



**From Feeling Incapable to Becoming Agentic:  
Language Mindset Transformation Through  
Reflective Dialogue in a Thai EFL Classroom**

**Sitah Thayati<sup>a</sup>, Ruedeerath Chusanachoti<sup>b\*</sup>, Wichai Sawekngam<sup>c</sup>**

<sup>a</sup> [iamsitah@gmail.com](mailto:iamsitah@gmail.com), Curriculum and Instruction Department, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

<sup>b</sup> [ruedeerath.c@chula.ac.th](mailto:ruedeerath.c@chula.ac.th), Curriculum and Instruction Department, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

<sup>c</sup> [wichai.s@chula.ac.th](mailto:wichai.s@chula.ac.th), Curriculum and Instruction Department, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

\* Corresponding author, [ruedeerath.c@chula.ac.th](mailto:ruedeerath.c@chula.ac.th)

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates how language mindset transforms over time and enables agency development among Thai undergraduate EFL learners. It aims to examine how mindset dimensions change during a reflective dialogue intervention, identify temporal patterns of belief transformation, and explore relationships between these beliefs and agentic behaviors. Employing a multi-method case study design, twenty-five students participated in a six-week intervention; data comprised 100 learning logs and pre-post semi-structured interviews with six focal participants, analyzed using paired-samples t-tests and thematic analysis. All six mindset dimensions—participation, motivation, effort, strategy, failure, and ability—shifted from fixed to growth-oriented perspectives. Three distinct pathways emerged: participation

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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|  | <p>and motivation beliefs transformed rapidly through peer validation; effort and strategy beliefs shifted moderately through guided experimentation; failure and ability beliefs changed gradually through accumulated evidence. These sequential transformations enabled behavioral agency, cognitive agency, and identity agency. Students developed interdependent agency—aligning autonomous action with collectivist values. Findings demonstrate that mindset transformation requires differentiated support mechanisms and realistic timeframes. Educators should employ targeted interventions; behavioral changes emerge within weeks, while identity transformation requires sustained practice over months.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> learner agency, language mindset, Thai EFL learners, reflective dialogue</p> |
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## Introduction

Reflective dialogue has emerged as a promising pedagogical approach for supporting language learners in examining and transforming their beliefs about learning. By creating structured opportunities for learners to articulate, share, and evaluate their experiences with peers, reflective dialogue can shift how learners understand their own capacity, effort, and identity in relation to language development (Lamy & Goodfellow, 1999; Walsh et al., 2020). However, the mechanisms through which such dialogue produces lasting belief and agency change—and the temporal pathways through which this occurs—remain underexplored, particularly in collectivist Asian EFL contexts where learner silence and face-concern present distinctive challenges to agentive engagement.

However, fostering agency remains challenging in many Asian educational contexts characterized by teacher-centered instruction, hierarchical relationships, and exam-driven practices. Learners in such systems often exhibit limited initiative, dependence on teacher direction, and fear of making mistakes. These tendencies are also observed among Thai EFL students, who commonly avoid volunteering responses and express anxiety about losing face when speaking publicly—patterns rooted in collectivist values and respect for authority and reinforced by classroom practices that often remain teacher-centered, limiting students' opportunities to exercise voice and autonomy (Phithakmethakun & Chinokul, 2020; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025). Yet recent classroom-based research with Thai pre-service teachers suggests these patterns are not immutable: reflective, learning-

oriented assessment approaches have been shown to significantly reduce speaking hesitation and build oral confidence, even among previously reluctant learners (Matyakhan et al., 2024).

While research affirms the importance of agency, less is known about how it develops—specifically, how passive learners transform into active agents. Addressing this gap requires integrating three complementary theoretical perspectives.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do language mindset dimensions change across a six-week reflective dialogue intervention among Thai undergraduate EFL learners?
2. What temporal patterns of agency development emerge during the intervention, and how do mindset transformation and learner agency relate to one another?

## Literature Review

First, growth mindset theory Dweck (2008) explains how beliefs about the malleability of ability shape motivation and persistence. Learners with fixed mindsets view ability as static, while those with growth mindsets perceive it as improvable through effort and strategy. Thayati et al. (2024), building upon Lou and Noels (2019)'s foundational framework, identified six key dimensions of growth language mindset: (1) positive effort belief—the conviction that practice produces improvement; (2) motivational belief—the capacity to maintain interest through challenges; (3) participation in language activities—the belief that engaging in language activities accelerates learning; (4) belief in failure or mistakes—whether mistakes are seen as informative feedback rather than shameful inadequacy; (5) belief in strategies for learning English—the recognition that multiple valid learning pathways exist; (6) perception of ability and potential—the belief that substantial proficiency is achievable. This multidimensional framework enables examining which specific beliefs constrain or enable particular forms of agency.

