

# Optimism and English School Children:

Reliability, validity and use of the Children's  
Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ) and the Youth  
Life Orientation Test (YLOT).

Submitted by Andrew John Richards to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of  
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## Abstract

This study explores the use of two tests of optimism: the Youth Life Orientation Test (YLOT) and the Children's Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ) in six English primary schools with children aged between 9 years and 12 years. The study grew out of some problems I was confronted with as part of my professional practice regarding the outcomes for children in a school that was failing to meet Government Targets in attainment.

In the study I worked with the staff and 9 – 11 year old children in six primary schools in rural, town, suburban and inner-city contexts. The total number of children was 305. The children were tested using the CASQ and YLOT and a range of other measures. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients (coefficient alpha) and test-retest coefficients for the subscales and overall scale of the CASQ and YLOT were calculated. The validity of each measure was explored using evidence from: test content; internal structure; relations to other variables; and from the consequences of testing. Lastly the use of the YLOT as a proxy and nature of any associations between the measures used was explored looking at individual; school and community level data.

The study found that the YLOT has good psychometric properties and could be used as a basis for further work both professionally and for research. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the whole scale was 0.81. The psychometric properties of the CASQ were poor in that the subscales had very low reliability coefficients and the aggregated total scale reliability coefficient was still too low at 0.53 to be able to recommend the use of the CASQ. Before the CASQ could be used there would need to be extensive work to increase its reliability and validity through lengthening the test or changing the format of the questions to reduce their specificity.

The use of the YLOT as a proxy indicator of mental health and associations with school and community level data were discussed. The YLOT could provide an indication of well being particularly in relation to childhood depression. The community level data were not sensitive enough to discern hypothesised associations between communities and the children attending the schools sited in the communities.

# Table of Contents

	Acknowledgments	2
	Abstract	3
	Table of contents	4
	Appendix	7
	Lists of Figures and Tables	8
<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1	The genesis of the project;	12
1.1.1	Exploratory schools work	12
1.1.2	Optimism and culture	15
1.2	The significance of the project	18
1.2.1	Optimism, hopelessness and mental health	18
1.2.2	Professional psychology	20
1.2.3	Optimism and well-being	24
1.3	Initial research aims	26
<b>2.</b>	<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>28</b>
2.1	Historical and current aspects of optimism	29
2.1.1	Origins of the word optimism	29
2.1.2	Origins of the word pessimism	30
2.1.3	Optimism used as a term in psychology	31
2.2	Definitions	37
2.3	Optimism and Pessimism: bipolar or two distinct poles	47
2.3.1	Conceptual models underpinning optimism and pessimism.	49
2.4	Review of the links between optimism and what may be related concepts	54
2.4.1	Optimism and Self Esteem	54
2.4.2	Optimism and Self determination theory, before exploring the links between these areas and those of wellbeing and mental health.	55
2.4.3	Well-being	56
2.4.4	Optimism and positive outcomes for individuals	57
2.4.5	Optimism and adversity: Coping and Resilience	62
2.5	Optimism: school and community foci	63
2.6	The research questions in the light of the	65

literature review, and gaps in the field

<b>3. Methodology</b>	68
3.1 The research questions	68
3.2 How the research questions have determined the philosophical underpinnings of this work	69
3.3 Alternative methods and why they have been rejected	71
3.4 Methods	73
3.4.1 Materials/instruments	73
3.4.2 Schools	77
3.4.3 Participants	81
3.4.4 Design	81
3.4.5 Procedure	81
3.4.6 Analyses	83
3.5 Ethical Considerations	84
3.8 Summary	85
<b>4. Analysis and Results</b>	86
4.1 Normality Checks	87
4.1.1 Method of normality checking	87
4.2 Reliability of the Youth Life Orientation Test (YLOT)	91
4.2.1 Inter-item correlations	92
4.2.2 Item – total correlations and impact of removing items on Cronbach alpha scores	91
4.2.3 Summary of YLOT Reliability	95
4.3 Reliability of the Children’s Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ)	99
4.3.1 Reliability of the CASQ subscales	100
4.3.2 Reliability of whole CASQ scale	106
4.4 Validity of the Youth Life Orientation Test (YLOT)	110
4.4.1 Evidence of internal structure	110
4.4.2 Evidence of relations to other variables	113
4.4.3 Evidence from the test content	115
4.4.4 Evidence from the consequences of testing: The YLOT as an indicator of possible mental health difficulties, for example childhood depression.	116
4.5.5 Summary of YLOT validity investigation	116
4.5 Validity of the Children’s Attributional Style	116

