

## **Instilling Growth Mindset to Promote Students' English Learning Behaviors and Oral Communication Learning Achievement**

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<b>Article information</b>	
<b>Abstract</b>	This study aimed to (1) investigate students' mindsets before and after the growth mindset is instilled on them, (2) examine effects of growth mindset-based instruction on students' English learning behaviors, (3) explore effectiveness of growth mindset-based instruction on students' oral communication learning achievement, and (4) investigate students' attitudes towards their learning experiences through growth mindset-based instruction. The study was conducted with a sample group of 42 English majored undergraduate students who were enrolled in the English Discovery Course in the first semester of the academic year 2022 at Prince of Songkla University, Surat Thani Campus. The experiment was carried out once a week and lasted eight weeks. Data were collected using mindset test questionnaire to investigate students' mindset before and after the experiment and analyzed by employing descriptive statistic of mean and S.D. before administering oral communication pre-test and post-test. The scores from the pre-test and the post-test were compared using paired sample t-test and Hedges' g effect sizes to measure the effects and the magnitudes of effects caused by the treatment. Qualitative data were collected using a students' learning behavior checklist, a lecturer's

	<p>observation form and a students' log. The study findings revealed a tendency of students' mindsets shift from fixed mindset to growth mindset. The data obtained from the students' behavior checklists and the lecturer's observation form exhibited students' productive learning behaviors during the experiment. A statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the oral communication pre-test and post-test was gained at a significance level of 0.01. The effect sizes calculated by means of Hedges' <i>g</i> yielded the value of 1.31 which was considered large. Also, students' positive attitudes could be perceived from the records in their logs. The findings suggested that growth mindset-based instruction could be implemented in an EFL class as it could yield positive effects on students' learning behaviors and improve their oral communication learning.</p>
<b>Keywords</b>	Growth mindset, Fixed mindset, English learning behaviors, Oral communication, Learning achievement
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## 1. Introduction

Currently, the importance of the English language is clear, and its significance is likely become more and more prevalent. The promising role of the English language has dramatically increased due to the proliferation of the Internet in today's globe (Gillan, 2022), making English the most popular foreign language in the world (Lyons, 2021). Based on this fact, most, if not all, learners certainly understand the crucial role of the English language in their life, and such understanding may motivate them to strive to achieve their English learning goals. The present learning environment, in which, due to the advancement of technology, learners can access a wide range of knowledge and practice resources to improve their English language proficiency, should make it easier for learners to achieve their learning goals. Unfortunately, in reality, Thai learners' English proficiency is still relatively low (CTN News, 2020; Noom-ura, 2013).

In class, learners' different learning behaviors are commonly observed. While some learners try hard to improve their English both inside and outside the class, others may lack motivation to persevere. This leads to the question of what keeps some learners striving to achieve their learning goal and what makes others refrain from doing so.

One plausible explanation can be found in a theory postulated by Dweck (2006). According to her, a major determinant in learners' success is their mindsets. Based on her theory, there are two types of mindsets, namely a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. The former refers to a belief that one's intelligence, skills, and other abilities cannot be changed; the latter refers to a belief that with effort, perseverance, and drive, one can eventually maximize their own potential. Such different mindsets lead to different behavioral patterns as well as learning processes, which in turn bring about different learning outcomes. Based on this theory, the learners who possess the growth mindset are more likely to become successful in their academic or even life goals as such a mindset contributes favorably to their motivation (Aditomo, 2015; Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck, 2006,

2015). In other words, with the belief that their abilities can be developed, learners are more likely to be motivated to invest more effort to achieve their learning goals which subsequently pushes them towards their learning success. In language learning context, motivation is considered a crucial factor influencing learners' language learning success (Gardner, 1985; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Oxford, 1996). Therefore, if learners possess growth mindset, their motivation is assumed to be activated and thereby they formulate certain productive academic behavioral patterns which result in language learning attainment.

In today's global setting, oral communication is important for learners to function effectively in their daily social interaction as well as in their current or future work. In fact, it is regarded as one of the most important language skills for learners to securely survive in the academic and professional world (Akinola, 2014). In addition, in this competitive era, without oral communication skills, it could be difficult for learners to become successful in their careers (Morozova, 2013) or even to attain employment. Hence, for many learners, it is the skill that they would like to become proficient in (Nunan, 1991). Unfortunately, in the Thai context, many previous studies have found Thai students' spoken skills to be the lowest when comparing to other language skills (Tipmontree, 2015), implying that mastering such skills is a significant challenge.

Oral communication involves the spoken interaction between two or more people. The skills required in this process can be broken down into five language components: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Harris, 1969; Hughes, 2003). These are demanding enough for learners to acquire. However, other challenging factors such as fear of making mistakes which consequently lead to anxiety and lack of confidence (Fung & Min, 2016), also play their roles to impeding their oral communication development. According to Yuh and Kaewwurai (2021), Thai learners encounter linguistic problems such as having poor grammatical knowledge, incorrect pronunciation, inadequate vocabulary as well as being unable to deliver fluent expressions. Other factors influencing their

speaking performance include being afraid to commit mistakes or lacking confidence. To overcome these barriers and develop oral communication skills, developing strong motivation, in addition to appropriate communicative teaching techniques, may be of crucial importance. According to Dweck (2006), motivation can be promoted by fostering a growth mindset. Such a mindset is assumed to activate their motivation and lead to productive academic behaviors with persistent commitment to learning, which will subsequently enable them to master oral communication skills. This study, therefore, was conducted to investigate whether growth mindset-based instruction could encourage students to become more persistent in their learning, especially in terms of oral communication. With very few existing studies, if any, showing the effects of growth mindset-based instruction on fostering students' growth mindset to boost their productive language learning behaviors and oral communication achievement, especially in the field of English teaching in Thailand, this study was conducted to fill this gap.

