



An Investigation into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners' Language Mindset: The Case of Chinese Junior High School Students

Lingxi Peng

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Master of Science in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition, 2024

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**An Investigation into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners'
Language Mindset: The Case of Chinese Junior High School Students**



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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the language mindset of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, with a specific focus on Chinese junior high school students. It explores the origins and development of these learners' growth language mindsets and the consequent impact on their English language academic achievement. The study employs a mixed-method approach, incorporating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to analyze the influence of classroom social climate, classroom goal structure, parents' language mindsets, and parents' failure mindsets on students' language mindsets and L2 academic performance.

The findings reveal that a positive learning environment in language classrooms, especially those prioritising mastery goals, substantially fosters the cultivation of growth language mindsets among Chinese junior high school EFL students. Additionally, parents' growth language mindsets and their attitudes towards failure have a notable impact on their children's language mindsets. The research demonstrates a strong positive relationship between students' growth language mindsets and their L2 academic performance, underscoring the importance of embracing a growth mindset to enhance language learning outcomes.

This dissertation concludes with implications for teaching practices, suggesting that language teachers should create a supportive language learning environment that emphasizes effort and progress. It also highlights the role of parents in nurturing their children's growth language mindsets by modeling a growth mindset and providing emotional support. This dissertation also calls for further research to explore the complex interplay between language mindsets and other factors such as language aptitude, sociocultural systems, and individual motivations in the context of language learning.

An Investigation into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners' Language Mindset: The Case of Chinese Junior High School Students

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

Drawing from the narrative detailed in Dweck (2012), envision a young adult enduring an exceptionally difficult day. They are passionate about a class they attend, but their enthusiasm is dampened when they receive a C+ on their midterm exam, causing a deep sense of disappointment. That evening, upon returning to their dwelling, they find a parking ticket on their car, adding to their distress. Overwhelmed, they reach out to their closest friend about their day, only to receive a somewhat dismissive response. People's reactions to this situation can vary significantly. Some might internalize the setbacks with thoughts like: "I'm a total failure." "Life is unjust, and all my hard work is in vain." or even consider "Just give up." In contrast, others may adopt a more constructive perspective: "The C+ indicates that I need to work harder, but I have the rest of the semester to improve my grade." "I must strive to be more diligent in class, be more careful when parking the car, and wonder if my friend had a bad day." Why people differ in the way they respond to negative experiences and setbacks?

Now, we start to understand the concepts of fixed mindset and growth mindset. People with fixed mindsets believe that human qualities are carved in stone while those with growth mindsets adhere that aptitudes, interests, and temperaments can be cultivated through efforts (Dweck, 2012). Mindset has been widely applied in education and psychology research, and researchers argue that different mindsets lead to a host of different motivational and educational outcomes such as resilience, engagement, and academic achievement (Burnette *et al.*, 2013; Sisk *et al.*, 2018). Nonetheless, some scholars have argued that mindsets only weakly predict students' performance, suggesting that the link between mindsets and academic success might be intricately nuanced (Burnette *et al.*, 2013; Sisk *et al.*, 2018).

The process of acquiring a second or foreign language (L2) is akin to the initial situation described, being a lengthy endeavour where learners are bound to face obstacles and feel disheartened (Khajavy *et al.*, 2021). For instance, there may be moments when the learner's speech is unintelligible to others, or when they struggle to comprehend conversations around them, and they might receive criticism from their teachers and peers regarding their written work (Lou & Noels, 2016). These challenges can lead some to abandon their language studies. However, those with growth mindsets tend to view setbacks as an indication that they must exert more effort to enhance their skills. Although the concept of mindset is intricately linked to a range of beliefs concerning effort, attributions, goal orientations, and learning strategies, its relevance within the sphere of language acquisition has only recently begun to receive more focused attention (Liu, 2022; Lou & Noels, 2017).

1.2. Rationale of the study

Accordingly, recent research in second language acquisition (SLA) has addressed the conceptualisation and measurement of language mindsets and shown that language mindsets were associated with L2 writing motivation and feedback seeking orientation (Papi *et al.*, 2019; Papi, 2020; Waller & Papi, 2017; Yao *et al.*, 2021a), L2 reading enjoyment and achievement (Khajavy *et al.*, 2022), L2 speaking anxiety (Ozdemir & Papi, 2022), L2 pragmatics learning motivation (Zarrinabadi *et al.*, 2022), achievement goal orientations and self-regulatory tendencies (Lou & Noels, 2016, 2017), and L2 achievement (Eren & Rakicioğlu-Söylemez, 2023; Lou *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, the current state of the field acknowledges that language mindsets are situational beliefs which can be influenced by inter-personal and social processes and changed by priming (Shirvan *et al.*, 2021).

Nevertheless, scant investigation has delved into the origins and evolution of language mindset (Shirvan *et al.*, 2021). In addition, most of the existing studies have focused on EFL university students in North America. Other large populations of learners such as

those enrolled in Chinese secondary-level education has received restricted attention (Bai & Wang, 2023). However, the development of language mindsets in Chinese context, in which emphasizes hard work and is deeply rooted in examination culture, is worthy of investigation to ameliorate students' anxiety and improve their language learning experience (Yao *et al.*, 2021b). Additionally, the population of junior high school students in China has reached approximately 50 million in 2022 and most of them must take English as a compulsory course. Given this large population of young English learners and the anxiety and pressure they experience in their language learning, this dissertation aimed to extend the research on language mindsets to Chinese secondary-level education and ecologically analyze the factors that impact the acquisition of EFL learners' language mindsets from two main ecological systems, language classrooms in interactions with teachers and peers and family contexts in interactions with parents.

The rationale for concentrating on language learning classrooms is that classroom conditions are crucial for stimulating and sustaining the motivation and interest in learning L2 (Joe *et al.*, 2017; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023; Wang, 2023). For instance, L2 teachers' implicit messages conveying in their feedback such as "Don't worry, not everyone is good at English" can foster fixed language mindsets (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). In contrast, praise such as "The point of language learning is not to get it without mistakes. The point is to grow your mastery step by step" can facilitate growth language mindsets (Lou & Noels, 2016). Another element of originality of this research is that it explores the important role of parents in the process of forming language mindsets. Although teachers might have a significant impact on learners' beliefs, language learning is a long-term process that often also takes place outside the classroom context (Lou & Noels, 2017). Additionally, in education research, parents are traditionally a key stakeholder in supporting students' motivation and academic success as well (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016). Though the important role of parents in students' educational and psychological development such as mindsets has been recognised (Liu *et al.*, 2023), limited research has investigated how parents' language mindsets exert an impact on students' language mindsets. Moreover, since some research mentioned that parents' failure mindsets concerning failure as motivating or demotivating better predicted their

children's mindsets (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016, 2017), this dissertation will examine both parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets.

1.3. Aim of the research

In brief summary, since there is a paucity of research on the sources of EFL learners' language mindsets, this dissertation aimed at filling this gap by exploring the effects of classroom social climate, classroom goal structure, and parents in an understudied context, Chinese secondary school. In addition, since the relationship between language mindsets and L2 academic achievement remains unclear, this dissertation will also endeavour to contribute empirical evidence of the predictive nature of mindsets on academic achievement in learning L2. In this case, the research questions are:

- 1) *How predictive are students' perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure on their language mindsets?***
- 2) *How predicative are parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets on students' language mindsets?***
- 3) *How do students' language mindsets affect their L2 academic performance?***

The first research question fills the gaps associated with how context may influence language mindsets. The second research question aims to bridge the gaps concerning how key stakeholders' mindsets may influence students' language mindsets. The third research question addresses the gaps in relation to how language mindset relates to L2 development in terms of educational outcomes.

Some pedagogical and practical implications can be drawn from the results of this dissertation; for instance, learners might be more inclined to enjoy the L2 learning process and achieve better L2 performance when they perceive that their proficiency can be enhanced through increased effort, regardless of their age or cognitive abilities (Mercer & Ryan, 2010). Consequently, language educators should foster a growth language mindset and construct a L2 learning environment that stimulates students to

practice and communicate in the L2. Specifically, it could be beneficial for teachers to promote deeper self-reflection among students and assist them in establishing goals that reflect personal advancement, rather than being comparative to their peers (Mercer & Ryan, 2010).

1.4. Overview of the dissertation

The second chapter will provide an overview of the existing literature, moving from general concept to specific concept and related studies. The third chapter is going to illustrate the research methodology, and the fourth chapter will present the results. Chapter 5 offers a more detailed discussion of the research findings and implications for teaching and parenting. The final chapter provides a conclusion of this dissertation while pointing out some limitations and achievement. Empirical implications and future research agenda are also discussed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Mindset

The concept of mindset is deeply rooted in the social-cognitive model of achievement motivation theory proposed by Dweck & Leggett (1988) and Dweck (1999), referring to the beliefs about the malleability of human attributes such as intelligence, personality, and ability. Two broad perspectives of beliefs have been identified as growth mindset and fixed mindset: a growth mindset (or incremental theory) concerns the beliefs that intelligence is malleable and can be improved by efforts, whereas a fixed mindset (or entity theory) construes intelligence as immutable (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 2012). It is worthwhile to raising that mindsets and implicit theories are used interchangeably in the literature (Dweck, 1999; Lou & Noels, 2016; Ryan & Mercer, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). However, while research on mindsets suggests that most people are aware of and able to articulate their beliefs when forming and transforming their behaviours, the implications of “implicit” run counter to this idea as it often indicates people’s inability to report the existence of beliefs (Lou, 2019; Lou & Noels, 2019a). As such, this dissertation has chosen to use mindsets as opposed to implicit theories because it better conveys the comprehensible nature of the construct and connotes its considerable impacts on individuals’ other psychological constructs and behaviours (Ryan & Mercer, 2012).

Indeed, mindsets have been argued to be the core beliefs about the nature of personal qualities which underpin and link a large system of allied beliefs such as effort beliefs, attributions, goal orientations, and learning strategies (Dweck, 2012; Lou & Noels, 2016; Ryan & Mercer, 2012). In other words, growth mindset and fixed mindset are conceptualised as two motivational meaning-making systems that guide learners to think, feel, and act differently in education (Dweck, 1999; Lou, 2019; Lou & Noels, 2020a; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023). For example, learners who endorse growth mindsets tend to attribute failures to a lack of effort or strategies and see challenges as opportunities for improving (Dweck, 2012; Lou & Noels, 2016, 2017, 2020a, 2020c). As such, in challenging

situations, they are more likely to react in a more mastery-oriented manner with their main focus on development and learning (Dweck, 2012; Lou & Noels, 2016). Conversely, fixed mindsets direct learners to attribute failures to a lack of natural talent and interpret challenges as ego-threatening (Lou & Noels, 2020c). To protect self-esteem, learners who adopt fixed mindsets tend to avoid challenges in the fear of negative evaluation and experience more negative emotions such as helplessness and anxiety (Lou & Noels, 2020a; Ozdemir & Papi, 2022).

Consequently, these different meaning-making systems impact students' academic motivation, resilience, grit, engagement, and ultimately their academic achievement (Burnette *et al.*, 2013; Claro *et al.*, 2016; Dweck, 2012; Dweck & Yeager, 2012; Zeng *et al.*, 2016). For instance, Zeng *et al.* (2016) investigated the effects of growth mindsets on school engagement and psychological well-being as well as the mediating function of resilience based on 1260 Chinese students from five diversified primary and middle schools. Results from the structural equation model (SEM) revealed that students with growth mindsets are more likely to bounce back from hardships and obstacles of academic and daily life, and in turn be more engaged in their schoolwork and have better psychological well-being (Zeng *et al.*, 2016). However, this relationship was demonstrated by a cross-sectional study, so it could not explore the development of mindset. Future studies could utilise a longitudinal approach to examine the causal relationships between the studied variables.

Additionally, mindsets can be directly related to academic achievement, and evidence suggested that students who hold growth mindsets have higher academic achievement (Blackwell *et al.*, 2007). Nonetheless, it should be noted that based on meta-analysis studies, the relationship between growth mindset and academic performance has been shown to be weak to modest (Burnette *et al.*, 2013; Sisk *et al.*, 2018). Given the benefits of growth mindsets, several experiments and intervention studies have delved into whether mindset is malleable and subject to change (Blackwell *et al.*, 2007; Yeager &

Dweck, 2012). The results indicated that individuals' mindsets are dynamic, and growth mindsets can be cultivated and fostered by interventions to promote positive outcomes.

2.2. Language Mindset Drawing on Carol Dweck's Mindset Scale

Although mindsets have been extensively studied across different academic domains, including music, sports, math, and science, there has been limited attention devoted to understanding mindsets in language learning not until recently (Burnette *et al.*, 2013; Liu, 2022; Lou & Noels, 2017). Given that many people believe that there exists a specific aptitude in foreign language learning, as evidenced by claims that one must have a "gift" or "ear" for languages, the role of mindsets appears particularly important in SLA (Lou & Noels, 2016; Lou, 2019). The recent increase might be also attributed to the flowering of positive psychology (PP) in applied linguistics and SLA literature (Liu, 2022), which aims to strengthen learners' and teachers' positive experiences such as optimism, creativity, happiness, grit, resilience, well-being, and growth mindset (Dewaele *et al.*, 2019; Macintyre *et al.*, 2019).

In a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with tertiary-level EFL learners at universities in Austria (N=5) and Japan (N=4), Mercer & Ryan (2010) found that mindsets are domain-specific and exist on a continuum. In other words, one could hold a growth mindset in foreign language learning but a fixed mindset in math (Lou & Noels, 2016). In addition, language mindsets could even be skill-specific, and a learner might express a different set of mindset beliefs about pronunciation, writing, vocabulary learning and other aspects of language learning (Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Mercer, 2012). The domain-specificity and skill-specificity of mindset have been increasingly acknowledged, and several research began to investigate the role of mindset in SLA drawing on Dweck's (1999) mindset scale.

