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Growth Mindset-Oriented Teaching and Children's Behavioral Development in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's learning behavior through daily feedback, emotional support, classroom interaction, and adaptive teaching practices. However, limited empirical evidence explains how teachers in under-resourced early childhood education settings understand and enact growth mindset principles in everyday classroom contexts. This study explored how early childhood education teachers in Manggarai Regency perceive and practice growth mindset-oriented teaching and how these practices are associated with children's behavioral development. A qualitative descriptive design was employed involving 29 early childhood teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires, instructional documentation, and in-depth interviews using instruments developed from growth mindset indicators and reviewed by early childhood education experts. The data were analyzed thematically through transcription, open coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation. The findings revealed three major themes: teachers' commitment to continuous professional learning, resilience in responding to instructional challenges, and adaptive teaching practices that supported children's confidence, independence, curiosity, and classroom participation. The study suggests that growth mindset functions not only as a personal belief about learning but also as a pedagogical orientation that shapes reflective teaching and responsive classroom interaction. These findings contribute context-sensitive evidence on teacher professional development in under-resourced early childhood education settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a central role in supporting children's cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development. In early childhood classrooms, teachers do not only deliver learning activities; they also shape children's learning behavior through feedback, modeling, encouragement, emotional support, classroom routines, and responses to children's mistakes or difficulties [1], [2]. Therefore, teachers' beliefs about children's ability to learn and improve are important because these beliefs influence how teachers interpret children's behavior, respond to learning challenges, and create supportive classroom environments.

One belief system that is highly relevant to this issue is growth mindset. Growth mindset refers to the belief that intelligence, ability, and competence can be developed through effort, effective strategies, learning experience, and constructive feedback [3]. In educational practice, this belief encourages teachers to view children's mistakes as part of learning rather than as signs of fixed inability. Teachers with growth-oriented beliefs are more likely to provide encouragement, offer adaptive support, reflect on their teaching, and help children persist when facing classroom challenges [4], [5].

Previous studies have shown that growth mindset is associated with more supportive learning environments, stronger student persistence, and adaptive teacher practices [6], [7]. Growth mindset training has also been reported to strengthen teachers' instructional facilitation and professional learning orientation [8]. In addition, research on mindset interventions indicates that their effects depend not only on the intervention itself but also on how well the intervention fits learners' needs, classroom culture, and educational context [9], [10]. These findings suggest that growth mindset should not be understood merely as an individual psychological construct, but also as a pedagogical orientation shaped by classroom practice and institutional conditions.

In early childhood education, this issue becomes particularly important because children's learning behavior is closely connected to emotional security, teacher-child interaction, and opportunities for active participation. Teachers' responses to children's hesitation, mistakes, dependency, curiosity, and willingness to try can influence whether children become more confident and engaged in learning activities. For this reason, growth mindset-oriented teaching in early childhood classrooms needs to be examined not only through teachers' beliefs, but also through the practices by which teachers guide children's behavior in daily learning situations.

However, the existing literature still presents several limitations. First, much research on growth mindset has focused on students in primary, secondary, or higher education, while studies involving early childhood teachers remain relatively limited. Second, previous studies often examine growth mindset as a general motivational construct, whereas fewer studies explore how teachers enact it through everyday classroom practices. Third, limited empirical evidence is available from under-resourced early childhood education settings, where teachers often work with restricted access to professional development, limited learning facilities, and weak institutional support [16], [17]. These contextual constraints may influence how growth mindset is understood, practiced, and sustained.

Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, provides an important context for examining this issue. Early childhood teachers in this region often face limited training opportunities and institutional resources, yet many continue to engage in informal learning, peer discussion, reflective practice, and classroom experimentation [18], [19]. This condition creates a relevant context for investigating how growth mindset is developed and enacted in real classroom situations, especially in relation to children's behavioral development.

