

Can teaching methodology affect the Growth Mindset of university students in one semester?

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Summary

Students with a growth mindset show a greater ability to overcome challenges in their learning (Dweck, 2007). By creating educational environments where intelligence is not felt to be implicitly assessed, students feel comfortable taking on subjects they find difficult, and thus learn more (Yaeger et al. 2019). However, in environments where students feel their intelligence is in question, they tend to take fewer risks and play to their strengths, avoiding failure but at the same time improvement (Limeri et al. 2020). Such students are considered to be of a fixed mindset. This project sets out to identify whether new teaching methods, necessitated by the restrictions faced during the Coronavirus pandemic, could be a potential tool in helping students of a foreign language move away from such a way of thinking.

Description of the project

- We studied students between 17 and 28 years old, who study English as a foreign language in one of their first- or second-year modules. The students were following a hybrid system of learning, in which they physically attended classes 2 out of 3 weeks and attended classes remotely for 1 out of 3 weeks. They were given a level test in week 1, at the start of the semester, and in week 14 of the semester.
- We tested some teaching methodology to see if it would demonstrate improvements in learning and heightened growth mindset perception, when compared to control groups.



Students studying at ESIC Valencia¹

Materials and methodology

64 students at B2/C1 level were analysed.

They studied with one teacher during the semester. The teachers in the control groups were not given any information about the project and those in the experimental groups encouraged growth mindset thinking using a variety of methods and tools, such as online platforms which encourage students to work together – shifting the focus away from individual ability and towards collaboration. They also took part in problem-solving activities, role plays and case studies, as well as regular vocabulary-building exercises. Throughout this process, teachers in the experimental groups encouraged students with positive reinforcement using terms like “not yet”, achievement scales and can-do statements.

- ✓ A level test was given at the start of the semester to the experimental groups and the control groups at B2 and C1 level in English.
- ✓ They studied for 14 teaching weeks and then repeated the level test.
- ✓ They were also given the Growth Mindset questionnaire at 14 weeks.



Transformative Learning in action²

Results

There was no significant difference between the results obtained by the experimental group and the control group in English or Spanish. Neither were there significant differences between the English and Spanish groups in the growth mindset level.

Conclusions

It was concluded that Growth Mindset is not significantly affected by teaching methodology in a 14-week period. However, this is a very short timeframe when compared to similar studies, and first-year students have previously been found to veer towards a fixed mindset, regardless of methods used (Reid & Ferguson, 2014). Further studies could take this into account, either by comparing changes between first- and second-year students, or by measuring the development of students' mindsets over a two-year period. It is perhaps this latter approach which may demonstrate the benefits of the methods used in this study.