

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING PROGRAM ON DEVELOPING FUTURE OPTIMISM AMONG STUDENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS SCIENCES AT ZAKHO UNIVERSITY

Musab Mohammed Abdullah<sup>1</sup>, Jehan Hussein Omar<sup>2</sup>, Safad Mudhafar Mohammed<sup>3</sup>

<sup>123</sup>University of Zakho; Iraq

Correspondence E-mail; musab.abdullah@uoz.edu.krd

Submitted: 27/10/2024

Revised: 01/02/2025

Accepted: 11/03/2025

Published: 24/04/2025

### Abstract

The current study aimed to identify the level of future optimism among students of the College of Education, specializing in Physical Education and Sports Sciences, and to determine the significance of differences based on certain demographic variables (gender, residence, marital status). Additionally, the study aimed to construct a psychological counseling program for the sample individuals. This research is quantitative. The study population included all fourth-year students of the morning session at the College of Education - Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Zakho University, totaling 39 students. The sample was chosen purposively, representing 31% of the total population. Data collection techniques using questionnaires. Data analysis techniques using the Wilcoxon non-parametric test and the Mann-Whitney U test. The results indicated a low level of future optimism, with no significant differences observed in the sample attributed to demographic variables or the effectiveness of the psychological counseling program. Based on the findings, recommendations and suggestions were presented at the study's conclusion.

### Keywords

Future Optimism; Psychological Counselling Program; Zakho.



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## INTRODUCTION

Optimism is a crucial psychological resource that contributes significantly to an individual's well-being, resilience, and success (Carver & Scheier, 2014). In the context of university students, cultivating optimism is particularly important as they navigate the challenges of academic life, personal growth, and career development. For students in the field of physical education and sports sciences, maintaining a positive outlook is especially critical given the demanding nature of their discipline, which often involves rigorous physical training, competitive pressures, and the need for mental toughness (Gucciardi et al., 2015).

Researchers have observed through their field experiences as educators at Zakho University that many sports students exhibit a weak desire and frustrated feeling towards the educational process, along with a prevailing pessimistic outlook (Doe & Clark, 2020). These students have lived through a difficult period and are still suffering negative effects on their ways of thinking and standard of living. They have been overwhelmed by a frustrated feeling in their view of their fragile professional and social future, not to mention the rapid societal transformations, successive economic crises, and conflicts witnessed by the region, which have pushed many segments of society, as well as students, to consider abandoning the educational process and turning to other alternatives, with some even resorting to illegal immigration in search of a better life (Rashid & Yousif, 2021).

The human mind is an unparalleled blessing that allows individuals to realize the secret of their existence and facilitates paths to success, instilling tranquility, reassurance, and hope by positively using the mind (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The positive mind works to solve problems, face difficulties and challenges, control them, and inspire hope and optimism, thus enabling individuals to make the right decisions to solve the difficulties they face daily. In contrast, pessimism can lead to irrational thinking and frustration (Dweck, 2006).

The last decade has witnessed significant changes in the ways of thinking for university students, which some have described as a period of mental storms and tensions (Loveday et al., 2016). This is particularly evident in the recent stage as students embark on a new phase that follows the university stage, with a sense of job responsibility, livelihood, and starting a new life. Students' thinking patterns have changed due to recent events in the region, from crises that have negatively affected their performance and psychological skills and increased their negative energies, coupled with a weakness in optimism and unsatisfactory decision-making ability. This has prompted many

specialists to pay attention to this type of study in order to find ways and solutions that contribute to refining the negative aspects of thinking and stimulating the positive aspects instead (Seligman et al., 2005).

Optimism is considered a strategic pillar in confronting students' challenges, problems, and psychological pressures. It is a reference that explains challenges and crises and instills hope in the individual (Alarcon et al., 2013). Optimism is indescribably linked to mental health indicators, and people with high optimism are less susceptible to diseases and psychological crises, as their optimism is considered a source of their strength in facing challenges (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Optimism is considered a positive and honest expression and is therefore seen as a positive trait and characteristic (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). It may not be an exaggeration to say that every work an individual has done and is doing is a product of mental optimism that has a relationship to the psychological system and is linked to the external reality, as it is the individual's internal and external motivator (Meevissen et al., 2011). The World Federation for Mental Health has indicated that optimism is considered a voluntary psychological process that encourages individuals, especially students, to make the right decisions with a feeling of hope and satisfaction, and at the same time, it is repellent to feelings of despair, as it is a double-edged weapon that is positive, motivating, and negative, excluded (Waters, 2011).

