

The development of growth mindset in the Japanese EFL discussion task

Momoko Okazaki

Waseda University, Japan

<https://doi.org/10.36505/TheLinguisticProceedings/2025/17/02/014/000700>

Abstract

The concept of Group Mindset (Dweck, 2006) is examined through the lens of group dynamics (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003) in a Japanese EFL setting. The study aimed to explore how learners' beliefs and their English expression change through peer interaction in a CALL classroom. 60 Japanese undergraduates took part in a weekly 15-minute spoken discussion over a semester. The mixed-method approach revealed that group dynamics scaffolded English conversation and fostered a growth mindset. However, despite its benefits, using technology during spoken communication decreased opportunities for communicative risk-taking and peer bonding. These findings highlight the need for teaching strategies that balance technology use in class to help learners develop a growth mindset and the skills necessary for practical English communication.

Keywords: growth mindset, group dynamics, communicative competence, multimodal discourse analysis, CALL

Introduction

Approximately 80% of Japanese undergraduates reported unpreparedness for real-life English communication regardless of studying English since elementary school (MEXT, 2024). A key issue is the lowered priority of discussion skills underpinned by communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Swain, 1984) and demotivation toward language learning. This exploratory study aims to understand the cause via growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), group dynamics (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003), and social comparison (Smith, 2000).

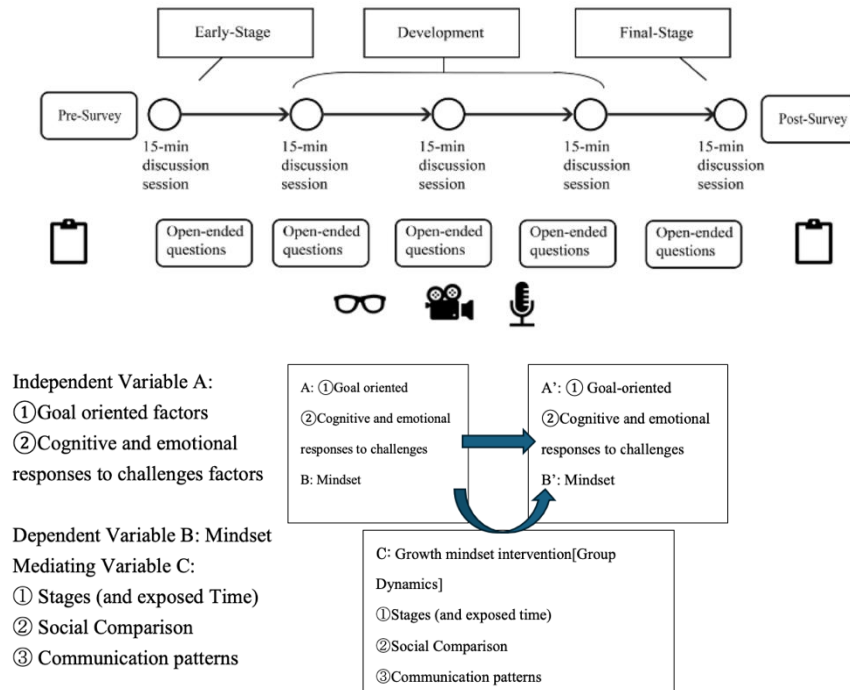
This study attempts to answer four questions: (1) Do growth mindsets, goals, and emotional responses change over time? (2) Do growth mindsets, goals, and emotional responses change through social comparison? (3) Which modes are prominent in students involved in group dynamics? Finally, (4) what communicative competence was prominent among students?

Methodology

Methods

Sixty-four first-year undergraduate students in the School of Law at a Japanese university participated in this exploratory study. Their English proficiency ranged from A2 to B1 in CEFR. Following Chang's (2007) ideal number of focus group

members, five to seven students were randomly selected for 15-minute face-to-face discussion sessions. Diagrams 1 & 2 summarize the procedure.



