

The Influence Of Peers On Language Learning Mindset And Motivation: Semester 3 Foundation Students At The Military Technological College (Mtc) As A Case Study In Oman

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how mindset and peer influence affect English language learning among students at the Military Technological College (MTC) in Oman. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining a questionnaire with open-ended responses across three performance groups. Results showed that while all groups leaned toward a growth mindset, the below average group scored noticeably lower, indicating stronger fixed-mindset traits. Reliability testing confirmed good to excellent internal consistency. Thematic analysis highlighted peer encouragement and collaboration as key factors in sustaining motivation, while institutional constraints limited opportunities for practice. The findings suggest that supportive peer environments and growth-oriented practices can enhance English learning outcomes in military education.

KEYWORDS

Growth Mindset, Fixed mindset, peer influence, English language learning, military education

1. INTRODUCTION

Competency in English language skills seems to be vital for students who are studying in a technical context, especially in an institution where engineering is the main discipline. When examining language learning, mindset and motivation are often regarded as essential factors contributing to effectiveness of language acquisition. Motivation drives learners' willingness to engage with the language, persist through difficulties, and pursue goals, whether for academic success, personal growth, or future career advancement [1]. Mindset, in turn, shapes how learners perceive their ability to improve and respond to challenges, influencing their emotional and behavioural engagement in learning contexts [2]. Together, these affective variables offer insight into learners' behaviour, particularly in a demanding educational setting like a military college.

According to [3], language learning motivation is shaped not only by internal factors but also by social interactions, in which peer influence plays a significant role. Learners often adjust their attitudes, effort, and self-perceptions in response to the behaviours, expectations, and performance of their peers.

This study investigates the influence of peers on language learning among foundation students at the Military Technological College (MTC) in Oman. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, combining a

questionnaire and open-ended responses, it seeks to examine how the interplay between peer influence and students' mindsets contributes to the enhancement of motivation and the cultivation of productive learning habits that facilitate sustained progress in English language acquisition. The inquiry is grounded in Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and Dweck's mindset theory, which collectively inform the conceptual framework (See Figure 1). The framework delineates the pathways through which peer influence shapes learners' mindsets, thereby reinforcing motivation and promoting effective study practices that underpin language development.

Peer Influence → Mindset → Motivation → learning Habits → Language Progress

Figure 1. Peer Influence Conceptual Framework

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study will hopefully provide valuable insights into how peer dynamics influence students' mindsets, which in turn shape their motivation and behavioural adaptation in the pursuit of English language learning. The findings of this research paper are expected to highlight important areas in the teaching field of languages, especially in similar educational settings. Additionally, it is hoped that the results will help educators design strategies that support learning mindsets, increase learner motivation, and ultimately improve English language acquisition.

3. PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to explore the types of mindsets held by foundation students and the extent to which peer dynamics influence these mindsets in the process of English language acquisition. The researchers sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What types of learning mindsets do semester 3 foundation students at MTC seem to have?
- 2- How do peer influence affect students' learning mindsets and motivation toward English language learning?
- 3- What strategies or changes can enhance English language acquisition considering students' learning mindsets and motivational factors?

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINDSET AND MOTIVATION

One of the theories that perhaps has had a significant impact on education is Dweck's mindset theory, a professor of psychology at Stanford University. According to [4], individuals hold one of two primary mindsets: a growth mindset or a fixed mindset. A growth mindset refers to the belief that intelligence and abilities are not fixed but can be developed through sustained effort, effective strategies, and perseverance. Learners with a growth mindset typically show the following behaviours:

- Embrace challenges rather than avoid them.
- View mistakes as an opportunity for learning.
- Persist in the face of difficulties and setbacks.
- Respond positively to feedback and use it for improvement.

In contrast, a fixed mindset is based on the belief that abilities are static and unchangeable. Individuals who hold this mindset tend to exhibit the following behaviours:

- Avoid challenges to protect their self-image
- Give up easily when faced with difficulties.
- Perceiving effort as a sign of inadequacy.
- Feel threatened by others' success.
- Struggle to accept feedback.

