

Cultivating a Growth Mindset in Japanese EFL Learners with a Presentation-Practice-Production-Based Approach

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Abstract

In this increasingly globalized world, the need for English is growing in Japan, too. However, learning English is by no means an easy task for Japanese EFL learners, who have no natural exposure to and need for real life communication in English. Thus, Japanese EFL learners may need to exert determined efforts to learn English. In this exploratory essay, the author focuses on “growth mindset”, the belief that language abilities can be improved through efforts. After showing survey results on mindsets, the author introduces an approach that can help cultivate a growth mindset in Japanese EFL learners.

Key Words: growth mindset; Japanese EFL learners;
Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP)-
based approach

1. Introduction

1.1 Learning English in an EFL Environment

Although the value and the importance of learning a foreign language for educational and professional development is well recognized, a number of learners tend to regard the process of learning a foreign language as a struggle by experiencing failures (Horwitz, 2001). For Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) learners this is unarguably the case. Due to drastic differences in phonological and grammatical systems between English and Japanese, it is extremely difficult for Japanese EFL learners and English teachers even to speak English fluently and accurately (Narita, 2013). It is also argued that, in the current Japanese EFL environment in which students and teachers do not necessarily use English for communication outside the classroom, using English in the classroom can be physically and mentally exhausting (Terashima, 2009).

A look at Japanese learners' English proficiency reveals a worrisome picture. Japan has been at the bottom in the test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) scores, compared with its neighboring Asian EFL countries, including China, Korea and Taiwan (ETS, 2017). By the Common European Framework

of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standard, an international benchmark for second language proficiency with six proficiency levels (C₂, C₁, B₂, B₁, A₂, A₁), about 80% of Japanese learners are regarded as Basic Users at A2 (Negishi, Takada, & Tono, 2012). This dismal picture shows the great challenge faced by Japanese EFL learners as great efforts and commitment are required to remedy the situation despite the L1-specific difficulties.

1.2 A Growth Mindset

Motivation plays a crucial part in leading students to make consistent efforts in English learning in the school setting. (Pintrich, 2003). In this essay, I will take a closer look at “mindsets” developed by Carol Dweck and her associates (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995; Dweck, 2006), succinctly described as individual learners' assumption about various human attributes, such as intelligence and personality. Mindsets are divided into two categories, i.e., growth mindset and fixed mindset (e.g., Dweck, 2006). Some people may regard such tributes as being static or fixed. For example, an individual may believe that some people are born intelligent or immoral, and that there is nothing that can be done to change these inherent traits (a fixed mind set), while others may regard these traits as being more malleable and that individuals have the

capacity to change them (a growth mindset). However, it would be an oversimplification to assume that a person's mindset comes in a clear-cut dichotomy that one possesses either a growth or a fixed mindset. In fact, as Dweck (op.cit.) points out, it is possible for an individual to have a growth mindset in one particular domain and a fixed mindset in another. For example, an individual may believe that artistic ability is a predetermined entity, that one can either be artistically talented or not. Meanwhile the same individual may also believe that sporting ability is something that can be developed through concerted efforts and practice. In the case of learning English, an optimal learner mindset comprises a belief that one's efforts and hard work can affect his/her language learning ability (a growth mindset) as opposite to the belief that one's language learning ability would never be improved through efforts (a fixed mindset).

2. A Brief Survey of Mindsets

To examine the degree to which Japanese EFL learners possess a growth mindset, the author conducted a questionnaire survey with English major students (ES) and non-English major students (NES), based on the assumption that ES are more motivated and proficient in English than NES. The goal of the survey was to reveal the role of a growth mindset in students' motivation in learning English. The ES group included 26 third-year students at national university of education who were enrolled in the required course "Teaching methodology III" in order to obtain English teaching certification. The NES group contained 21 first-year students enrolled in the "English I" course and 45 second-year students enrolled in the "Foreign language communication (English)" course. Hence, a total of 66 students attending general English courses ("English I" and "Foreign language communication") were categorized as NES in the study. The author used a questionnaire created by Leis (2018) that consisted of three parts. Part 1 collected background information including the student's age, sex, and major; Part 2 focused on the student's beliefs on mindset and Part 3 concerned their action related to mindset. Part 2 and 3, each containing 12 questions, were sub-divided into four sections: speaking, writing, reading and listening with three questions for each category. Each question had a six-point scale ranging from one (absolutely not) to six (absolutely so) (See Appendix A). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the 12 items in Part 2 (belief)

