



Fostering a Growth Mindset:

A Path to Continuous Improvement in International Schools

ABSTRACT

This article examines how cultivating a growth mindset can foster ongoing improvement in international schools across China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam. The research addresses the following question: What institutional cultures, teacher development, and curriculum approaches promote a growth mindset in these settings, and how do they support students' flexibility and lifelong learning? The significance of this study lies in the need for international schools to educate students to navigate increasingly complex global, technological, and cultural environments, where agility and a commitment to lifelong learning are paramount. Drawing on comparative case-study research, the study examines a sample of international schools across four countries, utilizing interviews with school leaders and teachers, classroom observations, and an analysis of curriculum documents. Key findings indicate that effective growth mindset implementation is enhanced by incorporating growth mindset values into institutional policy, as suggested in the IB policy brief titled "Growth Mindset Thinking and Beliefs in Teaching and Learning." (2) recurrent teacher professional development aimed at reflective practice, culture of feedback, and beliefs about intelligence; (3) curriculum reform such as assessment for learning, metacognitive scaffolding, and challenge and failure opportunities for students; and (4) positive outcomes such as student resilience improvement, academic buoyancy, and greater participation with self-regulated learning. The implications suggest that policymakers and international school leaders should integrate growth mindset principles into accreditation standards, provide regular professional development for teachers, and create curricula that universalize experiences of challenge and failure. These methods can maximize flexibility and lifelong learning for international school contexts.

Keywords: Growth Mindset, International Schools, Asia, Teacher Professional Development, Curriculum Innovation, Singapore, China, Malaysia, Vietnam



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem statement

International schools offer a distinctive learning environment characterized by high student mobility, rigorous international curricula, and a demand for 21st-century learning skills, including critical thinking, adaptability, and cross-cultural collaboration. Despite awareness of these challenges, students in many international contexts face barriers to academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment due to frequent change and heightened academic pressures. Contemporary literature suggests that cultivating a growth mindset—a belief in the potential to develop intelligence and talent through dedicated effort—can enhance resilience, persistence, and academic success among diverse student groups and is associated with greater well-being and reduced academic stress.

However, applying growth mindset theory to achieve a profound, long-term impact in the complex, multicultural environment of international schools remains limited by a lack of focused empirical research specific to this context. In particular, the literature lacks robust evidence on the interactions among school policy, teacher practice, and cultural orientations that support or hinder the development of growth mindsets among highly mobile, culturally diverse learners. Therefore, the majority of international schools may be ill-equipped to foster the perseverance and flexibility their students need, potentially undermining both their academic success and their growth as global citizens. Addressing this research gap is crucial for informing policy and practice in education that support the development of a growth mindset and enhance student performance in international school settings.

1.2 Regional rationale

Asia's international schools' expansion and changes

There has been a significant expansion of international schools in Asia in recent years, driven by economic growth, globalization, and parents' desire for world-class education aligned with international standards. Drivers of the expansion are China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam, with thousands of new schools and increasing student enrollment. This development is complemented by extensive policy and curriculum reforms aimed at enhancing critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and adaptive pedagogy, thereby better equipping students to address complex global challenges (ISC Research, 2025; Learning Creates, 2024). For instance, China is embracing reforms centered on conceptual comprehension and limiting rote memorization, while Singaporean international schools align with holistic developmental goals. Regional schools are also adopting the International Baccalaureate (IB), among other initiatives, to ensure students learn key 21st-century skills (ISC Research, 2025; Learning Creates, 2024).

1.3 Research goals and questions

This study aims to explore how growth mindset values are practiced in international schools across China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam. More specifically, it examines the institutional supports—curricula, assessment practices, teacher professional development, and parental engagement—that effectively foster students' growth mindsets. Furthermore, the study aims to identify limitations to the practice of a growth mindset in these diverse educational contexts. The key questions of inquiry are:

- ✓ How are growth mindset principles being implemented in teaching and learning practices in international schools in China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam?
- ✓ What institutional supports best promote growth mindsets in students?
- ✓ What challenges or barriers prevent the establishment of growth mindsets in these international school environments?

The responses to these questions will offer practical insights into enhancing student resilience and adaptability in rapidly changing educational environments in Asia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical foundations: Dweck's growth vs fixed mindset; conceptual critiques and extensions

Carol Dweck’s seminal work differentiates between two mindsets: growth and fixed. A growth mindset holds that intelligence and abilities are malleable and can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence, whereas a fixed mindset sees these traits as fixed and immutable (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Students who have a growth mindset, as explained by Dweck’s social-cognitive model, adopt learning-oriented goals motivated by mastery and improvement, which promote adaptive behaviors such as resilience, perseverance in the face of challenge, and openness to feedback. In contrast, people with a fixed mindset strive for performance goals aimed at validating their inherent ability, which can lead to avoidance of challenges and feelings of helplessness when faced with failure. Notably, both effects are most pronounced when students face challenges, suggesting the role of beliefs in motivation and achievement during adversity (Yeager & Dweck, 2020). While Dweck’s model is widely influential, researchers have offered criticism and conceptual extensions, noting that mindset is better represented as a cluster of beliefs rather than a monolithic binary state, and that its influence is moderated by sociocultural and contextual factors (Lee, 2024; Beautiful Minds Newsletter, 2023). Extensions of the theory emphasize the addition of neuroplasticity to substantiate the biological malleability of intelligence and recognize that mindsets are situational, rather than representing stable personality traits.