Although previous studies have begun to discuss the role of teacher motivation, role perception, professional culture, and institutional support in mindset implementation [20], [22], there remains a need for more context-sensitive evidence from early childhood education settings. In particular, little is known about how early childhood teachers in under-resourced regions translate growth mindset principles into daily practices that support children's confidence, curiosity, independence, and classroom participation.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to explore how early childhood education teachers in Manggarai Regency perceive and practice growth mindset-oriented teaching and how these practices are associated with children's behavioral development in classroom contexts. This study contributes to the literature by providing context-specific evidence on growth mindset as both a teacher professional orientation and a pedagogical practice that supports responsive early childhood learning environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Growth Mindset in Educational Contexts

The concept of growth mindset originates from the work of Dweck and Leggett, who distinguish between fixed and growth-oriented beliefs about intelligence and ability [3]. In education, this distinction is important because it shapes how teachers interpret student performance, respond to mistakes, and design learning experiences. Beliefs about intelligence influence motivation, persistence, and reactions to challenge [5]. In classroom practice, a growth mindset encourages teachers to see errors as opportunities for development rather than as indicators of permanent inability.

Research has shown that growth mindset has practical implications for teaching and learning. Well-designed growth mindset interventions can strengthen academic engagement, particularly when educational settings reinforce adaptive beliefs about effort and improvement [10]. These findings suggest that growth mindset should not be understood only as an individual belief but also as a classroom and institutional orientation that affects how learning is supported.

2.2 Teacher Beliefs and Professional Practice

Teacher beliefs play a major role in shaping instructional decisions and interactions with students. In early childhood education, these beliefs affect how teachers guide children's behavior, encourage exploration, and respond to developmental differences. Teachers who adopt a growth-oriented perspective are more likely to build supportive learning environments and promote

persistence in children [6], [7]. Such teachers tend to use encouragement, constructive feedback, and flexible support strategies that help children participate more confidently in classroom activities.

The relationship between mindset and teacher practice is also connected to professional learning. Teacher development is strengthened when educators view professional competence as something that can grow through reflection and experience [4]. This perspective supports continuous improvement and reduces defensive responses to challenges. Growth mindset-based training can improve teachers' capacity to facilitate learning more effectively [8].

2.3 Reflective Learning and Collaborative Development

Another important theme in the literature is the connection between growth mindset and reflective practice. Teachers with a growth mindset are generally more willing to evaluate their teaching, identify weaknesses, and revise their strategies. Reflective training grounded in growth mindset principles can improve teachers' metacognitive awareness [11]. Reflective professional learning also helps teachers become more responsive to classroom realities and more intentional in their instructional choices [12].

Collaborative learning further strengthens this process. Growth mindset interventions become more effective when they are supported by structured professional communities [13]. Other studies likewise underline the value of dialogue, peer feedback, and collaborative reflection in sustaining teacher learning [14], [15]. For early childhood teachers, these collaborative processes are especially relevant because teaching often requires immediate and context-sensitive responses to children's social and behavioral development.

2.3 Growth Mindset in Under-Resourced Early Childhood Settings

Although the literature on growth mindset continues to expand, studies that focus on early childhood teachers in under-resourced areas remain limited. This gap is important because institutional constraints shape how educational beliefs are translated into classroom practice. In contexts such as Manggarai Regency, teachers often face limited access to training, professional support, and learning facilities [16], [17]. These conditions may restrict the formal development of growth mindset-oriented pedagogy, even when teachers show strong commitment to improvement.

At the same time, local studies suggest that teachers in constrained settings often rely on informal learning, reflection, and collaboration to improve practice. Teachers continue to seek ways to strengthen classroom interaction and professional competence despite structural limitations [18], [19]. Recent studies also point out that mindset implementation is influenced by teacher motivation, institutional culture, and role perception [20], [22].

2.4 Research Gap

The reviewed literature shows that growth mindset has been widely discussed as a factor that influences learning, motivation, and teacher development. However, three limitations remain. First, many studies focus on students rather than teachers. Second, much of the available evidence comes from primary, secondary, or higher education settings rather than early childhood education. Third,

fewer studies examine how growth mindset is practiced in regions with limited institutional resources. Therefore, this study addresses an important gap by exploring how early childhood teachers in Manggarai understand growth mindset, apply it in classroom practice, and relate it to changes in children's behavior.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Setting

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how early childhood education teachers perceive and enact growth mindset-oriented teaching and how these practices are associated with children's behavioral development in classroom contexts. A qualitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to obtain a direct and contextual understanding of teachers' beliefs, experiences, and instructional practices rather than to test causal relationships statistically.

The study was conducted in Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. This setting was selected because it represents an early childhood education context where teachers often work with limited access to formal professional development, learning resources, and institutional support. At the same time, teachers in this context continue to develop teaching strategies through informal learning, peer discussion, reflection, and classroom experimentation.