In L2 writing, Waller & Papi (2017) investigated 142 EFL university students' writing mindsets in the United States (US) and indicated that a growth writing mindset is a

significantly positive predictor of students' L2 writing motivation and feedback seeking orientation. Based on 128 and 287 college foreign language learners in the US respectively, Papi *et al.* (2019) and Papi (2020) also confirmed that a growth L2 mindset positively predicted the value of written corrective feedback as well as the practice of feedback monitoring and feedback inquiry. In another context, within the EFL writing classes at a Chinese university, the L2 writing mindsets, motivations, and views on peer evaluations of 305 English major students were assessed through surveys (Yao *et al.*, 2021a). Utilizing SEM, the outcomes corroborated the results of prior research, indicating that students' L2 writing mindsets are predictive of their attitudes towards peer assessment, with their motivation to master English writing serving as a pivotal mediator (Yao *et al.*, 2021a).

In L2 reading, Khajavy *et al.* (2022) gathered data from 489 Iranian university students and reported that L2 growth reading mindsets were positively correlated to L2 reading enjoyment and achievement while negatively correlate to L2 reading anxiety. In L2 speaking, Ozdemir & Papi (2022) examined 92 international EFL teaching assistants' L2 mindsets at a US university. The multiple regression results presented that whereas the fixed L2 mindset positively predicted L2 speaking anxiety, the growth L2 mindset positively predicted L2 speaking self-confidence. In L2 pragmatics, Zarrinabadi *et al.* (2022) explored the pragmatic mindsets of 213 EFL Iranian learners and revealed that learners' pragmatic mindsets were associated with their motivation to learn and use the L2 pragmatic norms. Additionally, Bai & Wang (2020) conducted questionnaire surveys among 690 Hong Kong primary school students and suggested that growth mindset was a stronger predictor of self-regulated learning and English language learning achievements than self-efficacy and intrinsic value according to the SEM results.

However, all the mentioned studies in the above paragraph were purely quantitative based on students' self-reports from questionnaire surveys as the only source of data (Bai & Wang, 2020; Khajavy *et al.*, 2022; Ozdemir & Papi, 2022; Papi *et al.*, 2019; Papi *et al.*, 2020; Waller & Papi, 2017; Yao *et al.*, 2021a; Zarrinabadi *et al.*, 2022). Relying on

students' self-reports may potentially induce biases in social desirability (Bai & Wang, 2020). Triangulating the data through qualitative techniques such as interviews with students and teachers, case studies, and classroom observations could capture the complexity of language mindsets and depict a more valid picture of the role of mindsets in SLA (Bai & Wang, 2020; Khajavy *et al.*, 2022; Ryan & Mercer, 2012; Ozdemir & Papi, 2022). In addition, most of the studies were carried out in the context of US university. Future study is required to replicate these results in other contexts with different educational backgrounds and proficiency levels. Factors such as EFL learners' age and native language were not carefully examined in these studies, and future research can benefit from exploring such factors.

Furthermore, studies which attempted to measure EFL learners' L2 mindsets were adapted from Dweck's (1999) original mindset scale regarding general intelligence (Khajavy *et al.*, 2022; Ozdemir & Papi, 2022; Papi *et al.*, 2019; Papi *et al.*, 2020; Yao *et al.*, 2021a). For example, the general items (e.g., *You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you can't really do much to change it*) were simply changed to items specific to the language learning domain (e.g., *You have a certain amount of intelligence for learning other languages, and you can't really do much to change it*). Though the Cronbach's alpha of the L2 mindset measurement adapted from Dweck's (1999) mindset scale in these studies were all above .70 which indicated high reliability, language mindset was not treated as an established construct with little exploration of the specific nature of language mindset and theorisation about the components of language mindset (Ryan & Mercer, 2012).

2.3. Language Mindset Drawing on Nigel Mantou Lou and Kimberly A. Noels' Language Mindsets Inventory (LMI)

With reference to Dweck's (1999) mindsets framework and recent qualitative findings on language mindsets (Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Mercer, 2012), Lou & Noels (2017) clearly defined language mindsets and delineated three related but distinct components. Language mindsets refer to 'domain-specific beliefs about whether the

ability to learn languages is malleable or not' (Lou & Noels, 2019b:2). These beliefs are associated with emotional experiences which play an essential role in motivated action and are independent from linguistic-related cognitions such as actual language aptitude (Lou & Noels, 2019b). Fixed language mindsets describe the notion that an individual either inherently possesses the capacity to learn languages or lacks it. In contrast, growth language mindsets embrace the idea that language learning capabilities can be developed and enhanced through dedicated effort and the application of effective learning strategies (Lou & Noels, 2019b).

Many learners hold essentialist perspectives regarding L2 aptitude and age limits in SLA, potentially discouraging them from learning a new language (Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Mercer, 2012). However, though the concept of general language intelligence might parallel the idea of general intelligence beliefs proposed by Dweck, beliefs regarding L2 aptitude and age limits are rarely considered. As such, Lou & Noels (2016), Lou & Noels (2017), and Lou (2019) identified three key aspects of language mindsets: (1) General language intelligence beliefs (GLB), the beliefs about whether general language intelligence is fixed or malleable; (2) Second language aptitude beliefs (L2B), the beliefs about whether the ability to learn a L2 is innate and immutable or can be developed with dedication; and (3) Age sensitivity beliefs about language learning (ASB), the beliefs about whether the capacity to learn languages is flexible up to a certain age and fixed thereafter, or if it remains malleable across the lifespan. Together, these three themes resemble three lines of academic debates in SLA: the nature-versus-nurture debates on verbal intelligence and L2 aptitude and the critical period hypothesis (Lou, 2019; Lou & Noels, 2019b).

To assess the three themes of language mindsets, Lou & Noels (2017, 2019a) introduced the Language Mindsets Inventory (LMI) and confirmed its valid and reliable use in research with university-level language learners by correlational and factor analyses. Additionally, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and hierarchical confirmatory factor analysis (HCFA) examined the internal structure and covariation among the three aspects (GLB, L2B, and ASB) and two beliefs (incremental and entity beliefs) regarding language mindsets. The results indicated that depending on the specific research

objectives, a researcher can justifiably use any of the 1-factor model, the 2-factor model, the 3-factor model, and the 6-factor model to guide their research as the model fit statistics were not significantly different. Since this dissertation is not interested in understanding the intricacies of students' language mindsets but the development of language mindsets in a larger system of variables, it may be useful to combine the six subscales into two subscales or a single index (Lou & Noels, 2017). However, although focusing on university-level learners enrolled in diverse types of language courses and originated from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds, the study's context was constrained in North America. Thus, it is crucial to keep in mind the limitations of applying the LMI to other populations and learning contexts (Lou & Noels, 2017; 2019b).

From the review of the extant literature, there is a dearth of research measuring students' language mindsets, especially across different countries and education levels (Yao *et al.*, 2021b). As mentioned in 2.2., most of the mindset research were conducted in the context of tertiary education with adult university students (e.g., Lou & Noels, 2017; Mercer & Ryan, 2010), thus junior high school students have been relatively ignored. In order to understand the bigger picture, we need to investigate the language mindsets of young students since their mindsets are more likely to be modified and transformed and they appear to experience more problems in language learning (Bai & Wang, 2023; Dweck, 1999). Thus, measuring and analysing junior high students' language mindsets can provide incentives and implications for educators to implement interventions in language teaching at an earlier stage (Yao *et al.*, 2021b).

Additionally, language mindsets have been rarely considered in the Chinese context which has intriguing elements to examine (Bai & Wang, 2023). On one hand, the Confucian values proposed that competence can be improved through hard work and attributed academic success to efforts (Bai & Wang, 2023). On the other hand, the English education in China is still predominantly exam-based and numerous students are worried that receiving poor marks could lead to a sense of shame and humiliation (Dweck, 1999; Yao *et al.*, 2021b). Yao *et al.* (2021b) extended this line of research to the context of Chinese secondary-level education, and claimed that LMI (Lou & Noels, 2017) was a reliable and validated scale to measure Chinese junior high school students'

language mindsets. However, the participants in Yao *et al.* (2021b) were from four schools located in the eastern coastal cities, and caution should be taken in generalising its results to other regions, given the regional disparities in educational development in China and the impacts of socio-economic contexts on students' mindsets (Claro *et al.*, 2016). This specific research project took place in Chengdu, a city that has received relatively little attention in academic research yet is the capital city of the southwestern province of Sichuan and a significant hub for Western China.

2.3.1. Language-Mindset Meaning System (LMMS) and Relevant Empirical Studies

As mentioned in 2.1., mindsets play a central role in many motivational phenomena that guide students make sense of their abilities and learning situations. Accordingly, Lou & Noels (2019a) conceptualised the Language-Mindset Meaning System (LMMS) which frames language mindset as the corner stone for meaning-making that helps learners to construe their FL/L2 experiences and develop different affective and behavioural coping strategies. Table 1 extracted from Lou & Noels (2019a: 544) presented how fixed and growth language mindset are systematically associated with different motivational beliefs and self-regulatory processes. For example, language mindsets are believed to be linked with language learners' achievement goal orientations: to acquire knowledge and improve their competence (i.e., mastery goals); to demonstrate their ability and outperform their peers (i.e., performance-approach goals); or to conceal their inadequacies and avoid underperformance (i.e., performance-avoidance goals). In addition, language mindsets also potentially influence learners' tendencies to engage in self-regulation or to resign from goal pursuit in the face of adversity (Burnette *et al.*, 2013). However, previous research did not specify how these different goals and self-regulatory tendencies are related to language mindsets (Lou & Noels, 2017).

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Lou, N. M. & Noels, K. A. (2019a) Language Mindsets, Meaning-Making, and MoSvaSon.
In: Lamb, M., Csizer, K., Henry, A. & Ryan, S. eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Motivation for Language Learning*. Cham: Springer International Publishing: 537-560.

Situated in Canadian universities with 150 and 189 university students who were taking a L2 or FL class, Lou & Noels (2016, 2017) managed to test the mindsets–goals–responses model. Multiple analytical strategies such as ANOVAs and regressions as well as path analysis had been conducted based on the data from questionnaires. The results supported the model that growth language mindsets predicted stronger mastery goals, which in turn predicted a stronger intention to continue learning the L2 with mastery-oriented strategies when facing challenges. Nonetheless, the direct link between language mindsets and students’ performance goals and responses was not evident because participants responded to hypothetical rather than actual challenging situations (Lou & Noels, 2016, 2017). Future research should provide participants an actual challenging situation such as a failure score on a mock language task to better illuminate the relation between language mindsets and failure responses when ability is threatened. Additionally, students’ self-perceived L2 competence was found to have a mediation effect (see Table 2). Located in a Chinese secondary school context, Yao *et al.* (2021b) also provided evidence for the mindsets–goals–responses model that, despite

students experienced considerable anxiety and stress from constant examinations, those with growth language mindsets are more motivated and resilient to the obstacles in English study.

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Lou, N. M. & Noels, K. A. (2017) Measuring Language Mindsets and Modeling Their Relations with Goal Orientations and Emotional and Behavioral Responses in Failure Situations. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101 (1): 214-243.

Language mindsets have also been empirically examined in association with competence-based emotional tendencies such as anxiety to use the target language and fear of being judged or rejected (Lou & Noels, 2020a, 2020b). With 581 ESL students in a Canadian university, Lou & Noels (2020a) conducted three studies, including a social interaction task, a double-blind randomised experiment, and a preregistered cross-sectional survey, and reported that language minority students' growth language mindsets can be primed to mitigate their rejection sensitivity, perceived rejection, and perceived contact avoidance. Lou & Noels (2020b) expanded the findings by adding length of residence as a moderator and asserted that, especially for newcomers, growth language mindsets could reduce language minority students' language anxiety and facilitated intercultural communication and language development. Nevertheless, to fully understand whether growth language mindsets could break the vicious cycle of language anxiety through language experience as well as whether and how language mindset interventions impact language use and development over time, a longitudinal design is necessary (Lou & Noels, 2020a, 2020b).

The existing studies on language mindsets predominantly concentrated on meaning-making with regards to one's own ability in language learning and largely overlooked that language mindsets also play a role in shaping social inferences about others' potential to learn a new language (Lou & Noels, 2020c). In a correlational study (N = 231) and an experimental study (N = 106), Lou & Noels (2020c) explored the potential effects of language mindsets on participants' attitudes towards intercultural contact involving immigrants. The findings suggested that experimentally-induced growth language mindsets led to positive judgments of immigrants' potential to develop their skills in the local language, which in turn predicted participants' willingness to interact with immigrants and support of immigrants' language education. Expanding on previous research (Lou & Noels, 2020a, 2020b), Lou & Noels (2020c) revealed that language mindsets not only affect migrants' language anxiety with native speakers but also significantly shape the intercultural communication experience for the native speakers themselves. Collectively, research on language mindsets shed light on fostering effective intercultural interactions and enhancing intergroup relations.

2.3.2. Language Mindset and L2 Achievement

As noted in 2.1., mindset can be indirectly and directly related to academic achievement (Blackwell *et al.*, 2007). Nevertheless, the number of studies is scant and future research is required to deepen the understandings of the role of language mindsets in L2 achievement (Khajavy *et al.*, 2021). Khajavy *et al.* (2021) investigated the roles of language mindsets measured by LMI and grit measured by short grit scale (Grit-S) as predictors of L2 achievement and the interrelationship between the two constructs. 1,178 Iranian university students completed the questionnaires and provided their final course grades of English. Results of SEM indicated that only growth language mindset was a weak but positive predictor of L2 achievement. The authors explained that students with growth language mindsets tended to have better L2 achievement because of their perseverance of effort and employment of mastery-oriented strategies. Nevertheless, using final-term course grades to measure students' L2 achievement has been criticised for validity issues, and using standardized tests can increase the consistency of results. A theoretical review conducted by Liu (2022) also showed that

EFL learners with growth language mindsets are grittier and devote more time to their performance.

