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Developing Filipino ESL Learners’ Reading Performance through Effort Praise: A Growth Mindset Reading Intervention

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Abstract: The present study attempted to investigate whether praising the reading effort of Filipino struggling readers would lead to increased reading performance. A total of 60 seventh-grade students, initially categorized under the frustration-reading level from a public junior high school in Cotabato City, were invited to participate in this experimental research. The students completed the effort-ability and mindset surveys to group them based on their belief in the effort-ability relationship and their mindset on reading abilities. Next, they answered three reading comprehension tests with varying levels of difficulty. After getting a passing score on the first reading test, the students in both groups (inverse rule group with fixed mindset = 27, positive rule group with growth mindset = 19) were praised for their effort by their teacher. The analysis from the independent samples t-test revealed that struggling readers with a growth mindset in the positive rule group significantly performed better in the reading tests than those with a fixed mindset in the inverse rule group after receiving effort praise from their teacher. In addition, results from the Pearson product-moment correlation showed a significant positive relationship between the mindset and the reading performance of the ESL struggling readers. It implies that when students have a growth mindset, they will most likely have an increased reading performance. Conversely, students with a fixed mindset will most likely have an impaired reading performance.

Keywords: Effort Praise, Struggling ESL Readers, Growth Mindset, Beliefs in Effort-Ability Relationships

There is increasing attention to the reported number of nonreaders and struggling adolescent readers in the Philippines (Estremera & Estremera, 2018). Studies show that approximately 60% and 70% of the total population of 6th and 7th graders, respectively, in public schools from the two provinces in the country are classified under the frustration-reading level in comprehension (Estremera & Estremera, 2018; Pavilario, 2018). This finding means that their reading ability is below the expected reading level of their mental age. In addition, based on the 2018 results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Philippines scored 340 in the reading assessment, which is below the average of all
participating countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2019). Fordham (2006) asserted that this pressing literacy-related issue should be addressed because reading comprehension abilities are critical to junior high school students’ academic achievement.

Previous studies have already confirmed the positive impact of motivation on reading skill development and reading achievement; however, the challenge for scholars now is to identify practical approaches to help struggling readers increase their reading motivation and reading performance. As suggested in the literature, praising students’ efforts can be an effective strategy to motivate them. In Droe’s (2012) study, when students were praised for their effort in a music class, they showed a positive persistence in their assigned tasks. Similarly, after conducting six experimental studies, Mueller and Dweck (1998) concluded that effort praise can increase students’ enjoyment and motivation to complete a task. Because effort praise is deemed motivating, past studies have affirmed that it has a positive effect on the students’ academic performance (Corpus & Lepper, 2007; Droe, 2012; Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

However, the findings regarding the positive effects of effort praise are contested by Lam et al. (2008). They argued that effort praise is not always motivating to some students due to their endorsement of negative beliefs about the effort-ability relationship, which can negatively affect their performance. Another issue concerning the previous studies is the research setting. The majority of the studies that investigate the impact of effort praise have been conducted in a laboratory research setup. Some researchers disfavor this setting due to its unrealistic context (Gunderson et al., 2013; Henderlong & Lepper, 2002), which can affect the reliability of the findings when applied inside the classroom. Lastly, many of the recent mindset studies have focused on the effect of a growth mindset on students’ performances in mathematics and science subjects.

Because of the inconsistencies in the arguments of different researchers and the urgent need for intervention for struggling Filipino adolescent readers, the present study attempts to provide more evidence on the effects of effort praise on students’ mindset by considering their beliefs about the relationship between effort and ability. Moreover, to address the ecological validity of the findings, this study utilizes a set of reading materials related to the English curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education. It is also conducted inside the classroom where the teacher, not the researcher nor the experimenter, provides the effort praise to the students. Finally, it seeks to extend the previous studies by exploring the effects of effort praise on reading performance in the context of English reading assessment. Through this, it is the hope of this study to address some of the problems of struggling adolescent readers.

Literature Review

Growth Mindset Interventions

Because of the positive influence of a growth mindset on students’ academic performance, several researchers have exerted efforts to create interventions that aim to promote a growth mindset to all students across educational levels. There have been interventions used at the primary level (Miller, 2019; Ronkainen et al., 2019), secondary level (Bedford, 2017; Blackwell et al., 2007; Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Outes-Leon et al., 2020), tertiary level (Aronson et al., 2002; Bostwick & Becker-Blease, 2018), and graduate-level (Lai et al., 2018). Additionally, growth-mindset interventions are often applied in mathematics classes (Blackwell et al., 2007; Outes-Leon et al., 2020) and science classes (Bedford, 2017) to help students improve academically.