## **2. Literature Review**

The mindset theory was initially formulated by Dweck (2006), drawing on her previous work on implicit theories of intelligence. A mindset can be defined as individuals' implicit beliefs about their basic qualities or what Robinson (2017) refers to as "a set of attitudes and beliefs about abilities, such as intelligence." (p. 18). Mindsets, according to Dweck (1999, 2006, 2010, 2012), can be classified into two types namely a growth mindset (associated with incremental theory) and a fixed mindset (identified with entity theory). Individuals who possess a growth mindset see intelligence as alterable qualities which can be substantially developed over time through hard work, persistence, and resilience. They strongly value effort and focus on learning while encountering challenges. Furthermore, setbacks are viewed as an opportunity to learn and grow, and criticism is embraced as it is considered a guidance to improve themselves, with success of others being a part of their learning inspiration. Such a set of thoughts is regarded as the key factor which drives learners towards their goals. On the other hand, individuals with a fixed mindset believe that their intelligence is a fixed trait and unchangeable

so that effort is not truly valued. They consider failures as evidence of a lack of intelligence and challenges are seen as something they should avoid. They also tend to feel threatened by criticism, and a success of others can prompt feelings of personal inadequacy. As a result, while those with a growth mindset learn from mistakes for future success, individuals with a fixed mindset believe there is nothing they can do to improve their abilities. Simply put, having a fixed mindset weakens their commitment to achieving their goal.

A number of previous studies have highlighted the effects of students' mindsets on their performance or behaviors at school. Zeng et al. (2016), for example, found that students' possession of a growth mindset had positive effects on school engagement and contributed positively to their emotional and psychological commitment to their learning behaviors, and Aditomo (2015) reported that having a growth mindset concerning academic ability helped students maintain their motivation upon encountering failure, which subsequently led them to academic attainment. Similarly, Blackwell et al. (2007) noticed that students who believed that intelligence was alterable stuck firmly to their goal, kept on working hard, invested more effort, and were likely to adopt new strategies to handle obstacles. Claro et al. (2016) additionally claimed that a growth mindset was a remarkable predictor of accomplishment.

Although the benefits of a growth mindset to students' academic achievement have been empirically proved, practical ways to nurture students' mindset have not yet been extensively proposed. Some general classroom practices suggested by Dweck (2010) include creating a culture of risk-taking in the classroom, giving appropriate praise and encouragement, promoting students' resilience and long-term achievement through meaningful and challenging learning tasks, as well as emphasizing challenges rather than success. She adds that it is important to give students a sense of progress resulting from their effort to encourage them to continue their hard work, and to frequently use the word "yet" when students encounter failure or commit mistakes to encourage them to