Second, Mercer (2011, 2012)'s conceptualization of learner agency as socioculturally mediated capacity to act emphasizes three interconnected dimensions: behavioral agency (observable actions like participating in discussions), cognitive agency (mental processes like goal setting and strategy selection), and identity agency (viewing oneself as a capable language learner with developmental potential). Critically, these dimensions do not necessarily develop simultaneously—a gap our study explores.

Third, Mezirow (1991)'s transformative learning theory provides insight into how deeply held beliefs shift through reflection and experience. Transformation occurs when learners face disorienting dilemmas that

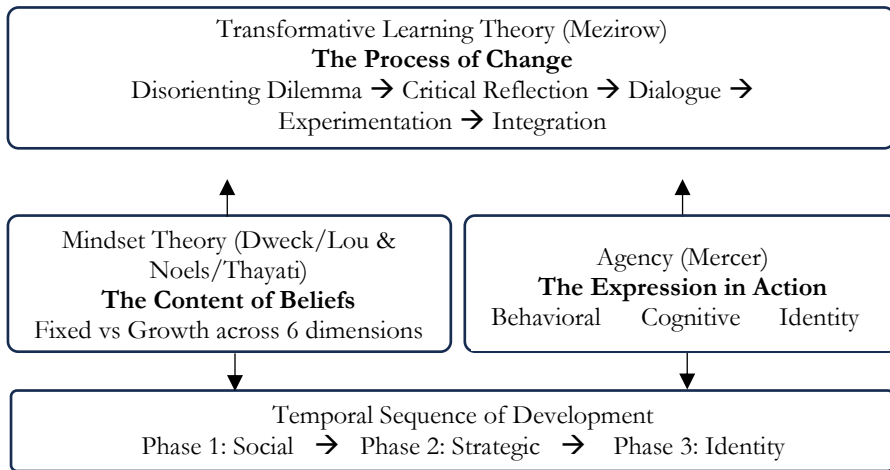
challenge assumptions, engage in critical reflection and dialogue, and experiment with new perspectives and behaviors.

Reflective dialogue supports both cognitive restructuring and social interaction, creating a dual mechanism for learning: processing new information while co-constructing meaning with peers (Lamy & Goodfellow, 1999). This socially mediated negotiation of understanding is crucial for shifting the ways learners think, participate, and position themselves in classroom relationships. Furthermore, reflective dialogue enables students to gain actionable insights into learning strategies and apply them to improve their academic performance (Prompan & Piamsai, 2024; Walsh et al., 2020). In Thai contexts, structured reflection has been shown to help learners reframe speaking from performance pressure to developmental practice, reducing hesitation and building confidence (Matyakhan et al., 2024). For such transformation to occur, learners require an interactive and psychologically safe space where emerging ideas can be articulated, tested, and developed collectively (Suratin & Sribayak, 2025). Importantly, grounding reflection in concrete evidence of learning—such as performances, language examples, or feedback—helps learners monitor progress and adjust behaviors, accelerating belief and identity change (Prompan & Piamsai, 2024; Walsh et al., 2020). Together, these principles portray reflective dialogue as a cognitive-social engine for agency development and more empowered engagement in language learning.

These three theoretical perspectives offer complementary lenses for understanding agency development. Mindset theory (Dweck, 2008; Lou & Noels, 2019; Thayati et al., 2024) identifies the content of beliefs that must shift—from viewing language ability as fixed to perceiving it as developable across six dimensions. Mercer’s agency framework (2011, 2012) reveals how these belief shifts manifest in action—through behavioral participation, cognitive strategy use, and evolving learner identity. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) explains the process through which change occurs—via disorienting dilemmas that trigger critical reflection, dialogue, and experimentation with new behaviors. Critically, these dimensions interact dynamically: initial behavioral changes (e.g., increased participation) may precede belief transformations, which then recursively strengthen agentic engagement. This integrated framework enables us to trace not only what beliefs constrain Thai EFL learners’ agency, but how pedagogical interventions can catalyze belief-behavior transformation within culturally specific contexts (Phithakmethakun & Chinokul, 2020; Prompan & Piamsai, 2024).

**Figure 1**

*The Interplay of Mindset, Agency, and Transformative Learning*



## Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design within a multi-method case study framework, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative learning logs and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative component (paired-samples t-tests,  $n=25$ ) assessed the magnitude and statistical significance of mindset belief change across the full participant group. The qualitative component (thematic analysis of learning logs from all participants,  $n=25$ , and semi-structured interviews with six focal participants,  $n=6$ ) examined the mechanisms, temporal patterns, and lived experiences underlying those changes. This integration enabled both breadth of measurement and depth of interpretation. The bounded case involved 25 Thai undergraduate students in a six-week reflective dialogue intervention, with in-depth qualitative analysis centered on six focal participants representing diverse initial language mindset profiles.