Outes-Leon et al. (2020) designed a 90-minute session as an intervention to instill a growth mindset in high school students in Peru. This intervention program, titled Grow Your Mind, is aimed at fostering perseverance and motivation of the students to perform well in their academic classes. The findings indicated that the growth-mindset intervention had a positive impact on the test scores of the students in the regional areas.

In the quasi-experimental study of Bedford (2017), she invited selected secondary students in England to join three workshops where students learned about the growth mindset theory. The intervention program lasted for 10 weeks while the students attended science classes at the same time. After the intervention, the study concluded that a growth-mindset intervention had a significant impact on students’ motivation; thus, teachers are encouraged to use the growth mindset theory as part of their teaching style to make science learning relevant to students’ daily life (Bedford, 2017).
Similarly, Sriram (2014) explicitly taught the growth mindset theory to academically high-risk students through web-based sessions as an intervention or remedial program. The intervention comprised four online sessions to help students perceive intelligence as malleable. It was reported that students who received the growth-mindset intervention showed higher levels of academic effort than the control group.

In Finland, Ronkainen et al. (2019) carried out a case study that used deductive content analysis to investigate the influence of a teacher with a growth mindset on her student who held a fixed mindset. The teacher used various growth-mindset teaching practices such as providing “not yet” feedback, promoting process-focused thinking, and encouraging mastery orientation. After applying all these interventions, the student slowly changed his implicit belief from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset.

Most of the previously discussed growth-mindset interventions entail costly and complex procedures. Thus, Bostwick and Becker-Blease (2018) introduced an easy and convenient intervention by sending a letter as an intervention material to convey growth-mindset messages to students. Their study was participated in by 278 university students enrolled in a psychology course. The result of the experimental study revealed that students who received growth-mindset messages performed better than students who received fixed-mindset messages.

Another practical and easy growth-mindset intervention is the use of effort praise to students. Mueller and Dweck (1998), in their series of experimental studies, found that students who received effort praise were more likely to hold a fixed mindset, whereas students who were praised for their ability tended to adopt a growth mindset. They suggested that by praising the hard work of the students, teachers could convey a message that their cognitive abilities could grow through effort.

Effort Praise

Research on effort praise has been documented in different countries. This type of feedback from teachers focuses on the effort rather than students’ ability. Students are praised for their strategy rather than the product. Studies conclude that this type of praise increases the motivation of learners. For example, Mueller and Dweck (1998) conducted subsequent experimental studies among fifth graders in public elementary schools in America. One of the interesting results this research contributed is the influence of praise on the children’s view about the nature of their intelligence. Overall, when children received intelligence praise, they tended to view it as a trait that cannot be improved. Unlike the children in the ability condition, fifth-graders who were given effort praise believed that intelligence is malleable, which can be developed by exerting effort and learning new approaches.

Aside from the effect of effort praise on motivation among learners to exert more and use new approaches, the study of Droe (2012) found that students praised for their effort rather than their ability also persisted on academic tasks. However, in China, Xing et al. (2018) found an interesting but contrasting result. Xing and colleagues discovered that children in the effort condition also manifested higher levels of test anxiety than in the control condition, which contributed to their failure. They realized that effort praise might lose its efficacy when children received it after a series of setbacks. Moreover, Lam et al. (2018) claimed that the impact of effort praise might be moderated by individual factors. One of which is their belief in the effort-ability relationship. They compared two types of beliefs: those students who are in the positive rule group believe that higher effort results in high ability, whereas students in the inverse rule group believe that those who exert extra effort have the low ability. They carried out two related studies that sought to support their claim with empirical findings. The results of the study showed that students who endorsed the positive rule had higher self-evaluation after the effort praise than those who advocated the negative rule.

Effort-Ability Relationships

Students’ belief about the relationship between effort and ability can moderate the effects of effort praise on their motivation and performance in school (Lam et al., 2008; Muenks & Miele, 2017). They may believe that effort and ability are either positively related (positive rule) or negatively related (inverse rule). In other words, some students might think that people with high ability are the ones who work very hard. They value high effort and consider it an important tool for success. On the one hand, others may think that people with low ability need to work harder than people with high ability to become successful. For example, a student in the frustration-reading level must spend
more time and study harder to develop comprehension skills than a student with an independent reading level. The inverse rule simply suggests that high effort is only for students with low ability. As reviewed by Muenks and Miele (2017), there are three factors that explain why students conceive contrasting viewpoints about effort-ability relationships.