These differing beliefs in mindsets play a critical role in shaping learners' motivation, resilience, and willingness to engage in the learning process. Having mentioned motivation, it is believed that motivation plays a central role in language acquisition [5]. Motivation is described as a blend of effort, the aspiration to learn the language, and a positive attitude toward the learning process [6]. Later, the motivation theory was advanced with L2 Motivational Self System, highlighting how learners' self-image, external expectations, and learning environment interact to influence engagement and persistence in language learning [7].

Dweck's Mindset Theory has been applied by several scholars, who found that learners with a growth mindset demonstrate greater motivation, persistence, and orientation toward mastery, whereas those with a fixed mindset are more likely to avoid challenges [8]. This body of research underscores the importance of fostering a growth mindset to enhance success in language learning. Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights into the relationship between learners' mindsets and their motivational responses in language acquisition. However, they have not specifically examined how distinct components of mindset influence domains of language learning, such as vocabulary development, reading comprehension, writing proficiency, or speaking skills. These areas represent promising directions for future investigation.

4.2. EFFECT OF PEER DYNAMICS ON MINDSET AND MOTIVATION

Peer dynamics seem to have a notable influence on learners' mindsets and motivation in language acquisition. According to [9], Students' mindsets, particularly the growth mindsets, can be fostered through positive peer interactions such as collaboration, encouragement, and shared goals as these reinforce the value of effort and shared progress. Moreover, learners tend to show improved motivation when their peers display positive attitudes toward language learning, participate in collaborative activities, and provide opportunities for constructive comparison that builds up self-confidence. However, peer dynamics can either foster a supportive atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and persistence or contribute to anxiety and avoidance behaviours, thus influencing learners' mindsets and their perceived competence in the target language [10].

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

The researchers adopted quantitative and qualitative case study approach to gain in-depth understanding of how peer dynamics influence learners' mindsets and motivation in English language acquisition. The participants were semester three foundation students at the Military Technological College (MTC) in Oman. They were selected because they had recently completed an intensive English language programme and had begun to experience the structured military lifestyle alongside their peers. The aim was to identify any gaps in English language acquisition resulting from issues related to peer influence at an early stage, enabling timely intervention before such challenges impact the later stages of their academic journey.

5.2. DATA COLLECTION

To investigate students' beliefs regarding their capacity to learn English, a questionnaire was administered to three groups of students, each comprising 30 participants, who were categorised according to their semester two examination performance (See Table 1).

Table 1. Students' Exam Score Categories

No	Group	Exam Score
1.	<i>Above Average</i>	<i>(70 - 80)</i>
2.	<i>Average</i>	<i>(60 - 69)</i>
3.	<i>Below Average</i>	<i>(50 - 59)</i>

The questionnaire assessed students' mindset orientation, whether they exhibited a growth or a fixed mindset (see Appendix 1). It consisted of ten statements; each rated on a six-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 6 (Strongly Disagree). The first five items reflected growth traits such as persistence, embracing challenges, and valuing feedback, while the remaining five reflected fixed traits such as fear of failure, discouragement, and belief in fixed ability. Total scores classify students into one of four categories (See Table 2). The cut scores were adapted from prior applications of Dweck's scale, with higher scores reflecting stronger endorsement of growth-oriented items. The thresholds (45–60 = strong growth; 35–44 = growth with some fixed ideas; 21–34 = fixed with some growth; 0–20 = strong fixed) were set to provide equal intervals across the possible score range (0–60). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's α , calculated separately for each performance group across the ten items.

Table 2. Questionnaire's Score Category

No	Category	Score
1.	<i>Strong Growth Mindset</i>	<i>(45 - 60)</i>
2.	<i>Growth Mindset with Some Fixed Ideas</i>	<i>(35 - 44)</i>
3.	<i>Fixed Mindset with Some Growth Ideas</i>	<i>(21 - 34)</i>
4.	<i>Strong Fixed Mindset</i>	<i>(0 - 20)</i>

In addition to the structured questionnaire, a set of open-ended questions was administered to the same group of students to gain deeper insight into the influence of peer interaction on their mindset and motivation toward learning English. These qualitative prompts were designed to explore how students perceive the role of their peers in shaping their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours in an English learning context (See Appendix 2).