was .93 and .79 for Part 3 (action). The average score in Part 2 (belief) was 59.5 for ES and 47.7 for NES, with significant inter-group differences with a moderate effect size, $t(90) = 5.727, p = .00, r = .52$. The average score in Part 3 (action) was 44.8 for ES and 34.1 for NES, with significant inter-group difference with a moderate effect size, $t(90) = 5.994, p = .00, r = .54$.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Part 2 (belief)

	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>
ES	59.5	26	5.132
NES	47.712	66	14.585

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Part 3 (action)

	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>
ES	44.764	26	7.495
NES	34.164	66	7.993

To further investigate whether students are likely to put their belief into action, the correlations between belief (Part2) and action (Part3) were examined using Pearson's correlation coefficients. The results showed that there was a moderate correlation in ES ($r = .56$), but no correlation in NES ($r = .13$). These results indicated that ES had a higher degree of growth mindset both in believe and action in English learning and were more likely to put their belief into action than NES. It can thus be taken as evidence that a growth mindset plays a crucial role in keeping learners highly motivated to learn English.

3. Suggestions

3.1 Theoretical Implications

The survey results highlight the importance of a growth mindset for Japanese EFL learners. However, as Lou and Noels (2016) suggest, students' mindsets can change and develop with proper assistance of teachers in the classroom setting. In this regard, several pedagogical suggestions can be given. First, teachers can give students an explicit explanation of the two different mindsets, with due emphasis on the crucial role of the growth mindset in learning English. The prevailing sense of frustration among Japanese EFL learners has led students to give up making efforts easily, feeling their lack of talent is one big hurdle against successful learning. Therefore the

idea that their ability can develop with hard work must be encouraging. Second, teachers can instruct students on the positive role of failure in the process of learning to prepare students to deal with failures properly in classroom tasks or activities (Lou & Noels, 2016). To this end, praises should be given focusing on students' efforts rather than talent, while comments should be focusing on the possible causes of failures (Dweck, 2006). As L2 learners who have developed their skills through trial and error, Japanese EFL teachers can share their learning experiences with students, with the message that English can be learned through mistakes and errors. Third, teachers should identify the objective and requirements of the course and ways for students to achieve these goals effectively (Leis & Wilson, 2017; Nussbaum & Dweck, 2008). As Mercer and Ryan (2009) suggest, even in cases of learners with a strong growth mindset, they may feel lost without the tools and strategies to guide their effort in the right direction. Despite a required English-medium instructional setting, judicious and selective use of Japanese in giving classroom directions may help students improve and maintain their growth mindset. Finally, successful learning experiences are essential to establish and maintain a growth mindset. Nussbaum, and Dweck (2008) suggest that learners will be highly motivated if they feel they are constantly developing and achieving the desired outcomes after making due efforts. In the Drawing from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002), Yamaoka (2018) found in her quantitative study with Japanese EFL remedial students that a sense of fulfillment had a stronger effect on students' motivation than autonomy and relatedness. She suggests that teachers focus on monitoring students' small progress or improvements in lesson planning and offer informational feedback and encouragement. In a pedagogically oriented study, Nasu (2017) reinforces the crucial role of a growth mindset for Japanese EFL learners and suggests that explicit instruction on the essential learning points should be given, followed by purpose-designed activities to deepen learners' understanding, which is argued to have the merit of avoiding confusion and disorientation on the students' part.