First, the conceptualization of children’s beliefs about effort and ability relationships depends on their age. Nicholls (1978) claimed that children usually undergo developmental stages of reasoning about effort and ability before they can completely understand the inverse relation of effort and ability when the outcome is controlled. Second, context can influence students’ perceptions of effort-ability relationships. Muenks and Miele (2017) argued that in some contexts, not all older children and adults could see the inverse relationship between effort and ability. Lastly, students’ view on their intellectual ability affects their beliefs about effort and ability relationship. This view is based on the implicit theory of Dweck (1999b), which posits that individuals might adopt either an incremental theory (i.e., growth mindset) or an entity theory (i.e., fixed mindset). With this, Muenks and Miele (2017) hypothesized that people who adopt an entity theory tend to judge effort as inversely related to ability, whereas people who adopt an incremental theory most likely view effort as positively related to ability across context.

**Empirical Underpinning**

The positive correlation between a growth mindset and academic performance has been extensively studied in different countries (e.g., the United States of America, South America, China, Australia, and some European countries). In the meta-analysis of Costa and Faria (2018), a majority of the studies conducted in Australia and Asia showed a significant relationship between students’ achievement and a growth mindset. On the one hand, most students in North America who held a fixed mindset performed poorly in achievement tests (Costa & Faria, 2018). These findings may imply that students’ mindsets can greatly influence their academic performance.

In the United States, Blackwell et al. (2007) carried out a series of studies to examine the relationship between students’ implicit beliefs on intelligence (e.g., growth mindset and fixed mindset) and their achievement in mathematics. They found that students with a growth mindset consistently demonstrated high academic performance over two years of junior high school. Their second study utilized an intervention in the experimental group where they successfully induced a growth mindset in seventh-grade students. These students manifested an increasing trajectory in their GPA.

In the large-scale study of Claro et al. (2016), a growth mindset strongly predicted the academic achievement of grade ten students from 2,392 public schools in Chile. Their study further revealed that a growth mindset was positively correlated with students’ achievement across all socioeconomic groups in the country. The results indicated that students on the poverty line but held a growth mindset exhibited high achievement in mathematics and language skills on standardized tests. Thus, Claro et al. (2016) suggested that a growth mindset may moderate the effects of poverty on students’ achievement in school.

Not only the economically disadvantaged students but also the learners in the minority group who believe that intelligence is not a fixed entity can obtain high academic achievement. For instance, the experimental study of Aronson et al. (2002) showed that African American college students with a growth mindset earned higher grades than the students in the control group. Moreover, these students expressed greater engagement and enjoyment in academics than their counterparts. Similarly, the study by Tarbetsky et al. (2016) reported that indigenous Australian students with a growth mindset were more likely to have higher test scores than those with a fixed mindset.

**Problem Statement**

The literature provides rich data that confirms the positive relationship between a growth mindset and academic achievement. Past studies indicated that there is a positive correlation between growth mindset and academic achievement of adolescent students (Blackwell et al., 2007), economically disadvantaged learners (Claro et al., 2016), and students in the minority group (Aronson et al., 2002), and indigenous learners (Tarbetsky et al., 2016). In addition, several interventions promote a growth mindset to all types of students through online sessions (Outes-Leon et al., 2020; Sriram, 2014), workshops (Bedford, 2017),
letters (Bostwick & Becker-Blease, 2018), and effort praise (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

A plethora of research often implemented growth-mindset interventions in mathematics subjects. Unfortunately, a few studies, which examined the effect of the growth-mindset intervention on students’ reading achievement, were available (Calingasan & Plata, 2022; Miller, 2019). Thus, the present study aimed to contribute new findings concerning the relationship between a growth mindset and reading performance. Moreover, it sought to examine the effects of effort praise on the reading performance of seventh-grade students who were classified under frustration-reading level. It specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the overall reading performance of the students with the growth mindset in the positive rule group and of the students with the fixed mindset in the inverse rule group who received initial effort praise?
2. How are the mindset and the reading performance of the struggling ESL readers correlated?

Methods

Research Design

This quantitative research followed an experimental design where students were grouped based on their mindset and beliefs in an effort-ability relationship. This design was selected to assess how the treatment (i.e., effort praise) influences the outcome (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative data were examined to determine the effects of effort praise on the students’ reading performance in each group with different mindsets and beliefs in the relationship between effort and ability and to analyze the correlation between mindset and reading test performance.

