

# FROM INSTRUCTION TO INSPIRATION: THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN FOSTERING A GROWTH MINDSET IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## Abstract

Education must extend beyond academic achievement to foster character, critical thinking, and resilience in facing challenges. This study examines the role of teachers in promoting a growth mindset—the belief that abilities can be developed through effort and learning—and explores student responses to such approaches. Conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi, this qualitative research used semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation to gather data from teachers and students between March and June 2025. Findings reveal that teachers effectively nurture a growth mindset by implementing strategies such as open-ended and reflective questioning, differentiated instruction, sharing inspirational stories, and cultivating supportive peer interactions. These approaches encourage students to value the learning process, embrace challenges, and perceive failures as opportunities for growth. In response, students demonstrated increased confidence, greater classroom participation, and enhanced motivation toward learning. The study concludes that teachers play a dual role as both instructors and inspirers, shaping students' mindsets and fostering environments where resilience and potential can flourish. Recommendations include the consistent integration of growth mindset strategies into teaching practices to support holistic student development. This research highlights the importance of teacher-driven initiatives in creating learning experiences that prioritize psychological and academic growth.

**Keywords:** *Growth mindset, Learning strategies, Teacher role*

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has brought about significant changes in various aspects of life, including education. In the 21st century, education faces more complex challenges than in previous eras. In line with these developments, education is required to produce graduates who are not only academically intelligent. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) states that 21st-century learning must emphasize character development, critical thinking skills, and the courage to take risks and try new things. To achieve these goals, the role of teachers is crucial. In this context, teachers act not only as instructors but also as mentors, facilitators, and inspirers for students. They are responsible for fostering a healthy and developing mindset in students so that they focus not merely on the final outcome but also learn to appreciate the learning process itself and grow from their failures. According to Nadeak (2021), teachers in the 21st century must be able to facilitate critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity skills. However, underpinning the development of these skills lies a fundamental aspect that serves as a crucial foundation, the mindset of students. This mindset is not only related to logical or rational thinking abilities but also to how students view themselves, their potential, and how they respond to failure and learning challenges. This mindset is known as a growth mindset, a concept first introduced by Carol S. Dweck that continues to evolve in the field of education. A growth mindset is the belief that a person's intelligence and abilities are not fixed but can be developed through effort, strategy, and guidance from the surrounding environment (Dweck, 2016). In education, students with a growth mindset are more open to challenges, demonstrate resilience in the face of failure, and possess a stronger motivation to learn. They understand that failure is not a definitive endpoint but a part of the learning process. Conversely, students with a fixed mindset believe that abilities are innate and unchangeable; consequently, they tend to avoid challenges, fear trying new things, and easily feel inadequate when confronted with difficulties (Martin, 2022). In high school education, research indicates that many students still tend to have a fixed mindset. They are afraid of getting bad grades, anxious when facing exams, and feel like failures when their learning outcomes are not satisfactory. In some high schools, students even demonstrate symptoms of

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academic stress due to the pressure to sustain high achievement. They focus more on the final result than on the learning process itself. This certainly poses a challenge for teachers, as this kind of mindset will limit students' potential to develop to their fullest. Based on research conducted by Claro, Paunesku, and Dweck (2016), a growth mindset can neutralize the negative impact of poverty on academic achievement. This means that a growth mindset has the power to help students from various backgrounds maintain high motivation to learn. Given the significant social and economic diversity within the Indonesian education system, the widespread application of this approach in schools is particularly crucial. This is where the role of teachers becomes critical in changing this mindset.

As individuals who have direct and consistent interaction with students, teachers have a significant opportunity to influence students' mindsets. In the learning process, teachers are not only tasked with delivering subject matter but also with shaping students' thinking about the learning process itself. According to Hattie and Zierer (2017), a core tenet of impactful teaching is the mindset that all students can develop when appropriate approaches and strategies are employed. Teachers who embody this belief treat student failure as a natural part of the learning process rather than a personal shortcoming requiring reprimand. Consequently, they are more inclined to provide constructive feedback that praises effort and strategy, not just final outcomes. However, cultivating a growth mindset in students is a complex undertaking for educators. It requires a solid understanding of learning psychology, reflective communication skills, and a deep commitment to fostering a safe and supportive classroom environment. As Yeager and Dweck (2017) emphasize, even simple interventions by teachers, such as using language that reinforces the malleability of ability, can have a profound long-term impact on student motivation and achievement. This underscores the necessity of providing teachers with the space and support needed to excel in this inspirational role.