Lou *et al.* (2022) explored the distinct and compounded effects of language mindsets, achievement goal orientation, persistence, language anxiety, and reappraisal on FL engagement and end-of-semester course grades. Based on 234 first-year Canadian university students, the exploratory structural equation modelling (ESEM) reported that growth language mindsets were significantly and positively correlated with mastery goals, persistence, positive reappraisal, and class engagement but not language anxiety and L2 achievement. However, language mindsets as a part of complex system with other motivational components together predicted L2 achievement. Similarly, Eren & Rakıcioğlu-Söylemez (2023) recruited 526 Turkish university students enrolled in Intensive English Program (IEP) and demonstrated that their growth language mindsets were moderately and positively associated with their graded performance. In addition, the relationships between GLB, L2B, ASB and graded performance were selectively mediated by perceived instrumentality and engagement. Nevertheless, Eren & Rakıcioğlu-Söylemez (2023) and Lou *et al.* (2022) both pointed out that the possible effects of learning environment such as instructor's language mindsets on students' language mindsets have not been considered in their studies. Such an investigation would shed further light on comprehending the origin and development of different mindset systems as well as the mechanism through which the mindset system operates to enhance students' L2 achievement progressively (Lou *et al.*, 2022).

In summary, it is not until recently that researchers have addressed the concept of language mindsets in the field of SLA (Lou & Noels, 2019a). In addition, the existing studies have clustered in (1) the conceptualisations of language mindsets (e.g., Lou & Noels, 2017; Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Mercer, 2012); (2) the systematic and dynamic links between language mindsets and other motivational factors (e.g., Lou & Noels, 2016; Lou *et al.*, 2022); and (3) the effectiveness and mechanisms of language-mindset interventions (e.g., Lou & Noels, 2016, 2017, 2020c). Some researchers also

paid attention to the relationship between language mindsets and L2 achievement, but the studies were limited, and the results were inconsistent (Eren & Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez; Khajavy *et al.*, 2021; Lou *et al.*, 2022). Other important areas for investigation identified by Lou & Noels (2019b), including the origins and contextual factors that contribute to different language mindsets as well as the impact of teachers and classroom climate on learners' language mindsets, have not received the attention they deserve.

2.4. Where Do Language Mindsets Come From?

Experimental research such as Lou and Noels (2016) has shown that certain interventions such as reading persuasive articles can temporarily change students' language mindsets. The priming can help counteract the effects of a fixed mindset that students might have developed over time. The malleability of language mindsets suggest that meaning making is a contextualised and dynamic process rather than a decontextualized and stable trait (Lou & Noels, 2019a). In other words, students shift their language mindsets in response to their interactions with their teachers, classmates, and participation in different learning contexts (Lou & Noels, 2016). However, Lou & Noels (2016) also noted that though priming could change learners' language mindsets, it is likely that they will return to their chronic mindsets once the situational cues disappear.

In this case, researchers need to explore where language mindsets come from or how contexts affect language mindsets since students might come to endorse certain mindsets more stably if the learning environment continually promotes corresponding goals or beliefs (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Given the benefits of growth language mindsets, this dissertation aimed at answering this research gap to provide pedagogical and practical implications for all stakeholders engaged in students' L2 learning experiences. The subsequent sessions will initially explore a pivotal study that took an ecological perspective to investigate the origins of language mindsets, and then delve into the development of language mindsets from three main perspectives, classroom social climate, classroom goal structure, and parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets.

2.4.1. Where do Language Mindsets Come from? An Ecological Perspective on EFL Students' Mindsets About L2 Writing

Shirvan *et al.* (2021) took an ecological perspective to explore the development of L2 writing mindsets and the association with self-efficacy. Under a modern social hermeneutics design, Shirvan *et al.* (2021) purposefully selected and interviewed six Iranian adult EFL learners with different experiences of learning English at language institutes. Several eco-systemic factors have been identified to underpin the emergence, complexity, and dynamics of language mindsets regarding the skill of L2 writing. Students highlighted that teachers (microsystem) are pivotal in shaping their L2 writing mindsets. In addition, their previous learning experience, interactions with parents, and the structure of high-stake exams (mesosystem), the institutional policies that pay overwhelming attention to communicative English over writing skills (exosystem), and the mainstream culture in favour of a natural talent for writing skills (macrosystem) also play significant roles in constructing students' language mindsets.

This study provided a complex-dynamic perspective to understand the formation of students' language mindsets and critical implications for all stakeholders involving in students' socialisation within the multiple ecological systems. However, some limitations have been acknowledged for future improvement. Firstly, this study is purely qualitative based on a small sample size of six adult EFL learners which might lack the statistical power to make broad claims about the population. In addition, the reliance on students' self-report data could introduce bias, and future research could adopt a mixed-method approach while engaging other stakeholders such as teachers and parents or conducting some classroom observations. Secondly, the findings may not be applicable to learners from other cultural backgrounds or educational systems than Iran. Thirdly, while this study acknowledged that EFL learners' language mindsets were situated and went through change under the impact of the classroom activities and feedback of the teachers, it did not fully capture how these mindsets evolve in response to different educational interventions over time. Given the most marked importance of microsystem and mesosystem, the following sessions will examine them in more depth.

2.4.2. Classroom Social Climate (CSC)

The experiences and expression of emotion by teachers and students create the classroom social climate, which in turn shapes their emotional experience and the quality of emotional and social behaviours in the classroom (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wang *et al.*, 2021; Wang, 2023). Patrick *et al.* (2011) posited four complementary elements of CSC: (1) Teacher academic support (TAS) refers to students' perceived teacher support to master the content; (2) Teacher emotional support (TES) concerns students' perceptions of the teacher caring about their well-being; (3) Classroom mutual respect (CMR) relates to students' perceived promotions of mutual respect and peer support in classroom interactions by teachers; and (4) Task-related interaction (TRI) describes the extent to which the teacher is perceived as embracing collaborative interactions among students in various academic tasks.

A growing body of evidence suggested that classrooms with a positive climate can improve student engagement, learning motivation, as well as academic performance (Patrick *et al.*, 2007; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). However, the construct of CSC has been relatively neglected in L2/FL classrooms while the contextual features of the L2/FL classrooms are thought to play a central role in inspiring and maintaining L2 learning motivation and engagement (Joe *et al.*, 2017; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023; Wang, 2023). Joe *et al.* (2017) proposed a model of the role of the CSC on 381 Korean secondary school L2 learners' self-determined motivation, willingness to communicate (WTC), and L2 achievement. The results of SEM presented that students' intrinsic motivation and WTC were predicted by positive CSC, and L2 achievement was positively predicted by teacher emotional support. The findings highlighted the significant impacts of the CSC exerted on L2 learning experiences and outcomes.

Nevertheless, to the best of this author's knowledge, no existing research has examined the impact of the CSC on students' language mindsets. Instead, CSC and language mindsets are largely viewed as parallel variables that contribute to other L2 outcome variables such as L2 WTC (Wang *et al.*, 2021), EFL academic resilience (Wang *et al.*, 2023),

and L2 grit and academic engagement (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023). Additionally, all the three studies mainly focused on adult college students while the CSC might be especially crucial for young adolescents since adolescence is typically a precarious time for changes in achievement beliefs and behaviors such as self-consciousness and sensitivity (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). In this case, this dissertation endeavours to explore the role of CSC in the cultivation of young secondary EFL learners' language mindsets.

2.4.3. Classroom Goal Structure (CGS)

An achievement goal is the underlying purpose or rationale for achievement behaviors, serving as a cognitive schema that helps to comprehend, decipher, and respond to achievement-related information within a defined context (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Achievement goal theory emerged from observations that children exhibit varied reactions to failure: some succumbed to a state of helplessness, whereas others engaged in adaptive coping strategies (Dweck, 2012). Such divergent responses were linked to the differing mindsets that children hold, which in turn influenced the types of achievement goals they pursued (Lee & Bong, 2019). Session 2.3.1. had introduced and defined three different achievement goals. As also mentioned in 2.3.1., some researchers inspired by the mindset theory have manipulated language mindsets as a precursor of achievement goal orientation (Lou & Noels, 2016, 2017). The results showed that learners with more fixed language mindsets and lower self-perceived proficiency were inclined to pursue performance-avoidance, which led to a lesser degree of mastery, a heightened sense of helplessness, increased anxiety, a more pronounced fear of failure, and a diminished intention to continue L2 learning.

Furthermore, which goals students pursued depended heavily on the prominent features of their external environment (Lee & Bong, 2019). Essentially, the achievement goals embraced by parents and teachers, along with the goal structures in the classroom perceived by students formulate students' personal achievement goal orientation and create differences in their ensuing motivation, strategy use, and performance (Lee & Bong, 2019). For example, Meece *et al.* (2006) examined the influence of classroom goal

structure on students' motivation and achievement and reflected that while mastery-oriented classroom goal structure was linked with the most favourable motivation and learning behaviors, performance-orientated classroom goal structure resulted in diminished motivation. Here, mastery goal orientation is characterised by an emphasis on enhancing one's competencies, acquiring new skills, attempting to achieve challenging tasks, and striving to comprehend educational content (Meece *et al.*, 2006). Conversely, a performance goal orientation is centered on showcasing superior ability in comparison to peers, competing to outperform others, and employing social comparison as a benchmark for assessing ability and performance (Meece *et al.*, 2006).

Nonetheless, a limited number of studies have explored the impact of CGS on students' development of mindsets, and particularly language mindsets (Park *et al.*, 2006). In a year-long study (student N=424, Teacher N=58), Park *et al.* (2006) reported that teacher-reported performance-oriented instructional practices were associated with students' fixed mindsets, which in turn affected students' mathematics achievement. To better analyze the teaching practices underpinning the CGS, Yu *et al.* (2022) employed the TARGET model of classroom structure and related it to the development of growth (vs. fixed) mindsets (see Table 3). In terms of the TARGET model, evaluation has been mostly studied. For instance, Lou & Noels (2020d) conducted a randomised controlled experiment among 180 ESL university students who failed a difficult English test and received either ability-consoling or improvement-oriented feedback from a teacher. The findings revealed that improvement-oriented feedback predicted students' endorsement of growth mindsets and need satisfaction, which in turn predicted students' duration of task engagement. In addition, Zarrinabadi *et al.* (2023) asserted that teachers' praise for efforts (vs. intelligence) enhanced Irian EFL learners' growth language mindsets, communicative competence, and WTC, and ameliorated their speaking anxiety. Calingasan & Plata (2022) confirmed the benefits of praise for efforts with Filipino ESL learners.

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Yu, J., Kreijkes, P. & Salmela-Aro, K. (2022) Students' growth mindset: Relation to teacher beliefs, teaching practices, and school climate. *Learning and Instruction*, 80, 101616. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2022.101616> (Accessed 19th July 2024)

Therefore, research on CGS might offer useful guidance on how to combine different teaching practices to support students' growth language mindset (Yu *et al.*, 2022), and this dissertation aimed at filling this gap. Through multidimensional scaling, Patrick *et al.* (2011) noticed that there is a convergence between a positive CSC and mastery-oriented CGS. However, measuring CSC could provide multidimensional perspectives when researchers want a more detailed and nuanced examination of dimensions within mastery-oriented CGS. In addition, performance-oriented CGS was clearly distinct from the CSC constructs. As such, CSC and CGS are viewed as distinct but complementary constructs in this dissertation.

2.4.4. Parents' Language Mindsets and Failure Mindsets

As mentioned in 2.4.1., the interactions with parents in the mesosystem could also exert significant effects on L2 learners' language mindsets. In addition, parents have traditionally played a key role in children's motivation and academic success (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016). However, to the best search of this author, no empirical studies have examined the impacts of parents on the development of student' language mindsets. In contrast to college students, adolescent students' beliefs and values are more malleable and easily influenced by surrounding adults, which increases the significance of research on the influence of parents on students' language mindsets. Thus far, researchers have primarily focused on how parents' praise influences children's mindsets, and the results

suggested that children with parents who praise them for efforts rather than intelligence are more likely to adopt growth mindsets and mastery goals (Boncquet *et al.*, 2022; Pomerantz & Kempner, 2013).

Some research explored the influence of parents' mindsets on children's mindsets, but no significant relationships have been found (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016). Haimovitz & Dweck (2017) explained that parents' mindsets might not be visible to children as parents typically do not manifest themselves clearly in parental practices. For instance, parents who endorse growth mindsets are still likely to praise their children for talent. Instead, Haimovitz & Dweck (2016, 2017) suggested that parents' failure mindsets which were more visible to children predicted children's mindsets. Parents who perceived failures as a catalyst driving the process of learning, improving performance, and fostering personal development (*a failure-is-enhancing mindset*) were more likely to socialise children with growth mindsets. In contrast, children who hold fixed mindsets were more likely to have parents who view failures as an obstacle that hinders these very aspects (*a failure-is debilitating mindset*). Although Haimovitz & Dweck (2016, 2017) demonstrated the effects of parents' failure mindset on children's mindset, evidence from different cultures is needed. Liu *et al.* (2023) extended this line of research in Chinese context in which children are traditionally viewed as appendages of their parents, and children's scholastic achievements significantly impact the family's reputation, either positively or negatively. Additionally, Chinese parents are prone to be more concerned about their children's academic failures and exhibit higher levels of failure-is-debilitating beliefs than Western parents. Similarly, the results generated by the Study 1 of Liu *et al.* (2023) supported the claim made by Haimovitz & Dweck (2016, 2017) concerning the positive effects of parents' failure-is-enhancing mindset on children's development of growth mindsets.

However, Liu *et al.* (2023) raised the concern that parents' beliefs are not always consistent with their children's perceptions. In this case, Liu *et al.* (2023) recruited another 298 children in Study 2 to report on their mindsets and perceptions of their

parents' failure mindsets. The findings confirmed the outcomes from Study 1 and showed that children's perceptions of their parents' failure mindsets had the same impact as the parents' own assessments of their beliefs. The results of Tao *et al.* (2020) also supported that students' perception of their parents' failure mindsets as debilitating predicted their own failure-is-debilitating mindsets and fixed mindsets. Besides, Song *et al.* (2022) probed the association between parents' growth mindsets and children's persistence and academic Skills. The children reported higher levels of persistence when their parents exhibited a strong growth mindset, and teachers assessed students as more proficient readers when their parents embraced a growth mindset.