### Participants and Setting

Twenty-five Thai undergraduate students (mean age 20.3 years; 23 female, 2 male) enrolled in an Elementary Education program at a public university in Northern Thailand participated in this study. All were Thai L1

speakers with beginner English proficiency as determined by course placement. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) enrollment in the same course section taught by the first author, ensuring shared instructional context; (2) no prior exposure to growth mindset instruction or related interventions; and (3) willingness to maintain reflective learning logs across the intervention period. Written informed consent was obtained following university ethics approval (COA No. 130/67).

At baseline, participants completed the Growth Language Mindset Scale (Thayati et al., 2024) and were stratified into three groups based on total scores: high mindset (scores 120–137,  $n=8$ ), moderate mindset (scores 110–119,  $n=9$ ), and low mindset (scores 85–109,  $n=8$ ). This stratification ensured that diverse initial belief profiles were represented in the qualitative component. Two participants from each stratum were then randomly selected as focal participants for intensive semi-structured interviews (yielding six focal participants in total; identified as S-codes, e.g. S015, S022, reflecting anonymized order in the original dataset). Random selection within each stratum controlled for researcher selection bias while preserving profile diversity across the full mindset spectrum.

## Intervention Structure

The six-week intervention comprised 12 sessions (approximately 24 hours total) with two sessions per week organized into five thematic units: (1) building trust and exploring language learning histories, (2) understanding brain plasticity and the growth mindset concept, (3) developing growth-oriented self-talk and reframing failure, (4) embracing mistakes as learning opportunities through peer dialogue, and (5) setting personal goals and experimenting with strategies. Each session followed a structured reflective dialogue protocol: an opening warm-up activating prior experience, a focused peer dialogue task using open-ended guiding questions (e.g., “What did you try this week that felt uncomfortable? What did you notice?”), a structured sharing segment in pairs or small groups, and a closing individual reflection. The first author served as both course instructor and facilitator; to minimize social desirability, learning log entries were anonymous and coded independently by the second researcher before joint discussion.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Three instruments were used to collect data. First, the Growth Language Mindset Scale (GLMS; Thayati et al., 2024) was administered to all participants ( $n=25$ ) at pre-intervention (Week 0) and post-intervention (Week

7). The GLMS is a validated 30-item self-report questionnaire measuring growth versus fixed orientations across six mindset dimensions: effort, motivation, participation, failure, strategy, and ability. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale; total scores range from 30 to 150, with higher scores indicating stronger growth-oriented beliefs. Pre-intervention scores served both as baseline measures for the quantitative analysis and as stratification criteria for focal participant selection. Post-intervention scores enabled paired-samples t-test analysis of change across the full sample.

Second, semi-structured interviews (45-60 minutes) were conducted with six focal participants at two time points: pre-intervention (Week 0) and post-intervention (Week 7). The interview protocol comprised two sections: (1) situational scenario questions (3 items), in which participants responded to hypothetical EFL learning dilemmas designed to elicit belief reasoning (e.g., a scenario involving a student who fears speaking up in class; a scenario involving a student who feels incapable despite sustained effort; a scenario involving a student who repeatedly receives failing feedback on written work); and (2) dimension-specific belief questions (2 questions per dimension, 12 items total), using standardized opening questions for each of the six mindset dimensions followed by flexible follow-up probes. Interviews were conducted in Thai to reduce language barriers, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. All participants (n=25) maintained structured learning logs at four time points (Weeks 1, 3, 5, 7), yielding 100 logs in total. Each log comprised six open-ended questions corresponding directly to the six mindset dimensions: (1) effort beliefs (“How did you approach a language task this week to complete it successfully?”); (2) motivation beliefs (“How motivated were you to learn English this week, and how did that affect your behavior?”); (3) participation beliefs (“What English activities did you join inside or outside class, and how did you feel participating?”); (4) failure beliefs (“What mistakes or failures in English did you encounter, and how did you respond?”); (5) strategy beliefs (“What techniques did you use this week, and did they work?”); and (6) ability beliefs (“Do you feel you have the potential to improve your English, and how do you express that confidence?”). Logs functioned as contemporaneous data instruments, capturing belief states as they developed across the intervention rather than relying solely on retrospective accounts, thereby strengthening triangulation with interview data.

Quantitative analysis employed paired-samples t-tests to compare pre- and post-intervention GLMS total scores and scores on each of the six mindset dimensions across the full sample (n=25), using IBM SPSS Statistics. Effect size was assessed via Cohen’s d. Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ . Qualitative analysis combined deductive framework analysis using Thayati et al. (2024)’s six mindset dimensions and Mercer (2011, 2012)’s three

agency dimensions with inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Two coders independently analyzed interview transcripts and learning log entries, categorizing statements as growth- or fixed-oriented; intercoder reliability was established prior to full analysis (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.84$ ). Thematic analysis proceeded through systematic coding, identifying patterns within and across participants, and constructing temporal trajectories of belief change across the four measurement points. Trustworthiness was established through member checking, data triangulation, and audit trails.