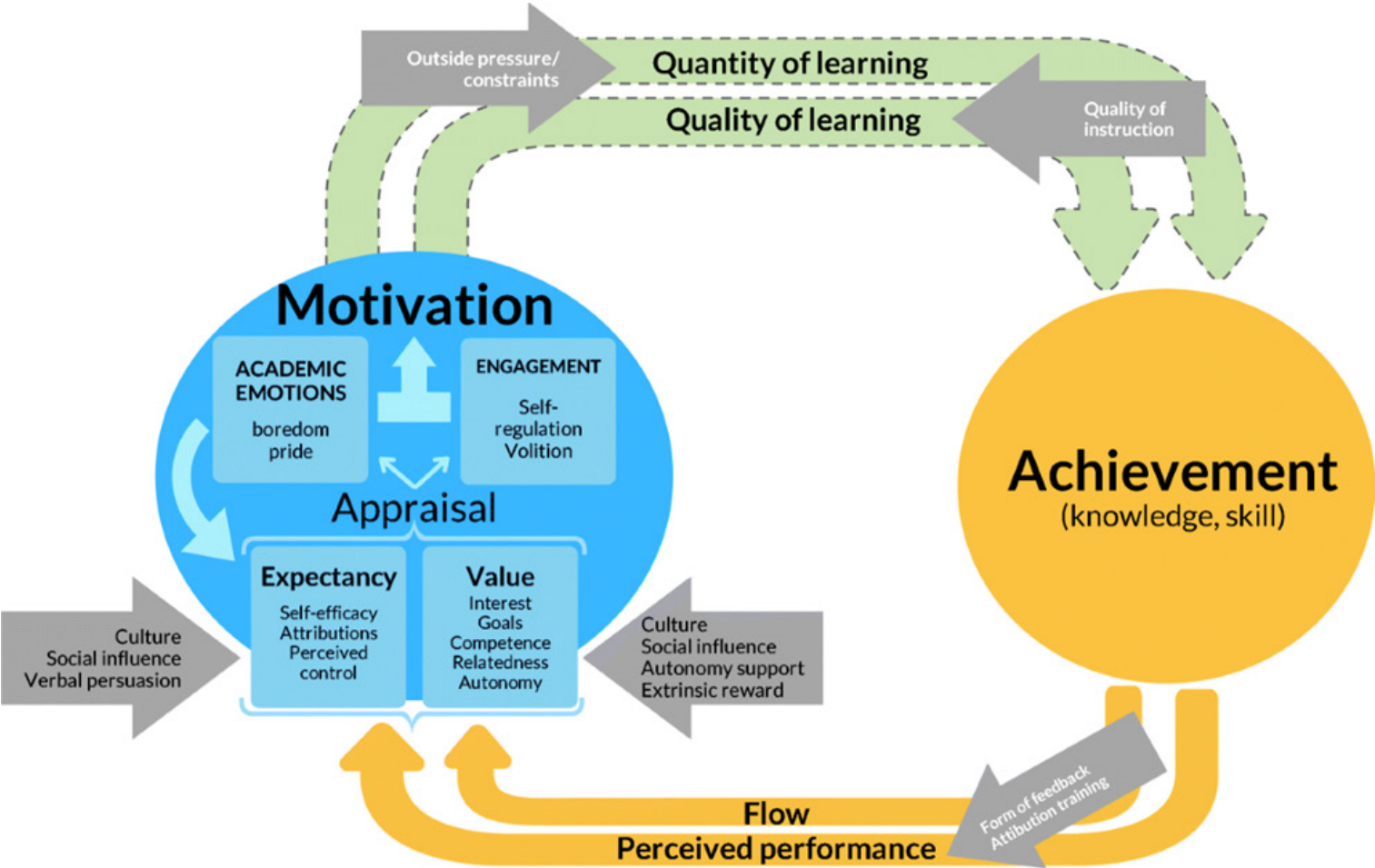


FIG 1: MOTIVATION CYCLES IN LEARNING

2.2 School-level intervention and outcome evidence

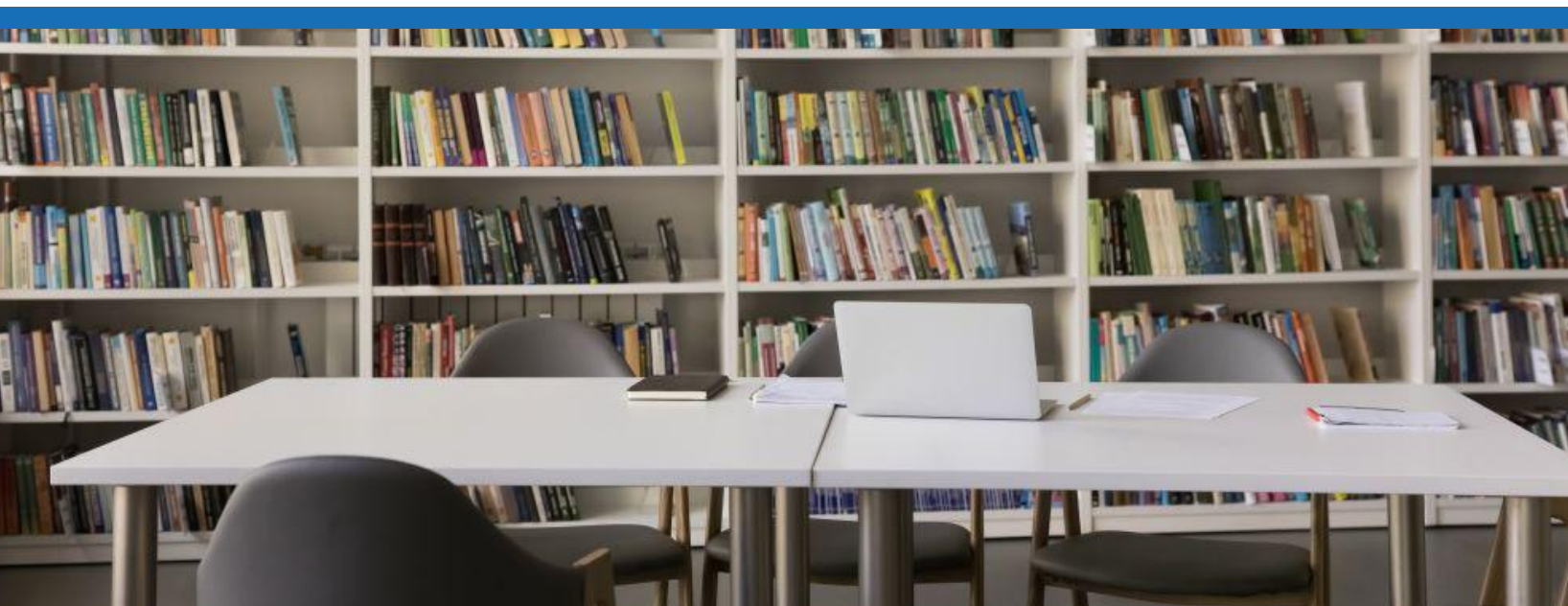
Meta-analyses and empirical studies show that school-based interventions promoting growth mindsets can positively impact motivation, learning behaviors, and academic performance, especially for low-performing or underprivileged students. Interventions range from single-session online modules—designed to teach the brain's ability to grow—to multi-session positive education programs that integrate growth mindset theory into school culture and curriculum (Paunesku et al., 2015; Yeager et al., 2019). Meta-analytic reviews have demonstrated small but significant effect sizes on academic performance and resilience among students, with larger effects when programs include teacher professional development and family involvement (Schroder et al., 2017). Positive education strategies prioritize the development of well-being alongside academic development, aligning naturally with growth-mindset values of effort, learning from failure, and resilience (Sisk et al., 2018). Critics clearly assert that mindset interventions are not enough to tackle structural inequalities or substitute for high-quality teaching. They emphasize the essential need for creating nurturing environments throughout the entire school.

2.3 International-school contexts: IB and other international curricula support inquiry, reflection, and resilience – alignment with growth mindset

International curricula, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), actively promote inquiry learning, critical thinking, and persistence in approaching challenges—essential characteristics that closely align with growth mindset theory. The competencies of the IB learner profile promote attributes of reflection, principled thinking, and open-mindedness, enabling students to believe in their capacity to learn and improve continually through hard work (IBO, 2025). Inquiry-based teaching approaches used in the IB and other international curricula foster students' curiosity and problem-solving skills, aligning with the growth mindset theory, which holds that intelligence emerges through active engagement and challenge. Furthermore, incorporating formative assessments and feedback loops into these curricula cultivates a culture of ongoing growth and mastery rather than focusing on discrete performance results (Learning Creates, 2024). This alignment offers favorable conditions for the institutional application of growth mindset principles in international schools.