The literature review begins by providing an overview of the broader field of mindset research, then narrows down to the particular notion of language mindset, followed by an examination of related studies. It also highlights the research gaps that this study aims to address. The subsequent chapter will detail the methodology for gathering and analyzing data.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

This proposed study adopted a mixed-method approach to systematically address the research questions. In detail, a convergent parallel design was chosen to collect quantitative and qualitative data separately and then converge the data for triangulation (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). For example, the quantitative and qualitative data might be compared and contrasted to look for similarity, difference, and complementarity (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Primarily, quantitative research was conducted to explore 1): the impact of students' perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure as well as parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets on students' language mindsets; and 2) the impact of students' language mindsets on their L2 academic achievement. This quantitative stage centred around the study of variables that captured the common features of groups of students (Dörnyei, 2007), and explored the predictive nature of these variables.

Owing to the exploratory nature, this research also engaged in qualitative inquiry so that it could respond in a flexible way to new details in terms of the development of language mindsets (Denscombe, 2010). Specifically, a multiple case study design was applied for two reasons: 1) Since very little is known about the origins of language development, the detailed study of a few cases might be particularly advantageous for open and fluid exploration (Dörnyei, 2007; Gustafsson, 2017). 2) Multiple case studies allow analysis within and across cases to understand the similarities and differences (Gustafsson, 2017). The use of mixed-method approach can increase the accuracy of data and reliability through triangulation while making sense of highly complex situations in a more comprehensive way (Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Denscombe, 2010).

3.2. Participants and Procedures

Convenience sampling was taken as the sampling strategy for this dissertation. Although Cohen *et al.* (2007) argued that convenience sampling bears the risk of generating biased results with an under-representation of the population, this was the most cost-effective and accessible method for an external student researcher. In addition, the chosen school is a public school which is arguably a typical and representative school in China. Primarily, this school mostly attracts students from working to middle class, which is reflective of a broad cross-section of the Chinese population. Moreover, as a public school, it is more accessible to the majority of students in China, contrasting with elite or private schools that may have selective admissions processes and potentially different educational experiences. In this case, students in this school are less likely to have pre-existing growth language mindsets or prestigious cultural capital.

Participants were pairs of Chinese EFL learners and their parents from two intact classes in a junior high school in Chengdu, Sichuan, China. Students were all in their final year of junior high school, aged from 14 to 16 years old. Prior to the research, I went to this school in person and introduced the research project to my contact headteacher. After receiving consent from the headteacher, she displayed the slides that I made to parents and students in the parents' meetings. On the slides, I explained the research purpose and procedures, highlighted the confidentiality of each participant's personal information and their rights, and presented the QR code and the link to the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained two parts, the first one for students and the second one for parents. 87 responses were recorded. Of these, 8 responses were all blank, 6 responses only had parents' answers but no students' answers, 2 responses only had students' answers, and 2 responses with the same rating for all the questions that only took 20 seconds to finish. The 18 responses were excluded from the analysis, and this left final sample of 69 matched pairs of participants (i.e. 69 students and 69 parents). Students were asked whether they were willing to participate in the follow-up individual interview at the end of the questionnaire. Students voluntarily left their preferred contact information for me to arrange Microsoft Teams meetings, and their parents also gave their consents at the end of their part of the questionnaire for me to make contact.

10 potential participants gave their assent (students) and consent (parents) to participate in the interview. Maximum variation sampling was adopted to select 4 students with varied mindset and achievement profiles (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Approximately, each interview lasted for 20 minutes, enabling a rich and detailed body of data while preventing interviewee fatigue (Cohen *et al.*, 2007), which was especially important given their young age. The interviews were implemented in Chinese to ensure the validity and reliability of their responses (Denscombe, 2010), as the capabilities of respondents in terms of English language proficiency was considered too low to provide appropriate responses. The detailed information of the participants was presented below in Table 4.

Student	Language Mindsets	Classroom mastery goal structure	Classroom performance goal structure	Classroom social climate	Parents' language mindsets	Parents' failure mindsets	L2 Academic performance
A	6	6	3.5	6	4.78	5	117
Student	Language Mindsets	Classroom mastery goal structure	Classroom performance goal structure	Classroom social climate	Parents' language mindsets	Parents' failure mindsets	L2 Academic performance
B	4.89	4.6	5.25	5.2	3.89	3.33	100
Student	Language Mindsets	Classroom mastery goal structure	Classroom performance goal structure	Classroom social climate	Parents' language mindsets	Parents' failure mindsets	L2 Academic performance
C	5.22	5.4	3.75	5.56	6	5.67	85
Student	Language Mindsets	Classroom mastery goal structure	Classroom performance goal structure	Classroom social climate	Parents' language mindsets	Parents' failure mindsets	L2 Academic performance
D	1.22	1.4	1.25	1.76	1.33	1	58

Table 4. Participant Information

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The questionnaire designed for this study measured students' growth language mindsets, their perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure, their L2 academic achievement, and parents' growth language mindsets and failure mindsets (see [Appendix B](#)). Given students' and especially parents' limited English proficiency, this researcher translated the original English scales into Chinese to eliminate comprehension issues. The translated version was scrutinized by two experienced EFL teachers who worked in the junior high school. No information was evaluated as lost

during translation by these experts, and all participants responded to the Chinese version of the questionnaire.

3.3.1. The Language Mindset Inventory (LMI)

Students' and parents' language mindsets in three subdimensions, GLB, L2B, and ASB, were measured by the LMI (Lou & Noels, 2017). As mentioned, LMI has been employed in a number of studies across various research settings and has demonstrated good validity and reliability (Eren & Rakıcioğlu-Söylemez, 2023; Lou & Noels, 2020a; Yao *et al.*, 2021b). For each of the three subdimension, there were 6 items, and 3 of which were reversed. Given previous scholarship arguing that reverse-worded items are cognitive burdensome, especially for younger respondents, and given the large number of items in LMI, this research removed the 9 reversed items to ameliorate measurement error and respondent fatigue in line with Liu *et al.* (2023) and Wang *et al.* (2021). The language mindset measure thus included 9 items, with 3 items for each subdimension. Participants indicated their agreement with the statements on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Higher scores indicate a stronger growth language mindset.

3.3.2. Students' Perceptions of Classroom Social Climate (CSC) and Classroom Goal Structure (CGS)

Classroom social climate and classroom goal structure were measured via students' perceptions because 1) the ways students perceive the same classroom environment might be varied in terms of individual differences; and 2) students' perceptions might be divergent from teachers' self-report instructional practices and it is the students' subjective perceptions that are most critical for understanding the impact of classroom environment on their language mindsets (Meece *et al.*, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2016; Patrick & Ryan, 2008). Therefore, it is important to evaluate how individual EFL learners perceive and give meaning to their language learning classroom experiences (Patrick & Ryan, 2008).

Students' perceptions of the EFL classroom social climate was assessed with Wang *et al.*'s (2021) Chinese language measure of CSC adapted from Patrick *et al.*'s (2011) measure, which includes four subscales: teacher emotional support (TES), teacher academic support (TAS), classroom mutual respect (CMR), and task-related interaction (TRI). Previous research adapting this measure to investigate the influence of CSC showed good reliability (Joe *et al.*, 2017), and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the Chinese-translated version tested in Wang *et al.* (2021) and Wang *et al.* (2023) were .95 and .96 respectively. All 16 items were rephrased as "English teacher" and "English classroom" instead of "teacher" and "classroom", and all items were measured from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6).

The classroom goal structure as perceived by students was examined through two scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS; Midgley *et al.*, 1996). The 5-item Classroom Mastery Goal Structure scale captures the degree to which students feel the teacher prioritizes grasping new concepts, acquiring new skills, learning from mistakes, and fostering a love for learning. The 4-item Classroom Performance Goal Structure scale assesses how much the teacher is seen as promoting rivalry and peer competition in academic pursuits. All items were measured from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6).

3.3.3. L2 Academic Achievement

Students' scores for the common junior high school uniform examination were collected. These scores were chosen over other assessment measures for two reasons. First the scores of the uniform examination was conducted throughout the Chengdu city, and thus are standardized examinations, which increases the validity. Second, as these scores are not teacher-rated, it was thought to increase the reliability of the results when compared with the locally developed assessments used in the classroom. This was especially important as students in the study were enrolled in different classes. This examination contained listening, grammar filling, cloze test, reading comprehension, error correction, and writing with a full score of 120 and a pass score of 72.

3.3.4. Parents' Failure Mindsets

Six items developed by Haimovitz & Dweck (2016) were used to measure parents' failure mindsets. This scale had a reliable internal structure (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) that was distinct from that of other related constructs such as mindsets (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016). All items were measured from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Since item 4 to 6 were negatively worded, this research will reverse the scoring before including them in multi-item scales. After the reverse scoring, the mean scores of the six items were calculated to indicate parents' failure mindset. A higher score suggested that the parents have a stronger inclination toward the failure-is-enhancing mindset.

3.3.5. Interview

Two pilot interviews with two students were implemented to validate the interview questions. The first pilot interview corresponded tightly with the structure and content of the questionnaires. However, questions such as "Does your English teacher encourage students to collaborate and help each other?" only elicited yes-or-no answers. As such, the second pilot interview started with a general question regarding students' perceptions of language mindsets and opinions on where language mindsets come from, which worked well to embrace new ideas (See [Appendix C](#)). However, the participant found it difficult to understand the abstract concept of language mindset. In this case, at the beginning of the formal interviews, I included a clarification of the concept to eliminate of ambiguities. Except the general starting question, I also prepared a few prompts to lead into specific aspects such as "how do you perceive the impact of interactions with teachers and peers on your language mindsets?" and why-questions to explore why they think in that particular way.

3.4. Data Analysis

3.4.1. Quantitative Data

69 responses were included in the data analysis and were processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29. Primarily, descriptive statistics such as

the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient were calculated for each subdimension of LMI and other primary variables. Then, assumptions for linear regression, including normality, outliers, linearity, and multicollinearity, were checked. To examine how does students' perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure (predictors) affect their language mindsets (outcome variable) and how does parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets (predictors) affect students' language mindsets (dependent variable), multivariate analysis using multiple linear regression was implemented. Additionally, all the four predictors were then put in one simultaneous multiple regression model to assess the overall model fit and the significance of individual predictors. With students' language mindsets as the predictor, its relationship with their L2 academic achievement was tested by simple linear regression.

3.4.2. Qualitative Data

This dissertation looked at the qualitative data within each case in-depth, allowing thorough exploration of research questions (Gustafsson, 2017). Then, a cross-case analysis was followed to seek differences and similarities between the cases (Gustafsson, 2017). Specifically, this study employed thematic analysis which not only enabled the researcher to conduct deductive or theory-driven analysis but also allowed new findings to emerge, contributing to the latent assumptions and ideologies from specific examples (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Primarily, the verbal data were transcribed and reviewed. Then, initial codes were generated based on open coding by segmenting raw interview data into meaningful expressions and creating categories where necessary (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Finally, the themes, the patterned responses capturing something significant regarding the research questions, were found out, revised, and defined (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval (See [Appendix A](#)) was obtained from the departmental research ethics committee before distributing the questionnaires to check whether extra clearance was

needed (Bell & Waters, 2014). As the research involved children, consent was obtained from a parent of all student participants, and children were also asked to give their assent to take part. In addition, this online study followed the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The data was safely stored in the university OneDrive with a strong password, and all the collected information will be deleted after this dissertation is assessed (BERA, 2018).

4. Results

This chapter is bifurcated into two sections, delineating the quantitative and qualitative results of the study. The quantitative results are systematically organized in correspondence with the three research questions that have guided the inquiry. This structured approach ensures that the empirical data is presented in a manner that directly addresses the questions posed, thereby facilitating a clear understanding of the study's empirical underpinnings. In the qualitative analysis, this chapter focuses exclusively on the results of cross-case thematic analysis, a strategic decision driven by the recognition of limited yet insightful data elicited from the interviews. Consequently, the chapter reports on the overarching themes that are deemed more likely to contribute substantively to the discourse. The omission of within-case information is a deliberate choice, aimed at avoiding an unwieldy narrative and ensuring the presentation of findings that exhibit a broader relevance.

4.1. Quantitative Results

4.1.1. Descriptive Statistics

The Cronbach's alpha values, means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and bivariate correlations for each subdimension of LMI and other key variables are presented in Table 5. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of all variables met the minimum value of 0.70 for linguistic research purposes (Dörnyei, 2007). In addition, most of the variables reach the value of 0.85, which demonstrate good internal reliability. All variables fall within the range of normal, with the exception of the classroom social climate and certain of its subcomponents, which exhibit a positive kurtosis exceeding 3. To check any outlier values for this variable, z-scores were created, and two outliers (> -3 SDs from the M) were identified. Instead of removing the outliers, they were assigned with the cut-off value ($M - 3*SD$), and this helped maintain the integrity of the dataset by keeping all data points while reducing the influence of extreme values on the overall analysis. After recoding, the kurtosis of classroom social climate reduced to 1.526.