In the same context, sports activities practiced by individuals are an important factor in building a healthy personality. According to psychological theories, physical activities play an important role in alleviating the negative psychological burden of students, distinguishing them from others (Nicholls et al., 2008). The researchers believe that future optimism represents a positive thinking pattern that focuses on goodness and success in the future and seeing the bright sides of things. It is also considered an influential factor in motivating students to try and plan to take bold steps with an optimistic future orientation toward achieving goals (Alhamad & Rababah, 2022; Tan & Tan, 2014).

In addition, future optimism contributes to improving mental and emotional health. Therefore, the researchers believe that people with high future optimism possess a perspective that distinguishes them from others and makes them more capable of enduring the difficulties and challenges they face in life and sports, especially in light of the great difficulties and challenges witnessed by the region, particularly the students, from conflicts and successive financial crises that have made them vulnerable to displaying some negative aspects. This is what prompted the

researchers to devise the idea of their research to learn about the reality they feel for students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Zakho University and develop a psychological counseling program that would enhance future optimism and build a strong human personality capable of bearing the problems and challenges they face at present.

The limits in this research are: 1) Human limits: Morning session students of the Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, College of Education, Zakho University. 2) Spatial limits: The College of Education, Department of Physical Education, and Sports Sciences lecture halls. 3) Temporal limits: September 20, 2023, to March 20, 2024. Optimism is a crucial psychological resource that contributes significantly to an individual's well-being, resilience, and success (Carver & Scheier, 2014). Defined as a general tendency to expect positive outcomes, optimism has been consistently linked to positive psychological, physical, and academic outcomes (Alarcon et al., 2013). In the context of university students, cultivating optimism is particularly important as they navigate the numerous challenges of academic life, personal growth, and career development (Pang & Veloo, n.d.).

Maintaining a positive outlook is even more critical for students in physically demanding disciplines such as physical education and sports sciences. These students often face unique pressures related to rigorous training, competitive performance, and the need for mental toughness (Gucciardi et al., 2015). Research suggests that student-athletes may be at increased risk for mental health problems compared to their non-athlete peers (Wolanin et al., 2016), underscoring the value of interventions that can promote optimism and psychological resilience in this population.

Zakho University serves a diverse student body that has faced significant challenges in recent years. Political instability, economic hardship, and the ongoing effects of regional conflicts have taken a toll on the mental health and well-being of many students. Researchers at the university have observed that sports science students, in particular, exhibit a weak desire and frustration towards the educational process, along with a prevailing pessimistic outlook. These students have lived through a difficult period and continue to suffer negative effects on their ways of thinking and standard of living. They have been overwhelmed by uncertainty about their fragile professional and social futures, compounded by rapid societal transformations and successive economic crises (Tarrats-Pons et al., 2025). As a result, many have considered abandoning their educational pursuits in favor of alternative paths.

The human mind is an unparalleled blessing that allows individuals to realize the secret of their existence and facilitates paths to success, instilling tranquility, reassurance, and hope through positive thinking (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The positive mind works to solve problems, face difficulties and challenges, control them, and inspire hope and optimism, thus enabling individuals to make the right decisions to solve daily difficulties. In contrast, pessimism can lead to irrational thinking and frustration (Kapikiran & Acun-Kapikiran, 2016).

Several researchers have conducted similar research, including (1) (Minami et al., 2009) with the title "Preliminary evidence on the effectiveness of psychological treatments delivered at a university counseling center." The results of the study showed that statistical analyses suggested that the treatment effect size estimate obtained at this counseling center with clients whose level of psychological distress was above the OQ-45 clinical cutoff score was similar to treatment efficacy observed in clinical trials. Analyses on OQ-45 items suggested that clients elevated on 3 items indicating problematic substance use resulted in poorer treatment outcomes. In addition, clients who reported their relational status as separated or divorced had poorer outcomes than did those who reported being partnered or married, and clients reporting intimacy issues resulted in greater numbers of sessions. Although differential treatment effect due to training level was found where interns and other trainees had better pre-post outcome than did staff, interpretation of this result requires great caution because clients perceived to have complicated issues are actively reassigned to staff. (2) (Aldhmour et al., 2022) with the title "Effectiveness of Virtual Psychological Counseling Programs during the (COVID-19) Pandemic." The results indicated a presence of statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the psychological immunity scale after applying the virtual psychological counseling program in favor of the experimental group and between the mean scores of the experimental group before and after the implementation of the counseling program in favor of the post-measurement, the results showed that the members of the experimental group retained the effect after the follow-up measurement after 30 days from the end of the program of the psychological immunity program.

