



Investigating Students' Mindset in Learning English at SMPN 2 Lubuk Pakam

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mindset of junior high school students in learning English and the factors influencing its development. Conducted at SMPN 2 Lubuk Pakam with 22 students from class VIII-9, the research employed a qualitative approach using open-ended questionnaires and thematic analysis. Referring to Dweck's (2006) six mindset aspects; challenges, obstacles, effort, criticism, success of others, and self-perception, the findings show that most students leaned toward a fixed mindset, except in the aspect of criticism, where many showed openness. The study also found that personal experience was the most significant factor shaping students' mindsets. Positive experiences supported a growth mindset, while negative ones reinforced a fixed mindset. These results highlight the importance of both internal

and external support in fostering a growth mindset in English learning. The scope of this study includes six aspects of mindset as proposed by Dweck (2006): challenges, obstacles, effort, criticism, success of others, and self-perception of ability. In addition, it explores three influencing factors: social environment, personal experience, and cultural values. Main Terms Defined:

Growth Mindset: The belief that abilities can be developed through effort, hard work, and dedication.

Fixed Mindset: The belief that abilities are fixed and cannot be changed.

Keywords:

Mindset 1, English learning 2, Junior high school students 3, qualitative research 4

INTRODUCTION

English is recognized as an international language that bridges communication across cultures, countries, and disciplines. In the era of globalization, mastery of English is not only essential for accessing academic resources but also a vital skill for employability, social interaction, and global citizenship. David Crystal (1997) states that English, as a global language, opens up significant opportunities for individuals to study abroad, gain scholarships, and improve quality of life. Despite its importance, the mastery of English among Indonesian students remains low. According to the 2023 English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), Indonesia ranked 79th out of 113 countries, indicating low overall English competence.

English is still considered a foreign language in Indonesia, and its use outside the classroom is rare, particularly in non-urban settings. In many public schools, English is introduced only in junior high school, which creates a disadvantage compared to learners in bilingual or English-immersed environments. Learners face cognitive and emotional obstacles, such as difficulties with grammar, limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and a lack of confidence when speaking or writing in English.

These challenges evoke varied responses among students, depending largely on how they perceive their own capabilities, a concept known as mindset. Carol Dweck (2006) introduces the theory of mindset, which distinguishes between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. Students with a fixed mindset believe their ability to learn a language is static and unchangeable, often resulting in fear of failure, and avoidance of challenges. In contrast, those with a growth mindset believe that ability can be developed through effort, strategies, and support. Research has shown that students with growth mindsets demonstrate greater academic resilience and motivation (Blackwell et al., 2007; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Mindset also affects how students interpret feedback and how they view the success of others. A student with a growth mindset may see criticism as constructive and others' success as inspiration, while a student with a fixed mindset may feel threatened by both. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where anxiety and fear of mistakes are prevalent (Horwitz et al., 1986), students with a fixed mindset are particularly vulnerable to disengagement.

Several international and national studies have confirmed the role of mindset in language learning. In Thailand, Sawongta (2023) found that mindset significantly correlates with English proficiency and student motivation. Iribani et al. (2024) identified that Filipino students with a growth mindset had higher language learning efficacy. In Indonesia, studies remain limited and mostly quantitative. Ariani et al. (2016) suggested that students' learning independence is influenced by their beliefs about intelligence, but did not explore the factors forming those beliefs. Meanwhile, Herawati et al. (2023) pointed out the lack of research on mindset in the Indonesian EFL context.

This study seeks to fill this gap by using a qualitative approach to explore not only what type of mindset students hold, but also how those mindsets are formed. It focuses on junior high school students in SMPN 2 Lubuk Pakam, where English is a subject that many students struggle with. Preliminary interviews with students and teachers suggest that students often feel that English is difficult, that they lack talent, and that they are easily discouraged by mistakes. This fixed mindset limits their engagement and progress in English learning.

Therefore, this study addresses two primary research questions: (1) What are the students' mindset tendencies in learning English based on Dweck's theory? and (2) What are the factors that shape students' mindsets in learning English? By answering these questions, this study aims to contribute insights that can support English teachers in cultivating a growth mindset through classroom strategies and socio-emotional support. It also provides a foundation for future research to develop materials and strategies that can support students' mindset.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach design to investigate junior high school students' mindsets in learning English and the factors that shape them. The focus was on understanding students' thoughts, experiences, and perspectives in-depth.

a. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 22 students from class VIII-9 at SMPN 2 Lubuk Pakam, who served as the primary source of data in gathering information related to students' mindsets in learning English.

b. Data Collection

The questions asked allowed students to freely express their opinions without being restricted by fixed answer choices. Supporting documentation, such as student responses were used to enrich the findings.

c. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The steps included familiarizing oneself with the data, creating initial codes, identifying thematic codes, validating the findings with Dweck's (2006) theory and interpreting the data in relation to the research questions.