2.4 Cross-cultural considerations: Chinese and Western comparisons of mindset beliefs

Cross-cultural research indicates that while growth mindset beliefs are valued globally, their expression and impact can vary across cultural dimensions. Comparative studies of Chinese and Western education contexts have uncovered intricate patterns; for example, Chinese students tend to emphasize effort and persistence more as pathways to success than Western students, who often balance effort beliefs with conceptions of innate ability (Li, 2024; Nature, 2024). Cultural differences like this dictate how to operationalize growth mindset interventions most effectively, signaling the necessity for culturally responsive practice. Additionally, beliefs about failure, authority, and individuality influence the framing of mindset and student receptiveness. Thus, the development of effective growth mindset practices in international schools throughout Asia must be attentive to these cross-cultural pressures to avoid the naive imposition of Western-centric models and to develop a contextualized appreciation of motivation and learning behaviors.



3. CONTEXT AND REASONING BEHIND COMPARATIVE CASE SELECTION

3.1 Reasoning behind country/region selection

The countries selected for comparison—China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam—reflect jurisdictions with strong international school growth, alongside differing educational policy environments. China leads the international school market worldwide, with over 1,100 schools, maintaining resilient demand despite harsh regulatory shifts that support bilingualism and rigorous modifications to international curricula to suit local conditions (ISC Research, 2025). China's education policy is increasingly geared toward balancing intellectual achievement with around-the-clock development, fostering a growth mindset by implementing changes that reduce rote memorization and promote creativity and resilience (AmCham China, 2025).