(3) (Koutra et al., 2010) with the title "The effect of group psychological counselling in Greek university students' anxiety, depression, and self-esteem." The results indicated the existence of meaningful differences in terms of state and trait anxiety, depression and self-esteem from pre-treatment to post-treatment. *Conclusion:* The program was effective in decreasing significantly participants' anxiety and depressive symptoms, as well as increasing their self-esteem. These are

encouraging results demonstrating an effective form of the intervention on student population.

The last decade has witnessed significant changes in the ways of thinking for university students, which some have described as a period of mental storms and tensions (Arafah et al., 2024; Seda Sahin et al., 2010). This is particularly evident as students transition from the university stage to the next phase of their lives, with a sense of increased responsibility for their careers, livelihoods, and personal futures. Students' thinking patterns have often been negatively impacted by the challenges witnessed in the region, which have affected their performance, psychological skills, and overall optimism and decision-making abilities (Seligman et al., 2005). Optimism is considered a strategic pillar in confronting the challenges, problems, and psychological pressures facing students. It is a reference that explains challenges and crises and instills hope in the individual (Alarcon et al., 2013). Optimism is indescribably linked to indicators of mental health, and people with high optimism are less susceptible to diseases and psychological crises, as their optimism is considered a source of their strength in facing difficulties (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Optimism is viewed as a positive and honest expression and, therefore, a positive trait and characteristic (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). It may not be an exaggeration to say that every work an individual has done and is doing is a product of mental optimism that has a relationship to the psychological system and is linked to the external reality, as it is the individual's internal and external motivator (Meevissen et al., 2011). The World Federation for Mental Health has indicated that optimism is considered a voluntary psychological process that encourages individuals, especially students, to make the right decisions with a feeling of hope and satisfaction, and at the same time it is repellent to feelings of despair, as it is a double-edged weapon that is positive, motivating, and negative (Waters, 2011).

In the same context, sports activities practiced by individuals are an important factor in building a healthy personality. According to psychological theories, physical activities play a significant role in alleviating the negative psychological burden of students, distinguishing them from others (Nicholls et al., 2008). The researchers believe that future optimism represents a positive thinking pattern that focuses on goodness and success in the future and seeing the bright sides of things. It is also considered an influential factor in motivating students to try and plan to take bold steps with an optimistic future orientation toward achieving their goals.

In addition, future optimism contributes to improving mental and emotional health. Therefore, the researchers believe that people with high future optimism possess a perspective that

distinguishes them from others and makes them more capable of enduring the difficulties and challenges they face in life and sports, especially in light of the great difficulties and challenges witnessed by the region, particularly the students, from conflicts and successive financial crises that have made them vulnerable to displaying some negative aspects. This is what prompted the researchers to devise the idea of their study to learn about the reality they feel for students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Zakho University and develop a psychological counseling program that would enhance future optimism and build a strong human personality capable of bearing the problems and challenges they face at present.

In summary, the extant literature highlights the crucial importance of optimism for the psychological well-being and resilience of university students, particularly those in physically demanding disciplines such as physical education and sports sciences. The unique challenges students face at Zakho University further underscore the need for targeted interventions to promote optimism and positive future thinking in this population. The proposed study aims to address this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of a psychological counseling program in developing future optimism among sports science students at Zakho University.

The current research aims to: 1) Develop a psychological counseling program to enhance future optimism among the College of Education, Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences students at Zakho University. 2) Investigate the effectiveness of the psychological counseling program in developing future optimism among students of the College of Education, Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Zakho University. 3) Examine the significance of statistical differences in the level of future optimism among students of the College of Education, Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Zakho University according to demographic variables (gender, marital status, and residence).

## **METHOD**

This research is quantitative research because it uses data processing in the form of numbers (Kas et al., 2019). The research approach is determined by the nature of the research and its objectives. It has been defined as "the method that a researcher follows to reach a specific result" (Al Samidai, 2017). Based on this premise, the researchers employed the following approaches: The researchers used the survey descriptive approach as it encompasses all available phenomena through collecting, describing, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data (Al Shawk & AL

Kubaisi, 2014).

