

Group Dynamics and Growth Mindset in Japanese EFL

Many Japanese university graduates struggle with practical English communication, despite receiving extensive English education aimed at overcoming a traditionally grammar-centric approach (MEXT, 2021). While recent curriculum reforms have emphasized communicative competence, classrooms often remain focused on form and accuracy due to the washback effects of standardized tests. As a result, learners rarely experience the dynamic, interactive communication necessary for real-world language use, which hypothetically links to students' motivation for continuous language learning. Having said that, although the integration of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) offers new affordances for communication practice, there is limited understanding of how it can support the development of learner mindsets and interpersonal interaction in EFL contexts.

This study examines this issue through the lens of growth mindset theory (Dweck, 2007), an underexplored perspective in Japanese language education. Specifically, it investigates how group dynamics (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003)—particularly social comparison (Smith, 2000) and peer exposure time—influence shifts in learners' beliefs about their communicative abilities and shape their strategies during communication difficulties. While many studies focus on the effectiveness of digital tools, this research highlights the cognitive and social-emotional dimensions of language learning in a CALL classroom to better understand the circumstances.

A mixed-method approach was adopted to analyze the interactional and psychological development of 60 Japanese EFL learners enrolled in a university-level English communication course. Students engaged in weekly communicative tasks supported by CALL affordances for a 15-week semester. Pre- and post-course questionnaires, adapted from Dweck's mindset scale and translated into Japanese for clarity, were administered to assess changes in learners' beliefs about language learning and their perceived ability to grow through effort. In parallel, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) was used to examine audio and video recordings of classroom interactions, focusing on non-verbal cues (e.g., gaze, gesture), turn-taking, L1 use, and repair strategies during moments of communicative breakdown.

Quantitative results revealed that social comparison significantly influenced learners' growth mindset shifts, especially in terms of mastery goals and persistence when facing difficulties. Students exposed to high-performing peers tended to adopt more effort-driven attitudes toward communication tasks. Qualitative findings further demonstrated that personal goal-setting and emotionally salient classroom events, such as group successes or peer encouragement, played a crucial role in stimulating mindset transformation. However, a consistent pattern emerged: students often prioritized technological tools (e.g., automatic translation, online dictionaries) over collaborative peer assistance when struggling, potentially limiting opportunities for face-to-face negotiation of meaning.

These findings suggest that fostering a growth mindset requires more than positive messaging—it depends on intentional structuring of peer interactions, task design,

and supportive group dynamics. Moreover, while technology can scaffold learning, over-reliance may unintentionally reduce opportunities for communicative risk-taking and peer bonding. This study underscores the need for pedagogical interventions that balance technology integration with interpersonal engagement, helping learners develop both the mindset and the skills necessary for real-world English communication.