Growth Mindset Pedagogy in Inclusive Classroom

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Abstract

The study themed to explore the growth mindset theory from the pedagogical perspective and its viability for inclusion in the classroom. To reach the theme, the study focused on three questions: What are the growth mindset pedagogical practices? How do these practices assist in creatinga growth mindset classroom culture? What kind of attitude develops among learners? A qualitative approach was employed to fulfill these concerns.A field survey in an inclusive school was undertaken, and data was collected using observation and interview schedules on 30participants. The study identifiedvarious growth mindset pedagogical practices and found that those practices assist in creating a growth mindset classroom culture and develop thegrowth mindset of the teachers and learners, which leads to the attitude among the learners to push them for learning in all circumstances. It is recognised from the growth mindset theory,which produces aspecific pedagogical practice mentioned in the analysis part of the paper, named growth mindset pedagogy,that is viable for inclusion in the classroom.

Keywords: *Growth Mindset Pedagogy, Inclusive Classroom, Growth Mindset Pedagogical Practices*

Introduction

The inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds and learning needs has gained momentum in recent decades. Conscious efforts are being made globally to include differently-abled children in mainstream classrooms. The biggest challenge to 'inclusion is the lack of proper knowledge, training, and attitude (Blackie, 2010; Pingle & Garg, 2015; Sharma et al., 2017; Biswas, 2018). The present study proposes a solution-finding approach for implementing a growth mindset in an inclusive classroom.

Based on intelligence theories, explicit and implicit aspects have two opposite views. The explicit theorists believe that intelligence is fixed and cannot be changed, while implicit theorists believe intelligence is malleable and depends on a person's mindset. Carol Dweck has described mindset as a "Fixed mindset" and a "Growth mindset" (Dweck, 2006; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016). The fixed mindset proposes the belief that talents, smartness, and intelligence can never be altered (Dweck, 2006; Stipek& Gralinski, 1996). In contrast, the growth mindset proposes that "intelligence is

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malleable" and can be developed through hard work, practice, and perseverance (Dweck, 2006)**.**

The key idea of the growth mindset has an immense impact on the understanding of teachers and learners about the concept of "success" and "failure" (Macnamara & Rupani, 2017; Sassenberg & Vliek, 2019). Learners who face failures in their academic experience or wider lives begin disbelieving their pin potential and producing lower achievements. Teachers can help them to shatter this fixed mindset by emphasising a growth mindset based on valuing 'efforts made' (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016). The concept of the growth mindset is key to creating an inclusive classroom environment.

Review of literature

Pramanik et al. (2018) examined teacher-related variables such as gender, age, teaching experience, grade level, the period of contact with differently-abled children, and personality factors, which may determine a teacher's attitude towards inclusion. It is found that the moderate attitude of school teachers is one of the causes of problems towards inclusion (Paramanik et al., 2018; Sharma, 2020). In the study of Blackie (2010), half of the teachers opined negatively towards inclusion due to lack of training, unrealistic expectations, lack of resources, inability to give special attention to each student, and class size. Teachers' attitudes are also influenced by the nature and severity of students' disabilities (Beyene & Tizazu, 2010). Notably, in this context, Sharma et al. (2017) analysed teachers' attitudes and found higher positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with "orthopedic challenges" while there were apprehensions about students' inclusion with vision, speech, and hearing impairments. Implications from the above discussion highlight a critical need to build up teachers' growth mindset to bring full inclusion into classrooms.

Growth mindset pedagogy emerges to be a plausible solution between inclusion and pedagogy. In inclusive schools, where there are enormous individual differences among the learners, shifting from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset can enhance their performance (Buchanan & Kern, 2017; Sassenberg & Vliek, 2019). Learners become confident and active partners in teaching-learning by acquiring growth mindset skills like resilience, self-advocacy, and positive thinking.

The case study of Rissanen et al. (2019) in a Finnish elementary school about growth mindset pedagogy-based classroom practices paves path-breaking implications easily applied to an inclusive classroom. Their work highlights some critical points of growth mindset pedagogy, forming the current study's foundation. Some of the indicative issues are: motivating learning processes of the students, interpretation of students' personalities and not results, actively opposing students' fixed mindset behaviors, fostering a belief in the supremacy of success, not educating all students on how to endure obstacles or failure and inculcating perseverance to face the adversities. In this context, an urgent need is identified to increase the positive level of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Sharma, 2020). A growth mindset may play a vital role in creating an inclusive environment where diverse learners with different perspectives receive similar content depending on their mood (Buchanan & Kern, 2017; Macnamara & Rupani, 2017; Sassenberg & Vliek, 2019). Individual differences and the corresponding needs of diverse learners in an inclusive classroom demand wide-ranging pedagogical practices (Tirri & Laine, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020). Growth mindset pedagogy helps to understand the essence of diversity and leads to a positive change in classroom situations (Blackwell, Trzesniewski & Dweck, 2007).