	Descriptive Statistics																	
	α	Range	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis										
1. Test Scores		98	35	133	96.48	19.99	-1.10	0.89										
2. Students' GLB	0.92	5	1	6	4.29	1.32	-0.72	0.11										
3. Students' L2B	0.88	5	1	6	4.56	1.20	-1.02	0.95										
4. Students' ASB	0.88	5	1	6	4.55	1.11	-0.81	0.90										
5. Students' Language Mindset	0.88	5	1	6	4.48	1.08	-0.97	1.33										
6. Classroom Mastery Goal Structure	0.90	5	1	6	4.81	1.08	-1.29	2.13										
7. Classroom Performance Goal Structure	0.80	5	1	6	4.44	0.98	-0.90	2.14										
8. Teacher Emotional Support	0.92	5	1	6	4.54	1.16	-0.85	1.14										
9. Teacher Academic Support	0.92	5	1	6	4.88	1.07	-1.51	3.37										
10. Classroom Mutual Respect	0.93	5	1	6	5.05	1.06	-1.64	3.79										
11. Task-related Interaction	0.86	5	1	6	4.95	1.13	-1.37	2.47										
12. Classroom Social Climate	0.95	5	1	6	4.85	1.03	-1.57	3.75										
13. Parents' GLB	0.90	5	1	6	4.45	1.10	-0.46	0.45										
14. Parents' L2B	0.91	5	1	6	4.59	1.11	-1.04	1.75										
15. Parents' ASB	0.94	5	1	6	4.59	1.09	-0.64	0.76										
16. Parents' Language Mindset	0.86	5.78	0.22	6	4.47	1.10	-1.09	2.97										
17. Parents' Failure Mindset	0.87	5	1	6	4.63	1.01	-0.65	1.02										
**	Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).																	
*	Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).																	
Bivariate Correlations																		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17		
	.580**	.633**	.476**	.612**	.460**	0.347	.465**	.472**	.404**	.386**	.468**	.328**	.403**	0.116	0.222	.290*		
		.773**	.666**	.910**	.692**	.451**	.662**	.606**	.551**	.511**	.628**	.648**	.575**	.354**	.541**	.445**		
			.708**	.913**	.722**	.417**	.631**	.661**	.578**	.536**	.645**	.601**	.639**	.360**	.510**	.442**		
				.860**	.712**	.505**	.604**	.624**	.571**	.543**	.628**	.565**	.552**	.508**	.595**	.430**		
					.790**	.520**	.709**	.696**	.635**	.587**	.706**	.660**	.642**	.429**	.594**	.480**		
						.440**	.816**	.780**	.794**	.779**	.851**	.596**	.632**	.485**	.621**	.506**		
							.342**	.465**	.421**	.379**	.430**	.495**	.514**	.388**	.411**	.402**		
								.884**	.826**	.742**	.927**	.534**	.544**	.471**	.505**	.509**		
									.847**	.781**	.940**	.530**	.521**	.441**	.490**	.471**		
										.876**	.950**	.529**	.498**	.486**	.470**	.483**		
											.912**	.579**	.522**	.483**	.485**	.465**		
												.586**	.560**	.505**	.524**	.518**		
													.781**	.634**	.772**	.621**		
														.606**	.772**	.741**		
															.679**	.533**		
																.563**		

Table 5. Descriptive statistics among primary variables

4.1.2. How predictive are students' perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure on their language mindsets?

A multiple linear regression was run to predict students' language mindsets from students' perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure. Primarily, all assumptions for multiple regression were checked and met. The Casewise Diagnostics table in the regression output showed that Case 5 with a score that was 3.16 SDs below the mean has been identified as an outlier in the dependent variable. To keep the analysis free from the influence of extreme values that may not be representative of the population, this particular case was excluded from analysis. When checking for multicollinearity, there was quite a strong positive correlation between classroom social climate and classroom mastery goal structure ($r = .843$, $p < .001$), which was expected with reference to the literature review but was still within the range of acceptable when taking into account the Tolerance and VIT values.

Multiple linear regression showed that students' perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure statistically significantly predicted their growth language

mindsets, $F(3,64) = 50.43$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = .703$. The R^2 value indicates that 70.3% of the variance in students' growth language mindsets can be explained by a model containing students' perceived CSC and CGS. The general form of equation is predicted growth language mindsets = $-0.50 + (0.614 * \text{classroom mastery goal structure}) + (0.279 * \text{classroom performance goal structure}) + (0.077 * \text{classroom social climate})$. Table 6 presented the standardized Beta value (β) which indicates that while mastery-oriented classroom goal structure significantly and positively predicted students' growth language mindsets, classroom social climate was not a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = 0.585$).

	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	-0.05	0.424		-0.118	0.906
Classroom Mastery Goal Structure	0.614	0.127	0.631	4.841	<.001
Classroom Performance Goal Structure	0.279	0.082	0.258	3.38	0.001
Classroom social climate	0.077	0.14	0.07	0.549	0.585

Table 6. CGS, CSC & Students' LM

When taking a closer look at the subcomponents of classroom social climate, the regression model suggested that teacher emotional support and teacher academic support were significant predictors of students' growth language mindsets, while classroom mutual respect and task-related interaction did not significantly predict growth language mindsets (See [Appendix D](#)). The strong correlations and significant coefficients for teacher support variables highlighted the importance of a supportive classroom environment in fostering growth language mindsets among students.

Next, the subcomponents of students' growth language mindsets, including GLB, L2B, and ASB, were regressed on the CSC and CGS variables to investigate their predictive effects. Results, shown in Table 7, indicated that the classroom mastery goal structure was a consistent and significant predictor across all three subcomponents of students' growth language mindsets. The classroom performance goal structure showed some predictive power for ASB, but not for GLB and L2B. The classroom social climate did not significantly predict any of the subcomponents in these models. These findings

underscored the importance of a mastery-oriented classroom environment in fostering a growth language mindset among students.

In summary, a multiple regression was conducted to examine the predictive power of perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure on students' growth language mindsets. The results showed that the classroom learning environment, particularly the goal structure, played a crucial role in shaping students' language mindsets. A mastery-oriented classroom goal structure significantly predicted the development of growth language mindsets among Chinese junior high school EFL learners. While the classroom social climate did not emerge as a significant predictor in the regression models, the overall findings underscored the importance of creating a language learning environment that supports and encourages students to view their language abilities as malleable and improvable through effort and learning strategies. This understanding can inform educational practices aimed at enhancing students' motivation and academic performance in language learning.

Dependent variable: Students' GLB						
	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	-0.663		0.606		-1.094	-1.094
Classroom Mastery Goal Structure	0.59	0.181		0.509	3.255	0.002
Classroom Performance Goal Structure	0.317	0.118		0.246	2.683	0.009
Classroom social climate	0.156	0.2		0.119	0.783	0.437

Dependent variable: Students' L2B						
	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	0.15		0.571		0.263	0.794
Classroom Mastery Goal Structure	0.651		0.171	0.601	3.811	<.001
Classroom Performance Goal Structure	0.199		0.111	0.165	1.791	0.078
Classroom social climate	0.089		0.188	0.072	0.472	0.639

Dependent variable: Students' ASB						
	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	0.311		0.549		0.566	0.573
Classroom Mastery Goal Structure	0.608		0.164	0.591	3.703	<.001
Classroom Performance Goal Structure	0.278		0.107	0.243	2.599	0.012
Classroom social climate	0.018		0.181	0.015	0.099	0.922

Table 7. CGS, CSC & Students' GLB, L2B, ASB

4.1.3. How predicative are parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets on students' language mindsets?

In order to answer research question two, a multiple linear regression was carried out to investigate the impacts of parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets on

students' language mindsets. Neither variable was significantly skewed or kurtotic, and the data met all assumptions of regression. Multiple regression showed a statistically significant relationship between parents' language and failure mindsets and students' language mindsets, ($F(2, 66) = 20.546, p < 0.001$). The slope coefficient for parents' language mindsets was .464 which indicates that student' growth language mindsets increases by .464 for every point increase in parents' growth language mindsets ($p < 0.001$) The slope coefficient for parents' failure mindsets was .229, $p = .072$, which means that parents' failure-is-enhancing mindsets moderately and positively predicted students' growth language mindsets. The R^2 value was .384, suggesting that 38.4% of the variance in students' growth language mindsets can be explained by a model containing parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets.

Dependent Variable: Students' language mindsets					
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients B	t	Sig.
(constant)	1.324	0.465		2.846	0.006
Parents' general intelligence beliefs	0.416	0.149	0.424	2.791	0.007
Parents' second language aptitude beliefs	0.327	0.143	0.337	2.283	0.026
Parents' age sensitivity beliefs about language learning	-0.043	0.118	-0.043	-0.364	0.717
Dependent Variable: Students' GLB					
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients B	t	Sig.
(constant)	0.853	0.587		1.454	0.151
Parents' general intelligence beliefs	0.678	0.188	0.566	3.607	<.001
Parents' second language aptitude beliefs	0.253	0.181	0.214	1.4	0.166
Parents' age sensitivity beliefs about language learning	-0.162	0.149	-0.134	-1.086	0.282
Dependent Variable: Students' L2B					
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients B	t	Sig.
(constant)	1.327	0.536		2.476	0.016
Parents' general intelligence beliefs	0.341	0.172	0.311	1.984	0.052
Parents' second language aptitude beliefs	0.507	0.165	0.469	3.074	0.003
Parents' age sensitivity beliefs about language learning	-0.133	0.136	-0.121	-0.98	0.33
Dependent Variable: Students' ASB					
	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients B	t	Sig.
(constant)	1.368	0.525		2.605	0.011
Parents' general intelligence beliefs	0.262	0.168	0.258	1.557	0.124
Parents' second language aptitude beliefs	0.224	0.162	0.223	1.382	0.172
Parents' age sensitivity beliefs about language learning	0.215	0.133	0.21	1.612	0.112

Table 8. Student' LM, GLB, L2B, ASB & Parents' GLB, L2B, ASB

Table 8 illustrated that parents' growth GLB and L2B have a significant positive effect on students' growth language mindsets, while parents' growth ASB exerts a negligible negative impact. For students' growth GLB, parents' growth GLB has a notably significant positive effect but L2B and ASB have less significant effects. In terms of students' growth L2B, parents' growth GLB and L2B show significant positive effects, whereas ASB has a non-significant negative effect. Taking students' growth ASB as the outcome variable,

whilst parents' growth ASB demonstrated a non-significant positive effect, the similar non-significant effects are also observed for parents' growth GLB and L2B.

In summary, parents' growth language mindsets, particularly beliefs regarding general intelligence and second language aptitude, can have a significant impact on students' growth language mindsets, though the specific effects vary depending on the aspect of the language mindset being considered. In addition, students are more inclined to form growth language mindsets if their parents embrace failure-is-enhancing mindsets.

4.1.4. How predicative are these four factors on students' language mindsets?

Given the absence of a definitive theoretical framework to prioritize certain factors, a simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the combined impact of all four variables and to determine the unique effects each factor has on its own. After removing the outlier (Case 5), all data met the assumptions of regression.

The model that contains perceived classroom social climate, classroom mastery/performance goal structure, parents' language mindsets, and parents' failure mindsets has a R^2 of .721, indicating that 72.1% of the variance in students' language mindsets is explained by the model. The F-value of 31.965 is significant ($p < .001$), suggesting that the overall model is a good fit for the data. In terms of the standardized coefficients and their significance, classroom mastery goal structure ($\beta = .526$) is a significant predictor with a large effect size and classroom performance goal structure ($\beta = .227$) also shows a significant positive effect. Parents' language mindsets ($\beta = .163$) have a moderate effect, but it is not statistically significant ($p = .087$). Parents' failure mindsets ($\beta = .026$) do not show a significant effect ($p = .767$). In addition, classroom social climate did not have a significant coefficient ($\beta = .074$, $p = .566$) in the final model, possibly due to multicollinearity or other variables being stronger predictors.

The main takeaway from this simultaneous multiple regression analysis is that the educational environment, particularly how teachers structure their classrooms and set goals for students, plays a significant role in shaping students' beliefs about their ability to learn languages. This suggests that educators have a powerful tool at their disposal to motivate and engage students in language learning. While parents also matter, the classroom seems to be the primary driver in forming the growth language mindsets. This insight can guide educators in creating more effective learning environments that encourage students to view language learning as a skill that can be developed through effort and persistence. Besides, the results showed that about 72% of the variance in students' growth language mindsets can be explained by the combined effects of the classroom environment and parents' mindsets. This is a substantial amount, indicating that these factors are indeed important.

4.1.5. How does students' language mindsets affect their L2 academic performance?

To answer research question three, a simple linear regression was used to explore the relationship between students' language mindsets and their L2 academic performance as indicated by standardised English test scores. Case 31 that was 3.756 SDs below the mean was identified as an outlier in the dependent variable and was removed from further analysis. The F-value is 54.386 with a p-value less than .001, indicating that the model is statistically significant and that students' growth language mindsets significantly predict L2 academic performance. The R^2 value was .456, indicating that 45.6% of the variance in English academic scores can be explained by students' growth language mindsets. This is a substantial proportion, showing that language mindsets play a significant role in language learning outcomes. The intercept was 48.638 and the coefficient for students' growth language mindsets was 11.020 with a t-value of 7.735 ($p < .001$), which denotes that for every one-unit increase in growth language mindset, the English academic score was expected to increase by 11.226 points, holding all else constant.

In summary, students' growth language mindset is a significant and positive predictor of their L2 academic performance. This finding means that a student's language mindset is not just a psychological concept as it has a tangible effect on their academic performance in the targeted language. In addition, students who believe that their language skills can improve through effort tend to perform better academically in their second language. This underscores the importance of educational practices that help students develop positive beliefs about their capacity to learn and improve in language learning.

4.1.6. A Summary of the Quantitative Results

The quantitative results have shed light on the critical factors that shape the language mindsets of Chinese junior high school EFL learners. The findings underscore the pivotal role of a mastery-oriented classroom goal structure and the influence of parents' growth language mindsets in fostering growth language mindsets among students. Moreover, students' growth language mindsets significantly predict their L2 academic performance, indicating that a belief in the potential for improvement can drive better language learning outcomes. The classroom environment, particularly the goal structure, emerges as a consistent predictor across all subcomponents of students' language mindsets. With these quantitative results setting the stage, the subsequent section will delve into the key themes generated from the case studies. The qualitative narratives offered an in-depth exploration of the diverse learner profiles, capturing the intricate interplay of personal experiences, classroom dynamics, and familial influences that contribute to the development of language mindsets. By weaving together the statistical evidence with the personal stories of learners, this dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors that enhance or hinder language learning among EFL students.