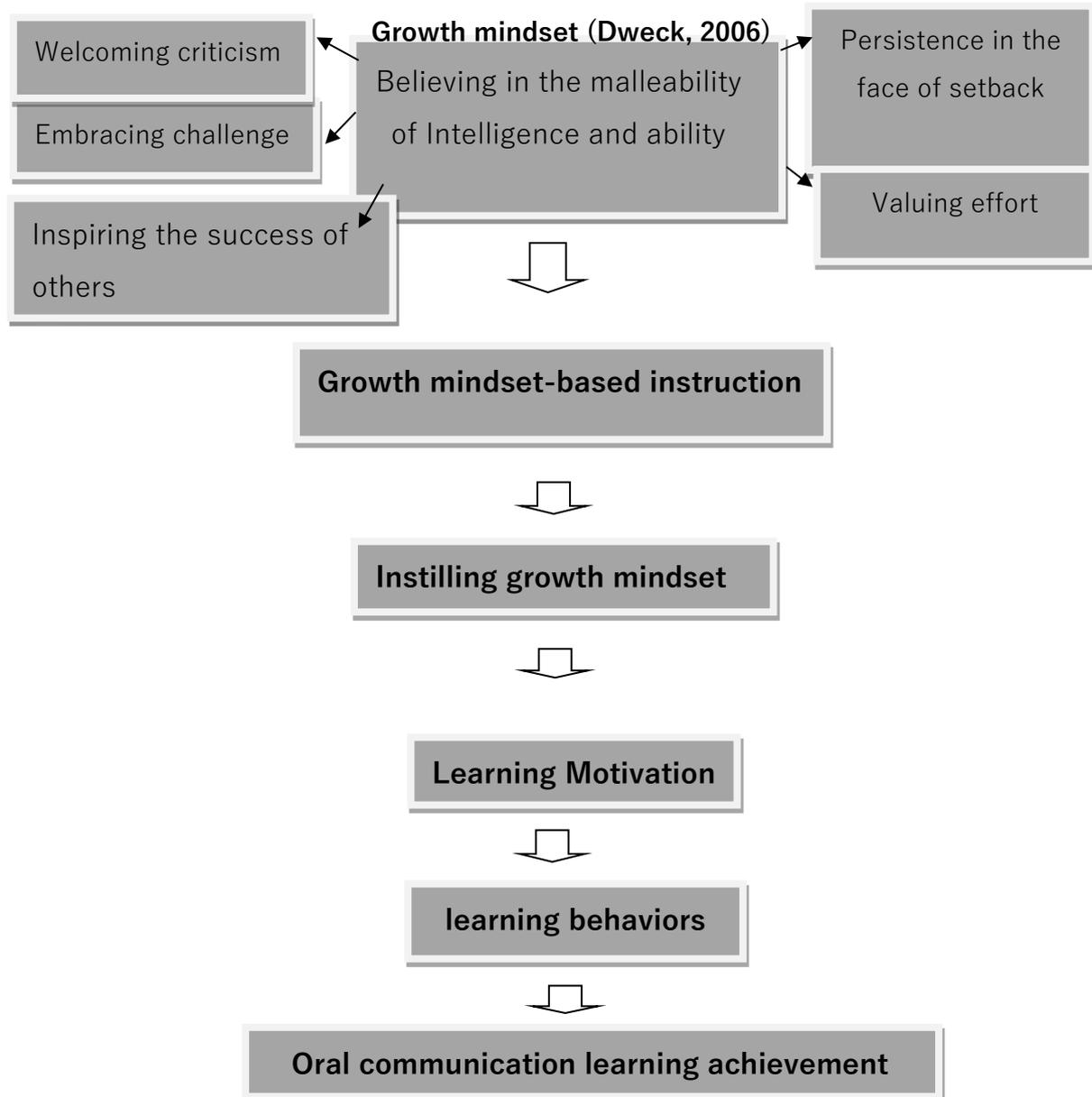
consider such failure or mistakes as a normal part of their learning processes and hence be motivated to try again. In addition, training students about how to replace their fixed mindset thoughts with growth mindset thinking is recommended. As Dweck (2015) remarks, recognizing and acknowledging a fixed mindset thought is a way to move closer to growth mindset thought and practice. Involving students in tracking progress and setting goals are also strongly suggested in the process of promoting students' growth mindset in the classroom. Uluduz and Gunbayi (2018) further add based on their review of related studies concerning growth mindset that to establish such a mindset, individuals 'embrace challenges,' 'persevere for learning,' 'learn from criticism,' set 'goals for growth,' and 'learn from mistakes' (p. 181). As Dweck (2006) points out, students' academic progress could be achieved through teaching of the principles of a growth mindset and ways to foster it. Hence, it is assumed that once learners' growth mindset is fostered through learning about growth mindset and practice in applying a growth mindset in the processes of learning, their learning behaviors could be changed in a productive way and hence learning gain could be expected.

In an English learning classroom context, a growth mindset may boost students' English learning achievement, especially the oral communication skills. According to Akinola (2014), being proficient in oral communication skill is a must for graduates as they are required to function effectively in both academic and professional contexts. However, the ability to communicate successfully through oral interaction requires many different factors, making the skill difficult to master and necessitating strong effort and persistence to achieve learning goals.

As mentioned earlier, there are factors apart from knowledge, pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar that can hinder learners' development of oral communication abilities. According to Fung and Min (2016), anxiety and lack of confidence caused by the fear of making mistakes are some of the main factors obstructing learners' effective communication. Janudom (2021) also observed learners' fear of making mistakes in an EFL classroom. Hence, to become

proficient in oral communication skills, learners have to strive to overcome the complications of the oral interaction processes while handling the negative psychological factors which can obstruct their attempt and motivation to master oral communication skills. Based on this, learners need a psychological tool to cope with the challenges of learning oral communication. Instilling a growth mindset into learners may be an effective way to help promote oral communication learning achievement as growth mindset have been found to influence academic behaviors at school, which can promote their academic growth (Dweck, 2010). The possession of positive academic behaviors such as paying attention and participating in class, completing assignments, or studying after class (Farrington et al., 2012), is a significant predictor of learning success. That is, holding a growth mindset, students are more likely to believe in the value of effort as a path to their academic growth, which in turn boosts productive learning behaviors and subsequently brings about success (Snipes & Tran, 2007). As Hu et al. (2022) found, holding a growth mindset had a positive effect on English language learning performance.

Although many empirical studies concerning the effects of fostering students' growth mindsets in the field of education have been conducted throughout the past decades, most have been carried out in the field of science and mathematics. In the Thai context, very few studies have been found to exist in any field, especially in EFL or ESL education. Thus, this study was conducted to explore the results of applying growth mindset principles into classroom practice with the aim of encouraging students to reformulate their mindsets, leading to a change in their learning behaviors and subsequently enhance their oral communication learning achievement. To explain how instilling a growth mindset could lead to oral communication learning achievement, the conceptual framework of the study is presented below.

**Figure 1***Conceptual Framework of the Study*

As shown in figure 1, the growth mindset-based instruction was developed based on the growth mindset principles postulated by Dweck (2006) to instill a growth mindset into learners. Once a growth mindset is instilled, learners should become more likely to be motivated to learn and hence adopt productive learning behaviors which subsequently lead to oral communication learning achievement.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

The study participants constituted an intact group of first-year English major undergraduate students who were enrolled in the English Discovery Course offered at Prince of Songkla University, Surat Thani Campus in the first semester of the academic year 2022, totaling 42 participants.