While many teachers apply these principles intuitively—for instance, by creating opportunities for student exploration and valuing diverse opinions—there remains a scarcity of research specifically examining the teacher's role in fostering a growth mindset at the secondary school level. Furthermore, despite its alignment with such goals, Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum policy has yet to offer educators detailed technical guidance on practically implementing these strategies in daily instruction. The evolution of the teacher's role from a mere instructor to a facilitator of inspiration is an imperative of modern education. In this capacity, educators transcend the simple transmission of information, instead fostering a dynamic and inspirational classroom environment. They serve as mentors who encourage students to recognize their potential, embrace risk, and persevere through failure. This transformation aligns with the spirit of *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom of Learning), which seeks to liberate students from the tyranny of grades and create space for growth based on individual potential. Consequently, a deeper, empirical understanding of how secondary school teachers enact this role in practice is critical.

This study aims to describe the role of teachers in fostering a growth mindset among senior high school students. Specifically, it seeks to identify the instructional strategies and communication approaches teachers employ to encourage this mindset. Furthermore, the research will examine the perceived impact of these teacher interactions on student motivation and attitudes toward learning challenges and failure. By developing a nuanced understanding of how teachers cultivate a growth mindset, this study aims to provide actionable recommendations for educators and institutions. The ultimate goal is to inform the creation of learning environments that actively support the holistic development of all students.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. The semi-structured interviews utilized a question guide as a framework but were implemented flexibly, allowing researchers to adapt and probe deeper based on participants' responses. During participatory observation, the researcher was directly involved in classroom learning processes, teacher-student interactions, and practices indicative of growth mindset reinforcement. Documentation analysis included examination of lesson plans, teacher reflection journals, and student progress notes. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, emphasizing depth of information over quantity, in accordance with Creswell's (2018) approach to qualitative research design. The participant group comprised two teachers known for actively using reflective and supportive approaches in student guidance, and three students who were actively engaged in the learning and articulated about their learning experiences. The focus of this study was on the role of teachers in fostering a growth mindset among students, learning strategies and communication approaches employed to encourage growth mindset development, and the influence of teacher interactions on student motivation and attitudes toward learning challenges and failures. The research findings were organized

systematically following standard academic structure, including introduction, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusions sections.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of empirical data reveals a suite of teacher-implemented strategies effective in fostering a growth mindset. This study documents a positive correlation between these reflective pedagogical practices and constructive student responses, including increased motivation and resilience in the face of academic challenges.

### 1. The role of teachers in fostering a growth mindset

Interview and observation data indicate that teachers play a pivotal role in fostering a growth mindset in students. Their role extends beyond delivering curriculum-based subject matter to creating a learning environment that supports students' mental and emotional development. One specific strategy teachers employ is to reinforce and appreciate student effort, not merely their final outcomes. The two teachers participants in this study reported consistently striving to pay closer attention to students' learning processes. They typically offer encouragement through process-oriented feedback, such as, "I like the strategy you used to completed this task" or "Your work shows significant improvement from previous attempts." According to these teachers, such comments motivate students to remain engaged and persistent, even when their results are imperfect. This practice aligns with Dweck's (2016) assertion that a growth mindset develops when students feel valued for the process and effort, not solely for their successes. It is also consistent with the findings of Zeng, Hou, and Peng (2016), who state that process-focused feedback significantly increases learning motivation.

Researcher observations of classroom learning process confirmed that teachers avoided fixed-ability praise, such as "you are smart" or "you have always been great." Instead, they predominantly used praise that emphasized effort and strategy, such as "you worked hard today" or "I noticed you tried a new approach." This distinction is critical because praise focused on innate ability can promote a fixed mindset, whereas process-focused praise encourages a growth mindset by reinforcing the value of learning and resilience after failure (Cimpian, 2014). Teachers also intentionally created opportunities for students to learn from errors. In observed mathematics classes, teachers did not immediately correct mistakes. Instead, they guided students to analyze the errors and independently correct their work. These teachers explicitly communicated that mistakes are a natural part of learning, not something to be avoided or feared. This approach aligns with Boaler's (2016) concept of "productive failure", which suggests that allowing space for struggle and error builds courage and perseverance.