## Results and Discussion

### Overview of Transformation Patterns

Throughout the intervention and post-intervention measurement period, learners' beliefs exhibited multi-layered transformations across six language mindset dimensions—participation, motivation, effort, strategy, failure, and ability — revealing a pervasive shift from fixed or deficit-oriented positions toward growth-oriented and agentic understandings of learning.

Quantitative analysis ( $n=25$ ) demonstrated significant gains across all dimensions (Table 1). Overall mean scores increased from 110.32 to 137.60 post-intervention, with all six dimensions showing statistically significant improvements ( $p < .05$ ). Language activity participation beliefs exhibited the largest gains, while beliefs about failure showed the smallest change.

**Table 1**

*Pre- and Post-Program Growth Language Mindset Comparison ( $n=25$ )*

| Dimension                                                    | Group | $\bar{x}$ | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Positive Effort Beliefs                                      | Pre   | 19.16     | 3.49      | 6.17***  | 24        | <.001    |
|                                                              | Post  | 24.20     | 2.99      |          |           |          |
| Motivation Beliefs                                           | Pre   | 16.56     | 3.91      | 5.66***  | 24        | <.001    |
|                                                              | Post  | 22.44     | 4.69      |          |           |          |
| Language Activity Participation Beliefs                      | Pre   | 16.36     | 3.86      | 6.85***  | 24        | <.001    |
|                                                              | Post  | 21.88     | 5.23      |          |           |          |
| Beliefs about Failure or Mistakes in English Learning or Use | Pre   | 21.72     | 4.24      | 2.58*    | 24        | 0.016    |
|                                                              | Post  | 24.20     | 3.95      |          |           |          |

| Dimension                                        | Group | $\bar{x}$ | $SD$  | $t$     | $df$ | $p$   |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|---------|------|-------|
| English Learning Strategy Beliefs                | Pre   | 21.28     | 4.14  | 4.95*** | 24   | <.001 |
|                                                  | Post  | 24.76     | 3.72  |         |      |       |
| Perceived English Learning Ability and Potential | Pre   | 15.24     | 4.70  | 5.48*** | 24   | <.001 |
|                                                  | Post  | 20.12     | 6.78  |         |      |       |
| Overall                                          | Pre   | 110.32    | 17.92 | 6.61*** | 24   | <.001 |
|                                                  | Post  | 137.60    | 23.74 |         |      |       |

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*  $p < .05$

Qualitative interview analysis (n=6) corroborated these patterns, revealing a dramatic shift from 64.60% fixed mindset statements pre-intervention to 97.06% growth-oriented statements post-intervention (Table 2). Complete transformation occurred in participation, motivation, effort, and strategy dimensions (100% positive statements), while failure (88.89%) and ability (93.33%) dimensions retained minimal fixed-mindset traces.

**Table 2**

*Coded Interview Statements by Mindset Dimension (n=6)*

| Dimension                                                       | Group | Positive Frequency | Positive % | Negative Frequency | Negative % |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1. Positive Effort Beliefs                                      | Pre   | 10                 | 43.48%     | 13                 | 56.52%     |
|                                                                 | Post  | 21                 | 100.00%    | 0                  | 0%         |
| 2. Motivation Beliefs                                           | Pre   | 6                  | 33.33%     | 12                 | 66.67%     |
|                                                                 | Post  | 16                 | 100.00%    | 0                  | 0%         |
| 3. Language Activity Participation Beliefs                      | Pre   | 5                  | 20.00%     | 20                 | 80.00%     |
|                                                                 | Post  | 17                 | 100.00%    | 0                  | 0%         |
| 4. Beliefs about Failure or Mistakes in English Learning or Use | Pre   | 3                  | 23.08%     | 10                 | 76.92%     |
|                                                                 | Post  | 16                 | 88.89%     | 2                  | 11.11%     |
| 5. English Learning Strategy Beliefs                            | Pre   | 10                 | 71.43%     | 4                  | 28.57%     |
|                                                                 | Post  | 15                 | 100.00%    | 0                  | 0%         |

| Dimension                                           | Group | Positive Frequency | Positive % | Negative Frequency | Negative % |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| 6. Perceived English Learning Ability and Potential | Pre   | 6                  | 30.00%     | 14                 | 70.00%     |
|                                                     | Post  | 14                 | 93.33%     | 1                  | 6.67%      |
| Overall                                             | Pre   | 40                 | 35.40%     | 73                 | 64.60%     |
|                                                     | Post  | 99                 | 97.06%     | 3                  | 2.94%      |

Critically, the pace and mechanisms of change varied systematically across dimensions. Three distinct temporal clusters emerged—rapid (Weeks 1-3), moderate (Weeks 3-5), and gradual (Weeks 5-7+)—each characterized by unique change mechanisms (Table 3). This heterogeneity suggests that different mindset dimensions require tailored strategies operating across different timescales.