3.2 A PPP-Based Approach and a Growth Mindset

In accordance with the suggestions above, the author proposes a Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP)-based approach for Japanese EFL learners. PPP starts with an explicit presentation of the specific new forms

and meanings, followed by accuracy-focused practice, and completes with the production stage in which "learners would be required to produce language more spontaneously, based on meanings the learner himself or herself would want to express" (Skehan, 1998, p.93). In the presentation stage, as the grammatical rules are explicitly explained either in L1 or L2, learners would less likely feel confused or lost. In the presentation stage that follows, learners are engaged in from easier to more difficult exercises. This gives students a sense of accomplishment as the activities are designed on a gradual basis. In cases of failure, students can go back to practice in the easier tasks before making another attempt at the failed one. This practice would teach them the importance of repeated consistent efforts as the essence of a growth mindset. In the production stage, learners are given the freedom to practice with their chosen grammatical items, words or expressions. The author suggests that task design for this stage should also be based on a gradual basis, i.e., moving from tasks that require to use specific grammatical items, words or expressions towards ones without that requirement, or students are allowed to use any linguistic resources acquired. This design would increase learners' chances of success, hence the feeling of accomplishment and progress. In cases of failure, teachers can explain the reasons for learners' poor performance and give helpful guidance for their next attempt. However, rejected by the proponents of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), this PPP-based approach is criticized for having serious limitations and weaknesses. For example, Willis (2004) mentions that language learning is a complex process that does not proceed in a linear manner. Skehan (1998) states that "such an approach is now out of fashion" (p.94) and White (1988) discredits the PPP-based approach as a meaning-impoverished methodology. In addition to these claimed disadvantages, the author finds the approach also lacking in meaningful input from the teachers and interaction between the teacher and students and among the students themselves. Possible remedies to these problems are to be discussed in the following section.

3.3 Practical Suggestions for Improving the Approach

With the aim of cultivating learners' growth mindset, several suggestions are put forward to improve the PPP-based approach. In the presentation stage, teachers can open the lesson with a small talk to provide students with

a respectable amount of input of high quality. The talk can be relevant to the topic to be taught for the lesson with grammatical items in the previous lesson and those to be introduced in the new one. Teachers are expected to involve students in the interaction with opportunities to elicit students' output. The following excerpt is an example of the small talk.

I went shopping in Shibuya yesterday. Have you ever been there? OK, I wanted to buy a new jacket to wear this autumn. I found a nice brown jacket and blue one. Another red jacket also looked very good. It was very difficult to decide. If you were me, which would you buy? I finally bought a red jacket. I will wear it sometime soon when autumn comes. Do you want to see me wearing it? After I bought the jacket, I went into an electric appliance store. I found a very cool personal computer. I really wanted to buy it. But it was too expensive to me, and I couldn't buy it, I thought, "If I had a lot of money, I could buy it". (Sato, et al., 2015, p.42)

This small talk presents the target grammar point "the subjunctive mood". Although the usage pattern for this specific mood is new for the students, its meaning can be inferred from the context. The teacher then explains the rule of the target structure either in English or Japanese with some example sentences. At this stage, it is crucial that the most essential points be taught explicitly so that students can acquire the knowledge with sufficient accuracy, i.e., explicit knowledge with which they can control, monitor and reflect on in their thinking process more effectively and smoothly without being confused in the subsequent stages of practice and production (奈須, 2017). "Parroting"--mechanical imitation and repetition in the practice stage in the traditional PPP is criticized for being based on the habit formation theory (Willis, 1996, 2004; Izumi, 2009). It is suggested that more complex tasks involving active imitation and repetition aimed at connecting form with meaning and contextualized practice be employed after pattern drills. For example, the teacher may ask the students to make their own sentences with a target structure, and to memorize them before practicing with partners in a free talk. This moving from easier (pattern drill) to more difficult (communicative practice) tasks on a gradual basis allows students to feel a sense of achievement, contributing

to a growth mindset. To maintain their motivation, the teacher is expected to be encouraging and to give positive feedbacks when students fail (Dweck, 2006; Lou & Noels, 2016). Finally, in the production stage, students are required to use the language in a real communicative setting. However, as learners may feel unwilling to make efforts in tasks with a high risk of failure (Leis, 2014), clear directions should be given on specific task requirements and how they can be met effectively (Leis & Wilson, 2017; Nussbaum, & Dweck, 2008). The teacher can start with a closed focused task in which students are required to use specific structures following a given format. This task would offer the students chances of success and thus a sense of achievement. An open unfocused task is then assigned where students are free to choose which grammatical items to use and how they can use them. To prepare Japanese EFL students for the possible failures in difficult tasks which may lead to a loss of motivation, it is crucial for task design to be based on a gradual basis throughout the stages, as encouraging a gradual progress is more effective for cultivating and maintaining a growth mindset. Figure 1 illustrates the suggested sequence of implementing the approach.