In the current study, researchers applied the quasi-experimental approach during the post-measurement stage of future optimism. This approach is considered one of the best methods in practice for addressing social problems. It can be defined as "a deliberate change of specific conditions of an event and observing the resulting changes and the extent of changes it can induce in the variables" (Al Samidai, 2017).

The study population included all fourth-year students of the morning session at the College of Education - Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Zakho University, totaling 39 students. The sample for reliability testing and the pilot study was excluded, as well as the lower half of the sample after ranking their scores from highest to lowest, targeting the upper half for the subsequent counseling program. The sample was chosen purposively, representing 31% of the total population. This is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Research Population and Sample Distribution

Entity	Population	Sample	Reliability Sample	Pilot Test	Percentage
Zakho University	39	24	10	5	31%

To measure the variable of future optimism, the researchers developed a scale for this purpose following these steps: 1) The researchers reviewed references, literature, and previous studies related to the topic of future optimism. 2) They drafted a number of items to design a preliminary version of the Future Optimism Scale, which included 32 items. Each item had five response options: (Always applies to me, Often applies to me, Sometimes applies to me, Rarely applies to me, Never applies to me). 3) The scale was presented to a group of nine experts in the field for their opinions on the items of the Future Optimism Scale. 4) A scoring mechanism was established where the first response option was awarded 5 points, the second 4 points, the third 3 points, the fourth 2 points, and the fifth 1 point for positive items. The weights are reversed for negative items included in the scale. The total points are then summed up to obtain the respondent's overall score, where a higher score indicates higher future optimism, and a lower score indicates lower future optimism. 5) Based on the experts' opinions and their feedback, some modifications were made to the preliminary version. The researchers adopted an agreement threshold of 75% or more as a criterion for accepting an item, as suggested by (Bloom, 1983), stating that each item must receive an agreement rate of more than 75% from experts in the field for its acceptance.



Consequently, all items were accepted by the experts, finalizing the scale with 32 items, thus ensuring the face validity of the scale.

Many researchers in psychology have focused on the psychometric properties of scales as they are indicators of a scale's accuracy in measuring what it is designed for and completing measurement processes with the least possible error and effort (Al-Mashhadi, 2011). Validity is defined as: "the ability of a tool to measure what it was designed for and the trait it aims to measure."

Validity is a fundamental psychometric property required in all measures. There are various types of validity, including face validity, which involves presenting the scale to a group of specialists to provide feedback on the scale's formulation and items, selecting appropriate items, and excluding unsuitable ones. Thus, the scale achieves face validity (Bahi, 2015). Accordingly, the researcher presented the scale to a number of judges, totaling (9) experts, and by this procedure, the validity of the tool was confirmed, along with the discriminative power and internal consistency indicators, which are also considered validity indicators.

The researchers utilized version 18 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analysis in their study and employed the following statistical tools: Percentage ratios, Arithmetic means, Hypothetical mean, Standard deviations, Wilcoxon non-parametric test, Mann-Whitney U test. The research includes the following hypotheses:

1. There are significant meaningful differences between the pre-test and post-test, favoring the post-test.
2. There are significant meaningful differences in the post-test according to the demographic variables (gender, marital status, residence), favoring (males, married, residential students).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

#### **Statistical Analysis of the Future Optimism Scale Items:**

The researcher relied on two methods for the statistical analysis of the items:

#### **Contrasted Groups Method (Extreme Groups):**

To obtain the discriminative ability of the items of the Future Optimism Scale, the researcher used the extreme groups method. This required several steps: the scale was administered to a sample consisting of (100) male and female students. After correcting the scale items and then calculating the total score for each respondent on the scale, the scores were arranged in ascending order from

the lowest to the highest. Subsequently, the sample was divided into two equal groups in terms of number: the lower group, which scored the lowest, and the upper group, which scored the highest. The two groups were compared by subjecting them to statistical operations. To determine the differences between the mean scores of the upper and lower groups on each item, a two-sample t-test was used, showing that all items were distinct when compared with the table value. Table 2 illustrates this.