Table 3

*Transformation patterns across six language mindset dimensions*

| Mindset Dimension | Initial Orientation                                           | Final Orientation                                                   | Temporal Pace        | Dominant Mechanism of Change                                 | Indicative Learner Expressions                              |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participation     | Hesitant; viewed participation as risky and teacher-dependent | Active; participation seen as shared responsibility and opportunity | Rapid (Weeks 1–3)    | Social validation and emotional safety through peer modeling | When others speak even with mistakes, I feel I can try too. |
| Motivation        | Extrinsic, compliance-driven                                  | Intrinsic, purpose-driven through belonging                         | Rapid (Weeks 1–3)    | Affective contagion and community belonging                  | We learn together to improve, not only for grades.          |
| Effort            | Effort perceived as futile or exhausting                      | Effort seen as meaningful and controllable                          | Moderate (Weeks 3–5) | Information + experimentation (guided reflection)            | I learned to plan small goals and check my progress.        |
| Strategy          | Passive following of teacher direction                        | Self-initiated, adaptive strategy use                               | Moderate (Weeks 3–5) | Metacognitive awareness and trial–feedback cycles            | I tried new ways and changed when they didn’t work.         |

| <b>Mindset Dimension</b> | <b>Initial Orientation</b>                | <b>Final Orientation</b>                          | <b>Temporal Pace</b> | <b>Dominant Mechanism of Change</b>                      | <b>Indicative Learner Expressions</b>            |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Failure                  | Avoidance; fear of error and loss of face | Acceptance; errors viewed as learning information | Gradual (Weeks 5–7)  | Experiential validation through safe mistake-making      | Mistakes show what I need to work on.            |
| Ability                  | Fixed belief in limited talent            | Growth-oriented, self-perceived capability        | Gradual (Weeks 5–7)  | Accumulated evidence of improvement and teacher feedback | I see I can improve; my English is just growing. |

Note. Qualitative patterns derived from focal participant interview and learning log data (n=6). Mean score changes reflect full-sample quantitative trajectory (n=25; Table 1).

In what follows, we examine how these transformations unfolded across three developmental phases, addressing objective 1 (transformation patterns across dimensions), objective 2 (temporal pace and mechanisms), and objective 3 (relationships to agency emergence).

### **Phase 1 – Rapid Activation (Weeks 1–3): Participation and Motivation**

#### ***Participation Beliefs: From Risk to Inclusion***

Among the focal participants (n=6), initially, many learners described participation as risky, optional, or dependent on teacher prompting. Students felt scared to speak even when knowing answers, worried about making mistakes in front of everyone (S022, Pre-intervention). By Week 3, discourse had shifted dramatically toward inclusive engagement. Students observed that when others spoke even with mistakes, nobody laughed or judged, leading to the realization that “everyone is learning together” (S015, Week 3).

This rapid shift reveals social validation as the primary mechanism. This mechanism operates through dual disconfirmation—observing peers make mistakes without experiencing social rejection simultaneously challenged beliefs that competence requires perfection and that struggle causes face-loss. Unlike teacher modeling, peer demonstrations provided credible proof that “people like me” can participate despite imperfection.

This extends Schunk and Hanson’s (1985) peer modeling theory by specifying that in face-conscious cultures, witnessing peer vulnerability—rather than observing peer success—catalyzes belief change. Quantitative analysis supports this: participation beliefs showed the fastest transformation

among all dimensions (Table 1), occurring specifically in Weeks 2-3 following peer dialogue activities.

While this might appear as mere situational comfort, three patterns indicate genuine belief transformation: students maintained participation when regrouped with unfamiliar peers (Week 4), rates remained high despite increased cognitive demands (Weeks 5-6), and interviews revealed explicit schema reconstruction—reframing participation from individual risk to collective contribution. This qualitative shift represents fundamental belief restructuring consistent with transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), positioning social validation as a gateway mechanism enabling subsequent cognitive and identity transformations.

### ***Motivation Beliefs: From Compliance to Belonging***

Among the focal participants (n=6), motivation beliefs shifted equally rapidly, moving from external obligation to shared purpose. Students initially studied English only because it was required, thinking they could just use Google Translate if unable to read something (S025, Pre-intervention). Following the intervention, students developed sustained motivation to keep practicing every day, even watching learning videos twice when previously they would just scroll past (S014, Post-intervention). This reflected fundamental reorientation from extrinsic compliance to intrinsic engagement anchored in community belonging.