	<b>Questionnaire (CASQ)</b>	
4.5.1	Evidence of internal structure of the CASQ	117
4.5.2	Evidence of relations to other variables	119
4.5.3	Evidence from the test content	120
4.5.4	Evidence from the consequences of testing: The CASQ as an indicator of possible mental health difficulties, for example childhood depression.	121
4.5.5	Summary of the CASQ validity investigation	121
4.6	The use of optimism measures to collect information about schools	121
4.7	Associations between the data collected: The YLOT as a proxy indicator for other child level indicators	127
4.8	Associations between the data collected: The YLOT as a proxy indicator for school level data	128
4.9	Associations between the data collected: The YLOT as a proxy indicator for community level data	128
4.10	Summary	125
	<b>5. Discussion and Conclusion</b>	<b>130</b>
5.1	<b>Reliability of the Youth Life Orientation Test (YLOT) and the Children’s Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ)</b>	<b>131</b>
5.1.1	Reliability of the YLOT	131
5.1.2	Reliability of the CASQ	133
5.1.3	Standard Error of Measurement – SEM and its impact on practical use of these tests	136
5.1.4	Summary of Questionnaire Reliabilities	137
5.2	<b>Validity of the Youth Life Orientation Test (YLOT) and the Children’s Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ)</b>	<b>138</b>
5.2.1	Validity of the YLOT	138
5.2.2	Validity of the CASQ	139
5.2.3	Summary of Questionnaire Validities	140
5.3	<b>Use of YLOT as a proxy indicator</b>	<b>140</b>
5.3.1	Use of YLOT as a proxy measure at an individual level	140
5.3.2	Use of YLOT as a proxy measure at a school level	141
5.3.3	Use of a YLOT as a proxy measure at a community level	142
5.3.4	Summary of use of YLOT as a proxy indicator and modelling	143
5.4	<b>Critique of methods</b>	<b>143</b>
5.4.1	Strengths of methods	143
5.4.2	Weakness of methods	144
5.4.3	Summary of critique of methods	146

5.5	Contribution to knowledge – the significance of the study	146
5.5.1	Professional and Personal contributions	146
5.5.2	Theoretical contributions	148
5.6	Looking outwards from this study	149
5.6.1	Directions for further work	149
5.6.2	Conclusions	150

## Appendix

	Appendix	152
A1	Certificate of ethical approval	153
A2	Scripts for class administration	155
A2.1	Script for class administration of tests visit 1	155
A2.2	Script for class administration of tests visit 2	157
A3	Instruments	158
A3.1	CASQ	158
A3.2	ROSE	164
A3.3	CESDC	165
A3.4	LCQ	166
A3.5	YLOT	167
A3.6	SRQ	168
A3.7	OCDQ	174
A3.8	SDQ	175
A4	TOTAL DATA SET – available on attached USB flash drive	176
A5	Data supporting analyses in chapter 4	178
A5.1	Exploratory Data Analysis: CASQ; Rosenberg; LCQ; CESDC; YLOT.	179
A5.2	Exploratory Data Analysis: SRQ SUBTESTS: extrinsic; Introjected; identified; intrinsic motivation and relative autonomy index (RAI).	183
A5.3	Exploratory Data Analysis: Community Level Data: Living Environment; Percentage Christian; Percentage Muslim; Percentage Hindu; Percentage No Religion; Economic Deprivation; Education, Skills and Training; Health; Mental Health.	186
A5.4	Transformations of skewed variables	190
A5.5	Normality tests for subscales of YLOT and CASQ, with winsorisation of YLOT	196
A5.6	PCA data for YLOT and CASQ with varimax rotation	211
A5.7	PCA data for YLOT and CASQ with oblimin rotation	219
A5.8	Diagnostic tests before carrying out multiple regression analyses	222
A5.9	School by school ANOVA data including post hoc tests	233
6	Bibliography	257