Although the participants were English major students, it should be noted that the majority of them had quite low English competency with average scores of 40.28 out of 100 from the English placement test provided by the University. In addition, the implemented class was their first onsite one after they had previously spent most time learning online due to the Covid-19 epidemic, making face to face interaction quite challenging for them. The treatment—growth mindset-based instruction—was implemented in class and was based on the required course content which included talking about the weather, free-time activities, and school subjects. Prior to conducting the research, participants' consent and approval from the ethics committee were obtained.

#### **3.2 Research Instruments**

The instruments employed in the study consisted of mindset test questionnaires, lesson plans, lecturer's observation form, students' learning behavior checklist, oral communication test, and a students' log.

The mindset test questionnaire was designed based on the characteristics of a growth minded and fixed minded person as defined by Dweck (2006) with five Likert scales to examine students' mindset, whether they tended to be growth-minded or fixed minded language learners. The questionnaire included two parts, 36 questions in the first part and five open-ended questions in the second part.

In terms of mindset-based instruction lesson plans, they were formulated into eight lesson plans. Each of these was divided into three steps, namely

activating growth mindset, fostering the growth mindset, and reviewing the growth. A summary of teaching steps in three-hour lessons over eight weeks are as follows:

**Table 1**

*Summary of Teaching Steps in an Eight-Week Three-Hour Lesson Plan*

<b>Teaching steps</b>	<b>Time spending (minutes)</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Activating growth mindset	40	This step involved introducing mindset principles including both fixed mindset and growth mindset and their effects on people's success as well as showing evidence of people's success as the results of holding growth mindset in the first few lessons before presenting growth minded and fixed minded perception towards effort, failure, challenges, criticism, and success of others in subsequent lesson plans.
Fostering the growth mindset	120	This step began by setting learning goal together. Learning activities include asking and answering questions, having conversation with their classmates, giving presentation in front of class, doing impromptu speaking tasks, interviewing other students out of class and dramatization. The oral communication instructional processes were designed based on growth mindset-based principles such as motivating learners to invest their efforts to complete their tasks by themselves under the lecture's support and guidance, giving feedback, normalizing mistakes by encouraging them to do difficult tasks again when mistakes were committed to encourage active oral interaction in class, training learners how to respond to their fixed mindset thought when encountering difficult or challenging tasks, stimulating them to try new strategies in face of setback or guiding instead of blaming when problems occur.
Reviewing the growth	20	In this step, learners were required to discuss and share their learning experience such as what they felt they achieve or not achieve and why, whether they apply growth mindset in the process of learning and how it worked, or how they felt when difficult tasks were assigned and how they handle them.

To observe students' mindset as reflected through the learning behaviors and performance, a lecturer's observation form was additionally used. In order to cross-check the results with students' learning behavior checklist, the record was based on the observable behaviors of the majority of the students in class.

For monitoring self-learning behaviors, students' learning behavior checklist was employed. Their responses to the given statements and their answers to the given questions were assumed to reflect learning behaviors.

As for the oral communication test, it was designed with the aim of measuring students' oral communication learning achievement before and after the implementation of growth mindset-based instruction. The test task was a guided role play where the students were required to perform oral interaction with their partners based on a cue card given with five minutes to prepare and ten minutes for oral interaction. The interaction was recorded for marking later by two raters, based on the designed rubric. The score was given individually according to each student's performance.

The students' log was used to elicit students' attitudes towards their learning experiences upon the completion of each lesson. Students were provided with eight questions, with questions and responses given in Thai so that they could express their thoughts clearly without any language barriers.

Upon the development of the research instruments based on growth mindset principles as proposed by Dweck (2006), the instruments were validated by three experts in the field to ensure the content and construct validity by using an index of item-objective congruence (IOC). All instruments were rated appropriate as the experts' responses yielded a value for all instruments above .8. As for the oral communication test, after the validation by the experts, it was piloted with sample test-takers who were not participants in the main study before being measured for inter-rater reliability by correlating the scores from two raters,

who were the researcher and one other English lecturer. Pearson's correlation coefficient was .88, indicating strong inter-rater reliability. Once the improvement and amendment of all research instruments according to the experts' comments and the quality of the instruments were assured, they were utilized in the main study.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Prior to being taught through growth mindset-based instruction, students responded to mindset test questionnaires and took oral communication pre-test. This was followed by the implementation of eight growth mindset-based instruction lesson plans. Students were asked to record their learning experiences in the logs and evaluate their English learning behaviors on the English learning behavior checklist at four different times during the experiment. Meanwhile, the lecturer observed students' learning behaviors and completed the lecturer's observation form in every class. After the experiment, the students were asked to answer the mindset test questionnaires again before taking the immediate oral communication post-test.

The obtained data from the first part of the mindset test questionnaire were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, and the open-ended questions were categorized and analyzed using content analysis. As for the oral communication test, the dependent *t*-test was used to compare the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test. Then, the effect size of the treatment was calculated. The qualitative data elicited by employing students' logs, lecturer's observation forms, and the second part of students' learning behavior checklists were analyzed using content analysis, while the data obtained from the first part of the students' learning behavior checklists were analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentage.