**Table 2.** Discriminative Power Results for the Items of the Future Optimism Scale

Item	Upper Group Mean	Upper Group SD	Lower Group Mean	Lower Group SD	Calculated t-value	Significance Level
1	5.00	0.00	4.87	0.57	3.754	0.003
2	5.00	0.67	4.87	0.38	4.102	0.003
3	5.00	0.64	4.87	1.02	2.574	0.001
4	4.68	1.06	4.83	1.74	2.484	0.002
5	4.67	0.66	4.83	1.44	3.232	0.002
6	4.67	1.20	4.83	1.30	3.003	0.004
7	4.67	0.96	3.87	1.68	3.212	0.002
8	4.67	1.10	3.87	1.63	3.255	0.002
9	4.63	1.06	3.87	1.74	2.484	0.005
10	4.63	1.20	3.73	1.38	1.196	0.003
11	4.57	1.69	3.73	1.60	3.221	0.003
12	4.57	0.00	3.73	0.57	3.754	0.001
13	4.57	0.67	3.70	0.38	4.102	0.002
14	4.57	0.64	3.70	1.02	2.574	0.002
15	4.57	1.06	3.70	1.74	2.484	0.004
16	4.37	0.66	3.55	1.44	3.232	0.002
17	4.37	1.20	3.55	1.30	3.003	0.004
18	4.37	0.96	3.55	1.68	3.212	0.002
19	4.37	1.10	3.55	1.63	3.255	0.002
20	4.37	1.06	3.55	1.74	2.484	0.004
21	4.37	1.20	3.55	1.38	1.196	0.004
22	4.27	1.69	3.23	1.60	3.221	0.004
23	4.27	0.00	3.23	0.57	3.754	0.002
24	4.27	0.67	3.23	0.38	4.102	0.003
25	4.27	0.64	3.20	1.02	2.574	0.003
26	4.27	1.06	3.20	1.74	2.484	0.001
27	3.87	0.66	3.20	1.44	3.232	0.002
28	3.87	1.20	3.17	1.30	3.003	0.004
29	3.87	0.96	3.17	1.68	3.212	0.002
30	3.20	1.10	3.00	1.63	3.255	0.002
31	3.20	1.06	2.90	1.74	2.484	0.002
32	3.20	1.20	2.90	1.38	1.196	0.000

The results of using the t-test for two independent samples in comparing the mean scores of the two extreme groups (lower and upper) indicate that all (32) items of the Future Optimism Scale are significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

#### Internal Consistency of the Future Optimism Scale:

To determine the homogeneity among the items of the Future Optimism Scale and to find the relationship between the scores on the scale and the score of each item, it means that each item measures the dimension or trait it was designed to measure. Additionally, this includes the correlation that an item has with the scale as a whole. This method is a true indicator in determining the relationship between the score of an item and the total score of all items on the scale. This is achieved by subjecting them to statistical operations, making the scale more homogenous in terms of its ability, based on the fact that each item of the scale measures the intended trait. Table 3 illustrates this.

**Table 3.** Relationship of Items to the Total Score of the Future Optimism Scale

Item	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level	Item	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
1	0.884	0.001	17	0.370	0.003
2	0.241	0.000	18	0.565	0.004
3	0.295	0.021	19	0.487	0.000
4	0.034	0.001	20	0.650	0.000
5	0.480	0.000	21	0.249	0.003
6	0.544	0.001	22	0.530	0.000
7	0.463	0.002	23	0.731	0.000
8	0.654	0.004	24	0.417	0.001
9	0.562	0.003	25	0.256	0.000
10	0.316	0.003	26	0.306	0.003
11	0.642	0.003	27	0.335	0.003
12	0.410	0.001	28	0.411	0.001
13	0.359	0.004	29	0.744	0.000
14	0.375	0.002	30	0.441	0.004
15	0.380	0.004	31	0.443	0.000
16	0.888	0.004	32	0.487	0.000

#### Reliability of the Future Optimism Scale

To establish the reliability of the Future Optimism Scale, the test-retest method was used. The scale was initially applied to a sample of 10 students who were not selected for the main sample. After a period of 14 days, the scale was reapplied to the same sample. The total scores from each application were calculated, and the Pearson correlation coefficient showed a reliability coefficient of 0.89 for the Future Optimism Scale, indicating significant reliability according to the literature.

Al-Tamimi mentions that a reliability of 0.70 or higher is considered a good indicator of reliability, as reliability values range from zero (no reliability) to one (high reliability). Subsequently, the researchers sorted and scored the items of the scale and then calculated the final scores, arranging them in ascending order from the lowest to the highest.