3.2 Participants

The participants were 29 early childhood education teachers selected through purposive sampling. The selection was based on three inclusion criteria: (1) currently teaching in an early childhood education institution, (2) having at least two years of teaching experience, and (3) being willing to provide narrative information about teaching practice, professional learning, and classroom experiences. Purposive sampling was used to obtain participants who had sufficient teaching experience and could provide rich information related to the research focus.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through three techniques: open-ended questionnaires, instructional documentation, and in-depth interviews. The open-ended questionnaire was used to obtain initial information about teachers' understanding of growth mindset, their professional learning experiences, and their strategies for responding to children's learning behavior. Instructional documentation was used to support and verify teachers' responses. The documents included lesson plans, teaching journals, classroom notes, and other instructional artifacts that reflected teachers' pedagogical practices. In-depth interviews were conducted to deepen the questionnaire responses and to explore teachers' emotional experiences, reflective processes, instructional challenges, and adaptive strategies in guiding children's behavior.

The use of multiple data sources allowed the researchers to compare teachers' written responses, interview narratives, and classroom-related documents. This procedure strengthened the credibility of the data and helped reduce dependence on a single source of information.

3.4 Research Instruments

The research instruments consisted of an open-ended questionnaire guide, an interview guide, and a documentation review sheet. The instruments were developed based on indicators derived from growth mindset theory, including beliefs about learning and improvement, responses to challenges, openness to feedback, persistence, reflective practice, and adaptive support for children. The instruments also included questions related to children's behavioral development, such as confidence, curiosity, independence, persistence, and participation in classroom activities.

To ensure content appropriateness, the instruments were reviewed by two experts in early childhood education. The expert review focused on the clarity of items, relevance to the research objectives, appropriateness for the early childhood education context, and suitability of language for participants. Before the main data collection, the questionnaire and interview guide were pilot-tested with teachers outside the main sample. Revisions were made based on expert suggestions and pilot feedback.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, interview recordings and written responses were transcribed and organized together with supporting documents. Second, the researchers read the data repeatedly to become familiar with the participants' narratives and classroom-related evidence. Third, open coding was conducted to identify meaningful units related to teachers' beliefs, professional learning, responses to challenges, classroom practices, and children's behavioral changes.

Fourth, similar codes were grouped into broader categories. For example, codes related to self-learning, peer discussion, reading, and reflection were grouped under professional learning. Codes related to patience, persistence, and problem solving were grouped under resilience. Codes related to encouragement, appreciation of effort, repeated opportunities, and flexible support were grouped under adaptive teaching. Fifth, the categories were reviewed and refined into major themes. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the research objectives and the broader literature on growth mindset, teacher professional development, and early childhood classroom interaction. The analysis was conducted inductively to allow themes to emerge from the data, while remaining informed by the conceptual framework of growth mindset

3.5 Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and instructional documentation. Member checking was also conducted with selected participants to confirm the

accuracy of key interpretations and to ensure that the researchers' understanding reflected participants' intended meanings.

In addition, peer discussion among the research team was used to review coding decisions, category development, and theme interpretation. The involvement of researchers familiar with the local educational and cultural context also helped strengthen contextual interpretation. An audit trail was maintained through organized records of questionnaires, interview transcripts, coding notes, category development, and theme refinement

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical principles for educational research. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the study. The researchers also assured participants that their responses would be used only for research purposes. Participant identities and institutional names were anonymized to protect confidentiality. Data were stored securely and accessed only by the research team.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis of open-ended questionnaires, instructional documentation, and in-depth interviews identified three major themes that describe how early childhood education teachers in Manggarai perceived and enacted growth mindset-oriented teaching. These themes were: (1) commitment to continuous professional learning, (2) resilience in responding to instructional challenges, and (3) adaptive teaching practices associated with children's behavioral development.

Table 1. Summary of Themes and Subthemes.