#### **4. Results**

The current study was conducted to answer four key research questions. The findings are presented according to each research question as follows:

**Research question 1:** To what extent do students' mindset change after growth mindset-based instruction?

Findings from mindset test questionnaires revealed a slight increase in the average of students' responses to growth mindset statements from 4.16 to 4.20. A tendency for students' mindsets to change from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset could be perceived. However, when considering their responses to open-ended questions, the results showed that most students were already likely to hold a growth mindset before the experiment. That is, they knew that their intelligence could be altered through practice. They realized that effort was a key to their success. Although they became nervous, upset, or sad when they encountered failures and challenges or the risk of making mistakes, they insisted that they would not give up. A significant change which could be identified from their responses after the experiment was their expression of strong intention and encouragement to put the growth mindset they held into real practice.

**Research question 2:** What is the effect of growth mindset-based instruction on students' English learning behaviors?

The present study utilized students' learning behavior checklist to elicit students' English learning behaviors after growth mindset-based instruction. The instrument included two parts. The first part was for students to check their behaviors as "Yes" or "Not Yet," and the second part was for them to reflect on the change of their English learning behaviors before and after learning through the growth mindset-based instruction. The results are shown in the following table.

**Table 2**

*Percent of Students' Responses As "Yes" and "Not Yet" To Each Question In The Learning Behavior Checklist In Average*

<b>Learning Behaviors</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Not Yet</b>
1. I have learned that my English can be improved, so I try harder to practice it.	100	0
2. In this class, I tried to do things I have never had a courage to do them before	92.71	7.28
3. I spent more time to practice my English outside the class.	88.68	11.31
4. I became less concerned about the judgement or negative feedback from others.	86.82	13.17
5. I had more courage to make mistakes in class.	88.28	11.71
6. When I was assigned to do learning tasks, I started without being worried about difficulty because I wanted to improve my English through those learning tasks.	94.80	5.19
7. I tried to complete assigned tasks by myself.	96.16	3.83
8. I carefully listened to my peers' and teacher's feedback to improve myself.	99.39	0.60
9. When I could not succeed in doing something, I was not discouraged. I was ready to try again.	88.68	11.31
10. I became more focused on my learning and self-development.	94.76	5.23
11. When my classmates did a better job, I admired them and I became more motivated to try harder.	96.01	3.98
12. When I could not achieve the tasks, I tried new strategies.	97.29	2.7

As exhibited in Table 2, which shows the results on the average calculation of students' responses to the given statements at four different times, a high percentage of students believed that they engaged in productive English learning behaviors. Noticeably, all students agreed that they had learned that their English

could be improved, driving them to try harder to practice the language. Although the percentages of students' responses to each statement in the checklist concerning their learning behaviors were not consistent as they shifted up and down throughout the four times, more than 80 percent of learners reflected that they had engaged in favorable English learning behaviors.

When considering students' perceptions of the changes in their English learning behaviors as reflected through the responses to the given statements in the second part of the instrument, positive changes in their behaviors could be clearly seen. The changes which could be most clearly perceived after learning through the growth mindset-based instruction were the confidence to express themselves and communicate in class, a diminishing fear of committing mistakes, and the ability to focus more on learning. They, for example, noted that (1) "I pay more attention to my study and it makes me understand the lesson even better," (2) "I dare to speak without being afraid of making mistakes," (3) "I dare to present myself in front of class," or (4) "I have learned that when I did something wrong, I can do it again." In general, students' responses in both parts of the instruments displayed consistent findings.

To examine students' learning behaviors from other angles, the lecturer's observation form was additionally employed. The lecturer's records showed consistent results, especially in terms of students' attention to their learning. It was noted from the first class after the concepts of a growth mindset were introduced that "when the lecturer introduced the concepts about growth mindset as well as giving a tangible example, the students listened attentively and quietly, especially when the lecturer confirmed to them that their English could definitely be improved no matter what level their English was at the moment. Their eyes were sparkling and full of hope when the lecturer showed them the example of people including their lecturer who struggled from very low English competency and later became successful because of the effort and perseverance." As the weeks continued, changes in students' learning behaviors, especially their increased

confidence and courage in making mistakes, were repeatedly recorded in different forms. The lecturer also reflected on students' more active participation in class and their courage to do impromptu activities or give presentations in front of the class. However, it was remarked that not all students benefited from the implemented intervention as the change could not be observed from some groups of students.

**Research question 3:** What is the effect of growth mindset-based instruction on students' oral communication learning achievement?

The data obtained from the oral communication pre-test and post-test mean scores revealed the positive effects of the growth mindset-based instruction on the enhancement of students' oral communication learning achievement. Displayed in Table 3 below is the results of students' oral communication test.

**Table 3**

*Comparison of Oral Communication Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Scores*

	<b>N</b>	<b>Total Scores</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t-statistics</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
Pre-test	42	24	11.44	2.93		
Post-test	42	24	14.92	2.32	8.243*	.0001

\*significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 3, the mean score on the oral communication pre-test was 11.44, and this increased significantly to 14.92 on the post-test. Hedges'  $g$  formula found a large effect size ( $g = 1.31$ ). Based on the findings, a tendency for students' oral communication to improve could be perceived. As growth mindset-based instruction is not an English language teaching method, it may not be possible to directly attribute learners' improvement to the growth-mindset based instruction; however, it is possible that it had positive effects on students' oral communication skills development.

The following table shows each aspect of students' oral communication learning achievement.

