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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Effectiveness of Self-assessment in Promoting Growth Mindset in EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

While research on mindsets theory deals with internal psychological processes, self-assessment research focuses on external teaching strategies. This research study aimed to examine the impact of self-assessment strategies in developing a positive mindset in EFL classrooms. Language students hold different beliefs regarding language learning, but one crucial belief that contributes to their success is whether their language aptitude is fixed or malleable. Twenty-five students from the Faculty of Education, University of Abu-Isa, Zawiya participated in this study. At the beginning of the study, participants were given *Mindsets Survey* to examine if they have growth, or fixed mindsets based on their scores on the survey. After the pre-survey, participants exercised self-assessment rubrics and checklists for 3 weeks in their writing class and the same survey was given to determine if any changes have occurred in the participants' academic mindsets. The results showed that the regular use of self-assessment rubrics and checklists during writing classes helped students with fixed mindset to develop a growth mindset. These findings imply that most students perceive self-assessment as a useful strategy since they self-control their learning process which is in line with the growth mindset theory.

Keywords: mindset theory, language mindsets, self-assessment, writing achievement.

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INTRODUCTION

Educators and scholars have long been interested in analyzing the different beliefs that students hold regarding their language learning, and how these beliefs might be predictors of students' academic motivation and achievements. Students' academic achievements might be influenced not only by their intellectual ability and content knowledge but also by other non-cognitive aspects such as their beliefs, attitudes, and values (Limeri et al., 2020). Teachers need to understand why some students have higher levels of motivation, persistence, and performance than others. In fact, students' active involvement in the learning process is highly influenced by the belief that they are capable of development and improvement (Yılmaz, 2022). To examine this issue, we draw from Carl Dweck's Mindsets Theory (2006) which suggests that students have different beliefs that can shape their attitudes regarding failure and success. Mindsets or implicit theories can be defined as "people's lay beliefs about the nature of human attributes, such as intelligence or personality" (Bernecker & Job, 2019, p. 180). They were originally developed by observing children's reactions to challenging situations and failure (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Dweck's (1999) research indicates that students' behaviors are based on their mindsets which can take two forms: growth mindset and fixed mindset. Students with a growth mindset (incremental theory) believe that intellectual or psychological attributes are malleable and can be developed and changed (Dweck, 1999); thus, they are more likely to show more effort and make use of adaptive strategies to improve their performance (Hong et al., 1999). Whereas students with a fixed mindset (entity theory) believe that intellectual or psychological attributes cannot be developed or changed (Dweck, 1999). Those students have a tendency to adopt performance goals as a means of showing their abilities and gaining positive feedback from others (Pepi et al., 2015). Students' mindsets are influential because they might lead to different behavioral responses to challenges (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Robins & Pals, 2002), impact students' attributions to their success and failure (Hong et al., 1999) as well as their goal setting (Burnette et al., 2013).

One of the primary determinants of students' success in both educational context and social life is a growth mindset that emphasizes the process of learning rather than the final product of students (Dweck, 2006; Blackwell et al., 2007). Students learning a foreign or a second language might encounter situations that challenge their language abilities and result in unproductive communication interactions (Lou & Noels, 2017). As a result, language mindset is significant since it impacts how students respond to challenges and setbacks. Yeager and Dweck (2012) indicated that it is essential for students to develop a mindset that enables them to face challenges and overcome failure. In fact, students' beliefs are influenced by their interactions and experiences with others around them—parents, peers, and teachers. Therefore, teachers can motivate students to develop a growth mindset by creating a classroom environment that changes students' approach to learning and encourages the development of effective work strategies which may lead to more success and achievement (Robinson, 2017). It has been suggested that there is a strong relationship between growth mindset and self-regulating learning (Burnette et al., 2013). Students who are involved in self-regulating learning such as self-assessment activities are able to develop "internal attributions, a feeling of empowerment, and a sense of autonomy" (Dyer, 2016, p. 1). Looking at the basic features of learner-centered education, it has been found that self-assessment is a core part as it helps students to speak out and express their ideas (Qasem, 2020). Self-assessment enables students to identify the specific actions required to enhance their learning and implement the necessary modifications to attain more academic achievement (Gross, 2019). By doing so, students would believe in a growth mindset as they change and develop their skills. This study aims to integrate self-assessment into students' learning process to develop a growth mindset in EFL students.