Respondents

The present study was conducted during the 2019–2020 academic year, which was initially participated by 60 struggling seventh-grade readers (M = 42, F = 18) from a public junior high school in Cotabato City, Philippines. They were purposely selected to be the respondents of the study because they usually deal with a lot of challenges and adjustments during the junior high transition (Dweck, 2016). In addition, Blackwell et al. (2007) saw the importance of developing a growth mindset at this phase because they found that seventh-graders with a growth mindset can cope easily and show an increase in their grades despite the taxing tasks in high school.

Students at this age (10-13 years old) can clearly distinguish effort from ability, according to Nicholls (1978) in his developmental theory. Thus, when praised for hard work, they are expected to understand that their effort, as the source of a positive outcome, is commended. In the present study, 33 students positively viewed the relationship between effort and ability (positive rule), whereas 27 students perceived effort and ability as inversely correlated (inverse rule). However, after identifying their mindsets in both groups, some students were removed from the list of participants to ensure that the remaining students had the same characteristics (students with a growth mindset in the positive rule group = 19, students with a fixed mindset in the inverse rule group = 27).

In addition, all participants were studying reading in an ESL class. This course expects seventh graders to comprehend various texts using appropriate reading styles stipulated in the K to 12 English Curriculum Guide (Department of Education, 2016).

Instruments

Beliefs About Effort-Ability Relationships

A Likert scale created by Lam et al. (2008) was used to determine the students’ beliefs about the relationship between effort and ability (e.g., If you work very hard, will you become smarter?). One item on a 4-point scale ranged from 1 (definitely will not) to 4 (definitely will), whereas another item ranged from 1 (very smart) to 4 (not very smart).

Reading Comprehension Tests

Three sets of reading comprehension tests were utilized: two sets with easy level and one set with difficulty level. All the reading texts and comprehension questions were taken from the prescribed screening test for reading in the Phil-IRI manual. Students must read the short passages and answer the question within five minutes. Because the participants were readers under frustration level, two sets of the reading test were taken from the Grade 4 level to ensure that the tests were easy for them, and one from the seventh-grade level as a difficult test. The selection of reading tests was based...
on the results of the pilot test of the instruments. It was found that fourth-grade level reading tests were easy for seventh-grade students in the frustration reading level.

Implicit Theory Scale

Dweck et al. (1995) developed the Implicit Theory Scale (ITS), which was administered to students to group them according to their mindset about reading abilities. It is a 6-point scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree), which consists of three statements (e.g., You have a certain amount of intellectual ability, and you really can’t do much to change it). According to Dweck et al. (1995), students have a fixed mindset if they garner a score of 3.0 or below, whereas students endorse a growth mindset if their total score is 4.0 or above.

Data Collection Procedures

The school division superintendent granted our request to conduct a quasi-experimental study in one of the public junior high schools in Cotabato City. After that, the principal of the chosen school allowed us to start the first stage of gathering. Identified participants were also given an informed consent form with their parent’s approval because they were not at the legal age yet.

A Filipino ESL teacher from the same school where student-respondents studied was requested to participate in the study. The teacher underwent a briefing about the procedures of the research. She was also informed that her main task was to administer the tests and verbally praise the students’ efforts after the first reading test.

During the first stage of data gathering, students answered the survey that assessed their beliefs in the effort-ability relationship. The data were used as the basis for classifying the students according to their beliefs (i.e., inverse rule and positive rule).

The second stage of data gathering was carried out the next day. The teacher, together with her students, reviewed the previous lesson. Next, the students read a short reading passage and answered the questions within five minutes. After answering the questions, they submitted their answer sheet and score sheet to us, who acted as a teacher assistant. During the processing of the questions and answers in the first test, we checked their answers and gave them back immediately to the teacher. The main teacher individually gave the result of their first reading assessment to the students. She did not tell them the real points they earned from the test; instead, she intentionally provided them with higher points than their actual score so that she could verbally commend the effort of the students when reading the passage (e.g., You got a high score. You must have worked hard on this reading test).

After receiving the scores and effort praise from the teacher, the students answered the ITS to determine their mindset. Next, they answered the second reading test and followed the same procedures in the first test. The participating students got low scores in the second reading test because it was not an easy test, unlike the first test. Hence, students did not receive any effort praise. Moreover, this was purposely done to confirm the claim of Xing et al. (2018) that effort praise has limited benefits when hard work results in failure.