Here, it is crucial to understand how the growth mindset pedagogy successfully caters to diverse learning needs. It becomes possible because the growth mindset pedagogy does not induce the outside into the learners. Instead, it creates a powerful incentive and

positive attitude and mindset within the individual. This mindset as attitude drives the learners to learn even from failures. The studies of Dweck (2006) and Rissanen et al. (2019) suggest that a growth mindset is an attitude to take up challenges, an attitude to persist in obstacles and don't-give-up to failures, an attitude to see efforts as practices to mastery, an attitude to accept and learn from the criticism and philosophy to discover the inspiration from others' success.

Purpose of the study

The study aims to identify the growth mindset pedagogical practices that assist in creating the growth mindset classroom culture and inclusive environment.

Research Questions

- What are the growth mindset pedagogical practices?
- How do these practices assist in creating the growth mindset classroom culture?
- What kind of attitude develops among learners?

Methodology

The **field survey** was conducted through a descriptive survey in an inclusive school known for its commitment to inclusive education and distinct pedagogical practices in Rajasthan India to find answers to the research questions. A sample of thirty participants selected through purposive sampling has been taken for the study, including the school headmaster, teaching staff, and learners with various disabilities.

The school is inclusive because it facilitates both the disabled and non-disabled students. Moreover, the school's name is self-explanatory; *Meeno Mano Vikas inclusive School,* Ajmer. Therefore, in this research, out of thirty samples, twenty students were disabled, and ten were non-disabled. Subsequently, the school is recognized under the Right to Education Act of 2009 to promote equity and provide all kinds of children with a suitable learning environment.

Tools employed for the analysis were a semi-structured interview schedule and an observation schedule.

Data collection

The data was collected through an interview schedule with headteachers, teachers, and learners. At the same time, the participatory observation was done per the situation's demand. The observation went on for one month, producing qualitative data. Extensive notes were taken about the school's daily activities in a particular context of distinct pedagogical practices performed by the teachers and students' responses.

Analysis of data

The content analysis of data collected through the interview and observation schedule has been done and given below. The text in italics with inverted commas denotes the interview responses within the analysis. The text within inverted commas without italics indicates observation schedule responses for illustration to align with dialogue.

Findings about pedagogical practices that induce growth mindset

Trust building enables them to share their problems. They don't hesitate to ask about their queries, confusion, and doubts and even share their feeling and sentiments. Through this, mentors get the opportunity to remove their confusion and doubts and handle their emotions and sentiments. The teachers in the study school make a healthy connection with children, which induces enthusiasm to think and do beyond the box and its limitations. The fact is, if we want to change the mindset, specifically want to bring a shift from fixed to growth, the mentor needs to develop trust-building with students.

Teachers' belief in the learners' success is a prominent factor in pushing the growth mindset theory. The survey school teachers also expressed the same, and they have a connection with the student. So, they share their problems and have faith in teachers. Teachers have believed in their efforts, talent, and success expressed in their interviews and observed establishing a strong bond with the students to provide emotional support.

A reward is always apprised by psychologists, socialists, and educationists. On the path of learning, the child is always looking for appreciation, and it is always needed by everyone. The importance of reward for efforts and response is missing in our classroom, and it is associated more with achievements — thereby neglecting and hampering the learning process. Teachers in the survey school use frequent rewards for every genuine effort and response despite success. Here it is to be noted that tips are important for response to induce consistency in putting efforts and bring them to do so even in unfavorable situations. Encouraging efforts through frequent rewards allows them to take risks and make mistakes, creating a more flexible environment for learning.

See the child's response when asked, how do you learn new things? Are new things difficult for you?

> *"For learning new things, firstly, I try to make a difference in myself. I have found that the key characteristics of successful 'effort' are focus on performance and avoidance of negative responses/people/ thoughts. My teachers allow me to learn in my way and time."*

The teacher's responses on putting in the effort, making mistakes, and providing frequent rewards were like this;

> *"They are allowed to learn at their pace. Frequent rewards are provided for their responses and efforts. The focus is on individual progress and learning. We keep letting them make mistakes as this is the way to practice more and more, and they explore themselves."*

Peer tutoring is a flexible way to scaffold learners that involve learners serving as tutors and tutees. Peer tutoring permits learners to get one-to-one assistance and opportunities to respond more being a small group. It facilitates the academic and social development of both. In survey school, peer tutoring is a powerful tool to achieve the maximum benefits of subject-based and skills-based learning. As required, the school adopted a different type of peer tutoring, like cross-age and same-age tutoring.

> *"Sometimes, I learn from my peers. Many of my friends with disabilities show great determination despite failures, and their never-give-up spirit inspires me."*

Teachers reflected when asked, *"What interventions do you adopt in inclusive classrooms"?*

> *"The old ones support young students because classrooms are structured as mixed-age groups, and they get the opportunity to learn from same-age peers in group activities."*
>
> *"It was also observed that in mixed-aged classroom where peer learning and sharing takes place, help-seeking and collaboration was encouraged."*

Accept failures: The reward may not be the end story always in life. Failures are an essential component of life too. The individual needs to learn how to accept failures and respond to them to shift from a fixed to a growth mindset. For this purpose, the pedagogical practices are to share the other's stories of success, including a portrait of struggle and accepting failures. The survey school teachers shared that they use these practices to inspire learners, keep up their struggles, and stand against failures and limitations. Let us take students' reflections to visualize how they are practicing struggle and accepting failures in their daily life but are not ready to give up.