LITERATURE

"[S]ome beliefs are not isolated ideas, but rather can serve an organizing function, bringing together goals, beliefs, and behaviors into what might be called a meaning system" (Dweck & Yeager, 2019, p. 483). Based on this, Dweck proposed implicit theories which indicate that people can be divided into two categories based on how they perceive their intelligence and abilities. It is referred to as implicit because most people are not aware of it (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). Students can be different in their implicit theories, from more of a fixed mindset (entity theory) of intelligence or personality to more of a growth mindset (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Students with a fixed mindset are more likely to avoid learning opportunities and challenges (Castella & Byrne, 2015) as they assume abilities are static and they possess predetermined strengths and weaknesses (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Therefore, those students adopt performance goals and make ability attributions for failure which leads to helpless reactions in the face of challenges. On the other hand, students with a growth mindset (incremental theory) believe that it is possible to develop from mistakes if they maintain effort in their learning process (Yılmaz, 2022) as they assume abilities are malleable and can be acquired. As a result, those tend to adopt learning goals and make strategy attributions that promote mastery-oriented responses to challenges and failure (Robins & Pals, 2002). It is a common assumption within our society that a fixed mindset is more dominant, but research revealed that both mindsets are equally prevalent (Dweck & Molden, 2017).

Decades of research have demonstrated the significant influence of mindsets on students' academic achievements, engagement, and motivation (Chen & Pajares, 2010). Aronson, Fried, & Good's (2002) study showed that the growth mindset intervention on undergraduate students helped them to achieve higher levels of engagement, and enjoyment as well as higher grades on their tests. Studies have shown that mindsets have a significant impact on students' goal orientations, their perceptions of effort, the strategies they use in learning tasks, and their academic performance (Hong et al., 1999; Robins & Pals, 2002; Blackwell et al., 2007). Robins and Pals conducted a study on 363 students at the University of California to investigate the impact of students' implicit theories (mindsets) on goal orientation, affect, attributions, and self-esteem. The study revealed that students who held an entity theory (fixed mindset) tended to adopt performance goals that allowed them to display their ability. In contrast, students who held an incremental theory (growth mindset) tended to pursue learning goals that helped them to improve their cognitive abilities. Regarding attributions, the findings indicated that entity theorists tended to attribute their failures to their ability and their success to factors beyond their control such as luck. Whereas incremental theorists tended to attribute their failure to ineffective learning strategies and their success to hard work and effort. For affect, students with entity theory were experiencing negative feelings such as shame and stress more than students with incremental theory who had more positive feelings such as enthusiasm and inspiration. In terms of self-esteem, it was observed that students with entity theory demonstrated lower levels of self-esteem over the course of four years compared to students with incremental theory. In addition, Nussbaum and Dweck (2008) examined what determines how students respond to setbacks in a learning task; whether they make use of remedial strategies or take defensive actions. It was found that the decisions made by students to either exert more effort to enhance their abilities or to simply seek emotional comfort were influenced by their beliefs that intelligence is malleable or fixed. The results indicated that entity theorists had the tendency to react defensively to negative feedback and choose strategies of relatively lower performers. In contrast, incremental theorists preferred to take remedial actions and choose strategies of high performers in order to overcome their setbacks and improve their performance.

Horwitz (1999) indicated that students' beliefs have an influence over their experiences and behaviors in the language learning process; thus, they should be integrated with the process so that language learning becomes effective. Lou and Noels (2017) conducted a study to introduce the Language Mindsets Inventory and to investigate the mindsets-goals-responses model. They proposed that students' mindsets impact their goals in the language learning process which in turn influences how they react to academic challenges. Path analysis revealed that fixed mindset was associated with performance goals which led to adopting helpless responses in the face of setbacks. Whereas growth mindset was linked with learning goals which predicted mastery-oriented responses to difficulties and failure. Indeed, Grant and Dweck's (2003) findings indicated that students who adopted learning goals demonstrated a greater tendency to actively engage in the course material which resulted in higher grades. Furthermore, students' mindsets have been found to influence their motivation and other outcomes including their responses to feedback (Henderson & Dweck, 1990; De Castella & Byrne, 2015). Waller and Papi (2017) investigated the link between students' mindsets regarding their L2 writing ability, their writing motivation, and their reactions to written corrective feedback. They found that students with incremental theory of writing (growth mindset) had more motivation to enhance their L2 writing ability and more willingness to seek feedback unlike those with entity theory of writing (fixed mindset) who showed lower levels of motivation and tended to avoid feedback.