4.2. Qualitative Results: Where do language mindsets come from?

4.2.1. Role Models

Seeing others who have developed their abilities and skills through effort within or even beyond the classrooms can inspire a growth mindset in students. For example, Student

A mentioned that the positive character in the social media set a role model for her to adopt a growth language mindset:

'Just like the protagonist in 'Forrest Gump,' as long as I don't stop trying and keep moving forward, I can definitely improve my language skills. I believe that I can make up for my innate shortcomings through consistent efforts. Some people rely on their natural talents and disdain hard work, but often it is these talents that are defeated by diligence.'

4.2.2. Early Learning Experiences

Language learners' initial experiences with language learning can shape their language mindset. Positive early experiences might foster a growth language mindset, while negative ones might lead to a fixed language mindset. For instance, Student A who adopted a very strong growth language mindset reported that learning English has been relatively easy for her since childhood. In contrast, Student D encountered huge challenges since the beginning of his language learning journey and developed more fixed language mindsets. However, this finding raises a concern that whether students with high language aptitude are more likely to have growth language mindsets in itself. In other words, it is possible that recognizing their natural abilities could motivate them to continue learning and improving, fostering a growth mindset. In this case, it is also worth to involve students' language aptitude in future research and investigate whether growth language mindsets could compensate for the lack of language aptitude and encourage students approach challenges, persist in their efforts, and ultimately improve their language skills.

4.2.3. Teaching Methods and Feedback from Teachers

The way English is taught can significantly influence students' domain-specific language mindsets. Chinese EFL teaching places considerable emphasis on reading and writing, and student B provided an example that,

'Our EFL teacher pays an overwhelming attention to L2 reading and writing at the listening and speaking. As such, I feel like though I can improve my reading and writing

skills by various strategies, my listening and speaking skills remains to be poor and unchangeable.'

This observation suggests that the pedagogy and curriculum English language education (exosystem) can have a varied impact on the formation of students' language mindsets across different aspects. A strong emphasis on certain language skills under the institutional policies might foster a growth mindset in corresponding domains, encouraging students to believe in their ability to improve. Conversely, the lack of attention to other skills might perpetuate a fixed mindset, potentially creating a lopsided linguistic proficiency. This imbalance could manifest as a growth language mindset that is strong in some areas but notably weak in others, ultimately affecting the holistic development of language proficiency.

Furthermore, Student B also stated that while she held a relatively strong growth language mindset, her EFL teacher's praise focused on performance and innate talent appeared to weaken her growth mindsets. For instance, when the EFL teacher considers whom to commend at a parent-teacher meeting, academic performance typically takes precedence. If a student has been diligently studying but their efforts haven't translated into improved grades, they might not receive the recognition they desire, which can be disheartening. Student D also expressed that the absence of positive feedback from his teacher intensified his skepticism about the potential for language abilities to be developed and improved.

4.2.4. Parental and Family Support

Parental support is a critical factor in shaping learners' growth language mindset. Parents who view setbacks as opportunities for growth, actively engage in their children's language learning process, and provide emotional support and stress management techniques can significantly influence their children's attitudes towards language learning. This support helps students recognize the value of grit and the possibility of gradual skill development, even when faced with initial academic

challenges. The proactive involvement of parents in their children's educational journey reinforces a growth mindset that can lead to a more positive and resilient approach to language acquisition. For instance, even with average or lower L2 academic results, Student C developed a robust growth language mindset. This positive outlook is largely due to the supportive actions of their parents, such as initiating conversations about their language learning experiences, discussing their achievements, addressing the challenges they face, and strategizing ways to overcome these obstacles.

4.2.5. Personal Interest

The personal interest in English, fueled by a passion for travel, music, and cultural exploration, significantly shapes the language mindset of students such as Student C. In other words, intrinsic motivation can transcend the focus on academic grades and foster a deep and enduring commitment to language learning.

'Due to my personal fascination with English, I often find myself delving into books and exploring various customs and cultures that pique my curiosity. Grades are not everything; they are just numbers.'

This reflection has also prompted me to contemplate the essence of mindset research. If the primary goal is to foster growth language mindsets to enrich the language learning experience by boosting positive emotions within a mastery-oriented learning environment, should the ultimate focus remain solely on academic performance? Or should it extend to encompass personal development, engagement, well-being, and the willingness to use the L2/FL?

4.2.6. Lack of Language Learning Resources

A lack of adequate learning resources and perceived support from teachers and family can lead to a decline in motivation and the development of a fixed language mindset among students, particularly those struggling with language learning. For example, Student D, classified as an underachiever, failed the English exam and demonstrated a significantly low inclination towards a growth language mindset. When he struggled with

language learning, he tended to internalize the idea that the language is inherently difficult for him, rather than seeing it as a challenge that can be overcome with the right tools and support. A scarcity of resources further prevent him from discovering the learning strategies that work best for him, which can hinder the development of a growth language mindset that values the exploration of different approaches. The negative impacts of limited language learning resources can be intensified by lack of perceived teachers' and parents' support. For example, his parents' indifference and lack of cultural capital might aggravate his sense of helplessness.

4.2.7. A Summary of the Qualitative Results

The qualitative results provide a nuanced perspective on the development of language mindsets among Chinese junior high school EFL learners. The findings reveal that a combination of role models, positive early language learning experiences, supportive teaching and parental practices, and personal inspiration contribute to the development of a growth language mindset. Conversely, students especially those who struggle with language learning often face challenges such as limited resources, performance-focused feedback, low self-efficacy, and a lack of support, which can lead to a more fixed language mindset. To foster a growth language mindset in EFL learners, it is essential to create an environment that values effort, provides adequate resources, and encourages personal engagement with the language. This holistic approach can help students recognize their potential for growth and improve their language learning experiences. Both the quantitative and qualitative data highlighted the importance of a supportive learning ecological system, including institutional policies, classrooms, parents, and personal motivation, in fostering a growth language mindset. Together, these findings underscored the multifaceted nature of language learning and the need for a comprehensive and complex-dynamic approach to language education that addresses both academic and personal development.

5. Discussion

The objective of this research was to evaluate how the perceived classroom social climate, perceived classroom goal structure, language mindsets held by parents, and their failure mindsets might predict the development of growth language mindsets among Chinese junior high school EFL learners. Perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure significantly predicted students' growth language mindsets. Specifically, the classroom mastery goal structure was the primary significant predictor. Parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets were also found to significantly impact students' language mindsets, with parents' growth language mindsets having a notable effect. In addition, Chinese junior high school EFL learners' growth language mindsets significantly and positively predict their L2 academic performance. The following sessions will discuss the findings in more details.

5.1. Discussion of implications for teaching practices

The results supported the claim that growth language mindset was a direct and positive predictor of Chinese junior high school EFL learners' L2 achievement in this study's context (Eren & Rakıcioğlu-Söylemez, 2023; Khajavy *et al.*, 2021). Past research has shown a significant relationship between learners' language mindsets and their grit, engagement, resilience, and self-efficacy (Bai & Wang, 2023; Liu, 2022; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023). EFL learners endorsing a growth language mindset might experience a greater sense of control over their linguistic capabilities and hold the belief that their proficiency can be enhanced (Lou & Noels, 2016, 2017). Consequently, they are inclined to invest more time, energy, and effort to their language learning, which in turn leads to superior L2 performance (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023).

5.1.1 Cultivation of mindset

Although the benefits of growth language mindsets have been confirmed in several ways (Khajavy *et al.*, 2021; Liu, 2022; Lou *et al.*, 2022), there is much to be learned about what language teachers can do to cultivate and sustain students' growth language mindsets.

The findings of this study affirmed that students' language mindsets can be subtly impacted by the learning environment, including interactions with teachers and peers (Lee & Bong, 2019; Shirvan *et al.*, 2021; Wang, 2023). As such, to guide teaching practices, a crucial first step involves identifying contextual factors that can communicate growth language mindset messages to EFL learners. The results suggested that when students were in an English language classroom where EFL teachers embrace mastery-oriented goal structure and failure-is-enhancing mindset, care about their learning progress and psychological well-being, and provide improvement-oriented feedback, they were more likely to develop growth language mindsets (Joe *et al.*, 2017; Patrick *et al.*, 2011; Wang *et al.*, 2021).

Nevertheless, what seems to contradict with the literature review is that, in this particular research context, Chinese junior high school EFL learners' perception of performance-orientated classroom goal structure might not always arbitrarily lead to negative outcomes such as diminished motivation and fixed mindsets (Meece *et al.*, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2016). The divergence might be attributed to several factors that are specific to the cultural, educational, and societal context in China. In many Chinese educational contexts, performance orientation is deeply ingrained (Dweck, 1999; Yao *et al.*, 2021b). Students, from a very young age, are accustomed to a system that values grades, rankings, and competition (Bai & Wang, 2023). This familiarity can make them more resilient to the potential negative effects of performance orientation. In other words, Chinese EFL learners may have developed coping mechanisms to adapt to the high-pressure environment and maintain motivation.

5.1.2 Individuals vary in language mindset responses to the classroom context

Another interesting finding was that students perceived the same L2 classroom differently and received both mastery-oriented and performance-oriented messages. Students have varied learning styles, motivations, and interpretations of their experiences. What one student perceives as a mastery-oriented activity, another might perceive as performance-oriented based on their personal goals and attitudes towards

learning. Besides, teachers and the educational system may unintentionally send mixed messages about the goals of learning. For example, even in a performance-orientated system, teachers might intend to integrate mastery goals such as helping students understand the material deeply.

5.1.3 Importance of multiple perspectives

The research findings further validated that concentrating on students' perceptions of CGS and CSC could provide a more accurate measure than relying on teachers' self-reported instructional practices. What significantly influences students' motivational frameworks, including their growth language mindsets, is not merely the teachers' professed beliefs but the extent to which these beliefs are integrated into their actual teaching practices (Park *et al.*, 2016). However, as also noted by Park *et al.* (2016), students' subjective perception might intertwine the impact of the learning environment with other outcomes they report on. Essentially, EFL learners who possess a growth language mindset are inclined to view the CGS and CSC in a more favorable light. Consequently, it is suggested that future research could validate students' self-reports through direct classroom observations to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the educational environment's influence.

5.1.4 Summary of implications for teaching practices

In summary, EFL teachers are urged to create a language classroom that is secure, friendly, and dynamic by regulating emotional and social processes (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023). For instance, by highlighting the importance of effort and progress over performance and competition, teachers can guide their students to set goals aimed at mastery (Lou & Noels, 2019). Moreover, teachers should praise the hard work and perseverance of their students, creating a safe environment that reassures them it is acceptable to make mistakes (Dweck, 2015). Encouraging the use of learning portfolios to document their language learning progress is another strategy (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023). Additionally, conducting workshops for EFL teachers to equip them with the necessary tools to foster a growth language mindset in their students can lead to the

establishment of a learning environment that nurtures a love for learning, a willingness to embrace challenges, and a pursuit of mastery (Dweck & Yeager, 2021).

5.2. Discussion of implications for parenting

Investigating the influencing factors and mechanisms of mindsets has gradually become an active domain in education and psychology, however, it is unclear how children construct their mindsets, especially language mindsets, by drawing on their parents' mindsets (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2023; Tao *et al.*, 2022). This study contributed to the relevant research area by considering the significance of parents or family context in forming Chinese junior high school EFL learners' language mindsets.

5.2.1 The positive influence of parents' growth mindsets

In line with the literature review, parents who exhibit a failure-is-enhancing mindset and frame failure as a learning opportunity could inspire their children to adopt a growth language mindset (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016, 2017). This relationship might be explained by the fact that children often learn by observing the behaviors and attitudes of their parents (Liu *et al.*, 2023; Song *et al.*, 2022). When parents construe failure positively and use it as a steppingstone for growth and risk-taking, children are more prone to emulate this behavior and develop a growth language mindset (Liu *et al.*, 2023; Song *et al.*, 2022; Tao *et al.*, 2022). In addition, a focus on recovering and learning from failures redirects students' attention from the outcome to the process, which is central to resilience and a growth mindset.

Although some research indicated no significant relationship between parents' mindsets and children's mindsets (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016, 2017), this study suggested that parents' growth language mindsets significantly and positively predicted EFL learners' growth language mindsets. In other words, parents' language mindsets are visible to children in several possible ways. With reference to the qualitative results, parents might serve as the first and most influential role models for children. When parents embrace a growth mindset in language learning and other aspects of life, children are likely to adopt similar attitudes towards SLA. Additionally, since mindsets are argued to be

central in a large system of allied beliefs such as effort beliefs, attributions, goal orientations, and learning strategies (Dweck, 2012; Lou & Noels, 2016; Ryan & Mercer, 2012), parents' language mindset might influence their communication patterns, support and encouragement, feedback and praise, and educational expectations. The belief systems and corresponding behaviours in turn could influence how children perceive their own potential for language learning.

5.2.2 Unpicking the mechanisms underpinning the relationship

The specific predictive power of parents' growth language mindsets on students' growth language mindsets could be attributed to several factors. Primarily, challenges in SLA such as pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition might be more salient for Chinese EFL learners (Khajavy *et al.*, 2021), which might make the growth mindset more relevant and thus more influential. Furthermore, given the domain-specific nature of mindsets (Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Mercer, 2012), the current study might be more sensitive for detecting the relationship between parents' and children's mindsets in language learning than those which measured general mindsets in the reviewed literature (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016, 2017). It could also be that within the Chinese EFL context, parental engagement in their children's language learning is particularly high, leading to a more evident transmission of language mindsets to their children. This heightened influence may stem from parents' recognition of the social and career advantages associated with being bilingual or multilingual, which in turn motivates them to actively cultivate a growth language mindset for their offspring.