**Table 4**

*Oral Communication Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Scores In Each Aspect*

	Pretest				Posttest		Pair Dif		
	N	Total	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	t-	Sig.
Fluency	42	4	1.83	0.53	2.48	0.46	0.649	6.155	.0001
Content	42	4	1.89	0.45	2.60	0.47	0.714	6.382	.0001
Pronunciation	42	4	1.97	0.52	2.33	0.39	0.363	4.060	.0001
Grammar	42	4	1.79	0.51	2.30	0.39	0.512	5.271	.0001
Confidence	42	4	2.02	0.61	2.5	0.49	0.476	4.215	.0001
Effort	42	4	1.94	0.48	2.69	0.42	0.750	7.633	.0001

\* significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

The above table shows the increase in students' mean scores in all aspects of the oral communication achievement test, with the highest mean scores for effort and content. The results of the effect size calculation using Hedges'  $g$  formula revealed the size as large for fluency, content, grammar, confidence, and effort ( $g = 1.3, 1.54, 1.12, 0.86, \text{ and } 1.66$ , respectively), while the size of the effect on pronunciation was medium ( $g = 0.78$ ), leading to the conclusion that the growth mindset-based instruction generated positive effects on students' learning in all aspects of oral communication, especially their effort and content delivery.

**Research question 4:** What are students' attitudes towards their learning experiences through growth mindset-based instruction?

To elicit further information on the effectiveness of the growth mindset-based instruction on students' learning improvement, their attitudes towards the learning experiences was examined by employing students' logs. Included in the logs were eight questions which elicited students' reflections on their learning experiences and attitudes.

Students' positive attitudes towards the learning experiences through growth mindset-based instruction were demonstrated extensively in the logs. Their favorable attitudes could be perceived through their satisfaction in their learning success. They, for instance, recorded that (1) "My success today is my courage to answer the lecturer's questions. I can do it because I am not afraid to make mistakes as I used to in the past," (2) "I raise my hand to answer questions in class because my thought has changed. I believe that everything can be developed," (3) "I dare to answer the lecturer's questions. I think if I try doing something I have never dared to do before, I will be able to unlock something inside me. I feel very good about myself after I try it," and (4) "I dare to sit in the front. I want to try it once in my learning experience." Though many positive responses could be extensively perceived, it should be noted that there were some students, though very few, who could not perceive their success as they said they had not yet experienced any success in the classes.

Students' favorable attitudes were also reflected through the perception of their improvement in terms of gaining confidence. In other words, feeling more confident to do things they were previously afraid of made the learning experience satisfying for them. Many of them, for example, responded in the logs that (1) "I am satisfied because I feel more confident to express myself. I am afraid that if I don't do it today, I might not have a chance to do it again," (2) "I feel satisfied because I dare to answer the lecturer's questions. I had always been afraid of doing it because I was afraid of making mistakes. I tried it today and I feel very good because I feel I have some improvement," or (3) "I have become more courageous after learning about growth mindset."

Students' constructive attitudes could be recognized through the positive reflections which were repeatedly found throughout the time of the instruction, with the most common themes including their capacity to overcome their fear of making mistakes and their perception of learning improvement as a result of their learning goals and gains in confidence. Other reasons for student satisfaction

included being aware of their acquisition of knowledge and skills such as vocabulary knowledge, sentence structures, pronunciation, and speaking skills. Being impressed by the way the lecturer treated them was another cause of student satisfaction as they recorded such treatment made them feel relaxed and comfortable. For instance, they noted that (1) “The lecturer always supports me throughout my learning. What the lecturer says in class is really encouraging,” (2) “The lecturer advises me instead of blaming when I make mistakes,” and (3) “I like what the lecturer teaches me about growth mindsets. It motivates me to move forward and improve my learning.” Even those who had not yet perceived much improvement expressed their intention to further improve themselves by stating that “I need more time.”

When it comes to the benefits of growth mindset-based instruction on their learning, students’ responses reconfirmed their positive perceptions. Advantages that were extensively remarked upon included obtaining confidence and courage in expressing themselves and the ability to do what they had been afraid of. Found in the logs were such responses as (1) “Learning through growth mindset-based instruction has great benefits for me. It helps me try doing something I have never done before. It also helps build my learning confidence,” (2) “After learning about growth mindsets, I dare to speak more,” (3) “I had been the person who dared not express myself or speak in class. Now, everything has become the opposite,” and (4) “After learning about growth mindsets, I am not afraid to make mistakes.” In addition, many students revealed that their attitudes and thoughts had changed after they learned about the growth mindset. They, for example, expressed their strong sentiment that (1) “My thinking has changed since the first day I learned about growth mindsets. I have become a more positive thinker. I enjoy doing something challenging,” (2) “Learning about growth mindsets is very useful for me. After the lecturer taught me about growth mindsets, I have become less worried about my study and I have more desire to learn,” and (3) “I have become a more positive person and I am not afraid of failures.” Many other students additionally remarked that learning about growth mindsets encouraged them to try harder and

improve themselves. Even the student whose responses showed no change in terms of his/her learning improvement throughout the learning processes noted in the log that “Learning about growth mindsets has some benefits to me sometimes, although it is just in a short period of time.”

As evidenced by students’ consistent responses to different questions in the logs, it could be concluded that they had favorable attitudes towards the growth mindset-based instruction, especially in terms of their learning improvement, confidence gains, and learning motivation.

## **5. Discussion**

Students’ answers to the closed questionnaire questions showed a tendency for students’ mindsets to change from fixed mindsets to growth mindsets after they were exposed to growth mindset-based instruction, although the change was small. However, it should be noted that students’ responses to the open-ended questions of the mindset test questionnaire did not reveal such changes as it seemed many students already held a growth mindset before the instruction period began.