Previous research has shown that there is a positive connection between implicit theories (mindsets theory) and higher levels of self-regulatory behaviors (Hammann, 2005; Limpo & Alves, 2014). Burnette et al.'s (2013) meta-analysis revealed that incremental theorists had a tendency to use self-regulatory strategies such as reorganizing notes at the end of each class to connect what they have learned with their experiences to overcome their mistakes whereas entity theorists preferred to use the strategies that focus on memorizing only what is likely to be tested to protect their self-esteem. According to Siegesmund (2017), students who make use of self-regulatory learning have the ability to assess their own learning process, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and make modifications to enhance their academic performance. Self-assessment is considered a self-regulatory strategy to facilitate students' learning (Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009). It can enhance student ownership, responsibility, motivation as well as the quality of learning (Schunk, 1996; Topping, 2003). Through self-assessment, students are encouraged to focus on the process of learning; identifying their own strengths and weaknesses rather than the final product. In a foreign language context, students may lose interest in mastering the language as they do not have the opportunity to practice the language outside the classroom. As a result, students may have a tendency to associate language learning with mastering grammar and vocabulary rather than actual use of the language (Harris, 1997). Recently, there has been an increasing interest in the use of self-assessment to facilitate language learning (Oscarson, 2009; Elgadal, 2017; Inan-Karagul & Yuksel, 2018). Javaherbakhsh (2010) reported that self-assessment techniques had a positive impact on Iranian EFL students' writing ability. In Elgadal's (2017) study, Libyan EFL students were able to improve their writing in terms of content, language, and organization after the use of the self-assessment sheet. Similarly, Zhang and Zhang (2022) found that the use of self-assessment rubrics on Chinese EFL university students increased the development of writing performance.

Teachers' way of teaching and practices have a significant impact on students' mindsets (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Sun (2015) indicated that teachers who implement the process-oriented approach which emphasizes understanding the materials and students' progress rather than memorizing and their personal abilities, encourage students to have a growth mindset. Hence, the use of self-assessment practices directs students' attention towards the learning process and

strategies which in return has the potential to cultivate the belief that any learning ability could be developed and improved through effort and effective strategies.

Research Questions

1. What is the mindset of university students in the English language department?
2. Does the regular application of self-assessment rubrics and checklists during writing classes help students with a fixed mindset develop a growth mindset?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study were 25 Libyan female students from the Faculty of Education, University of Abu-Isa, Zawiya. They are 2nd-year students in the English Language department. The study was conducted in one class. Their English proficiency level was B1 (intermediate). The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 22. The research study was conducted during their writing class. The sample represented non-probability (purposive) sampling.

Instruments

Mindset Survey contains 14 items. The first four statements were adopted from the *Becoming Effective Learners Survey* which was developed and tested to investigate the role of noncognitive factors including mindsets on students' academic performance (Farrington et al., 2012). In addition, the same statements were used in grades 4 to 12 from Clark County School District in Nevada, United States to examine students' attitudes and beliefs regarding growth mindset, performance-avoidance, and academic behaviors (Snipes & Tran, 2017). The reset survey statements were based on Dweck's (2006) representation of the growth and fixed mindsets in her book *Mindset: New Psychology of Success*. Participants responded to the survey using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *completely agree* to *completely disagree*. The content of the survey items is composed of 8 fixed mindset statements (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12) and six growth mindset statements (6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14). For example:

1) "My ability to learn is something that I can't change very much."

4) "If I am not naturally smart in a subject, I will never do well in it"

6) "I am in charge of what I am able to learn."

9) "When I do something incorrectly, I want to try it again."

Based on the survey score, the participants were divided into four mindsets: strong growth mindset, moderate growth mindset, moderate fixed mindset, and strong fixed mindset, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Mindset Categories.