Major Theme	Subthemes	Main Data Sources
Commitment to continuous professional learning	Self-directed learning, peer discussion, reflection on classroom experience, openness to improvement	Questionnaires, interviews, teaching journals
Resilience in responding to instructional challenges	Patience, persistence, problem solving, emotional regulation, adaptation to limited resources	Interviews, questionnaires, classroom notes
Adaptive teaching practices and children's behavioral development	Encouragement, appreciation of effort, repeated opportunities, flexible support, increased confidence and participation among children	Interviews, documentation, lesson plans

4.1 Teachers' Commitment to Continuous Learning

The first theme shows that many teachers viewed professional competence as something that could be developed through continuous learning. Participants described learning not only as participation in formal training, but also as a daily process of improving teaching practice through reading, peer discussion, observation of children, and reflection on classroom experience.

Several teachers reported that limited access to formal professional development did not prevent them from seeking new teaching ideas. They used informal strategies such as discussing classroom problems with colleagues, adapting ideas from previous teaching experiences, and revising learning activities when children did not respond as expected. Teaching journals and lesson-related documents also indicated that some teachers made adjustments to classroom activities based on children's participation and behavioral responses.

This theme suggests that growth mindset among teachers appeared in their willingness to learn from experience and improve their teaching strategies. Rather than viewing teaching competence as fixed, the teachers tended to see it as an ability that could be strengthened through practice, reflection, and collaboration..

4.2 Resilience in Facing Instructional Challenges

The second theme concerns teachers' resilience in dealing with instructional challenges. Participants reported several difficulties in classroom practice, including limited teaching resources, differences in children's readiness, classroom management problems, children's hesitation to participate, and restricted opportunities for professional support.

Despite these challenges, many teachers described efforts to remain patient and flexible. They did not immediately interpret classroom difficulties as failure. Instead, they attempted to adjust activities, simplify instructions, repeat explanations, provide additional examples, and encourage children who were reluctant to participate. Interview data showed that teachers often relied on patience, emotional regulation, and trial-and-error strategies when classroom situations did not proceed as planned.

The data also showed that resilience was closely related to teachers' sense of responsibility toward children's development. Teachers continued to seek practical solutions even when institutional support was limited. This pattern indicates that growth mindset-oriented teaching was expressed not only through positive beliefs, but also through teachers' persistence in maintaining supportive learning conditions.

4.3 Adaptive Teaching Practices and Children's Behavioral Development

The third theme shows that teachers associated growth mindset-oriented teaching with changes in children's classroom behavior. Participants reported that children became more confident, independent, curious, and willing to participate when teachers provided encouragement, appreciated effort, allowed repeated attempts, and responded to mistakes in a supportive manner.

Teachers described several adaptive practices used in daily classroom interaction. These included giving children opportunities to try again, praising effort rather than only correct answers, helping children complete tasks gradually, using simple language, modeling expected behavior, and creating a classroom atmosphere where mistakes were treated as part of learning. Documentation such as lesson plans and classroom notes supported the finding that teachers attempted to adjust learning activities based on children's responses.

According to participants, these practices were associated with several positive behavioral changes among children. Children who were initially hesitant became more willing to try classroom tasks. Some children showed greater independence in completing activities. Others became more active in asking questions, joining group activities, or responding to teacher instructions. Teachers also reported that supportive feedback helped children become less afraid of making mistakes.

Overall, the findings indicate that growth mindset-oriented teaching was enacted through everyday classroom practices rather than through formal intervention alone. Teachers expressed growth mindset through continuous learning, resilience in facing difficulties, and adaptive responses to children's behavioral needs.

5. DISCUSSION

This study explored how early childhood education teachers in Manggarai Regency perceive and enact growth mindset-oriented teaching and how these practices are associated with children's behavioral development. The findings show that growth mindset was reflected in three interconnected dimensions: teachers' commitment to continuous professional learning, resilience in responding to instructional challenges, and adaptive classroom practices that supported children's confidence, curiosity, independence, and participation. These findings indicate that growth mindset in early childhood education is not only a belief about ability and improvement, but also a practical orientation that shapes how teachers learn, respond to difficulties, and interact with children.

The first finding shows that teachers expressed growth mindset through continuous professional learning. Teachers did not rely only on formal training, but also used informal learning strategies such as peer discussion, self-reflection, reading, and adjustment of teaching activities. This finding supports the view that growth mindset is closely related to teachers' professional agency and willingness to improve their practice [4], [11], [12]. In under-resourced settings, this form of professional learning becomes particularly important because access to structured professional development is often limited.