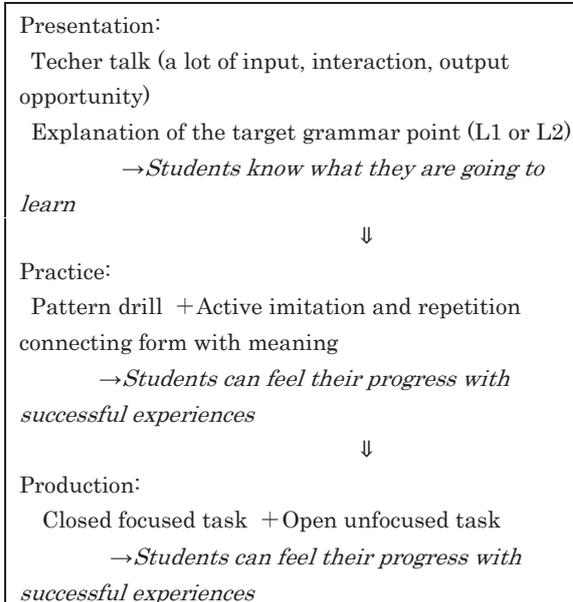


Figure 1. A revised PPP-based approach for cultivating a growth mindset

The author argues for maximum English-medium instruction (with the exception of a few occasions, e.g., explanation for grammar) on the ground that English-medium lessons are found to help improve students' motivation to use English (Koga & Sato, 2013; Sato

& Koga, 2013). This increase in motivation can be accounted for with reference to the notion of “possible selves”, which Markus and Nurius (1986) define as “the ideal selves that we would very much like to become” (p. 954). In this sense, the teacher who delivers the lesson in English would serve as a “possible self” for the students who would also wish to communicate using English as competently. I would thus suggest that an English-medium lesson based on a revised PPP-based approach delivered holds the potential in fostering students’ growth mindset towards becoming better English users.

4. Conclusion

In this increasingly globalized world, language teachers are faced with the daunting task to educate learners to be globally-minded citizens with the ability to communicate across cultures using a foreign language. As a second language shared by users across the world, English as an international language would hold its dominant place unwaveringly at present as well as in the foreseeable future. To respond to the challenge brought by the overwhelming power of English as a lingua franca, Japanese students are pressured to become competent communicators in English. However, we should recognize the difficulty in learning English in the Japanese EFL environment, which calls for learners’ incessant efforts and determination. With a focus on a growth mindset and its facilitating role in making good learners, the author has introduced a revised PPP-based approach and demonstrated its potential in the development of a growth mindset. However, the general trend for English teaching and learning to adopt a communicative approach (e.g., CLT, TBLT) evokes further discussion on possible ways to improve students’ growth mindset using communicative approaches. Empirical studies are needed to explore in depth the features of the growth and the fixed mindset and their relations with motivation, learning behaviors and outcomes. Further investigation of these issues will contribute to improving the quality of English lessons to promote EFL learners’ motivation and to help them develop a growth mindset. It is hoped that this exploratory essay would provide some inspirations for practitioners and researchers to consider the role of mindset in EFL pedagogy in Japan.