Student interview data corroborated this finding. One student revealed that a fear of being reprimanded or mocked had previously made them afraid to make mistakes. However, in an environment that encouraged trying and collaborative problem-solving, the student developed greater confidence to attempt challenging tasks. This shift in attitude, from fearing failure to embracing challenge, is a key behavioral indicator of a developing growth mindset. It supports the claim by Burnette et al. (2013) that a pedagogical approach emphasizing development and process increases student resilience to academic pressure. In acting as mentors, teachers not only educate students academically but also shape their character and their approach to learning. Furthermore, teachers implemented a reflective approach by prompting students to self-evaluate after lessons. This involved having students document what they had learned, the challenges they faced, and future strategies for overcoming learning obstacles. This practice supports Brookhart's (2017) view that reflection helps students recognize their strengths, understand their difficulties, and consciously develop strategies for self-improvement.

To foster a growth mindset, teachers also played a crucial role in designing appropriately challenging tasks. They structured learning activities and assessments with scaffolded levels of difficulty, progressing from simple to complex. This design prevents frustration and builds self-confidence and perseverance by ensuring students experience success through effort. This is consistent with Kapur's (2016) finding that optimally challenging tasks trigger persistence and strengthen students' belief that abilities can be developed through practice. Beyond instructional design, teachers cultivated a positive and supportive classroom climate. They ensured a conducive learning environment, free from ridicule or excessive pressure, and encouraged students to respect and appreciate their peers' learning journeys. This finding aligns with Rattan, Good, and Dweck (2012), who emphasize that a positive, empathetic classroom culture is more effective for fostering a growth mindset than one focused solely on results and competition. In summary, the teachers' role in fostering a growth mindset was reflected in three primary practices: (1) reinforcing effort and process over results; (2) creating a safe space for trial, error, and improvement; and (3) delivering process-focused praise that teaches student to value the learning journey.

## **2. Teacher Strategies in Learning**

### **2.1 Use of open-ended and reflective questions**

One effective method for fostering a growth mindset in students is the use of open-ended and reflective questions. Such questions provide students with opportunities to think critically, elaborate on ideas, and explore multiple solutions rather than focusing on a single correct answer. Open-ended questions help build students' awareness that the thinking process is more valuable than immediately arriving at an accurate result. Based on observations and interviews, teachers frequently used open-ended questions to initiate class discussion. This practice encouraged students to express their opinions, respond to their peers, and deeply explore possible answers. The use of open-ended questions was also integrated into the inquiry-based learning model adopted in classroom instruction. In this approach, students take an active role in formulating questions and drawing conclusions through exploration, culminating in reflection on both their thinking process and outcomes (Murniasih, et al., 2025).

In addition to posing open-ended questions, teachers encouraged students to reflect on their learning processes. Reflection activities focused on the efforts made, strategies used, and progress achieved, rather than solely on final results. Students were prompted to document the challenges they encountered and the steps they took to address them. Through reflection, students developed the belief that intelligence and abilities can be enhanced through practice and persistence (Dweck, 2016). This approach aligns with the view of Chin and Osborne (2008), who suggest that reflective questions enhance students' cognitive engagement by prompting them to construct personal meaning. This process fosters a sense of responsibility for one's own learning. By incorporating open-ended questions and reflection, teachers not only deepen students' academic understanding but also strengthen their metacognitive capacity (Brookfield, 2017), making this an effective strategy for cultivating a growth mindset.

### **2.2 Differentiated learning approach**

Differentiated learning is an educational approach that tailors the learning process, content, and products to students' individual needs, interests, and readiness levels (Tomlinson, 2014). This strategy is designed to address learner diversity, enabling each student to develop their potential through customized learning opportunities. Based on teacher interviews, all students share common learning objectives; however, instructors employ varied methods, including differentiated media and assignments, to help learners achieve these goals. As emphasized by Tomlinson and Moon (2013), differentiation does not imply lowering standards but rather providing alternative pathways to ensure all students meet established expectations. Teachers reported assigning more challenging tasks to advanced students to further develop their abilities. Previous research by Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012) indicated that differentiated learning positively affects both student motivation and achievement. This approach supports growth mindset development by demonstrating that abilities are not fixed but can be enhanced through appropriate learning opportunities. Through differentiation, no student is left behind, as each receives tailored support for potential development. Ultimately, this approach helps all students feel valued, supported, and confident that their efforts will lead to growth and improvement.