Where participation belief change operated through observational proof, motivation change occurred through affective contagion—the emotional experience of belonging. Participation generated belonging, which fueled intrinsic motivation, which sustained participation.

This aligns with self-determination theory's (Ryan & Deci, 2000) emphasis on relatedness as a psychological need supporting intrinsic motivation, while extending it by revealing relatedness operates differently in collectivist contexts—motivation did not arise from individual autonomy but from interdependent contribution to collective learning.

The early phase generated an affective safety net. Students began exercising behavioral agency but this represented social empowerment rather than cognitive self-regulation. Nevertheless, this foundation proved essential: behavioral engagement created affordances for subsequent cognitive experimentation.

## Phase 2 – Cognitive Regulation (Weeks 3–5): Effort and Strategy

### *Effort Beliefs: From Futility to Strategic Efficacy*

Among focal participants (n=6), by mid-intervention, students began confronting effort beliefs. Initially, students felt that no matter how much they tried, it never seemed to work, leading them to complete assignments quickly without real engagement, viewing unsuccessful attempts as “a waste of time” (S014, Pre-intervention). By Week 4, this shifted as students learned to plan small goals and check progress, focusing on manageable targets like ten words per day rather than attempting to memorize everything, allowing them to see that they were “actually learning now” (S011, Week 4).

Effort belief transformation required information-plus-experimentation. The 2-3 week gap between neuroplasticity instruction (Week 2) and belief consolidation (Weeks 4-5) reveals that conceptual information creates intellectual permission while self-persuasion through behavioral commitment generates conviction. Students needed to personally verify whether their effort produces their improvement.

This challenges the sufficiency of Dweck’s (2008) informational approach while confirming its necessity, integrating it with Aronson’s (1999) self-persuasion theory. Learning logs showed effort beliefs declined from 56.52% fixed statements pre-intervention to ~30% post-instruction (Week 2), reaching 0% only by Week 5—demonstrating information alone produced incomplete transformation.

This pattern does not reflect instructional failure but rather a structural requirement: abstract principles cannot substitute for personal verification. Even high-mindset students who found instruction convincing required experiential confirmation, suggesting mindset intervention should be reconceptualized as inherently two-phased.

### *Strategy Beliefs: From Passivity to Adaptive Control*

Among focal participants (n=6), strategy beliefs evolved from passive dependence to self-initiated adaptive use. Students initially relied on tools like Google Translate for everything, using it to protect themselves from being wrong out of fear of making mistakes (S019, Pre-intervention). By Week 4, students actively tried new ways and changed when they didn’t work, experimenting with multiple methods and selecting those that worked well (S022, Week 4).

Strategy transformation operated through metacognitive awareness and trial-feedback cycles. Exposure to diverse learning approaches expanded students’ repertoire. However, believing in strategy value required

experiencing strategic agency—actively selecting approaches, monitoring effectiveness, and adapting based on outcomes. Through guided reflection scaffolding this metacognitive process, students developed strategic self-regulation (Oxford et al., 2018)—not merely possessing strategies but actively choosing and adapting them.

Importantly, this capacity emerged only after creating safe experimentation spaces. Early participation belief changes proved prerequisite—students needed confidence that struggle wouldn't trigger judgment before experimenting with unfamiliar approaches.

### **Phase 3 – Identity Consolidation (Weeks 5–7+): Failure and Ability**

#### ***Failure Beliefs: From Avoidance to Diagnostic Acceptance***

Among focal participants (n=6), failure beliefs proved most resistant with early data dominated by avoidance. When teachers asked questions, students' minds went blank and faces burned with shame, continuing to think about mistakes and feel terrible after class (S004, Pre-intervention). By Weeks 6-7, discourse shifted toward diagnostic acceptance. Students stopped feeling bad about mistakes, seeing them instead “as information about what I need to work on,” noting specific errors to practice later with group support rather than feeling ashamed (S019, Week 5).

This reframing marked a profound interpretive change—errors as learning signals rather than self-indictments. However, the transformation was gradual and required sustained safe mistake-making experiences. Students acknowledged that changing how they emotionally responded to mistakes took the whole six weeks, emphasizing they couldn't just decide to stop feeling ashamed but rather “needed many experiences making mistakes safely before the shame started fading” (S025, Post-intervention).

This gradual transformation occurred because failure beliefs in face-conscious cultures carry affective intensity requiring systematic habituation. Unlike cognitive beliefs amenable to informational intervention, emotional responses to mistakes demanded repeated experiences of vulnerability without negative consequences—a process resembling exposure therapy principles.

Failure beliefs showed the smallest quantitative change among all dimensions across the full sample (n=25; Table 1). This was corroborated qualitatively: coded interview data (n=6) showed 11.11% fixed statements remaining post-intervention (Table 2). The extended timeline reflects that interpretive reframing precedes emotional regulation—students intellectually accepted mistakes as learning signals by Week 4 but required additional weeks before shame responses diminished.