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Appendix A

英語学習に関するアンケート

Part 2

パート2ではあなたが次の事柄にどの程度共感するかを1（絶対そうではないと思う）から6（非常にそう思う）の中から一つを選んでお答えください。

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1. 絶対そうではないと思う | 2. そう思わない | 3. どちらかというと思わない |
| 4. ややそう思う | 5. そう思う | 6. 非常にそう思う |

Speaking

1. どんなに頑張っても練習しても英語の発音はネイティブスピーカー並みにならないだろう。()
2. スピーキングテストで高い点数を取れるのは先生に好かれている学生である。()
3. 自分が英語で話しているときに、教師が自分の英語のすべての間違いを直すと、恥ずかしいと感じる()

Writing

4. 英作文能力は生まれつきだと思う。一生懸命練習しても能力の向上には影響はない。()
5. 教師が自分の英作文の誤りをすべて直すと、恥ずかしいと感じる。()
6. どうせあまり上達しないから、英作文を練習する意味があまりない。()

Reading

7. たとえどんなに難しい英語の本を読んでも、英語読解能力は上がらないだろう。()
8. どんなにたくさん英語の本を読んでも英語読解能力は上がらないだろう。()
9. 英文を読んで最もうまく理解できるのはたくさん読む練習した人ではなく、生まれつきの能力のある人だろう。()

Listening

10. 英語のリスニング能力を上達させることは不可能である。できる人はできる、できない人はできない。()
11. 英語を聞き取り理解する能力の高い人は外国語を習得する生まれつきの能力を持っている()
12. 練習しても上達しないから、英語のリスニングを練習する意味があまりない。()

Part 3

パート3ではあなたが次の事柄にどの程度共感するかを1（絶対そうではないと思う）から6（非常にそう思う）の中から一つを選んでお答えください。

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1. 絶対そうではないと思う | 2. そう思わない | 3. どちらかというと思わない |
| 4. ややそう思う | 5. そう思う | 6. 非常にそう思う |

Speaking

13. 「簡単で良い成績が取れる授業」と「難しくてもあまり良い点数が取れないかもしれないがスピーキング能力が上がる授業」を選ぶことができたなら、私は「難しくてもあまり良い点数が取れないがスピーキング能力が上がる授業」を選ぶだろう。()
14. チャンスがあれば、できるだけネイティブスピーカーと英語で話しをしたい。なぜなら、たくさん練習すればそれだけ上手になるから。()
15. 勉強になるので、優勝する可能性はなくても、チャンスがあれば英語の弁論大会に出てみたいと思う。()

Writing

16. 勉強になるので、優勝する可能性はなくても、チャンスがあれば英作文大会に出てみたいと思う。()
17. 先生からたくさんフィードバックをもらおうとライティング能力は上がると信じているので、出来るだけ多く、また複雑な英文も用いて英作文を書く。()
18. ライティング能力が上がるので、チャンスがあれば英語でブログや日記などを書いてみたい

Reading

19. リーディングの宿題で「簡単な課題」と「難しい課題」の選択があれば、リーディング能力が上がるので「難しい課題」を選ぶだろう。()
20. 英語の勉強になるので、難しくても、英語の雑誌や本を頻繁に読む。()
21. 英語の文章を読むときに、たとえ難しくても諦めない。()

Listening

22. 英語のリスニングが上達する為の様々な方法をよく使っている。()
23. たくさん練習すれば英語のリスニング能力が上達すると信じているので、ほぼ毎日何かの形で練習している。()
24. 洋画の音声を「英語」と「吹き替え」の選択があれば、英語のリスニング能力が上がると思っているので、「英語」を必ず選ぶ。

【日本語要旨】

日本人英語学習者のマインドセットを向上させる提示-練習-使用 (PPP) を基盤とする指導法

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益々グローバル化していく社会において英語の必要性と重要性は高まっている。日本人学習者は英語でしっかりとコミュニケーションできるように教育されなければいけない。しかしながら、英語を学ぶことは、日常的に英語に接することがなく、使用する必要のない日本人学習者にとって非常に難しいことである。日本語と英語が大きく違った言語であるということにも注目しなければいけない。本稿において筆者は、英語能力は努力により伸長するという信念である成長的マインドセットに焦点を当てる。実際にアンケート調査を行った結果、英語をより真剣に学んでいると考えられる学習者はそうでない学習者より成長的マインドセットの程度が高いという結果も得た。本稿では成長的マインドセットについて概観した後、それに基づき、成長的マインドセットを向上させうるアプローチについての提案を行った。具体的には、明示的な説明と、自らの向上を実感できる練習活動、さらに成功体験を重ねながらの実際のコミュニケーション活動という流れである。