Academic Mindset Categories	Scores
Strong Growth Mindset	14 – 27
Moderate Growth Mindset	28 – 41
Moderate Fixed Mindset	42 – 55
Strong Fixed Mindset	56 – 70

Procedure

To reach the objectives of this study, quantitative data was used to investigate the impact of self-assessment strategies on students' mindsets. Before giving the survey to the participants, the teacher explained the content of the survey in the mother tongue of the students. Participants' mindsets were measured using the 14-item mindset survey. At the beginning of the study, participants' mindsets were determined as fixed, or growth mindsets based on their scores on the survey. Before this study, participants hadn't experienced self-assessment as a part of their learning process. Therefore, the criteria for assessing their writing work and the procedures were taught and practiced under the teacher's guidance. Self-assessment methods included a variety of strategies such as rubrics and checklists used daily. The writing works were assessed in terms of the content, mechanics, vocabulary, and organization of the writing using the rubrics provided by the teacher. The process continued for three weeks to discover what the participants would develop through self-assessment methods. At the beginning of the fourth week, the mentioned survey was applied to determine whether any development had appeared in the participants' mindsets after using self-assessment strategies during instruction.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the data obtained from the pre and post-survey. Whereas the differences between the three tests were tested using analysis of repeated measures ANOVA. The differences were tested at .05 level of significance. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research study were presented through tables and figures. In a total (n = 25) of participants, the statistical analysis of the Mindset survey revealed that 9 of them had a moderate growth mindset, 15 participants had a moderate fixed mindset, and only 1 participant had a strong fixed mindset. However, after the application of self-assessment rubrics and checklists during writing classes, the number of moderate growth mindset' students increased to 19 students, while only 6 students stayed in the moderate fixed mindset category as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Pre- and Post-Scores of Participants in The Mindset Survey

Participant No	Pre-Score	Post-Score	Difference in Scores
1	41	40	-1
2	48	47	-1
3	49	27	-4
4	56	40	-16
5	39	40	1
6	42	40	-2
7	37	39	2
8	42	42	0
9	36	37	1
10	45	44	-1
11	36	35	-1
12	44	40	-4
13	41	35	-6
14	42	43	1
15	42	39	-3
16	45	38	-7
17	38	37	-1

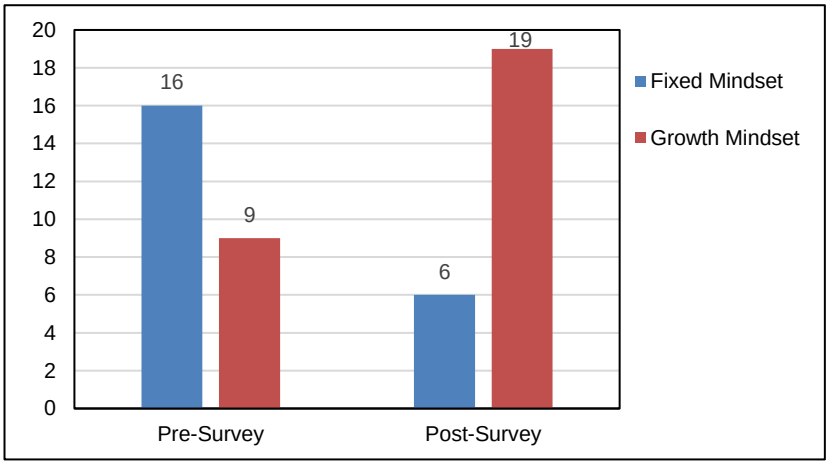
18	49	40	-9
19	33	37	4
20	49	34	-15
21	47	46	-1
22	46	29	-17
23	44	38	-6
24	36	37	1
25	48	40	-8

The participants with a moderate fixed mindset in the pre-survey gave mixed results. Of the fifteenth participants who had a medium fixed mindset, six stayed in the same category in the post-survey. The remaining nine participants moved to the moderate growth mindset category, as shown in Table 3. Figure 1 shows the participants as only distributed under two primary academic mindsets: growth mindset and fixed mindset.

Table 3. The number of participants in pre- and post-survey.

Academic Mindset Categories	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Moderate Growth Mindset	9	19
Moderate Fixed Mindset	15	6
Strong Fixed Mindset	1	0
Total	25	25

Figure 1. The number of participants in pre-survey and post-survey.