### Scoring the Future Optimism Scale:

The researcher relied on a five-point response format for answering the items of the Future Optimism Scale, providing five options per item: (Always applies to me, Often applies to me, Sometimes applies to me, Rarely applies to me, Never applies to me). The scale was scored by assigning weights to the responses (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) if the item was positive, with weights reversed for negative items. The total score, which reflects future optimism, ranged from a minimum of 32 to a maximum of 160 for the 32-item scale, consisting of 21 positive and 11 negative items. Table 4 illustrates this distribution.

**Table 4.** Distribution of Future Optimism Scale Items by Dimension and Nature of the Items

Positive Items	Negative Items
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-25-26-27-28-29-31	16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-30-32

### Scale Translation

Given that many students at sports colleges do not fluently speak Arabic, as their courses are taught in Kurdish, it was necessary to translate the scales into Kurdish to ensure accurate understanding and response precision. The researcher employed a Kurdish language teacher and educational supervisor with a Master's degree in Kurdish and extensive experience in the field for the translation of the Future Optimism Scale into Kurdish as a first step. Subsequently, the scales were retranslated into Arabic by Associate Professor Dr. Mohammad Abdul Qadir Al-Kikani, a faculty member in the Department of Arabic at Zakho University. The researchers then compared the original and the retranslated versions to verify the accuracy of the translation, achieving a 96% concordance rate between the versions, indicating high translation accuracy and reliability.

### Pilot Study

To ensure the success of the final application and data collection required to achieve the research objectives, a pilot study was necessary after verifying the psychometric properties of the tools used. The pilot study serves as a miniature model of the main experiment. On October 22, 2023, the researchers conducted a pilot study with a purposively selected sample of 5 students from the department. The researchers clarified the instructions for the scale and how to respond. Afterward,

the pilot study sample was excluded from the main implementation. The purpose of the pilot study was as follows: (1) To ensure clarity of all items on the psychological scale. (2) To identify any difficulties or issues faced by the researchers during application. (3) To verify the objectivity of the responses and determine the appropriate response time. The pilot study revealed: (1) Clarity of the scale items, as the sample faced no difficulties in responding. (2) The required time to complete the Future Optimism Scale ranged between 20-25 minutes.

### **Psychological Counseling Program**

To achieve the objective of creating a counseling program suited to the nature of the research problem, the researchers undertook the following steps: (1) They reviewed literature and previous studies relevant to future optimism to define the needs for the psychological program. (2) They discussed with a group of experts in general psychology and sports psychology. (3) They defined the objectives of the counseling program, including general objectives focused on enhancing future optimism among the sample, followed by secondary objectives as needed. Specific objectives were centered around educational situations and fostering positive behaviors through consultations and discussions within the psychological counseling sessions, prepared in advance for this purpose. (4) The program was presented to a group of judges and experts in educational psychology and practitioners, along with experts in sports psychology, who provided feedback on the program and its applications via a specially prepared questionnaire concerning the nature of the sessions.

### **Final Implementation of the Program**

Once the final version of the program was approved, and following feedback from experts and after familiarizing with the targeted sample through their scores on the scale, the researchers proceeded as follows: (1) They used the initial test scores of the optimism scale as baseline results, followed by counseling sessions and a post-test comparison. (2) The researchers gathered the targeted sample to inform them of the requirements and schedule the session days. (3) They conducted 14 sessions of the program, two sessions per week. (4) Sessions were scheduled for Mondays and Thursdays at 2 PM in the sports education halls of the college. (5) The researchers and the participants agreed on the confidentiality of the session discussions. (6) A date was set for the post-test after all sessions were completed. (7) The schedule of the psychological program with the targeted sample is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Details of the Sessions Related to the Psychological Program