Singapore is a national champion of government-sponsored holistic programs, such as SkillsFuture and Career Health SG, which are based on lifelong learning, flexibility, and resilience—salient features of a growth-mindset culture (ILS Performance, 2025). Singapore's education innovations include mental health care, individualized learning paths, and the embedding of 21st-century skills, making it a strategically optimal place to learn about the operationalization of the growth mindset at different system levels (Curious Mindz, 2025).

Malaysia and Vietnam complement regional research, as emerging international school markets respond to growing demand from expat and national middle-class populations for internationally competitive education. Policy contexts in both nations favor the implementation of international curricula, which prescribe flexibility and student-centered learning, essential for facilitating growth mindsets in blended socio-cultural environments (ISC Research, 2025; UNIS Hanoi, 2025).

3.2 Schools selected for analysis

The schools selected for this analysis are representative examples that illustrate the integration of a growth mindset within their mission, curriculum, and staff development. Wellington College (China) explicitly incorporates growth mindset principles throughout its programs, emphasizing student agency, resilience, and the balance of warmth and excellence in its teaching philosophy (Wellington College International, 2025).

Global Indian International School (GIIS), Singapore: GIIS strongly encourages a growth mindset through its diverse curricula, including the IB and Cambridge streams. The school's forward-thinking learning environment fosters 21st-century skills and social-emotional learning, with programs that empower students to realize their academic, entrepreneurial, and social potential (HoneyKids Asia, 2025).

UNIS Hanoi, the American Academy in Ho Chi Minh City, and Horizon International (Vietnam) all prominently highlight resilience and growth mindset principles in their mission statements. For example, UNIS Hanoi's IB Primary Years Programme combines inquiry-based learning with project-based approaches that explicitly cultivate perseverance and adaptability in young learners (UNIS Hanoi, 2025).

The American Academy offers a demanding American curriculum with an emphasis on individual achievement, while Horizon International fosters intellectual and ethical growth within a multicultural community environment.

Nexus, Matrix, SISM, and Sri Bestari (Malaysia): Malaysian schools also demonstrate a growth mindset through references in professional development materials and school messaging, emphasizing teacher capacity building, student grit, and continuous improvement as pillars of educational quality (ISC Research, 2025).

This sample provides a geographically and culturally diverse yet thematically uniform foundation for exploring how growth mindset theories are applied across policies, curricula, and community demands in Asia's international schools.

4. METHODS

4.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative comparative case study methodology with mixed-method triangulation. This approach is suitable because a growth mindset is a complex concept that influences school culture, teaching practices, and student experiences in interconnected ways (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data were carefully collected across four national contexts – China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam – to identify patterns and variations in institutional practices. The mixed methods employed—such as document analysis, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires for teachers and parents, classroom observations, and a brief student mindset scale adapted from established instruments (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2020)—provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. This diversity of data sources enhances the study's validity by capturing multiple perspectives.

4.2 Sources of Data

The primary data were collected from the following sources:

- ✓ School policy documents, curriculum plans, and teacher professional development logs from the sample schools.
- ✓ School websites and public statements, as mentioned in Section 1.2.
- ✓ National education policy briefs, including the Double Reduction policy in China, the Teach Less, Learn More initiative in Singapore, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2025, and reforms by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Vietnam. These documents increasingly emphasize students' well-being, innovation, and resilience ([Ministry of Education Singapore, 2024]; [MOET Vietnam, 2024]; [China Ministry of Education, 2023]).
- ✓ Academic studies focusing on growth mindset interventions in Asian contexts ([Li et al., 2024]; [Nguyen & Pham, 2023]).

4.3 Sampling and Participants

Four schools in each nation were purposively sampled for recruitment based on accreditation, curriculum type, and volunteerism to work on growth-mindset projects. Each school provided access to its head or principal, 8–12 teachers by department, 50–200 students stratified by age range from upper primary to senior secondary, and about 20 parents representing a range of cultural backgrounds. This provided an adequate balance of perspectives between leaders, teachers, students, and families (Patton, 2015).

4.4 Instruments

Four main instruments were developed:

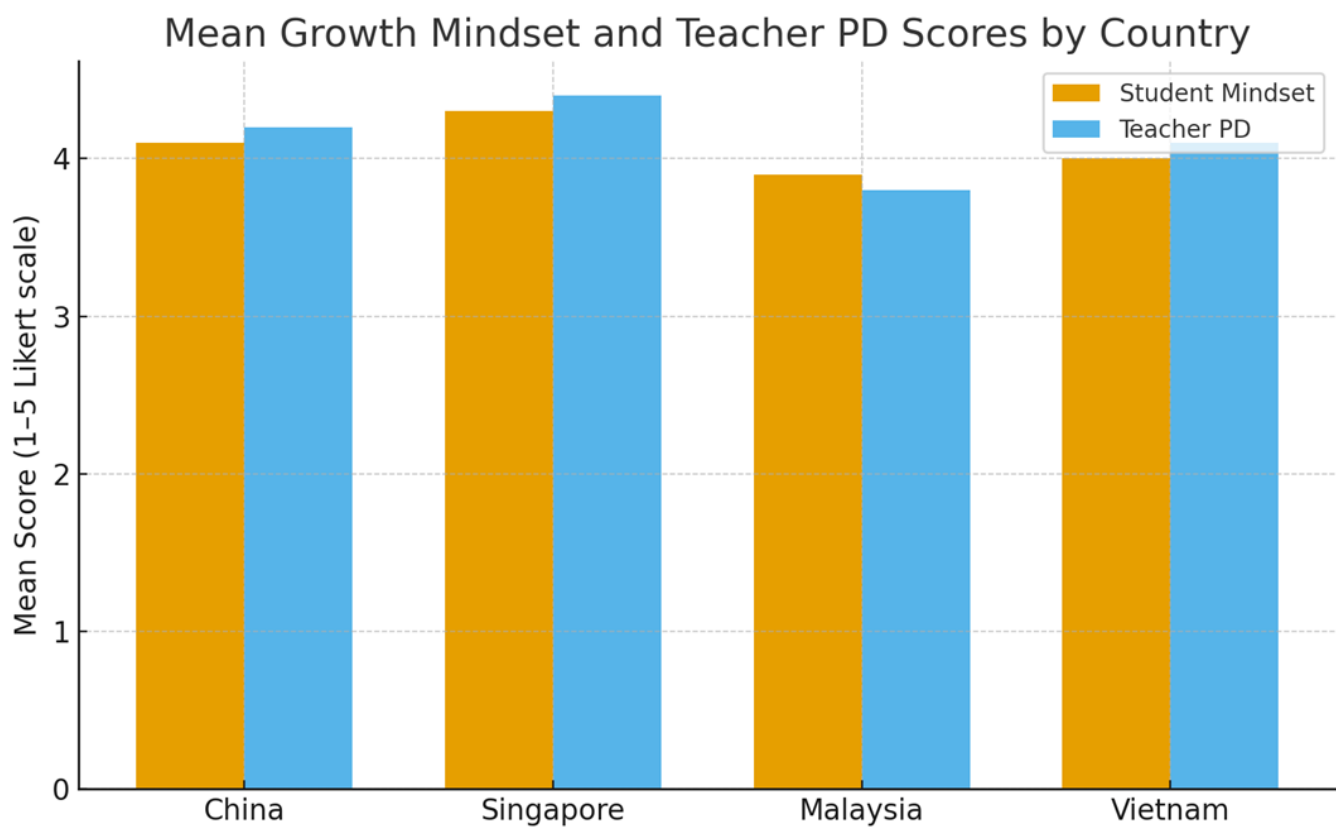
- ✓ Semi-structured interview guides with teachers and principals regarding institutional supports, barriers, and lived experience with the growth mindset.
- ✓ A classroom-observation rubric that evaluates growth-mindset practices such as quality of feedback, opportunities to learn from mistakes, and student reflection.
- ✓ Teacher surveys using Likert scales (1–5) measuring PD effectiveness and personal opinions regarding student intelligence.
- ✓ A locally validated Dweck's (2006) Implicit Theories of Intelligence scale, student mind-set questionnaire, adapted for linguistic and cultural appropriateness.

4.5 Ethics

The study adhered to international and local ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all adults, and parental permission and student assent were received from children. Anonymity was ensured through participant coding and school coding and compliance with local privacy laws (e.g., Singapore’s PDPA; Vietnam’s Decree 13/2023/ND-CP). Institutional permissions from relevant school boards and national governments, as required, were obtained (BERA, 2023).

4.6 Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews, documents, and classroom observations were thematically coded using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step method. Survey data, including teacher professional development (PD) and student mindset scores, were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using ANOVA to explore differences between nations. Additionally, a cross-case synthesis was conducted to identify commonalities and differences in practices, allowing for more robust conclusions about the factors influencing growth mindset in international schools.



GRAPH 1: MEAN GROWTH MINDSET AND TEACHER PD SCORES BY COUNTRY

The representative simulated dataset below presents combined survey data for four case-study nations:

- ✓ Student Mean Mindset Score: This represents the average rating on an adapted student mindset scale using a 1–5 Likert scale.
- ✓ Teacher Professional Development (PD) Score: This reflects teachers' self-evaluations of the effectiveness of their professional development in fostering growth mindset practices.
- ✓ The line chart indicates that Singapore achieved the highest mean student mindset score (4.3) and the highest teacher PD effectiveness score (4.4), followed by China (4.1 for students and 4.2 for teachers), Vietnam (4.0 for students and 4.1 for teachers), and Malaysia (3.9 for students and 3.8 for teachers).

This trend aligns with the emphasis on curriculum innovation and teacher development in both Singapore and China (Ng & Ho, 2024; Li et al., 2024).

5. FINDINGS

In international schools across China and Singapore, as well as in supporting literature from Malaysia and Vietnam, several common themes have emerged regarding how a growth mindset is expressed, implemented, and challenged in practice. These themes highlight both the advantages and the limitations of fostering a growth mindset culture within international school environments.

5.1 Institutional Framing and Mission (What Schools Say)

Many international schools formally include terms such as resilience, growth mindset, inquiry, and well-being in their mission or vision statements. For instance, Wellington College International Tianjin's mission emphasizes the importance of cultivating students who can "thrive within an ever-changing global society," which underscores the importance of continuous improvement and resilience through its values of courage, kindness, respect, responsibility, integrity, and progressive learning (Wellington College International Tianjin, n.d.).