### ***Ability Beliefs: Toward Tentative Possibility***

Ability beliefs showed gradual movement across the sample but remained incomplete at intervention conclusion. Among the focal participants (n=6), students shifted from absolute fixed positions toward tentative openness. Initially convinced that if you're not good at English, you're just not good at it, viewing it as lacking natural talent despite trying many times without much improvement (S004, Pre-intervention), students gradually began recognizing improvement, viewing their English as “not bad, just growing.” They could hear the difference when comparing current performance to Week 1 recordings, acknowledging having a long way to go while being better than before, tentatively concluding “maybe I can actually learn this” (S023, Week 7).

Students moved from I am incapable to I am not incapable rather than fully embracing I am capable. This linguistic hedging reveals possible self—Markus and Nurius (1986)—an imagined future identity that feels attainable but not yet claimed.

For identity beliefs, initial disconfirming evidence gets dismissed through belief perseverance (Ross & Anderson, 1982). Only after repeated disconfirmation across varied contexts did students consider self-concept revision. This aligns with Mercer (2012)'s argument that identity agency develops through prolonged experience of being agentic.

One might interpret this incomplete transformation as intervention failure. However, this tentative positioning actually represents authentic progress—moving from absolute conviction of incapability to openness about possibility. Complete transformation of deeply-rooted identity beliefs within six weeks would be unrealistic and might indicate social desirability bias. The partial shift from “I can't” to “maybe I can” reflects genuine self-concept revision appropriate to the intervention timeline, consistent with identity development requiring extended engagement beyond brief interventions.

These gradual shifts initiated identity agency—fundamental self-concept transformation. Students began choosing harder reading passages instead of always picking the easiest ones, reframing struggle from meaning they were bad at English to indicating they were “learning” (S011, Post-intervention).

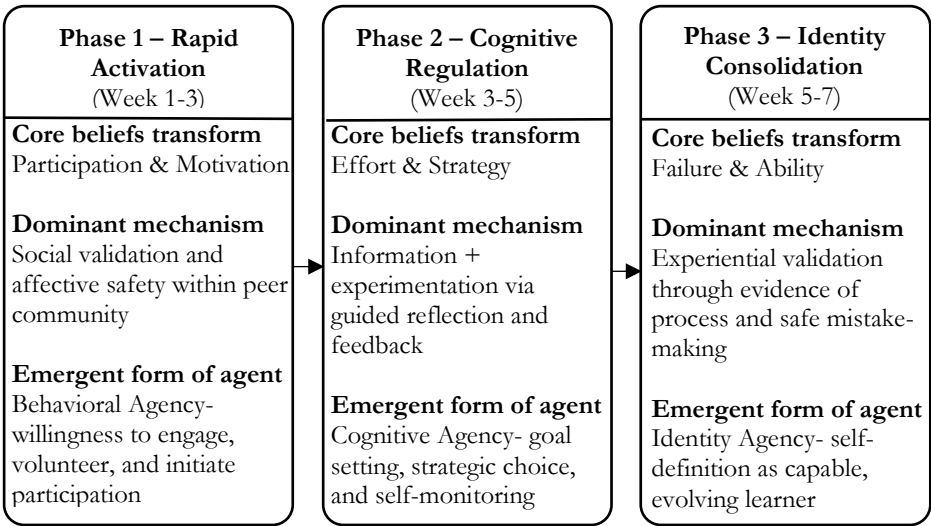
### **The Developmental Cascade: From Behavior to Identity**

Our findings reveal agency as a hierarchically organized developmental system where initial behavioral shifts create conditions for

subsequent cognitive restructuring and identity transformation. Figure 2 illustrates this developmental cascade.

Figure 2

*Development cascade of learner agency emergence*



These three layers were cumulative and interdependent. Behavioral agency (Weeks 1–3) emerged as readiness to participate through social validation—students were engaging more, but “still just doing what activities asked” without independent goals (S018, Post-intervention). Cognitive agency (Weeks 3–5) emerged as reflective control over strategies and self-monitoring, as students learned to “figure out what works for me, not just what teacher says” (S018, Post-intervention). Identity agency (Weeks 5–7+) emerged when learners redefined themselves as capable and self-improving, shifting from thinking they were just bad at English to knowing they were “a person who can learn English if I use the right methods” (S023, Week 7). Crucially, each layer enabled the next: behavioral participation created affordances for cognitive experimentation, which generated the accumulated evidence needed for identity reconstruction (Lou & Noels, 2017). Table 4 integrates these temporal and mechanistic analyses.

This progression resonates with theoretically posited connections between mindset beliefs and agentic engagement (Lou & Noels, 2017). Table 4 integrates temporal and mechanistic analyses.