The questions addressed several key areas: the impact of peers on students' learning beliefs, motivation and effort, study habits, participation in extracurricular English activities, and their overall language progress. This open-ended format allowed students to express their experiences and perspectives in their own words, providing rich, contextual data that complemented the quantitative findings from the mindset questionnaire. By examining the narratives that emerged from these

responses, the study aimed to identify patterns in peer influence, understand how social dynamics contribute to either growth or fixed mindset orientations, and highlight practical implications for fostering a supportive learning environment.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

6.1. QUESTIONNAIRE

6.1.1. SCORE TRENDS

The reliability analysis demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency across all groups. As shown in Table 3, the Above Average group achieved a Cronbach’s α of 0.81, the Average group 0.82, and the Below Average group 0.91. These values exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 [11], indicating that the instrument was a reliable measure of students’ mindset tendencies.

Table 3. Cronbach’s α values for the questionnaire across performance groups

Group	Students	Items	Cronbach’s α	Interpretation
Above Average	30	10	0.81	Good reliability
Average	30	10	0.82	Good reliability
Below Average	30	10	0.91	Excellent reliability

The mean scores obtained for each item in the questionnaire can be seen in the Questionnaire Results in Table 4. The above-average group achieved the highest total score of (45.18), reflecting a strong growth mindset. The average group followed with (43.18), while the below-average group obtained the lowest score of (38.67); both groups exhibited growth tendencies combined with some fixed ideas. Taken together, the overall average across the three groups was (42.32), which similarly reflects growth with certain fixed elements. The results suggest that mindset scores tend to decrease as performance levels decline. However, the difference between the above-average and average groups is relatively small at 2 points, whereas the gap between the average and below-average groups is more pronounced at 4.5 points.

Table 4. Questionnaire Results

Item	Average Score For the 3 Groups			Overall Average of 3 Groups
	Above Average	Average	Below Average	
Q.1	4.73	4.60	4.30	4.54
Q.2	4.70	4.73	4.43	4.62
Q.3	4.60	4.53	3.93	4.35
Q.4	4.90	4.60	4.70	4.73
Q.5	4.53	4.80	4.03	4.45
Q.6	4.40	3.70	3.63	3.91
Q.7	4.53	4.20	3.66	4.13
Q.8	4.10	4.30	3.63	4.01
Q.9	4.13	3.86	3.03	3.67
Q.10	4.56	3.86	3.33	3.91
Score	45.18	43.18	38.67	42.32
Mindset Type	Strong growth	Growth with some fixed ideas	Growth with some fixed ideas	Growth with some fixed ideas

The descriptive statistics for total mindset scores across the three performance groups are summarised in Table 5, showing the mean values, variability (SD), and associated 95% confidence intervals.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of total questionnaire scores (0–60) by group

Group	n	Mean ± SD	95% CI
Above Average	30	45.20 ± 8.61	[41.99, 48.41]
Average	30	45.00 ± 9.38	[41.50, 48.50]
Below Average	30	38.67 ± 10.82	[34.66, 42.74]

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of group on total mindset scores, $F(2,87) = 4.41$, $p = 0.015$, $\eta^2 = 0.092$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that the Below group scored significantly lower than both the Above ($p = 0.028$) and Average groups ($p = 0.035$), while no significant difference was observed between the Above and Average groups ($p = 0.997$). These results were confirmed by a Kruskal–Wallis test, $H(2) = 8.09$, $p = 0.017$. Pairwise effect sizes indicated moderate differences between Below and both Above ($g = 0.66$) and Average ($g = 0.61$), and a trivial difference between Above and Average ($g = 0.02$).