The second finding highlights teachers' resilience in responding to instructional challenges. Participants reported difficulties related to limited teaching resources, children's varied readiness, classroom management, and restricted professional support. However, many teachers attempted to respond to these challenges through patience, repeated guidance, emotional regulation, and instructional adjustment. This finding is consistent with studies showing that teachers with growth-oriented beliefs are more likely to respond constructively to challenges and support persistence in

learning environments [6], [7], [8]. In the Manggarai context, resilience was not expressed as an abstract motivational trait, but as a practical response to everyday classroom constraints.

The third finding shows that growth mindset-oriented teaching was associated with adaptive classroom practices and positive changes in children's behavior. Teachers reported that children became more confident, independent, curious, and willing to participate when teachers appreciated effort, provided repeated opportunities, used supportive feedback, and treated mistakes as part of learning. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that supportive teacher beliefs and practices can strengthen children's engagement, persistence, and willingness to participate [6], [7], [10].

These findings also suggest that growth mindset operates relationally in early childhood classrooms. It does not remain only within the teacher as an individual belief system; rather, it becomes visible through daily interaction with children. When teachers provide encouragement, model patience, normalize mistakes, and offer flexible support, they create classroom conditions that help children feel safer to try, fail, and try again. This relational dimension is important because early childhood learning depends heavily on affective support, trust, and repeated interaction between teachers and children.

Another important contribution of this study is its contextual perspective. Previous research on growth mindset has often focused on students or on intervention effects in more structured educational contexts [9], [10]. The present study provides evidence from an under-resourced early childhood education setting, where teachers' practices are shaped by limited training opportunities, restricted facilities, and local institutional conditions [16], [17]. The findings show that teachers may still enact growth mindset principles through informal collaboration, reflective teaching, and adaptive classroom strategies [18], [19].

The findings have several practical implications. First, professional development programs for early childhood teachers should not only introduce growth mindset as a concept, but also help teachers translate it into concrete classroom practices such as giving effort-based feedback, responding constructively to mistakes, supporting hesitant children, and designing repeated opportunities for children to participate. Second, teacher training in under-resourced areas should recognize and strengthen existing informal learning practices, including peer discussion, reflective sharing, and collaborative problem solving.

The study also has theoretical implications. It expands the understanding of growth mindset by positioning it not merely as an individual psychological construct, but as a pedagogical orientation embedded in teachers' professional learning and classroom relationships. In early childhood education, growth mindset appears to operate through the teacher's daily responses to children's behavior, especially when children hesitate, make mistakes, struggle with tasks, or need encouragement to participate.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the study used a qualitative descriptive design with participants from one regional context, so the findings are not intended for broad statistical generalization. Second, the data relied primarily on teachers' narratives,

questionnaires, and instructional documentation. Although triangulation was used, future studies could include more systematic classroom observation to capture teacher-child interaction directly. Third, the study examined perceived behavioral changes in children rather than measuring behavioral outcomes longitudinally. Future research should consider longitudinal or mixed-method designs to examine how growth mindset-oriented teaching influences children's behavioral development over time.

Overall, the discussion shows that growth mindset among early childhood teachers in Manggarai functions as a professional, pedagogical, and relational orientation. It supports teachers' continuous learning, strengthens resilience in challenging conditions, and shapes adaptive practices that are associated with positive behavioral development among children.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored how early childhood education teachers in Manggarai Regency perceive and enact growth mindset-oriented teaching and how these practices are associated with children's behavioral development. The findings show that growth mindset was expressed through teachers' commitment to continuous professional learning, resilience in responding to instructional challenges, and adaptive teaching practices in daily classroom interaction. These practices were associated with positive behavioral changes among children, particularly increased confidence, curiosity, independence, and willingness to participate in learning activities.

The study contributes to the literature by showing that growth mindset in early childhood education functions not only as a personal belief about learning, but also as a pedagogical and relational orientation. In under-resourced settings, teachers' growth mindset may support reflective practice, persistence, and adaptive responses to children's needs, even when formal professional support and learning resources are limited.

Practically, the findings suggest that professional development programs for early childhood teachers should help teachers translate growth mindset principles into concrete classroom strategies, such as effort-based feedback, supportive responses to mistakes, repeated learning opportunities, and flexible guidance for children. Future research should include direct classroom observation and longitudinal designs to examine how growth mindset-oriented teaching influences children's behavioral development over time.

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