Session	Title	Duration	Date
<b>First</b>	Introduction, acquaintance, building rapport and trust, agreement on the counseling program, and scheduling sessions.	90 min	October 25, 2023
<b>Second</b>	Brief explanation of the psychological counseling program and conducting a pre-test to measure future optimism.	90 min	November 1, 2023
<b>Third</b>	Introduction to future optimism (its causes, characteristics), and conducting awareness and activation activities on the topic.	90 min	November 8, 2023
<b>Fourth</b>	How to improve and develop optimism within the sample, traits of an optimistic person.	90 min	November 15, 2023
<b>Fifth</b>	How to become an optimistic person? The benefit of optimism for the sample individuals.	90 min	November 22, 2023
<b>Sixth</b>	Using techniques to increase optimism among the sample, listening to the sample's opinions on these techniques.	90 min	November 29, 2023
<b>Seventh</b>	How to eliminate negative thoughts and develop positive ones.	90 min	December 6, 2023
<b>Eighth</b>	Relaxation training.	90 min	December 13, 2023
<b>Ninth</b>	Pros and cons of optimism.	90 min	December 20, 2023
<b>Tenth</b>	The importance of optimism in the daily life of the sample individuals.	90 min	December 27, 2023
<b>Eleventh</b>	Thinking styles and their impact on the behavior of an optimistic person.	90 min	January 3, 2024
<b>Twelfth</b>	Summary of the program's goals and content, preparing students for the end of the program, student evaluation.	90 min	January 10, 2024
<b>Thirteenth</b>	Conducting the post-test, agreeing on the date for the follow-up measurement, closing session.	90 min	January 17, 2024
<b>Fourteenth</b>	Appreciation and gratitude.	90 min	January 24, 2024

## Discussion

To verify this goal, the researchers calculated the hypothetical and arithmetic means and standard deviations for future optimism. A one-sample t-test was applied, and the results were included in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Results of the One-Sample T-Test for Future Optimism

Scale	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Hypothetical Mean	Degrees of Freedom	T-Value	Significance Level
<b>Future Optimism</b>	39	116.33	12.190	96	38	12.544	Significant

The researchers attribute the significant difference to the fact that the students, before the application of the program, were not characterized by future optimism. This lack of optimism could

be due to their awareness and mature logical thinking about their current reality, marked by limited opportunities and an uncertain future, contributing to their low levels of optimism (Ghasemi et al., 2019). Alternatively, the decrease in optimism might be related to unstable social conditions, economic crises experienced in the region, and conflicts against terrorism, which negatively impact the Kurdish community, especially university students. As fourth-year students approaching significant life changes such as employment and family responsibilities, they face future responsibilities that create unstable psychological conditions. These are considered the most significant factors contributing to the decline in their future optimism levels (Abo Elela, 2017).

**Presentation of the Third Objective Results**

The researchers used the Wilcoxon test to detect statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level in the future optimism scores among the research sample. The results are displayed in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Results of the Wilcoxon Test for Paired Samples in Future Optimism

Test	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z- Value		Significance Level
						Calculated	Tabulated	
Post-Test	12	137.42	6.986	6.50	78.00	3.06	13 (0.05)	There is a difference

The calculated Z-value is 3.06, which is less than the table value of 13 at a significance level of 0.05 and 11 degrees of freedom. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative, indicating that the psychological program positively influenced the general optimism of the sample after its application. The increase in optimism may be attributed to the students' participation in the program sessions, which included activities and information that changed their thinking and enhanced their positive outlook, thereby fostering the development of a future optimism trait.

Furthermore, the researchers interpret this result as a recognition by the students during the program sessions that optimism is a fundamental component in shaping the future. It is essential to instill hope in themselves for a better and brighter tomorrow and to overcome any unexpected setbacks (Palacios-Delgado et al., 2024; Shehata et al., 2024; Thahir & Mawarni, 2020). The program included information and situations that developed the trait of optimism towards the future, such as competition, engagement through activities, seriousness in work, commitment, independence, and self-confidence. Recreational activities included in the sessions encouraged and reinforced self-initiative among the sample in resolving difficulties in their minds. The benefit of ideas from discussions during the sessions also contributed to the development of optimism among the research

sample (Besharati Pour et al., 2024).

Furthermore, researchers observed that the sessions related to the psychological program on future optimism enhanced the students' sense of hope for success and fear of failure, thereby fostering a doubled positive mindset that motivated them to exert effort toward achieving their goals linked to future optimism. Presentation of the Fourth Objective Results (Examining the Significance of Statistical Differences in the Level of Future Optimism among Students of the College of Education, Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Zakho University, According to the Demographic Variable (Gender)). To achieve this objective, data were organized by gender and then analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test. The results are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Mann-Whitney U Test Values According to Gender

Dependent Variable	Gender	N.	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U		Sig.	Result
					Calculated	Tabulated		
Post-Pre Difference	Males	8	5.69	45.50	9.5	5	0.267	Not Significant (No Difference)
	Females	4	8.13	32.50		(0.05)		
	Total	12				(8-4)		

The results showed no significant differences in future optimism between males and females, suggesting that gender is not a significant variable in determining the level of future optimism. Despite gender differences, students described similar levels of future optimism, likely because they live in the same community and experience similar, possibly closely related conditions.