6.1.2. INTERPRETATION

Overall, the questionnaire results indicate slight but meaningful differences in mindset tendencies across the three performance groups. As shown in figure 2, mindset scores gradually decline from the above-average group to the below-average group, with the former displaying a strong growth orientation and the latter reflecting growth mixed with fixed beliefs. The average group fell between these two extremes, also demonstrating growth tendencies with some fixed elements. When considered collectively, the overall average score across all groups was 41.9, which similarly reflects a growth mindset tempered by certain fixed beliefs. This pattern suggests a potential association between lower performance and the presence of stronger fixed-mindset tendencies, although growth-oriented beliefs remain evident across all groups.

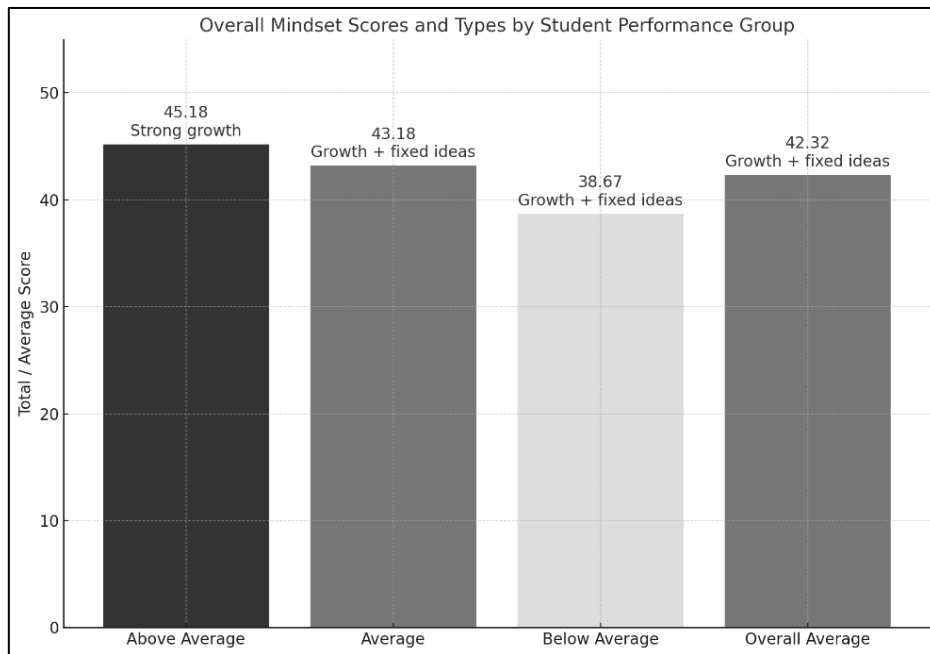


Figure 2: Questionnaire average Scores

6.2. OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The open-ended questions were analysed using inductive thematic coding. Two researchers independently coded the responses to identify recurring patterns, achieving 85% inter-coder agreement; disagreements were resolved through discussion. This process enhanced the reliability of the qualitative findings and ensured a balanced interpretation of students' perspectives.

6.2.1. PEER INFLUENCE ON LEARNING ATTITUDES

Most students reported that peers positively influenced their attitudes toward learning English. Supportive peers provided encouragement and help, fostering greater confidence. One student explained: "My classmates encouraged me to keep practicing even when I made mistakes, which made me less afraid to speak." Such accounts demonstrate how positive peer dynamics promoted a growth-oriented approach to language learning.

6.2.2. PEER INFLUENCE ON MOTIVATION AND EFFORT

Peer participation in lessons and group activities often enhanced motivation. Several students noted that active classmates inspired them to stay focused. For example, one commented: “When my peers participate seriously, I also feel motivated to try harder and not give up.” These responses align with the quantitative findings that link peer interaction to higher engagement.

6.2.3. MOTIVATION AND LEARNING HABITS

Many students associated motivation with improved learning habits, such as dedicating more time to English studies. However, others acknowledged the constraints of their environment. As one below-average student reflected: “Sometimes military training takes my time, so I can’t join extra English sessions.” This highlights how institutional pressures may hinder the development of consistent study routines despite positive attitudes.