5.2.3 Summary of implications for parenting

In summary, parents are children's instructors and coagents, and they have the responsibility to create a growth-oriented language learning environment for their children (Liu *et al.*, 2023). Parents should model a growth language mindset by embracing challenges, demonstrating resilience in the face of setbacks, and encouraging effort and persistence. Moreover, parents should guide their children to perceive language learning challenges as developmental moments instead of setbacks that define

their capabilities. It is important for parents to facilitate discussions on the lessons that arise from these experiences and to strategize on how to progress and build resilience. Considering the qualitative results, offer emotional support and access to language learning resources such as language learning software, books, and language-rich activities are also keen to encouraging students to develop growth language mindsets.

5.3. The Overwhelming Influence of Classroom environment

According to the results of simultaneous multiple regression model including all the four factors in 4.1.4., the impacts of classroom goal structure and classroom social climate on the development of growth language mindsets among EFL learners tend to be significantly more pronounced than that of parents' language mindsets and failure mindsets. Taking an ecological perspective, EFL classrooms provide the primary microsystem for direct language instruction (Shirvan *et al.*, 2021). EFL teachers' educational pedagogy and feedback mechanisms may have a more immediate and direct impact on students' language learning experiences. Moreover, interactions with peers can also significantly influence an individual's language mindset (Burnette *et al.*, 2013; Meece *et al.*, 2006). Peer dynamics, collaborative learning, and group activities can collectively shape language mindsets (Burnette *et al.*, 2013; Meece *et al.*, 2006). This author also argues that, in the Chinese educational context, the cultural respect for teachers as well as the authority and pedagogical expertise of teachers can be particularly salient, which may contribute to the pronounced impact of the classroom environment on the development of growth language mindsets among EFL learners. Parents in China might also place a high level of trust in teachers' expertise and encourage their children to follow the teachers' guidance, further amplifying the teachers' influence.

5.4. Other Possible Influencing Factors

The simultaneous multiple regression model that contains perceived classroom social climate, classroom mastery/performance goal structure, parents' language mindsets, and parents' failure mindsets has a R^2 of .721, indicating that there might be other

influencing factors that contribute to the formation of growth language mindsets. Primarily, since Chinese junior high school EFL learners appeared to show highly growth-oriented language mindsets ($M=4.48$), the mainstream culture might play a significant role in shaping the growth language mindsets of EFL learners as noted by Mercer & Ryan (2010) and Shirvan *et al.* (2021). Similar to Japan, Chinese culture values hard work, and perseverance which might encourage a growth language mindset in language learning (Mercer & Ryan, 2010). In addition, since English is associated with high status and prestige in Chinese mainstream culture, learners may be more motivated to learn and develop a growth mindset. Nevertheless, this study did not involve a cultural comparisons by recruiting EFL learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, and future research can aim to examine the impacts of macrosystem on language mindsets.

Students' socioeconomic status (SES) might also considerably shape their language mindsets. For example, Student D mentioned that a lack of language learning resources within the family context negatively intensified his sense of helplessness and reinforced fixed language mindsets. Cultural capital, therefore, plays a multifaceted role in shaping language mindsets by providing resources, exposure, and values that can enhance the motivation and strategies for language learning. It can contribute to an environment where a growth language mindset is not only encouraged but also supported by tangible experiences and knowledge. In other words, a family's cultural capital and economic capital should also be taken into account in future research.

Moreover, given the intricate associations between language aptitude and language mindsets (Lou & Noels, 2016; Lou, 2019; Mercer & Ryan, 2010; 2012) and the reflection of Student A, it is also important to control for language aptitude in future research. For example, high language aptitude might boost language learners' learning confidence, progress, and efficiency as well as promote early success to set a positive trajectory for developing a growth language mindset. Furthermore, while language aptitude has a strong predictive power on language development and outcomes (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Liu *et al.*, 2022), it cannot be the primary determinant of success due to ethical

considerations. The role of growth language mindsets could be particularly crucial for individuals with lower language aptitude, as they may offer a compensatory mechanism for overcoming obstacles and attaining proficiency in SLA. Future studies might usefully explore the potential of language mindsets to mitigate the effects of lower language aptitude, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of what contributes to successful language learning.

5.5. Summary of the chapter

This chapter investigated the influence of classroom social climate, classroom goal structure, and parents' language and failure mindsets on the development of growth language mindsets among Chinese junior high school EFL learners. The research revealed that a mastery-oriented classroom environment and parents' growth language mindsets significantly foster students' growth language mindsets, which in turn positively impacts their L2 academic performance. The study emphasized the importance of teachers cultivating a supportive learning environment that values effort and progress, and the role of parents in modeling resilience and a positive attitude towards language learning. It also acknowledged the cultural and individual differences in students' perceptions of the classroom environment and the potential influence of other factors such as mainstream culture, socioeconomic status, and language aptitude. This chapter concluded with recommendations for educators to create dynamic and secure classrooms, for parents to actively support their children's language learning, and for future research to explore additional influences on the development of growth language mindsets.

6. Conclusion and implications for future research

6.1. A brief summary of each research question

This study revealed that the classroom goal structure, particularly the mastery goal structure, was a key predictor in the cultivation of growth language mindsets among Chinese junior high school EFL learners. Contrary to expectations, the classroom social climate did not significantly influence the development. Additionally, the study indicated that the parents' failure and language mindsets were instrumental in shaping the language mindsets of their children, with the parents' growth language mindsets exerting a notably positive influence. The research further established that students' growth language mindsets significantly and positively predicted their L2 academic performance, indicating that a belief in the potential for improvement is a powerful catalyst for enhanced L2 language acquisition.

6.2. Methodological Implications

The results of the current study confirmed the claim made by Patrick *et al.* (2011) that the construct of perceived classroom social climate is highly convergent with the mastery-oriented classroom goal structure. In addition, whilst mastery-oriented CGS was a significant and positive predictor of students' growth language mindsets, CSC did not have significantly predictive power. In terms of empirical implications, the findings supported that the mastery goal structure construct could serve as an effective, concise, and economical substitute for the use of numerous measures of classroom social climate, thereby evaluating the classroom's multifaceted characteristics (Patrick *et al.*, 2011). However, when researchers are seeking a more in-depth and nuanced analysis of the various dimensions within the classroom's mastery goal structure, the results advocated for employing teacher academic / emotional support, classroom mutual respect, and task-related interaction to offer multidimensional perspectives (Patrick *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, the mastery goal structure can be perceived an overarching framework encompassing a variety of distinct yet interconnected dimensions rather than a single entity.

Moreover, the author encountered significant challenges during the interviews with Chinese junior high school EFL students. Even after the interview questions were revised based on the pilot study to increase engagement, the participants still struggled to fully comprehend the concept of language mindset, which hindered the collection of valuable data. In this case, interviews might not be an appropriate method to explore the development of language mindsets among young EFL learners. Possibly, the abstract, intangible, and complex nature of language mindset might explain why most of the mindset research were focused on university students (e.g., Khajavy et al., 2022; Lou & Noels, 2017; Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Waller & Papi, 2017) instead of young students. Moreover, young learners may lack the self-awareness and communication skills required to introspect and discuss their own language learning attitudes and beliefs. However, this research indicated that Language Mindsets Inventory (LMI) and other quantitative measures are applicable and valid among Chinese junior high school EFL students.

6.3. Alternative Research Agenda of Language Mindsets

As mentioned in 5.1., growth language mindset is a significantly positive predictor of Chinese junior high school EFL learners' L2 achievement in this study. In other words, the more these learners believe in their ability to improve their language skills through effort, the higher their actual language achievement is likely to be. However, the reflections of Student C suggested that the ultimate goal of fostering growth language mindsets should be to create a well-rounded language learner who is not only academically successful but also confident, engaged, culturally aware, and willing to use the language in various contexts. Although few studies have investigated language mindsets in relation to language anxiety (Lou & Noels, 2020a; 2020b) and mindsets in association with psychological well-being (Zeng *et al.*, 2016) and self-efficacy (Bai & Wang, 2020), limited studies have examined the relationship between language mindsets and other outcome variables such as personal development, engagement, well-being, WTC, positive emotions, self-efficacy, metacognition, and life-long learning. Future research should aim at taking a holistic approach that encompasses several key areas to truly enrich learners' language learning experience.

6.4. Limitations and Future Directions

Some limitations of this study should be addressed in future studies. First, since this was a small-scale study led by an individual student, the sample (N=69) might not be large enough for generalization. The results of this study should be replicated drawing upon a larger and more comprehensive sample of students and schools located in other regions of China or countries around the world. In addition, most of the existing mindset research have been placed its focus on EFL learners, and future studies should also involve learners learning a second/foreign language other than English from different age groups, educational levels, and ethnolinguistic contexts.

Second, due to time constraints, the current study adopted a cross-sectional design, which limited the ability to track the evolution of learners' language mindsets and related constructs in response to teaching and parenting strategies. To gain a deeper understanding of the contextual influence on language mindsets and their interplay with L2 development, including willingness to communicate (WTC) and language proficiency outcomes, longitudinal and experimental studies are essential. Future studies could also evaluate the likely interactive relations between language aptitude, language mindsets, and language performance. Such an investigation would offer valuable insights into the origins and development of growth language mindsets, as well as the mechanisms by which the mindset system operates as a whole.

Third, the current study exclusively examined the impact of parents' mindsets on EFL learners' language mindsets, without considering the potential effects of instructors' language mindsets. The rationale was that learners' perceptions of teaching practices within the classroom may be more immediately apparent and credible than teachers' self-reported language mindsets and practices. Nonetheless, by incorporating the possible influence of instructors' language mindsets, future research could reveal the consonances or dissonances between instructors' and students' language mindsets, as well as the convergence or divergence between instructors' language mindsets and the

teaching practices as they are perceived by learners. Finally, with the exception of English test scores, the data were obtained based on self-report measures, indicating that the current results are more or less open to the effects of social desirability. To mitigate this, classroom observations might be considered in future research to validate the construct of perceived classroom social climate and classroom goal structure.

6.5. Final Remarks

Considering the advantages for L2 development, it is crucial to help learners develop growth language mindset, which can direct them to set learning goals and assist them in viewing mistakes and failure more positively as chances to enhance their abilities. Beyond the points covered in the preceding chapter, educators, school administrators, and policymakers should also take initiatives to foster growth language mindset among students. For instance, policymakers could design a comprehensive and balanced curriculum that equally emphasizes all language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This holistic approach should be reflected in the syllabus and assessment criteria. In other words, assessment should move away from an exclusive focus on reading and writing and be aimed at evaluating students across all language skills including but not limited to oral presentations, group discussions, and interactive listening exercises.

Given that language mindsets are dynamic and shaped by learners' language learning experiences, future studies should focus on the ecological acquisition of these beliefs from various sources. Sociocultural systems significantly influence people's language learning beliefs at a macro-social level. Simultaneously, interpersonal relationships with key stakeholders in learners' lives can also shape their language mindsets. It is crucial to explore how societal factors beyond the classroom impact language mindsets and how these mindsets can predict both linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes. For instance, the relationship of international students with the target language community may affect their language beliefs, subsequently influencing their language learning and adjustment processes. Learners' language mindsets are influenced not only by their sociocultural

environment and interpersonal interactions but also by individual factors such as their language aptitude. Moreover, future research should examine the interplay between language mindsets and other individual factors such as motivation and learning strategies to gain a holistic understanding of the psychological dynamics in language acquisition.

While there is still much research that needs to be done to fully understanding the intricate relationships that form students' mindsets and how these mindsets influence learning, this dissertation achieves several key contributions in the field of language learning and education, particularly in the context of EFL among Chinese junior high school students. Overall, this dissertation's originality lies in its ecological approach to understanding the complex dynamics of language mindsets, its focus on a specific and understudied population, and its emphasis on the role of the immediate learning environment and family context in shaping language learning beliefs and outcomes. It recognizes the complex nature of language mindsets and adopts an integrative approach to trace their roots, taking into account the interplay of diverse systems such as teaching practice, peer interactions, parenting, individual difference, and broader cultural impacts. The expansion of the focus beyond language teachers is crucial for enriching learners' language learning journey and its results through an inclusive approach involving all stakeholders. Furthermore, by employing a mixed-methods approach, the dissertation presents a well-rounded perspective on the factors influencing language mindsets, offering both statistical evidence and in-depth personal narratives.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Research Ethics Approval

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES
INTERDIVISIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk; staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk



Lingxi Peng lingxi.peng@kellogg.ox.ac.uk
Department of Education, Social Sciences Division
University of Oxford

12 December 2023

Dear Lingxi Peng,

Research ethics approval

Research title: The role of teachers, classroom climates, and parents on Chinese junior school English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' language mindsets

Research ethics reference: EDUC_C1A_23_342

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the University's procedures for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to confirm that, on the basis of the information provided to the DREC, ethics approval has now been granted for this study.

Please note the following:

Personal data: It is the responsibility of the PI to ensure that all personal data collected during the project is managed in accordance with the University's [guidance and legal requirements](#).

In-person activities: Any data collection involving in-person interactions with participants must have an up-to-date fieldwork risk assessment in place; further guidance is available from the Safety Office's [website](#).

Amendments: Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval, as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available on the [SSH IDREC webpage](#).

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk / student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk or ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Carroll'.

James Carroll
DREC member

cc: Heath Rose, heath.rose@education.ox.ac.uk

Information Sheet for Parents

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Heath Rose
heath.rose@education.ox.ac.uk
Lingxi Peng (MSc Student)
Oxford University email address: lingxi.peng@kellogg.ox.ac.uk



An Investigation into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners' Language Mindset: The Case of Chinese Junior High School Students

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS / GUARDIANS

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: EDUC_C1A_23_342

In partnership with researchers at the University of Oxford, Chengdu Jinniu Experimental Middle School has agreed to take part in a research study investigating the language mindsets of Chinese junior school EFL children and the impacts of teachers, classroom climates, and parents on their language mindsets. We would like to invite your child to be part of this research. We very much hope you would like your child to take part, but before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Why is this research being conducted?