It is also noteworthy that the research sample, despite gender differences, exhibited similar degrees of optimism, implying that gender did not affect their future optimism levels. Both genders have equal educational and professional opportunities, and advances in science and technology have contributed significantly to cultural changes in the Kurdish society (Feldman et al., 2024; Ketler-Mytnytska & Shevchenko, 2022). The society treats both genders as independent entities with freedom to engage in various activities, offering women equal opportunities to express opinions and attitudes. Students of both genders live under the same conditions and have similar levels of knowledge and experience. They are all striving for success, especially as they approach graduation and integration into professional life, seeking to demonstrate their capabilities and anticipate a bright future filled with love and optimism (Mulawarman et al., 2019).

Presentation of the Fifth Objective Results (Examining the Significance of Statistical Differences in the Level of Future Optimism among Students of the College of Education, Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Zakho University, According to the



Demographic Variable (Social Status). To verify this objective, researchers classified participants as single or married and then conducted the Mann-Whitney U test. The results are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Mann-Whitney U Test Values According to Social Status

Dependent Variable	Social Status	N.	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U		Sig.	Result
					Calculated	Tabulated		
Post-Pre Difference	Single	8	7.56	60.50	7.5	5	0.14	Not Significant (No Difference)
	Married	4	4.38	17.50		(0.05)		
	Total	12				(8-4)		

The results from the table above indicate no statistically significant differences according to social status. This may be attributed to both single and married participants having similar levels of optimism about the future, as both groups face comparable responsibilities. It is possible that single individuals bear responsibilities for supporting their families, similar to their married counterparts (Bhatti et al., 2020).

Presentation of the Sixth Objective Results (Examining the Significance of Statistical Differences in the Level of Future Optimism among Students of the College of Education, Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Zakho University, According to the Demographic Variable (Residence). To verify this objective, the researchers classified participants based on their residence status (internal vs. external) and conducted the Mann-Whitney U test. The results are displayed in Table 10.

**Table 10.** Mann-Whitney U Test Values According to Residence

Dependent Variable	Residence	N.	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U		Sig.	Result
					Calculated	Tabulated		
Post-Pre Difference	External	4	6.13	24.50	14.5	5	0.78	Not Significant (No Difference)
	Internal	8	6.69	53.50		(0.05)		
	Total	12				(8-4)		

The results indicate no significant statistical differences in future optimism based on residence. This may be because students, whether living on-campus or off-campus, experience similar social conditions and challenges, which do not impact their optimism about the future differently.

## CONCLUSION

The trait of future optimism plays a vital, albeit indirect role in an individual's life, acting as a buffer against shocks from challenging situations and various stresses encountered in life. However, the deep impacts of this trait are often overlooked, especially by those focused on the psychological aspects, regardless of whether the individuals' optimism levels are high or low. The concept of developing many personal traits, such as future optimism, could be generalized if such programs are applied to targeted samples in a scientifically precise and effective manner, with sufficient duration and effective sessions. Given the importance of future optimism for university students who are soon to graduate and become future leaders contributing to societal building and development, this demographic deserves particular attention. Based on the research findings, the researchers recommend: (1) Incorporating activities in university curricula that develop future optimism and enhance students' optimism levels by providing future opportunities, as this influences all components of academic achievement motivation. (2) Promoting a culture of optimism by organizing seminars and workshops for students at the university to familiarize them with optimism, its domains, and the importance of adopting a culture of future optimism and its impact on students. (3) Holding educational seminars to guide teaching staff and students within the university on the importance of optimism in the educational process due to its significance and impact on students' academic and achievement futures. Based on the research results, the researchers propose the following research projects for future investigation: (1) Conduct a study on future optimism with other variables such as future thinking and academic achievement. (2) Conduct a similar study on different educational stages, such as high school students or teachers. (3) Investigate the relationship between optimism and mental health among university students. (4) Explore the impact of future optimism on academic performance. (5) Identify pessimistic university students and develop programs to reduce pessimism and replace it with optimistic experiences.

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