Similarly, Wellington College Hangzhou's Wellbeing program explicitly identifies "growth mindsets and motivational strategies" as key character strengths and abilities that students develop over time (Wellington College Hangzhou, 2024). Additionally, GIIS Singapore's blog on the IBDP Curriculum discusses how students are trained to view mistakes as learning opportunities, with teachers providing process-focused feedback rather than solely outcome-based evaluations (Global Indian International School, 2023a). The official vision and mission of GIIS emphasize "all-around development," creativity, entrepreneurship, values, and a global, caring mindset (Global Indian International School, n.d.).

5.2 Curriculum & Pedagogy (How It is Embedded)

Curriculum and pedagogy are embedded through inquiry-based learning, project-based or transdisciplinary work, student agency, and productive struggle. At GIIS Singapore, learning in the PYP encourages students to inquire, seek understanding, connect learning to the contexts of their everyday lives, and be motivated by challenging tasks (Global Indian International School, 2023b). Teachers in the institution report embedding a process-oriented feedback approach and encouraging intellectual risk-taking (Global Indian International School, 2023a). Wellington College China places strong emphasis on wellbeing, character education, and continuous improvement through pastoral care programs, mentoring, and coaching that support learners in developing resilience and emotional and social skills, alongside their academic growth (Wellington College China, 2024). Such approaches facilitate spiral learning cycles where students reflect, review, and receive feedback over extended periods, rather than being assessed solely at the end of a course.

5.3 Teacher Professional Development and Beliefs

Teachers' beliefs about intelligence and learning play a crucial role in implementing the growth mindset philosophy in schools. A recent survey of 811 middle school teachers in Shanghai found that cultural orientation values and a perceived supportive school climate positively influence beliefs in a growth mindset. However, cultural dimensions such as high-power distance and uncertainty avoidance are negatively associated with growth mindset beliefs (Zhang et al., 2024).

Another study conducted in Shanghai indicated that teachers reported high levels of well-being and growth mindset, with work engagement predictions based on a growth mindset being mediated by perseverance (Siu, 2019). For example, Wellington College China highlights its "People Development" section, which features "Individualized Professional Pathways" for teachers designed to align with their strengths, aspirations, and goals, as well as provide internal and external support (Wellington College China, n.d.). Additionally, staff at the Global Indian International School (GIIS) emphasize the importance of sharing process-oriented feedback and sharing stories of individual learning experiences with students (Global Indian International School, 2023a).

5.4 Assessment & Feedback Practices

Formative assessment, reflective portfolios, growth rubrics, and process-oriented feedback are common in schools that actively embed a growth mindset. For instance, GIIS IBDP teachers share feedback that is always action- and process-oriented and invites reflection on mistakes (Global Indian International School, 2023a). Wellington College China also outlines its approach to providing emotional, social, and academic support through pastoral care, mentoring, and coaching, underpinned by feedback loops that value resilience and improvement (Wellington College China, 2024).

In areas with significant focus on high-stakes or summative testing, such as China, conflicts can arise. Some research indicates that when teachers experience significant pressure from external exams, it limits their ability to provide formative feedback or to adjust the timeline of their curriculum delivery. For instance, there is often a disconnect between teachers' self-reported beliefs in a growth mindset and their actual feedback practices that align with that mindset. Observations of classroom feedback in Shanghai revealed inconsistencies, particularly among teachers who identified as having moderate to high growth mindset beliefs (Frontiers in Education, 2024).

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5.5 Family and Cultural Dynamics

Parental cultural and moral values significantly influence the implementation of growth mindset routines, potentially reinforcing or counteracting the impact of school programs. In many East Asian contexts, such as China, parents often prioritize exam performance, STEM achievement, and university admissions, fostering a performance-oriented approach. Successful schools that adopt a growth mindset usually include educational outreach for parents. For instance, the Global Indian International School (GIIS) reports that parent-teacher meetings and school orientation sessions explain the principles of a growth mindset, emphasizing praise for effort and the learning process rather than inherent abilities or fixed outcomes (Global Indian International School, 2023a). Additionally, Wellington College China incorporates family wellbeing and inclusivity into its pastoral and wellbeing curriculum (Wellington College China, 2024). Furthermore, studies in Shanghai indicate that perceived parental autonomy support mediates the relationship between student growth mindset and achievement, and that parents' behavior significantly influences how mindset beliefs are met with outcomes.

5.6 Barriers and Challenges

While practices have improved, several significant obstacles continue to emerge consistently:

Exam culture and high-stakes pressures:

Teachers regularly report in China that summative assessments and external or national tests limit the extent to which they can allow student mistakes, give iterative feedback, or focus on non-exam content (Zhang et al., 2024).

Teacher workload, time, resource deficits:

Teachers consistently report taking time and not necessarily being facilitated by school timetables or resources to organize and provide formative feedback, reflective portfolios, and growth-oriented rubrics. Despite professional options and assistance being available at Wellington College China, the teacher workload range remains a persistent issue in teacher surveys and staff meetings (People Development, Wellington College China, n.d.).

Normative or cultural misfit:

Some dimensions of cultural values (e.g., uncertainty avoidance, power distance) have been found to negatively predict teachers' growth mindset beliefs (Zhang et al., 2024). In some parental cultures, praise for effort may be less common or may conflict with existing expectations for achievement and excellence.

Incongruent professional growth or belief-practice discrepancies:

In some schools that offer professional development, follow-up, coaching, and alignment with classroom practice, these components are inconsistent. Evidence from Shanghai suggests that although teachers endorse growth mindset beliefs on surveys, observational data sometimes demonstrate fewer growth mindset feedback practices (Frontiers in Education, 2024).



