

UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Cognitive and Social Emotional Predictors of Optimism in Early Childhood

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9d35s099>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 48(0)

Authors

Ranginkaman, Narges
ten Braak, Dieuwertje
St—órksen, Ingunn
[et al.](#)

Publication Date

2026

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Cognitive and Social Emotional Predictors of Optimism in Early Childhood

Narges Ranginkaman

University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway

Dieuwer ten Braak

University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway

Ingunn Størksen

University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway

Thormod Idsøe

University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

Abstract

The development of optimism is influenced by the interplay of cognitive functions and social experiences, which together shape its complexity and trajectory. Using a direct assessment—the Future Expectation Task—in a longitudinal dataset of Norwegian preschoolers ($N = 902$), we examined how age, executive function (EF), and social emotional skills (emotion perception, social problem solving, prosocial behavior) predict achievement-specific (expectations of success and achievement) versus general optimism. Structural equation modeling revealed distinct pathways: older age and higher EF predicted lower achievement-specific optimism but greater general optimism, consistent with EF-linked shifts toward learning more from negative than positive outcomes (valenced learning) that calibrate expectations in achievement contexts. Social emotional skills, particularly emotion perception and social competence, were positively associated with general optimism. This study advances cognitive science by linking EF maturation and socio-emotional adaptation to optimism development, offering insight into mechanisms underlying future-oriented thinking.