To discuss these findings, it should first be remarked that undergraduate students are considered adult learners who are likely to have been through certain tough experiences in their lives which could affect their mindsets. As Dweck (2006) points the knowledge that people obtain about a growth mindset can cause a change of their belief about themselves and their lives, but the new belief cannot completely replace an old belief. The stronger belief will direct the way people think, feel, and act. Although the findings revealed that students already largely held a growth mindset, the knowledge and experience they gained from learning through growth mindset-based instruction could be assumed to have helped them formulate a stronger growth mindset which will eventually influence the way they think about themselves and their lives as growth minded people.

In terms of the effectiveness of growth mindset-based instruction in promoting students' productive English learning behaviors, which was the second question of the current study, the students' learning behavior checklists and the lecturer's observations revealed that students possessed productive learning behaviors and that some of their learning behaviors changed in favorable ways after they had learned through the implemented instruction. Based on this, it could be claimed that growth mindset-based instruction promoted students' positive English learning behaviors, which, in turn, led them to English learning attainment. The first factor causing such changes could be the knowledge and understanding about the concept of a growth mindset, which supported their existing beliefs about factors enhancing English learning success. It should be noted that most, if not all, students knew well what they had to do in order to become successful English learners. This could be clearly seen from the high percentages of the responses in their English learning behavior checklists that indicated positive learning behaviors. However, their ability to put such knowledge into practice is still doubtful. Moreover, their existing beliefs were possibly not all stable as for many of the students these shifted over time. Learning through growth mindset-based instruction may have strengthened the existing beliefs and that could explain why they found their learning behaviors had changed in productive ways. Nevertheless, as noted from the findings, not all students exhibited positive learning behaviors after learning through the implemented intervention. In fact, it possibly takes time to foster a growth mindset which is strong enough to affect one's behaviors, and different students in this study needed different amount of time. This is consistent with the findings from other studies such as Lou and Noels (2019), who remark that intervention could benefit only some students and in only some contexts.

The results additionally showed a statistically significant improvement in terms of students' oral communication after exposure to the growth mindset-based instruction.

The first explanation could be that this improvement was due to students' better insights into growth mindsets. Through the growth mindset-based instruction, they learned and experienced that their English ability could be improved through practice. They understood that effort was the key to their success while mistakes and failures were a normal, crucial part of learning and improving. They were exposed to different situations, showing them that difficulties or challenges did not indicate an inadequate ability, but were opportunities to stretch their potential. Students might have known about all these concepts or have held a growth mindset to a certain extent already. However, the knowledge without direct experience may not have been forceful enough to drive them to put it into practice. The reconfirmation of their existing perceptions about growth mindset which learners experienced during this period may have activated their commitment to their learning goals and subsequently promoted their oral communication learning achievement. This is well supported by students' feedback on the learning experience in their logs. Many of them reflected that their thinking had changed since their first day of learning about growth mindsets. They became less worried about making mistakes and more motivated towards learning. Dweck (2006) also affirms that students' academic progress could be achieved through growth mindset-based instruction.

In each lesson, the growth mindset-based instruction unfolded in a step-by-step process—beginning with the introduction of key mindset concepts along with benefits of growth mindsets to learning improvement, followed by opportunities to put growth mindset thinking into practice through different challenging tasks, and concluding with a review and reflection. This teaching process may have gradually fostered students' growth mindset as well as strengthened their existing growth mindset, which subsequently aided in their learning improvement. Of course, growth mindset-based instruction is not an oral communication pedagogical method, yet it could be regarded as an effective intervention that fosters students' uptake of learning opportunities and encourages progress in learners' performance. In the present study, students' reflections in the logs and the learning

behavior checklist could strongly support this claim, as they said that, after instruction, they paid more attention to their studies and they wanted to learn more. They also dared to speak because they were not afraid of committing mistakes as they were ready to try again. These reflections clearly showed constructive behaviors which contributed to their learning improvement; as Dweck (2006) confirms, a growth mindset can be developed and when individuals have a growth mindset, they are likely to have higher achievement. Blackwell et al. (2007) and Dweck (2015) additionally highlight that changing learners' mindsets can cause an effect on academic behaviors and boost accomplishment.

Furthermore, students' improvement detected in this study could possibly derive from a normalization of making mistakes, which was one of the crucial aspects of the growth mindset-based instruction. This instructional process was carried out by assigning students to do difficult and challenging tasks to get used to making mistakes and overcoming their fear of making mistakes under the positive support from the lecturer. This learning processes may have contributed to students' improvement in their oral communication. Janudom (2021) has pointed out that learners' fear of making mistakes is commonly observed in an EFL classroom. Similarly, Fung and Min (2016) note that anxiety and lack of confidence caused by the fear of making mistakes are some of the main factors obstructing learners' effective communication. More recent research also reconfirms the correlation between learners' high anxiety levels and fixed mindsets (Barber, 2023). Once a learner begins to develop a growth mindset, their fear of making mistakes, as well as their anxiety, could diminish, leading them to perform better in oral communication. Their reflections in their logs could additionally support this claim as they mentioned that after learning about growth mindsets, they were not afraid of making mistakes. Besides this, students' oral communication improvement could be explained through the viewpoint of learning motivation. Once students were instilled with a growth mindset, they believed that their language ability could be improved through their effort and proper strategies, and accordingly, they tended to become more motivated to learn. As they indicated,

they tried to do what they had never dared to do before in order to improve themselves, such as asking or answering questions in class. If motivation is one of the crucial predictors of language learning success as Gardner (1985), Oxford (1996), and Gass and Selinker (2008) claim, fostering students' growth mindset is the key as mindsets, according to Dweck (2006, 2015) strongly influence motivation. Similarly, Lou and Noels (2016) confirm that language mindsets and language learners' motivation are linked. Hence, it could be claimed that growth mindset-based instruction implemented in this study boosted students' learning motivation which promoted productive learning behaviors and subsequently brought about learning improvement.