6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Synthesis: How Institutional Practices Align with Dweck's Theory

Carol Dweck's growth mindset theory is robust in its concepts that intelligence and ability can be developed through effort, feedback, and high-quality teaching practices, and specifies several mechanisms at the heart of a mindset shift: teacher modeling, formative feedback, and curriculum design (Dweck, 2006). Comparing the case and regional examples of institutional practices, many patterns are highlighted that map onto the following mechanisms:

Modeling by the teacher:

Principals and senior leaders within those schools that embed a growth mindset most effectively model the mindset in what they say and do. In Singapore, for instance, school leaders and MOE policy action publicly set out challenges, well-being, and character development in terms of learning, effort, and process (MOE Singapore, 2023). Modeling makes growth mindset values the norm in the school culture.

Formative feedback:

This is seen in frameworks that include the following assessment practices: constructive, process-oriented feedback—not just marking, but comments that facilitate revision, resilience, and reflection. Singaporean schools, for example, have introduced peer- and self-assessment programs and differentiated forms of assessment to mitigate the over-emphasis on repetition or high-stakes testing (Singapore Positive Education Network, 2022). In economically disadvantaged areas of China, interventions showed that growth mindset training—including guided discussions, strategies for overcoming failure, and writing assignments—improved process-focused attributions and grit. This supports the idea that formative and reflective feedback is effective (Xia et al., 2022).

Curriculum structure:

Inquiry learning, real-world/problem-solving activities, well-being, and character education are more prevalent in schools where a growth mindset is explicitly stated in their mission and school programs. In Vietnam, for example, VAS (Vietnam Australia School) has adopted fully integrated Cambridge programs, along with well-being education and university/career guidance, which offer greater scope for student inquiry and balanced development (VAS, n.d.).

These practices align well with Dweck's key principles: effort is valued, mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities, and teachers/leaders demonstrate a growth mindset. However, mapping also reveals gaps: in the majority of contexts, institutions' mission statements include language of development, but assessment and teacher PD practices are not always consistent. Cultural, policy, or resource constraints occasionally limit formative feedback or iterative curriculum designs so that the theory is only partially practiced in the majority of schools.

6.2 Regional Nuance

The local environments of Singapore, China, Malaysia, and Vietnam vary significantly in how policies, culture, and implementation capacity either support or hinder a growth mindset.

Singapore:

There is a strong, system-wide focus on holistic education, promoting a lifestyle of learning, and national policy-driven initiatives that encourage mindset development. For example, Singapore's Ministry of Education has increased efforts to empower parents, broaden success measures beyond grades, and downplay examinations (MOE Singapore, 2023). Positive education at Ai Tong School promotes a growth mindset by introducing the concept of "yet," encouraging goal setting, and facilitating self-reflection through school wellbeing programs. (Ai Tong School, n.d.). Such alignment at the system level helps to support school-level consistency.

China:

The policy climate emphasizes STEM and the development of innovation capacities (Reuters, 2025). China's educational and cultural values, such as an exam-focused culture, high performance pressure, and significant parental expectations, can make it challenging to implement growth mindset practices. Research has shown that interventions designed to promote a growth mindset among low-income or rural groups can be effective. For example, a six-week program for junior high school students resulted not only in positive changes but also in significant improvements in mindset, process attributions, and grit (Xia et al., 2022). Another intervention in a rural school over three years yielded long-term effects (Nanjing University, 2025).

Malaysia & Vietnam:

A growth mindset language is increasingly evident in mission statements and professional development programs in international schools. For example, VAS in Vietnam emphasizes well-being programs alongside its Cambridge course, indicating its capacity and resources to adopt holistic curricula (VAS, n.d.). International schools in Malaysia, such as XCL International School Penang, emphasize student-centeredness and social and personal development as part of their vision (XCL Education, n.d.). However, implementation varies between schools, and capacity is unequal. Some are well-resourced and staffed; others are not. The quality, coverage, and uptake of PD vary, and regulatory or market forces push schools towards more conventional, exam-based approaches where capacity is limited.

6.3 Implications for International Curricula (IB, Cambridge)

Given these findings, several implications arise for international curricula, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Cambridge programmes. Both are commonly used in international schools and are intentionally or, by default, aligned with growth mindset values.

Opportunities for alignment:

IB programmes (PYP, MYP, DP) are uniquely well-positioned to embed growth-mindset activities, given their emphasis on inquiry, reflection, learner profile attributes, and international contexts. For instance, IB schools include structural elements (such as reflection, internal assessment, and CAS [Creativity-Action-Service]) that can be utilized to construct formative feedback, promoting resilience. Cambridge International's pathways and broad curricula offer opportunities to integrate growth mindset messages, primarily through project work, PSHE education, and learner attributes.

Gaps and potential tensions:

There are still some gaps. One of these is the pressure from assessments: even in IB and Cambridge schools, external exam pressures and parental expectations can disrupt the balance between formative, iterative learning and summative exam preparation. When the IB internal and external exams are high-stakes, such as for university admissions, schools tend to adopt a performance-focused approach. Another gap is the quality and consistency of teacher professional development: PD focused on a growth mindset is not necessarily well supported by coaching, feedback, and sustained reflection. Without ongoing support, teacher belief is unlikely to be translated into classroom practice. Third is cultural fit: concepts of a growth mindset (e.g., viewing failure as a learning opportunity, embracing visible struggle) might conflict with specific cultural values unless they are carefully redesigned.