Regarding the impact of self-assessment strategies such as rubrics and checklists, three writing tests were assessed by the students. These tests were at the end of the first ten days, the second 10 days, and the end of the study. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of the students' self-assessments.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Self-Assessment During the Study.

Test No.	M	SD
Test 1	13.84	2.07
Test 2	16.20	2.56
Test 3	17.44	2.02

Based on the descriptive statistics in Table 4, the self-assessment strategies used during the study helped the students perform better from the beginning until the end of the study. There were increments in the mean scores of the students. Repeated-measure ANOVA was used to determine the significant differences between the three mean scores. Before using the test, the homogeneity of variance of differences assumption *sphericity* should be tested as shown in Table 5. Since the *p*-value .166 is greater than .05, the assumption of sphericity was achieved.

Table 5. The Homogeneity of Variance of Differences Assumption.

With Subjects Effect	Mauchly's W	Approx. Ch- Square	df	Sig.	Epsilon Greenhouse Geisser	Huynh-Feldt	Lower-Bound
Test	0.856	3.587	2	0.166	0.874	0.937	0.500

The F-value was 27,72, which was significant since its *p*-value was .000, which was less than the .05 alpha level. The results showed that there were statistically significant differences between the means of the three test trials within the subject variable test. To determine the differences between the three self-assessment tests' three means, pairwise compressions were used, as shown in Table 6. Significant differences were found between the mean score of the first test and the mean scores of the second and third tests. The mean scores of the second and third tests were significantly higher than the first test's mean scores. However, no significant differences were found between the mean score of the second and the third because the *p*-value of .487 was greater than .05. In addition, the post hoc pairwise compression showed a significant increment in mean scores between the first, second, and third tests.

Table 6. Pairwise Comparisons.

Test	Test	M Difference I-J	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	-3.720*	0.701	.000	-5.167	-2.273
	3	-4.080*	0.603	.000	-5.324	-2.836
2	3	-0.36	0.5	.478	-1.391	0.671

The main purpose of the study was to help second-year students in the English Language department establish an academic growth mindset through the use of self-assessment. To achieve this, the students have been provided with self-assessment strategies such as rubrics and checklists. According to the results obtained from the *Mindset survey*, those with a moderate fixed mindset at the beginning of the study changed to a moderate growth mindset after applying the self-assessment rubrics and checklists during their writing class. Given the link between mindsets and various educational enhancements and the fact that changing students' mindsets has long-term impacts, language instructors have shifted their attention to the concept of a growth mindset (Lou & Noels, 2019). Furthermore, it has been observed that self-assessment is a strategy that could help students to be aware of their academic mindset as well as the strategies they use to progress and overcome the challenges they may encounter (Gross, 2019).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research study aimed to investigate the impact of self-assessment rubrics and checklists on fostering growth mindset in university students of an English language department. The results indicated that the regular use of self-assessment

rubrics and checklists during writing classes helps students with a fixed mindset to develop a growth mindset. Students who lack a positive academic mindset may believe that they have no ability to improve their conditions in life and further their learning achievements (Mercer & Ryan, 2009). Blackwell et al. (2007), who investigated the influence of the mindset theory of intelligence on teenagers' mathematics accomplishment, found out that students who had a growth mindset indicated high progress in their grades across the two years of middle school. In contrast, those with entity theory predicted low progress in grades. Dweck (2006) stated that students are more likely to believe in their abilities if the teachers are concerned about understanding them. In fact, students can adopt different beliefs through their interaction with their teachers, peers, and learning materials (Lou & Noels, 2019). According to Ryan (2017), teachers need to provide their students with the techniques and resources which they need to overcome any challenges. Therefore, enabling students to make use of self-assessment in their learning setting is one strategy to increase their potential to have a positive mindset which can transform students' educational experience (Gross, 2019). This idea is further supported in the study by the findings obtained from the three writing tests using rubrics and checklists. Throughout the study, the students' achievement improved, showing a significant difference between the first and third tests due to the integration of self-assessment strategies in learning materials. Like Noels and Lou (2015), the findings suggested that teachers can motivate language learners to change their academic mindsets which play a role in their performance and responses to learning obstacles. The generalizability of the results is limited by the fact that there were only female participants in the study. In terms of future studies, it would be useful to use semi-structured interviews with several participants to investigate their appraisal regarding the impact of self-assessment practices on their academic mindset.

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