As for students' attitudes towards growth mindset-based instruction, the findings elicited from students' logs clearly demonstrated their favorable attitudes towards the learning experience through the given instruction. Such positive attitudes towards the instruction could stem from the repeated reinforcement of the belief in students' ability to improve themselves, which possibly in turn motivated them to try what they had never dared to do or encouraged them to handle difficult assigned tasks. Once they experienced success in these tasks, they felt proud of themselves and this feeling helped them establish positive attitudes.

The way the lecturer performed in delivering instructions as well as feedback could be another crucial factor affecting students' positive perception of the learning experiences. Students' ability to improve was regularly reinforced by giving guidance, constructive feedback, and chances for them to do what they could not previously do. Lou and Noels (2020) found that students' learning performance was influenced by their perception of the teacher's belief in their ability. According to Dweck and Yeager (2019), students tend to perform productively in learning if teachers' belief in their improvability is perceived. In the present study, the lecturer created a friendly learning atmosphere to make students feel secure and relaxed when they were learning or working on assigned tasks. At the same time, the lecturer did not put students under pressure, even if

the lessons or the assigned tasks were difficult. Brown (2001) posits that students experience uncertain feelings and language anxiety when attending foreign language classes. The teacher can help students overcome such feelings by creating a relaxed atmosphere and building good relationships and trust with students by encouraging them to try new learning experiences, guiding and supporting them when they show anxiety or make mistakes, and always giving them second chances with the aim to help them learn rather than to judge. According to Brock and Hundley (2016), students cannot learn well with a teacher they do not like. Students' reflections of positive sentiments towards the lecturer as an understanding and supportive person in their logs also strongly support this claim. It could be said that once the students like their lecturer, they are more likely to like what they learn.

Having chances to experience the feeling of success could be another factor leading to positive reflections. In fact, although sometimes the success seems simple, such simple successes create confidence to try something more difficult and build their self-esteem, which is regarded as a crucial component of learning attainment (Brown, 2000). This could be considered one of the key factors activating students' favorable attitudes towards their learning experience revealed in the present study.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of growth mindset-based instruction in promoting students' oral communication learning achievement could be claimed based on the findings presented previously. The findings concerning their productive English learning behaviors, as well as their favorable attitude towards the learning experience, could additionally support this claim. However, there are previous studies that have reported contradictory results. For example, Kaijanaho and Tirronen (2018) conducted a study with third-year students from two computer science courses to investigate their mindsets in relation to their grades and found that there was no correlation between the students' mindsets and their course grades. Such a contradictory finding may have resulted from the different

methodology applied. As participants' computer skills and knowledge were not measured before taking the course, their course grades could stem from their existing competence before taking the course rather than their mindsets.

## **6. Limitations and Recommendations**

The findings from this study have revealed the contribution of growth mindset-based instruction to students' improvement in terms of their oral communication learning, productive learning behaviors, and their favorable attitudes. The study results confirmed Dweck's studies (2006, 2007) together with many other relevant previous studies such as Blackwell et al. (2007), Dweck (2010), and Zeng et al. (2016). Inevitably, some limitations existed. For example, it would be useful to examine the correlations of students' mindset and their oral communication learning achievement by pairing or matching students' oral scores and their responses in mindset test questionnaires so that the claim concerning the effects of the treatment on students' achievement could be more convincing.

## **7. Conclusion**

Growth mindsets have been proven to predict students' academic growth as well as success in their lives. The current study also showed a tendency for students' learning to improve after they were exposed to growth mindset-based instruction. Hence, growth mindsets should be taught and fostered, especially in EFL classes, where students encounter various psychological barriers. Definitely, a growth mindset is not a panacea, and mindsets cannot be changed overnight. Also, some students might already hold certain growth mindset concepts, yet be unable to effectively put them into practice if their growth mindset is not strong enough. Teaching them and helping them foster their growth mindset will help them to put the mindset into practice, which should subsequently enhance their learning improvement. It should also be noted that growth mindset-based instruction is not an EFL teaching technique. Instead, it should be understood as an intervention used to support students' growth mindset when they are learning English in order to reconfirm to them that they can always improve their language

skills through hard work and effort while encouraging them to embrace challenges and stretching their full potential when encountering difficulties. They should also be made to realize that hard work and effort helps them bounce back when facing failures. Encouraging students to focus on learning and improving themselves, not proving their smartness, is the key in integrating growth mindset-based instruction in an EFL class. The findings from the present study confirm that fostering a growth mindset in an EFL class is a worthwhile practice that an EFL lecturer can and should do to motivate learners to generate productive academic behaviors which will subsequently lead to their learning achievement. Although the findings revealed that not all students may benefit from the intervention, through gradual reinforcement of growth mindsets with different strategies, productive outcomes could be expected.

## **8. About the Author**

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