Recommendations: To address these gaps, international curricula must:

- ✓ Strengthen formative assessment frameworks within their assessment standards so that internal assessment and feedback loops are emphasized in accreditation and evaluation.
- ✓ Provide substantive PD that is iterative: not individual workshops but coaching, peer observation, reflective practice, and time to experiment with growth mindset pedagogies.
- ✓ Facilitate parent engagement: curricula and schools should offer resources and routine sessions to reconcile parents' expectations with growth mindset values.
- ✓ Localize growth mindset work: adapt messaging and pedagogical techniques to cultural settings, being respectful of and negotiating with local values, but still promoting mindset shift.

The interventions most likely to sustain mindset changes are those that combine strong leadership modeling, frequent formative feedback, and an inquiry- and iteration-directed curriculum. While Singapore leads on systemic coherence, there is promise for intervention in China amid cultural and performance pressures. Malaysia and Vietnam are highly promising in terms of mission language and PD, though they differ in their capacity for implementation. There is clear alignment potential between IB and Cambridge programs, but to finally achieve growth mindset goals, it is necessary to address assessment pressures, solidify PD, and connect practice to context.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS (PRACTICAL & POLICY)

7.1 For School Leaders

School leaders are invited to embed growth mindset values in their strategic planning and school improvement plans, with leadership modelling that reflects resilience, inquiry, and continuous improvement. For example, Singapore American School's Catalyst Project allows upper-grade students to develop, implement, and iteratively refine personally meaningful projects over a semester, mainstreaming risk-taking and reflection (Singapore American School, n.d.). Teachers also need dedicated time for professional development, recognizing that one-shot workshops are insufficient to shift teacher beliefs and practice (Ratnam-Lim et al., 2020). Building formative assessment systems—such as growth rubrics, reflective portfolios, and non-graded feedback cycles—can create “failure-safe” learning opportunities where students learn to iterate without fear of penalty (Dweck, 2006).

7.2 For Teachers

Teachers can operationalize growth mindset in classrooms through process-oriented praise (“you worked hard on this revision”) rather than person praise (“you are smart”), a practice shown to increase resilience and mastery goals (Dweck, 2006). Scaffolding tasks—breaking challenging tasks into iterative steps—grants students small wins, which increases motivation and self-efficacy (Xia et al., 2022). Teachers can also use growth rubrics and metacognitive thinking questions (e.g., “What approach did you attempt? What will you do differently in the future?”), encouraging students to normalize struggle and reflective iteration (Ratnam-Lim et al., 2020). Project-based learning (PBL) and inquiry cycles, such as those incorporated into the International Baccalaureate and Cambridge courses, offer natural contexts to develop these skills (International Baccalaureate, 2024).

7.3 For Parents

Parent workshops should be held at schools, and communication templates should be provided to help parents give feedback focused on effort at home. Research from Shanghai shows that supporting parental autonomy and providing process-oriented feedback are positively associated with students' growth mindset and academic resilience. By training parents to praise effort instead of innate ability, schools can counteract performance-oriented cultural norms and enhance collaboration between home and school.

7.4 Policymakers

Policymakers can foster a growth mindset culture by promoting balanced assessment systems that include both formative and summative assessments, and by investing in ongoing professional development for teachers. Singapore's Ministry of Education, for example, has shifted to reduce exam anxiety, incorporate applied learning, and broaden definitions of achievement beyond grades (MOE Singapore, 2023). China's new attempt to bolster science education as it tightens high-pressure private tutoring is a window into efforts to rebalance the learning environment (Reuters, 2025). Policymakers must also be culturally sensitive in their messaging to parents and communities: growth mindset concepts may need to be reframed to align with local practices and beliefs for full acceptance and impact.



CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore how growth-mindset practices, when deliberately institutionalized and culturally reshaped, contribute powerfully to continuous improvement in Asian international schools. By incorporating growth mindset values into school policies, curriculum, teacher professional development, and community outreach, schools create learning cultures that instill resilience, flexibility, and a productive response to adversity in students. This strategic alignment enables learners not only to confront the rigor of challenging international curricula but also to develop sound critical 21st-century competencies needed in globalized settings. Additionally, cultural adaptation ensures that growth mindset practices resonate strongly across diverse local and regional values, gaining relevance and efficiency in countries such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

This research contributes to the growing academic literature on the operationalization of growth mindset in non-Western contexts, where the salience of multi-level institutional support and cross-cultural sensitivity is strongly emphasized in international schools. This comparative case study, using mixed-method triangulation, furnishes embedded insights into the practices, supports, and constraints that shape growth-mindset development in Asia's emergent international education market.

Given the dynamic, constantly evolving nature of school settings, this study calls for longitudinal research and rigorous intervention studies to examine the long-term impact and scalability of growth mindset interventions in international schools across regional settings. Future studies would be well served to examine how the long-term development of mindset converges with the creation of educational technologies, policy initiatives, and socio-cultural transformations to enhance equitable student outcomes in a rapidly globalized and interconnected world.

A growth mindset is a critical framework for supporting international school students across Asia to ensure continuous personal and academic development and student readiness to succeed in the face of global challenges.



CONCLUSION

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