Language mindsets are domain-specific beliefs about whether the ability to learn languages is malleable or not. Language mindsets are argued to be important because they have implications for how people respond to adverse situations, namely, persistence and resilience. For example, children with fixed mindsets are more likely to experience fear of failure, helplessness, and anxiety, and these behavioral intentions also predict students' learning strategies, willingness to communicate, use of L2, and achievement in language courses and standard exams. Therefore, investigating influencing factors and mechanisms of language mindset has become an active domain in second language acquisition and language education. This research aims to study the impacts of teachers, classroom climates, and parents' impacts on EFL learners' language mindsets and draw implications for creating an optimal language learning environment with the best academic and emotional supports from teachers and parents.

Why has my child been invited to be involved in this research?

We are inviting your child to take part because they are junior school EFL students, aged between 14 and 16, attending Chengdu Jinniu Experimental Middle School. We are inviting 80s children to take part.

Does my child have to be involved?

No. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether to allow your child to participate. If you do agree to participation, you may withdraw your child at any time, without giving a reason and without any effect on their education, by advising the school or researchers of this decision. The deadline by which you can withdraw any information they have contributed to the research is 1st June 2024. After receiving a withdrawal request, the researcher will identify what can be destroyed and what needs to be kept. As a rule, all data/documents/artefacts that can still be identified to the participant should be

destroyed. However, the data can't be withdrawn once it has been anonymised. If your child is not involved in the research, they will receive alternative provision of equivalent educational value.

What will happen if my child takes part?

- The online questionnaire will take you around 5-10 minutes, and the voluntary follow-up online interview will last for 20-30 minutes.
- The link of the online questionnaire will be posted in the Classroom WeChat Group, and it is suggested to be finished at home with your supervision.
- The follow-up interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams, and please ensure that you have downloaded this app.
- If your child is happy to participate, please give your consent at the end of the online questionnaire.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

No identifiable data will be collected such as participants' name, contact number, and email address in the quantitative study. Students who are willing to take part in the follow-up questionnaires will be required to note down their names for me to reach out. However, their names will not be presented in the research outputs. During the report, they will be pseudonymised, and some representative answers might be reported.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no direct or personal benefit to you from taking part in this research. However, students can have a deeper understanding of mindset and the power of trust, which might support them in future study with more resilience and self-efficacy. In addition, based on the correlation analysis between parents' and students' language mindset, you can also obtain important messages about parental influence and might would like to be more careful about your children's educational development.

What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

Researchers will ensure all other data collected in the research has identifying information removed as soon as possible after collection. Audio and/or video recordings, notes, and all other data will be stored in University OneDrive. At the end of the research, recordings will be erased. The research, her supervisor, and probably the research teams and technical/ IT support will have access to the research data.

In detail,

Questionnaire data: The data will be gathered through Qualtrics, which indicates that it will be automatically online. The data will be transferred to SPSS for analysis and stored in University OneDrive. Also, the laptop will be protected with strong passwords. The questionnaire data will be deleted in the Qualtrics, SPSS, and OneDrive 3 months after the release of dissertation marks.

Audio recordings: The audio recordings will be transcribed by FeiShu (an app, using my personal account) and stored in University OneDrive. Once the transcription is finished and check, the history in FeiShu will be deleted permanently.

The researchers will retain Consent forms for 3 years after submission of the dissertation.

Regular summaries of our findings will be given to the school and will be available to interested families. I will not identify the school, teacher or any students in any reports of the research.

Will the research be published? Could my child be identified from any publications or other research outputs?

The findings from the research will/may be written up [please describe - e.g. in a thesis, dissertation, academic publications, conference presentations, a report commissioned by an external organisation,

websites, videos etc.] Explain whether it will be possible for participants to be identifiable from the outputs and clarify whether they have a choice about this.

NB: For doctoral students or other qualifications where a thesis or dissertation needs to be deposited in the [Oxford University Research Archive](#), include the following: A copy of my thesis/ dissertation will be deposited both in print and online in the [Oxford University Research Archive](#) where [it will be publicly available to facilitate its use in future research/ its access will be restricted].

Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your child's personal data is used in the research.

The University will process your child's personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest.

Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from <https://compliance.web.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

Who has reviewed this research?

This research has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: EDUC_C1A_23_342).

Include details of any other reviews, e.g. from another UK University, or a local ethics committee if the research is taking place overseas.

Who is organising and funding the research?

Give details of the organiser (named researcher at Oxford University) and funder.

Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research, or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please contact Lingxi Peng at lingxi.peng@kelllogg.ox.ac.uk or Heath Rose at heath.rose@education.ox.ac.uk, and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Boundary Brook House, Churchill Drive, Headington, Oxford OX3 7GB

OR

[only for applications reviewed by a Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC)] Chair, [insert relevant Departmental Research Ethics Committee name]; Email: [insert relevant departmental research ethics committee email address and postal address]

What should I do next?

Please fill in the enclosed form and return it to your child's class teacher if you would/would not like your child to take part in this research. Please remember that you may withdraw your child at any time, without affecting their education and without giving a reason, by notifying the researcher.

Further Information and Contact Details

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Information Sheet for Student

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Lingxi Peng (MSc Student)
Oxford University email address: lingxi.peng@kellogg.ox.ac.uk



An Investigation into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners' Language Mindset: The Case of Chinese Junior High School Students

INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDENTS AGED 11 TO 15 YEARS

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: EDUC_C1A_23_342

We are inviting you to join in a research study. My name is Lingxi Peng and I study at the University of Oxford in the Department of Education.

Before you decide if you would like to join in, it's important to understand what the research is about, why I'm doing it and what it would involve for you. Please read and think about this leaflet carefully. Please feel free to talk to your family, friends, or the researcher about it if you want.

If anything isn't clear or you have more questions you can ask your parent/guardian to give us a call and we can discuss it with you and your parent/guardian.

Why are we doing this research?

Language mindsets are people's beliefs about how easily they can learn languages. These mindsets matter because they affect how people deal with tough situations, like continuing to try hard and not giving up. For instance, kids who think language skills can't change often feel scared of failing, helpless, and anxious. These feelings can also influence how they learn, their eagerness to talk, use of a second language, and how well they do in language classes and tests. There's a lot of interest in studying what affects these language mindsets, especially in learning second languages and in language teaching. This research looks into how teachers, the classroom environment, and parents influence students' beliefs about learning languages. It also explores ways to make the best learning environment with strong support from teachers and parents, both academically and emotionally.

Why have I been invited to take part?

This research will pay special attention to Chinese junior school EFL students because they are highly vulnerable for low confidence and demotivation in terms of the highly performance-oriented culture of secondary school. You are identified as a potential participant because you are a final-year junior school aged

around 14-16 who will take the approaching high-stake national examination. In addition, approximately 80s students will be recruited to participate in this study.

Do I have to take part?

No - It is up to you to decide if you want to take part in this research. You are free to stop taking part at any time during the research without giving a reason by telling your teacher, the researcher or your parent/guardian. You do not have to say why and this will not affect your education.

If you decide to stop, no one will be upset with you.

If you do not wish to join in, you will be asked to answer a questionnaire and a follow-up interview if you wish.

What will happen if I take part in the research?

- The online questionnaire will take you around 5-10 minutes, and the voluntary follow-up online interview will last for 20-30 minutes.
- The link of the online questionnaire will be posted in the Classroom WeChat Group, and it is suggested to be finished at home.
- The follow-up interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams, and please ensure that you have downloaded this app.
- If you are happy to participate, please give your consent at the start of the online questionnaire.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

No identifiable data will be collected such as your name, contact number, and email address in the quantitative study. Students who are willing to take part in the follow-up interviews will be required to note down your names for me to reach out. However, your names will not be presented in the research outputs. During the report, you will be pseudonymised, and some representative answers might be reported.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no direct or personal benefit to you from taking part in this research. However, you can have a deeper understanding of mindset and the power of trust, which might support you in future study with more resilience and self-efficacy.

What information will be collected and what happens to the results of the research?

Results are kept strictly confidential, and only the people doing the research, or helping with the research, can look at the data. Only a number will be used to identify you, and all information and results are kept in password-protected computer in the University. Your audio recordings will be securely stored encrypted. Researchers will change the names of your school, teacher, and all the students when we write about the research. No one will know that you have taken part unless you tell them yourself.

The findings from the research will/may be written up in a dissertation. No identifiable information will be presented in the research outputs unless you are willing to present your name.

If we want to use the information for anything else, we will ask your permission. At the end of the research, we will write to your school about what was discovered. You are welcome to read this if you are interested.

All research data and records will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research. Third parties may be given access to research data for monitoring and/or audit of the research, or for data storage purposes.

Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the research.

The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest.

Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from <https://compliance.web.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

Will anyone else know I'm doing this?

We will keep your information private. This means we will only tell those who have a need or right to know, such as the research team and your parent/guardian. We will only share information that has your name and address removed.

What if I don't want to take part in the research anymore?

Just tell your parent/guardian and the people carrying out the research that you don't want to take part. You don't have to give a reason and no one will be annoyed with you. It is YOUR choice.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research will be conducted by Lingxi Peng, a MSc student on Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition at the University of Oxford and be supervised by Heath Rose. No fundings are applicable.

Who has reviewed the research?

This research has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: EDUC_C1A_23_342).

What do I do now?

Please tell your parents, guardians and/or teacher whether you are happy to take part.

What if there is a problem or something goes wrong?

Please tell us if you are worried about any part of this research, by contacting the researcher lingxi.peng@kellogg.ox.ac.uk. You may also talk to your teacher/parent/guardian who will let the researcher know. If you are still unhappy or wish to make a complaint, either you or your teacher/parent/guardian can contact the chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford:

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk;
Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Boundary Brook House, Churchill Drive, Headington, Oxford OX3 7GB

OR

[only for applications reviewed by a Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC)] Chair, **[insert relevant Departmental Research Ethics Committee name]**; Email: **[insert relevant departmental research ethics committee email address and postal address]**

Further Information and Contact Details

Lingxi Peng

Department of Education

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Lingxi.peng@kellogg.ox.ac.uk

Thank you for reading – please ask me any questions.

Consent Form

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E-Mail: heath.rose@education.ox.ac.uk
<https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/people/heath-rose/>

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

CUREC Approval Reference: EDUC_C1A_23_342

The role of teachers, classroom climates, and parents on Chinese junior school English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' language mindsets

- Your child's school has agreed to take part in a study run by the University of Oxford looking at the language mindsets of EFL children and the impacts of teachers, classroom climates, and parents on their language mindsets.
- If your child takes part, a researcher would come and visit them at school for interviews.
- To find out more about the study, please read the attached information sheet. You can e-mail me at lingxi.peng@kellogg.ox.ac.uk if you have any questions.
- **If you are happy for your child to take part, please fill in the form below and return it to your child's class teacher as soon as possible.**

Name of child: _____
Forename Surname

Name of school: _____

I have read and understood the details of the above study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study with others. I have received satisfactory answers to my questions. I understand that the project has received ethics clearance through the University of Oxford's ethical approval process for research involving human participants, and I understand who will have access to the data, how it will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the study. I understand that participation is voluntary and that my child and I are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my child's education being affected in any way. I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

If applicable:

I agree for my child to be audio recorded	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand how audio recordings / videos / photos will be used in research outputs	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

I give permission for my child to take part in the above study.

Name of parent/guardian: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** dd / mm / yyyy

Name of researcher: _____

AP25 Participant Consent Form, version 3.1, February 2023

Signature: _____ Date: dd/mm/yyyy

If you would like to receive an annual newsletter summarising our research, please fill in your address:

AP25 Participant Consent Form, version 3.1, February 2023

Appendix B

https://oxfordeducation.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_08JS4m5BrP6gK3A

Appendix C

在我们的日常生活中，我们经常能听到两种声音，一种是语言学习能力是与生俱来的，可好可坏，一种是语言学习能力是后期可以通过自己的努力培养的，请问你如何看待这两种不同的声音呢？

其实，在语言学中，有一个叫做language mindsets的概念即语言学习心态，指的是个体对自己语言能力的信念，即成长型心态（growth mindset）与固定型心态（fixed mindset）。持有成长型语言心态的人相信，他们可以通过努力和策略来学习、发展和提高自己的语言能力，而持有固定型语言心态的人则认为他们的语言能力是一种天生的特质，无法改变；他们要么擅长语言，要么不擅长。

刚刚你已经涉及到了你对此的看法，请问能谈谈你自己的语言学习心态吗？

那你觉得你现在的语言学习心态是怎么形成的呢？

*我可以给你提供几个维度来思考，比如老师，同学，家长，和主流文化的影响，你也可以从其他维度来回答这个问题。

In our daily lives, we often hear two voices. One is that language learning ability is innate, which can be good or bad. The other is that language learning ability can be cultivated through one's own efforts later on. How do you view these two different voices?

In fact, in applied linguistics, there is a concept called "language mindsets," which refers to an individual's belief in their own language ability, that is, a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset. People with a growth language mindset believe that they can learn, develop, and improve their language ability through effort and strategy. On the other hand, those with a fixed language mindset believe that their language ability is an innate trait that cannot be changed; they are either good at languages or they are not.

You have just touched upon your own views on this. Can you talk about your own language mindset? How do you think your current language mindset was formed?

*I can provide you with several dimensions to consider, such as the impacts of teachers, classmates, parents, and mainstream culture, or you can also answer from other dimensions.

Appendix D

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Correlation with Students' Language Mindsets	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Students' Language Mindsets	4.5168	1.07573	-	-	-	
Teacher Emotional Support	4.5682	1.16812	.727**	0.411	2.055	0.044
Teacher Academic Support	4.9105	1.00354	.715**	0.278	1.4	0.166
Classroom Mutual Respect	5.09	0.97396	.642**	-0.061	-0.303	0.763
Task-Related Interaction	4.9594	1.12703	.622**	0.162	0.956	0.343

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).