6.2.4. PARTICIPATION IN ENGLISH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE CLASS

Participation outside class was limited, largely due to time restrictions. Still, students expressed enthusiasm for such opportunities, with one noting: “If the college gave us more English clubs, I would join because it would help me practice more.” This suggests untapped potential for peer-driven activities.

6.2.5. FACTORS INFLUENCING LANGUAGE PROGRESS

Across groups, students identified peer encouragement as a key factor in language progress. One remarked: “I improved my English because my friends always practiced with me after class.” These narratives reinforce the conceptual framework (Figure 1), showing how peer influence supports mindset, which in turn fuels motivation and productive study habits.

7. RESULTS DISCUSSION

The questionnaire results indicate that all three groups lean toward a growth mindset, though the differences in scores reflect a gradual shift toward fixed-mindset traits as performance decreases. This variation is subtle rather than stark, suggesting that most students, regardless of academic standing, share broadly similar beliefs about learning and improvement. Nevertheless, even small differences may play a meaningful role in shaping confidence, classroom engagement, and persistence, particularly in English language learning.

Mindset is unlikely to be the sole factor distinguishing higher-performing students, yet it remains a critical psychological component. Students with stronger growth-oriented views appear more inclined to embrace feedback, adopt new strategies, and recover from setbacks. By contrast, those leaning toward fixed traits may be more easily discouraged and less proactive, especially when facing complex language tasks. These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions that cultivate resilience and adaptive learning behaviours.

The reliability analysis reinforces these interpretations. Cronbach’s α values indicated good internal consistency for the Above Average ($\alpha = 0.81$) and Average ($\alpha = 0.82$) groups, and excellent reliability for the Below Average group ($\alpha = 0.91$). This consistency across groups strengthens confidence in the validity of the scale and the robustness of the results.

An examination of group differences shows that although the overall variation in mindset tendencies was relatively small, the Below group scored significantly lower than both the Above and Average

groups, with moderate effect sizes (Hedges' $g = 0.61-0.66$). This suggests that while Above and Average students share similar growth-oriented beliefs, those in the Below group are more likely to exhibit fixed-mindset traits. These findings provide empirical support for the claim of "slight but consistent" differences, concentrated primarily among lower-performing students, and underscore the need for targeted interventions to sustain motivation and resilience in this group.

The qualitative data added depth to the questionnaire findings, showing how peer support directly shaped students' beliefs and behaviours. Thematic analysis highlighted how encouragement, collaborative participation, and shared accountability fostered resilience and perseverance. At the same time, institutional constraints, particularly the military structure, limited opportunities for extracurricular engagement. Exemplar quotes illustrated both the positive reinforcement of peer networks and the challenges of sustaining growth-oriented behaviours under time pressures. These insights not only validate the conceptual matrix but also demonstrate the need for structured peer-led initiatives to strengthen motivation and learning outcomes.

Taken together, the findings affirm that mindsets are not static but can be influenced by peer interaction, classroom climate, teacher practices, and institutional support. To enhance students' mindsets and performance, several practical steps are recommended: integrating growth mindset principles into the curriculum through reflective activities; promoting peer collaboration via structured group tasks and discussions; and providing constructive, effort-focused feedback that encourages risk-taking and learning from mistakes. Furthermore, mentoring, academic advising, and manageable peer-led extracurricular activities could boost engagement, particularly among below-average students. At the institutional level, aligning policies and practices with growth-oriented principles would help reinforce a culture of resilience, adaptability, and continuous improvement.

9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and gave their consent to participate voluntarily. Confidentiality was assured by anonymising responses and reporting results in aggregate form only. The study followed institutional guidelines for educational research at the Military Technological College.

10. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that most MTC students lean toward a growth mindset, with only slight differences across performance groups. Even students in the below-average group recognised the value of effort and improvement. Peer influence emerged as a significant factor in shaping motivation and mindset, with students consistently highlighting the role of supportive peers in boosting confidence, perseverance, and study habits. These findings support the conceptual framework (Figure 1), showing how positive peer dynamics can reinforce adaptive learning attitudes and contribute to improved language acquisition.