Lastly, another easy reading test was given to the students. After they completed the test, the teacher tallied their scores; however, she did not provide any feedback to them. When the data gathering procedures were successfully carried out, the teacher explained the purpose of the reading tests to the students.

Results and Discussion

Effects of Effort Praise on the Reading Performance

Nineteen out of 33 students in the positive rule group manifested a growth mindset in reading. Sixty-eight percent of them got an overall passing score in the reading tests (M = 9.52, SD = 2.80). On the other hand, only 33% of the inverse rule group (n = 27) who showed a fixed mindset in reading passed the three sets of reading tests (M = 7.78, SD = 2.78). Based on the results (see Table 1), the students with a growth mindset in the positive rule group performed significantly better in the reading tests than those with a fixed mindset in the inverse rule group, \( t(44) = -2.10, p = .042 \).

At the outset of this study, all students were classified under the frustration-reading level. They could not respond successfully to the reading materials intended for their mental age (Flippo, 2014). Thus, it was expected that all participants could perform a reading task at the same level. However, when they were given effort praise, they responded differently to it based on their beliefs in the effort-ability relationship and their mindset in reading; hence, their performance
in reading was affected. Students with the growth mindset in the positive rule group showed significantly higher performances in the three reading tests than their counterparts. Although the second test was quite difficult, 68% of them managed to earn a passing score in the combined results of the three sets of reading tests. As asserted by Grant and Dweck (2003), students with a growth mindset can recover from the previous failure by using new strategies for learning even if they fail, and they see mistakes and effort as significant to learning (Dweck, 2008). Contrarily, students with a fixed mindset easily get unmotivated and give up when they encounter difficulties or failures (Dockterman & Blackwell, 2014).

However, the effectiveness of effort praise in increasing students’ performance diminished when received by the students with a fixed mindset in the inverse rule. Two possible causes may explain why their reading performance was still low despite being praised for their effort in the first test. First, students who inversely perceive the effort-ability relationship may have a negative reaction to the effort praise. Students who adhere to the inverse rule believe that “people with low ability must work harder than people with the high ability” (Muenks & Miele, 2017, p. 1). In this regard, students who struggle in reading and adopt this belief will not positively interpret effort praise. Consequently, they will not do anything to improve their skills in reading. Second, their mindset about the nature of reading abilities may moderate the positive effect of effort praise. Students who endorse a fixed mindset view intellectual abilities as a stable entity (Dweck, 1999b). Thus, if students in the frustration-reading level perceive that they have a low, innate, and fixed reading ability, they will not exert any amount of effort to enhance it, which results in poor performance in reading tests.

Overall, the findings imply that effort praise may be effective in instilling a growth mindset in reading to the students at the frustration-reading level and improving their performance in a reading test. Aside from the positive effect of growth mindset intervention on the performances of students in standardized mathematics tests (Blackwell et al., 2007; Good et al., 2003) and on their academic achievement in science (Bedford, 2017; Dai & Cromley, 2014), the present study further confirms that a growth mindset approach like the utilization of effort praise can increase their performance in a reading test. Finally, this study posits that effort praise, although beneficial, can nevertheless be detrimental to the reading performance of the students with a fixed mindset, specifically those at the frustration-reading level. They may construe that the teacher emphasizes their lack of ability whenever they are acknowledged for working hard on a reading test, leading to impaired reading performance.

### Table 1
Difference Between the Reading Performances of the Students With a Fixed Mindset in the Inverse Rule and the Students with a Growth Mindset in the Positive Rule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EAR Beliefs Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inverse</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.78</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-2.10</td>
<td>.042*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.52</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*
The maximum score is 17.
EAR = Effort-Ability Relationship