### **2.3 The use of inspirational stories and personal experiences**

Another effective strategy for fostering a growth mindset involves incorporating inspirational stories and personal experiences into teaching. Bruner (1996) suggests that humans construct understanding through storytelling, as narratives possess the power to create meaning, inspire motivation, and transmit values. During observation, teachers frequently motivated students by sharing examples of notable figures who achieved success only after persevering through repeated failures. Additionally, teachers often recounted personal experiences to inspire students, helping them recognize that failure is a natural and necessary step toward achievement. This practice aligns with Dweck's (2017) findings, which indicate that students with a growth mindset demonstrate greater persistence when confronting challenges, mainly because they perceive failure as a learning opportunity. By serving as relatable role models, teachers can impart positive attitudes and values, extending their influence beyond cognitive instruction to become sources of inspiration. When inspirational narratives are coupled with opportunities for personal reflection, students strengthen their belief in their own capacity to grow. Thus, storytelling functions not only as a motivational tool but also as a pedagogical method for instilling the principles of a growth mindset.



### **3. Student Responses to Teacher Approaches**

#### **3.1 Students become more confident and less afraid of making mistakes**

A notable positive response to the teachers' growth mindset strategies was a significant increase in students' self-confidence. By emphasizing that mistakes are a natural part of learning, teachers helped students become more willing to take risks and attempt challenging tasks. Data gathered through interviews and observations revealed that students demonstrated greater confidence during lessons, as seen in their willingness to express opinions, experiment with novel problem-solving approaches, and present their work without hesitation. Even when initial outcomes were suboptimal, students persisted in refining their efforts. It was also observed that students exhibited strong initiative in assisting peers who struggled with assignments, reflecting a classroom culture of collaboration and mutual support. These findings align with research by Zhou et al. (2024), which associates a growth mindset with higher academic resilience, effort, and self-confidence, as students come to believe that ability can be developed through dedication and strategy.

Teachers reinforced this confidence by maintaining high expectations and treating all students as capable of success. This approach created a supportive learning environment where students felt safe to share ideas without fear of negative judgment. The assurance that they are valued regardless of outcomes further reduced anxiety around making mistakes. Peer interactions also played a key role in building confidence. Observations noted a strong culture of constructive peer feedback, where students offered praise, suggestions, and constructive criticism to help each other improve. This practice not only enhanced learning outcomes but also fostered a sense of responsibility and empathy among students. Together, teacher support and constructive peer dynamics contributed significantly to students' growing confidence and diminished fear of failure.

#### **3.2 Students are more active in asking questions and exploring ideas**

Another significant outcome of the teacher's approach to fostering a growth mindset was the observed increase in students' willingness to ask questions and explore new ideas. Classroom observations revealed highly active student participation, characterized by frequent questioning directed both at the teacher and among peers during group discussions. This contributed to a positive learning atmosphere and sustained engagement across all students. With guidance and support from the teacher, students demonstrated growing confidence and enthusiasm in developing and expressing their ideas. A notable teaching strategy observed was the intentional provision of space for student questions at the beginning of lessons. Furthermore, the teacher consistently validated and rewarded student inquiries, which—as student interviews confirmed—created a safe environment for posing questions and sharing incomplete or developing ideas.

This practice aligns with the Cognitive Theory of Inquiry Teaching, which emphasizes the role of educators in teaching students how to ask meaningful questions, formulate hypotheses, and explore ideas systematically (Lazareva, 2014). In such an environment, students transition from passive recipients of information to active constructors of knowledge through questioning and discovery. A classroom culture that encourages inquiry serves as a foundation for developing higher-order thinking skills—including analysis, evaluation, and synthesis—which are essential to cultivating a growth mindset. Additionally, student questioning and exploration are closely linked to self-regulated learning. According to Zimmerman (2015), students with self-regulatory skills actively monitor their comprehension, set learning goals, and seek strategies to achieve them. Questioning is a key mechanism through which students direct and take ownership of their learning. Thus, by creating frequent opportunities for students to ask questions, teachers not promote a growth mindset but also help students develop the ability to manage their own learning processes.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that teachers play a crucial role in fostering a growth mindset in high school students through strategies such as using open-ended questions, differentiated learning, and sharing inspirational stories. Student responses showed increased confidence, greater willingness to take risks, and more active participation in learning. Supportive peer interactions, particularly through constructive feedback, further reinforced this development. Ultimately, teachers serve not only as instructors but as inspirers who create environments where students can develop resilience, embrace challenges, and realize their potential.

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