Overall, while mindset is an internal disposition, it can be shaped by external factors such as peer interaction, classroom culture, and institutional support. Creating a collaborative and reflective learning environment can encourage more adaptive behaviours. Structured peer collaboration, constructive feedback, and motivation-focused strategies are particularly important in sustaining growth-oriented attitudes and enhancing English language outcomes in contexts like MTC.

However, this study was conducted at a single-site military college, which may constrain the generalisability of the findings. The structured military environment, with its strict discipline and time pressures, may moderate peer influence differently than in civilian higher education contexts. Future

research across more diverse institutions is therefore recommended to assess the transferability of these results.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement by choosing a number from 1 to 6.

التعليمات: الرجاء اختيار رقم من ١ إلى ٦ حسب درجة موافقتك على كل عبارة

Scale: | 1 = Strongly Agree | 2 = Agree | 3 = Mostly Agree | 4 = Mostly Disagree | 5 = Disagree | 6 = Strongly Disagree |

No	ITEM	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I enjoy working on difficult English tasks, even when they seem hard at first. أستمتع بالعمل على المهام الصعبة في اللغة الإنجليزية، حتى وإن بدت صعبة في البداية						
2.	When I make mistakes in English, I see them as opportunities to learn something new. عندما أرتكب أخطاء في اللغة الإنجليزية، أعتبرها فرصاً لتعلم شيء جديد						
3.	I keep trying even when English becomes very difficult. أستمر في المحاولة حتى عندما تصبح اللغة الإنجليزية صعبة جداً						
4.	My English skills can improve if I work hard and use effective strategies. يمكنني تحسين مهاراتي في اللغة الإنجليزية إذا بذلت جهداً واستخدمت استراتيجيات فعالة						
5.	Feedback from teachers or classmates helps me improve my English. مساعدتي ملاحظات المعلمين أو الزملاء في تحسين لغتي الإنجليزية						
6.	I avoid difficult English activities because I'm afraid of failing. أجبت الأنشطة الصعبة في اللغة الإنجليزية لأنني أخشى الفشل						
7.	When I don't understand something in English, I often feel like giving up. عندما لا أفهم شيئاً في اللغة الإنجليزية، كثيراً ما أشعر بالرغبة في الاستسلام						
8.	If I have to try hard, it means I'm not naturally good at English. إذا اضطررت لبذل جهد كبير، فهذا يعني أنني لست موهوباً في اللغة الإنجليزية						
9.	I feel discouraged when others do better than me in English. أشعر بالإحباط عندما يحقق الآخرون نتائج أفضل مني في اللغة الإنجليزية						
10.	I find it difficult to accept corrections or suggestions about my English. أجد صعوبة في تقبل التصحيحات أو الاقتراحات المتعلقة بلغتي الإنجليزية						

APPENDIX 2: OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

SECTION 2:

1. Peer Influence on Attitudes and Beliefs

Do your peers affect how you think about learning English? Explain how?

هل يؤثر زملائك على طريقتك في التفكير حول تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟ وضح كيف؟

2. Peer Influence on Motivation and Effort

Do your peers influence your motivation and effort to learn English? How?

هل يؤثر زملائك على دافعتك وجهدك في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟ كيف؟

3. Motivation Impact on Behaviour

Does your motivation help you improve your behaviour in learning English? If yes, what good study habits have you developed?

هل تساعدك دافعتك على تحسين سلوكك في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟ إذا نعم، ما العادات الدراسية الجيدة التي طورتها؟

4. Studying Habits/Strategies

Do you join English activities with your peers outside class? If yes, how do they help you learn?

هل تشارك في أنشطة إنجليزية مع زملائك خارج الفصل؟ إذا نعم، كيف تساعدك هذه الأنشطة في التعلم؟

5. Language Progress

Is the improvement or decline in your English level related to any of the factors mentioned earlier? Please explain.

هل تطور مستواك أو تراجعته في اللغة الإنجليزية مرتبط بأحد العوامل المذكورة آنفاً؟ وضح؟