> *"After repeated failures, we can develop alternate strategies according to our disabilities to achieve our goal."*
>
> *"We daily attend physiotherapy sessions and often experience failure.*

The other way to look at it can be that we improve ourselves every time we make a new effort."

Distribution of opportunities is a remarkable pedagogical practice as it indulges learners in learning and explores their interests, talent, and limitations. The survey school teachers expressed that they provide opportunities equally to the learners by conducting group activities, giving responsibility within the group, and focusing on individual participation. It is shared that there is no conventional and fixed way of assessment. It was also observed that, according to the student's needs, flexible assessment methods are employed by recording each student's daily progress and performing group activities and vocational skills. The important point is that the school adopted this to teach them socially accepted behaviors. Look at the response of the teachers when asked for the same.

"Tasks are given according to the interest of the student and the type of disability. Equal opportunities are given to the bright and underperforming students."

"Assess by providing vocational training and recording individual progress. Evaluate by distributing responsibilities according to the student's capabilities and focus on group activities where individual participation is encouraged."

"Some notable facts during observation are; integrated teaching with the exploratory activities designed in the local context, visits to the actual occupation sites like stitching shop, factories, and local market."

Parental involvement is not only encouraged but diligently recorded. Every student's progress report is shared with the parent during scheduled visits. The school management facilitates teachers' professional development by periodically organizing expert meetings, seminars, and workshops to update them about inclusive education's innovative practices.

Classroom culture

Through the data analysis growth mindset pedagogical practices are identified. *The answer to question two,* how these practices assist in creating a growth mindset classroom culture, is drawn as; classroom culture is experiential learning designed through exploratory activities and vocational training in gardening, sewing, etc., in a local environment. They have the opportunity to work in groups and take responsibility. They are rewarded for effort, not success or failure; they continue to fail repeatedly, learn never to give up, and accept failure positively. They were also scaffolded by teachers and peers. Through mixed-age classes, they enjoy peer tutoring. Most importantly, they found that teachers believed in their success, effort, and talent, which drove them to progress consistently, and their small successes were celebrated in the group. Flexible assessments and teachers record daily progress based on learning rather than grades. They are free to make mistakes because mistakes are a fundamental learning method. So, learning in a fear-free environment allows them to clear doubts and reflect on specific issues. In this way, defined practices create a growth mindset in classroom culture.

Learners' attitudes

To answer the third question, the growth-mindset pedagogical practices help learners to develop certain attitudes. Such as an attitude to struggle, an attitude to accept failure, an attitude to accept challenges, an attitude to seek opportunities, and the belief in hard work and talent; this way of taking things showed a shift in mindset (from a fixed to a growth mindset).

For example (A response), I have extreme eye difficulties and aspired to be a pilot, whereas my friend, who has severe reading and writing difficulties, wanted to become an official. We are aware of realities, so we have shifted ourselves to have a good social life,

simultaneously retaining around on a good job/work but keeping on trying for the best.

This shows that students accept failure or limitations and change their mindset according to the realities of life. It was observed that they continue with exploratory activities as per the capabilities to contextualize experiential learning.

It was observed that the school is inclusive with quite a high disabled population compared to other schools. The teachers have to work with the diverse group not only in respect of sociocultural diversity but various type of physical, mental, and intellectual, and other challenges also. They begin working with the learners at their own pace, despite differences and constraints, and they make them free to struggle to accomplish their goals and finish the tasks. They didn't decide on a common mark line for everyone to achieve. The teacher showed full patience and kept sharing the progress with their parents. They didn't run any common session timeline for every learning, didn't behave in a hands-off manner towards those who were not getting things, and continuously tried, again and again, to make the content comprehendible by breaking the task into small chunks/ steps and facilitating scaffolding by peers . The teachers shared that after working in the sample school, they also transformed their thinking and personality . When they joined, it was challenging for them to cope in that school or working culture that was different from the usual school environment.

Sometimes they face challenges when a child is not progressing; then they must work out reasons and ways to make the child learn and grow. In handling children, they also come across many doubts . They shared that patience, positive thinking, and faith/ belief in themselves always helps them reach their goal.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the growth mindset pedagogical practices create a conducive classroom culture through which learners can develop the growth mindset or shift from fixed to growth, which is essential in the present era. The study again puts forward that teachers should adopt the growth mindset to believe in their learners' talent, efforts, and mistakes, and adopt the growth mindset pedagogical practices to develop the learners' attitude toward struggle, accepting failure, putting effort, and never giving up in any circumstances. These practices allow peers' involvement through group activities and peer learning. Thus, a positive and progressive mindset celebrates diversity and social cohesion within the class and caters to the needs of all learners.

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