinking was found to reduce anxiety and build students' confidence, especially in speaking English. This supports the idea that a positive mindset can mitigate the effects of language anxiety, which is a common barrier to effective language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Students with a positive outlook are more likely to take risks, participate in class discussions, and practice speaking without fear of making mistakes. Language instructors can play a crucial role by creating a supportive environment that promotes positive thinking and helps reduce anxiety.

The study also highlighted that positive thinking encourages active participation and engagement in class. This finding is consistent with research showing that positive emotions and attitudes enhance engagement and facilitate deeper learning (Fredrickson, 2001). Students who feel optimistic and confident are more likely to contribute to class discussions, ask questions, and collaborate with peers. Teachers can leverage this by incorporating activities that foster a positive classroom atmosphere and encourage student participation.

Positive thinking was also linked to greater resilience and the ability to overcome challenges in learning English. This supports the concept of psychological resilience, which involves maintaining a positive outlook and adapting effectively to adversity (Masten, 2001). Students who view setbacks as temporary and manageable are more likely to persist in their efforts and eventually achieve success. Language educators can promote resilience by teaching students positive coping strategies and reframing difficulties as learning opportunities.

Finally, the study found that positive thinking contributes to improved academic performance and greater satisfaction with English language learning. These findings echo broader educational research linking positive attitudes to better academic outcomes (Seligman et al., 2009). When students approach their studies with a positive attitude, they are more motivated, engaged, and likely to perform well. This highlights the value of integrating positive psychology principles into language education to enhance the overall learning experience.

In summary, this study aimed to explore students' perceptions of positive thinking in learning English as a foreign language. The key findings include high levels of positive thinking, a positive impact on motivation, anxiety reduction, increased participation, greater resilience, and improved academic performance and satisfaction with English language learning. These findings have several important implications for language teaching and learning.

For language educators, the study suggests the importance of actively promoting positive thinking in students by emphasizing its benefits and incorporating activities that foster optimism and self-efficacy. Creating a supportive environment that

reduces anxiety and builds confidence is also crucial, which can be achieved through positive feedback, opportunities for success, and support for risk-taking. Teachers should also focus on engaging students through interactive and collaborative activities to enhance participation and deepen learning. Additionally, educators should teach resilience-building techniques and coping strategies to help students navigate challenges and maintain a positive outlook. Finally, integrating positive psychology principles into the language curriculum can significantly enhance students' academic performance and overall satisfaction with their learning experience.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of positive thinking in students' experiences and success in learning English as a foreign language. The findings reveal that positive thinking boosts motivation, reduces anxiety, increases class participation, fosters resilience, and improves academic performance and satisfaction. Quantitative data showed strong links between positive thinking and various aspects of language learning, while qualitative insights revealed how positive thinking helps students set goals, build confidence, engage in class, and overcome challenges. Positive thinking enhances students' motivation, helping them set and achieve language learning goals. It also reduces anxiety and builds confidence, particularly when speaking English. Additionally, students with a positive mindset are more likely to actively participate in class and demonstrate resilience when faced with challenges. The study suggests practical recommendations for language educators, including promoting positive thinking, creating supportive classroom environments, and encouraging active engagement through interactive learning. Teaching resilience-building techniques can also help students overcome obstacles more effectively. Ultimately, integrating these approaches into language education can lead to more rewarding learning experiences, improved academic success, and sustained motivation for students.

## REFERENCES

- Beck, J. S. (2011). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218–226.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132.
- Horwitz, E. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112–126.

- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156.
- Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). *How languages are learned* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Charos, C. (1996). Personality, attitudes, and affect as predictors of second language communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 15(1), 3–26.
- McCroskey, J. C. (1970). Measures of communication-bound anxiety. *Speech Monographs*, 37(3), 269–277.
- Oxford, R. L., & Ehrman, M. E. (1995). Adults' language learning strategies in an intensive foreign language program in the United States. *System*, 23(3), 359–386.
- Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1985). Optimism, coping, and health: Assessment and implications of generalized outcome expectancies. *Health Psychology*, 4(3), 219–247.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2006). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. Vintage.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into Practice*, 41(2), 64–70.