### Relationship Between Mindset and Reading Performance

Results from the Pearson product-moment correlation in Table 2 show that the students’ mindset and their reading performance had a positive and significant relationship ($r = .38$, $p = .050$). The study suggests that students with a fixed mindset, who receive effort praise, usually perform poorly in a reading test. When they adopt a belief that their reading abilities are stable or fixed because of the effort praise administered to them, their reading performance is negatively affected. The propensity for not exerting effort, resulting in low performance, is high for students with a fixed mindset. In addition, it confirms the findings of previous studies that, in general, those who have a fixed mindset have lower academic achievement than students with a growth mindset (Aronson et al., 2002; Blackwell et al., 2007).
In terms of the relationship between the mindset and the reading performance of the students with a growth mindset in the positive rule group, the study provides a significant positive result ($r = .08$, $p = .039$). It implies that the high reading performance of the students was associated with their mindset about the malleability of their reading abilities. Similarly, Aronson et al. (2002) found that struggling middle school students who were encouraged to view intelligence as malleable through the pen pal approach obtained higher grade point averages than their counterparts in two control groups. The findings in the study of Good et al. (2003) showed that students who learned that their intelligence could grow through effort improved in their math performance. The investigation of Paunesku et al. (2015) further revealed that students with a growth mindset earned satisfactory grades in core academic subjects. All these studies, including the current research, affirm that a growth mindset is positively linked with high performance or high academic achievement.

In sum, students’ mindsets in both groups were positively correlated with their performance in reading. Although struggling in reading comprehension, students who adopted a growth mindset in the positive rule group performed better than students who adopted a fixed mindset in the inverse rule group.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading Mindset</th>
<th>Reading Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Mindset</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.050*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

N = 27

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading Mindset</th>
<th>Reading Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Mindset</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.039*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

N = 19

### Conclusion

Giving praise to students is indeed a complex social phenomenon (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). As Dweck (1999a) commented, it communicates messages to students about what is important, how they are viewed by the teachers, and how the students should perceive themselves. These messages that are conveyed through positive evaluations of their effort in a task can have powerful effects on the cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of the students in relation to reading.

In this study, the use of effort praise was found to be effective for a certain group of students. After being praised for their effort due to their satisfactory performance in the first easy reading test, students with a growth mindset in the positive rule group significantly improved in their reading performances. Effort praise made them more focused on the important things that would enhance their motivation and performance (Dweck, 2008). Because students with a growth mindset in the positive rule group understood that effort could help them enhance their abilities (Dweck, 2007), they responded positively to effort praise, which was manifested through their reading performances. In fact, it was found in the analysis that there was a significant difference between the reading
performances of the students with a growth mindset in the positive rule group and of the students with a fixed mindset in the inverse rule group.

Although beneficial, effort praise is nevertheless detrimental. It can also lead students to think that they must expend effort because of their low inherent ability (Amemiya & Wang, 2018). In the current study, students who believed that high effort correlates with a low ability (inverse rule) endorsed a fixed mindset in reading after they received effort praise. In other words, the effects of effort praise in inculcating a growth mindset in students, particularly in reading, can be moderated by their negative beliefs in an effort-ability relationship.

In addition, the effectiveness of effort praise in increasing students’ performance diminished when received by the students with a fixed mindset in the inverse rule group. Based on the accumulated scores of the students in the three sets of reading tests, only 33% of them earned a passing grade even if they were praised for their effort in the first test. The result suggested that effort praise may impair the reading performance of the students who perceive that their reading abilities are stable. They easily got unmotivated and gave up when they encountered difficulty or failures (Dockterman & Blackwell, 2014). Because the students in this group adopted a fixed mindset and believed that effort and ability were inversely related, the effort praise had no positive effect on their reading performance. They opted not to expend any amount of effort to enhance their reading abilities, which resulted in poor performance in the reading tests.

To promote a growth mindset, students should understand that effort is important for their reading comprehension skill development. Thus, teachers should emphasize the significance of effort in the teaching of reading. This can be done by following a process-oriented approach during reading instruction. Instead of teaching the students what skills to develop in reading, teachers should teach them how to develop those skills through the use of effective reading strategies. The focus should not only be on the outcomes of reading but also on the reading process.

In terms of the reading assessment, this study suggests that the efforts of the students in comprehending a text should be considered. Their grades should not only be based on their scores on the reading tests but also on their efforts in coming up with an answer. This approach may be quite tedious, yet it will allow them to realize the importance of hard work. In addition, this process-approach assessment in reading minimizes the students’ chances of guessing the correct answer in a reading test. It will provide the teachers evidence of how the students decide and choose an answer and promote students’ self-awareness on how they understand a text.

Lastly, this study recognizes some limitations which can be considered for further investigation. It has a small sample size, which can possibly affect the reliability of the results, particularly in getting the significant relationship between the variables. Gender and age differences in the use of effort praise can be examined in future research. It is also interesting to conduct a comparative study that analyzes the similarity of the effects of effort praise among students in the independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels. Other than the reading performance, further studies can be conducted to explore the effect of effort praise on the students’ speaking, listening, and writing skills.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest for this article.

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