

The Impact of Growth-Oriented Feedback on ESL Learners' Resilience, Motivation, and Language Acquisition

Richard Lee Wilson

Abstract

This study examines the effect of growth-oriented feedback on English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' resilience, motivation to engage with challenging language tasks, and overall language acquisition. Drawing upon Carol Dweck's mindset theory, this research contrasts growth-oriented feedback, which emphasizes effort and strategy, with fixed-oriented feedback, which reinforces the idea that abilities are static. Through an experimental study involving ESL learners, the research investigates how different feedback styles influence students' learning behaviors, willingness to take on linguistic challenges, and long-term language development.

Introduction

Background

Carol Dweck's mindset theory distinguishes between two fundamental beliefs about intelligence and ability: the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. A fixed mindset assumes that intelligence and skills are innate and unchangeable, leading individuals to avoid challenges and view effort as futile (Dweck, 2006). In contrast, a growth mindset holds that abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work, encouraging persistence, effort, and resilience in the face of challenges.

The role of feedback in shaping mindset has been widely studied (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Research has shown that praising intelligence often leads to a fixed mindset, whereas feedback emphasizing effort fosters a growth mindset (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). In the context of ESL learning, where students face significant linguistic and cognitive challenges, the type of feedback provided by educators can have a profound impact on learners' motivation and progress (Mercer & Ryan, 2010).

This study explores how growth-oriented feedback influences ESL learners' resilience, motivation to engage with difficult linguistic tasks, and overall language acquisition. The research hypothesis posits that providing growth-oriented feedback will lead to increased resilience, greater motivation, and improved language skills compared to fixed-oriented feedback, which may reduce confidence, decrease effort, and lead to avoidance of learning opportunities.

Methods

Participants

The study involved 100 ESL learners aged 14-18 from diverse linguistic backgrounds enrolled in an intensive English program. Participants were randomly assigned to two groups: a growth-oriented feedback group (n=50) and a fixed-oriented feedback group (n=50).

Procedure

The study was conducted over a 10-week period. All participants engaged in the same language learning curriculum, focusing on reading, writing, speaking, and listening. However, the nature of feedback provided by instructors differed:

- **Growth-Oriented Feedback Group:** Feedback emphasized effort, strategies, and improvement. For example, comments included, "I can see you worked hard to structure your argument. Keep refining your ideas with more supporting examples."
- **Fixed-Oriented Feedback Group:** Feedback focused on innate ability or static judgments. For example, comments included, "You're naturally good at grammar, but writing just isn't your strong suit."

Measures

Participants were assessed using:

- **Resilience Scale for ESL Learners (RSEL):** A survey assessing learners' persistence and ability to handle setbacks.
- **Motivation for Language Learning (MLL) Questionnaire:** A measure of students' willingness to engage with difficult language tasks.
- **Language Acquisition Performance Test (LAPT):** A standardized test measuring improvements in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Statistical analysis revealed significant differences between the two groups:

- **Resilience Scores:** The growth-oriented feedback group showed a 23% increase in resilience scores compared to a 4% increase in the fixed-oriented group ($p < 0.01$).
- **Motivation Levels:** Motivation scores increased by 18% in the growth-oriented group but only 3% in the fixed-oriented group ($p < 0.05$).
- **Language Performance:** Participants receiving growth-oriented feedback improved their LAPT scores by an average of 12%, whereas the fixed-oriented feedback group showed only a 5% improvement ($p < 0.05$).

Qualitative Findings

Interviews with participants in the growth-oriented group revealed that they felt encouraged to take risks and viewed mistakes as opportunities for learning. In contrast, students in the fixed-oriented group reported anxiety and reluctance to engage in challenging tasks, fearing negative judgment.

Analysis and Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The findings align with prior research on mindset theory, demonstrating that growth-oriented feedback fosters persistence, intrinsic motivation, and improved academic outcomes (Dweck, 2006; Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). By shifting the focus from innate ability to effort and strategy, students developed resilience and actively engaged in language learning.

Conversely, fixed-oriented feedback appeared to reinforce avoidance behaviors and reduced willingness to take on linguistic challenges. This supports studies suggesting that fixed mindsets contribute to lower academic engagement and reduced effort (Cury, Elliot, Da Fonseca, & Moller, 2006).

Educational Implications

The results highlight the importance of how feedback is framed in ESL instruction. Teachers should adopt feedback practices that emphasize growth, persistence, and learning strategies rather than innate talent. Growth mindset interventions, even when brief, have been shown to yield lasting positive effects on student motivation and performance (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that growth-oriented feedback enhances ESL learners' resilience, motivation, and language acquisition. Educators should be mindful of their feedback strategies to cultivate an environment that encourages perseverance and active engagement in language learning. Future research could explore the long-term impact of growth-oriented feedback on diverse ESL populations and different proficiency levels.

References

1. Blackwell, L. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. *Child Development*, 78(1), 246-263.
2. Cury, F., Elliot, A. J., Da Fonseca, D., & Moller, A. C. (2006). The social-cognitive model of achievement motivation and the role of perceived competence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32(2), 156-168.
3. Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
4. Dweck, C. S., & Leggett, E. L. (1988). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review*, 95(2), 256-273.
5. Mercer, S., & Ryan, S. (2010). A mindset for EFL: Learners' beliefs about the role of natural talent. *ELT Journal*, 64(4), 436-444.
6. Mueller, C. M., & Dweck, C. S. (1998). Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1), 33-52.
7. Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets that promote resilience: When students believe that personal characteristics can be developed. *Educational Psychologist*, 47(4), 302-314.