RESULTS

1. Students' Mindset in Learning English

The research findings are based on students' responses to open-ended questionnaires consisting of 12 items, analyzed using six aspects of mindset proposed by Dweck (2006): challenges, obstacles, effort, criticism, success of others, and self-perception of ability. The participants were 22 eighth-grade students from class VIII-9 at SMPN 2 Lubuk Pakam.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Mindsets Across Six Aspects

Aspects of Mindset	Growth Mindset	Fixed Mindset	Mixed Mindset
Challenges	1. 8	1. 14	-
	2. 9	2. 13	
Obstacles	1. 10	1. 12	-
	2. 11	2. 11	
Effort	1. 2	1. 20	-
	2. 10	2. 12	
Success of Others	1. 6	1. 13	1. 3
	2. 7	2. 14	2. -
Criticism	1. 10	1. 8	1. 3
	2. 15	2. 7	2. -
Self-Perception of Ability	1. 6	1. 16	-

	2. 5	2. 17	
Total Respondents			22 Respondents

The results show a dominant fixed mindset across most aspects, particularly in challenges, effort, and self-perception. However, students demonstrated more openness in receiving criticism, indicating a tendency toward a growth mindset in that aspect.

2. The Factors that Shape Students' Mindset in Learning English

This section presents three main factors that influence students' mindset in learning English: social environment, personal experience, and cultural values. Data were collected through six additional open-ended questions designed to investigate these external and internal factors.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Mindset Based on Influencing Factors

Factors Shaping Mindset	Growth Mindset	Fixed Mindset	Mixed Mindset
Social Environment	1. 9	1. 13	-
	2. 9	2. 11	
	3. 8	3. 13	
Personal Experience	1. 4	1. 14	1. 4
	2. 4	2. 14	2. 3
Cultural Value	6	14	1
Total Respondents			22 Respondents

The findings indicate that negative experiences in the learning environment and unsupportive social or cultural responses often lead students to develop a fixed mindset. Meanwhile, students with positive reinforcement and inclusive experiences are more likely to adopt a growth mindset.

DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study reveal students' tendencies toward either a fixed or growth mindset in learning English, particularly in the aspects of challenges, effort, self-perception of ability, obstacles, and success of others. This indicates that many students still hold the belief that their ability to learn English is limited or unchangeable, aligning with what Dweck

(2006) defines as a fixed mindset, where individuals assume their intelligence or skills are static and cannot be improved through effort.

Data were collected from 22 eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Lubuk Pakam through open-ended questionnaires and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that most students demonstrated a fixed mindset across several aspects. In facing challenges, 14 students expressed discouragement or resignation, believing they lacked the talent to succeed. Similarly, responses regarding obstacles, such as failure or limited time, showed that many students easily gave up or avoided learning altogether.

In the effort aspect, a large majority (20 out of 22) indicated that they would only make an effort under certain conditions, such as when tasks were easy or when prompted by others. This suggests that they did not perceive sustained effort as a meaningful factor in achieving better learning outcomes.

Regarding the success of others, many students expressed feelings of discouragement or self-doubt when comparing themselves to peers who performed better in English, which reflects a fixed mindset tendency to view others' success as a threat rather than a source of inspiration. These patterns are consistent with Dweck's theory, which emphasizes that students with a fixed mindset tend to associate failure with personal limitations rather than a lack of practice or strategy.

Interestingly, in the aspect of criticism, the majority of students (15 out of 22) responded with a growth mindset, expressing openness to feedback and willingness to learn from others' suggestions. This is a positive indication that some students are beginning to see correction as a tool for growth rather than a judgment of ability. This aligns with Dweck's (2006) view that students with a growth mindset value constructive feedback and use it to improve their performance.

Regarding the factors influencing mindset, the study identified personal experience as the most impactful. Students who had previously faced negative experiences, such as failure, discouraging feedback, or mockery from peers—tended to develop a fixed mindset. On the other hand, those with encouraging teachers, supportive families, or success in language tasks were more likely to develop a growth mindset. This finding is supported by prior studies (e.g., Yeager & Dweck, 2012), which emphasize the role of environment and prior learning history in shaping students' beliefs about intelligence and learning.

Moreover, the role of social environment—including teachers' attitudes, classroom dynamics, and peer influence—was also significant. Students often internalized the way others responded to their English performance. If they were supported and given opportunities to grow, they were more confident in their ability. Cultural values also played a role, particularly in how English was perceived by the community; students who felt English was not valued or was mocked in their environment were less likely to persist.

In summary, the dominance of the fixed mindset among students suggests a need for more supportive, reflective, and growth-oriented learning environments. Teachers and parents must work together to encourage positive learning experiences, praise effort over innate ability, and reframe failure as part of the learning process.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the majority of eighth-grade students in class VIII-9 at SMPN 2 Lubuk Pakam showed a tendency toward a fixed mindset in learning English, particularly in the aspects of facing challenges, overcoming obstacles, exerting effort, responding to others' success, and self-perception of ability. The only aspect in which most students demonstrated a growth mindset was in responding to criticism, as they tended to be open to receiving feedback and suggestions.

The analysis also revealed that students' mindsets are shaped by three main factors: social environment, personal experience, and cultural values. Among these, personal experience emerged as the most dominant factor. Students who had negative experiences in learning English tended to develop a fixed mindset, particularly in relation to engagement and avoidance. These findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive learning environment that fosters mindset development through constructive feedback, emotional safety in the classroom, and opportunities for meaningful achievement.

This study is limited in scope, as it only involved one class from a single school and relied solely on open-ended questionnaires as the data collection instrument. Further research is recommended to include a larger and more diverse group of participants, employ interviews or classroom observations for data triangulation, and consider the role of teachers' mindsets in influencing students' attitudes toward learning.

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