Data collection and measures

The Mindset system model questionnaire (Lou et al., 2022), which incorporates major conceptions of Mindset (Dweck, 2006), Goals (Elliot & Church, 1997), Language use anxiety (Gardner et al., 2004), and social comparison (Smith, 2000), measured qualitative data for later statistical analysis purposes. Also, in-class observation with supplementary audio and video recording was conducted to triangulate quantitative data from a multimodal perspective. After all, spoken communication and paralinguistic information, such as gestures, were sorted based on three stages of group dynamics (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003).

Results

Pre- and post-questionnaires showed perceived development in mindset components of achievement goals, language anxiety, and social comparison components. The unpaired MANOVA and multi-regression analysis of the post-questionnaire showed statistical significance in relation to social comparison and mindset-related factors. (Mindset: $p < .00005$, Mastery goal: $p < .028$, and

Persistence: $p < .014$, below $p\text{-value} < .05$ $n=60$, effect size=.2). However, no statistical significance was found between growth mindset and time. (Repeated MANOVA and Pillai Test; $F\text{-value}=.8727$, $n=15$, effect size=.030).

The in-class observation revealed interesting patterns of student conversation. To begin with, discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic competence were prominent, leaving grammatical competence aside, because active participation provokes more grammatical errors. Meanwhile, sharing significant events in life, such as personal experiences and goals, promoted discussion; it varied by factors such as group familiarity, knowledge of the discussion topic, the ability to logically present ideas, and, occasionally, attitudes toward the ethical use of technology. Notably, students were divided into speakers and followers, clearly distinguishing between active presenters and listeners. Also, the ones who asked for help more often were the ones who used less technology.

Discussion

1. Do growth mindsets, goals, and emotional responses change over time?

A growth mindset wasn't necessarily linked to exposure time; The development of a growth mindset was more complex (See, Discussion 2.) Notably, the growth mindset students in the questionnaires did not necessarily have active spoken communication, which showed a tangible difference from past studies.

2. Do growth mindsets, goals, and emotional responses change through social comparison?

The components of growth mindset, mastery goals, and persistence were correlated with social comparison. Unlike past studies, the results showcased that a typical Japanese hierarchical relationship among students, such as Sempai (Senior position) and Kohai (Junior position), was not significant in tertiary-level education; instead, they all sought support in handy technology for feedback. This explains that research designs should be carefully implemented, because groups behave differently depending on the setting.

3. Which modes are prominent in students involved in group dynamics?

First, students tend to actively communicate verbally and in writing, code-switching between Japanese and English. Then, students strategically utilized digital tools and engaged in active discussions before seeking help from others. The triangulation emphasizes the importance of seeing data multidimensionally, especially in the presence of perceived growth mindsets. Being inactive in discussion does not necessarily mean disengaged in a language learning activity.

4. What communicative competence was prominent among students?

The data suggested that negotiation of meaning grounded in communicative competence fosters abstract thinking, which is highly exposed to Japanese

sociolinguistic cues, regardless of the language in use. This finding highlights a typical aspect of English education in the Japanese context.

Conclusion

The multi-modal analysis revealed dynamic dimensions of the growth mindset in the Japanese EFL setting. While technology is increasingly integrated as a support tool in face-to-face discussions, the overuse of such tools is like a double-edged sword. That is, although it saves time and avoids communication breakdown, it relinquishes opportunities for reflective experiences and peer feedback, changing the landscape of interaction and social comparison. Future research should examine how digital tools affect fostering a growth mindset, considering classroom group dynamics.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my former supervisor, Dr. Stockwell, during my Master's years; my current supervisor, Professor Detey, Sylvain, for his support in my PhD. study, and, finally, my affiliation with GSICCS at Waseda University.

References

- Canale, M., Swain, M. 1980. Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47.
- Dörnyei, Z., Murphey, T. 2003. Group dynamics in the language classroom.
- Dweck, C.S. 2006. *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Smith, H.R. 2000. Assimilative and contrastive emotional reactions to upward and downward social comparison. In J. Suls & L. Wheeler (Eds.), *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research* (pp. 173–200). Springer Science Business Media.