## Sequential Dependencies

These layers were cumulative and interdependent: behavioral participation created affordances for cognitive control, which ultimately enabled identity redefinition. Looking back, students recognized how everything connected—first needing to actually participate to realize nothing terrible happened, then being able to start experimenting with different ways to learn, and only after seeing themselves improve through their own efforts could they start believing maybe they weren’t “as bad at languages as I always thought,” with “each step made the next step possible” (S023, Week 7).

**Table 4**

*Temporal–mechanistic model of learner agency emergence*

| Phase of Transformation                          | Core Beliefs Transformed   | Dominant Mechanism                                                           | Emergent Form of Agency                                                          | Representative Evidence                            |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Phase 1 – Rapid Activation<br>(Weeks 1–3)        | Participation & Motivation | Social validation and affective safety within peer community                 | Behavioral Agency – willingness to engage, volunteer, and initiate participation | I’m speaking up more now, even when unsure.        |
| Phase 2 – Cognitive Regulation<br>(Weeks 3–5)    | Effort & Strategy          | Information + experimentation via guided reflection and feedback             | Cognitive Agency – goal setting, strategic choice, and self-monitoring           | I plan small goals and check which ways work best. |
| Phase 3 – Identity Consolidation<br>(Weeks 5–7+) | Failure & Ability          | Experiential validation through evidence of progress and safe mistake-making | Identity Agency – self-definition as capable, evolving learner                   | I’m not bad at English; I just keep improving.     |

## Mechanisms of Transformation

Note. Evidence and representative quotes drawn from focal participant data (n=6). Phase labels and timing informed by full-sample quantitative trajectory (n=25).

Three primary mechanisms emerged, each corresponding to different belief layers

### ***Mechanism 1: Social Validation (Rapid, Weeks 1-3)***

Our findings specify how social validation operates in collectivist classrooms. While Schunk and Hanson (1985) demonstrated that peer models enhance self-efficacy, our research reveals the critical mechanism: observing competent peers admitting vulnerability creates what we term dual disconfirmation. This differs from traditional modeling in three ways: the content modeled is struggle rather than success; the operative element is witnessing that vulnerability disclosure does not cause rejection; the cognitive process is belief revision through disconfirming evidence rather than behavioral imitation. This culturally-specific mechanism addresses collectivist participation barriers. In face-conscious cultures (Thailand's Hofstede individualism index: 20), social risk—not capability doubt—constrains participation (Palfreyman, 2003). Vulnerability modeling addressed this operative constraint. While traditional modeling theory predicts observing struggling peers would undermine self-efficacy, our data show the opposite. This paradox resolves when recognizing students already expected struggle—they needed proof that struggle wouldn't cause face-loss, not evidence of achievability.

### ***Mechanism 2: Information-Plus-Experimentation (Moderate, Weeks 3-5)***

Our research challenges the sufficiency of Dweck (2008)'s informational approach to mindset intervention. Neuroplasticity information creates *intellectual permission* without personal conviction. Self-generated evidence proves more convincing because it addresses “Can I improve?” rather than “Do people improve?” The temporal lag between instruction and consolidation reflects time needed for experimental cycles. This integrates Dweck's framework with Aronson's (1999) self-persuasion theory—a connection unexplored in mindset literature. Information provides conceptual framework; experimentation generates conviction. This delay was consistent across all mindset groups, suggesting structural rather than individual-dependent requirements. This pattern might be attributed to instructional inadequacy; however, three factors challenge this: our instruction followed validated protocols; even convinced students required experiential confirmation; collectivist learners particularly value concrete experience over abstract principles (Nisbett et al., 2001). This suggests

measuring pre- versus post-experimentation scores would better capture transformation trajectories than post-instruction scores alone.

### ***Mechanism 3: Experiential Validation (Gradual, Weeks 5-7+)***

Our findings reveal why identity beliefs resist change despite disconfirming evidence. We identify a critical obstacle: belief perseverance (Ross & Anderson, 1982) operates as a protective mechanism—learners initially dismiss improvement evidence by attributing gains to external factors (easier tasks, teacher help, luck) rather than revising self-concept. This extends identity agency theory (Mercer, 2012) by specifying the mechanism through which prolonged agentic experience eventually transforms identity: only after accumulated disconfirmation across multiple contexts and modalities does the weight of evidence overcome perseverance defenses, forcing genuine self-concept revision. Our contribution identifies the temporal threshold and evidence diversity requirements for identity belief transformation. A single instance of success, or even multiple successes in one domain, proves insufficient. Learners require sustained, varied evidence—performing well across different tasks, in different contexts, with different peers—before accepting that improvement reflects personal capability rather than situational factors. This has practical implications: identity-focused interventions must extend beyond typical 4-6 week timeframes and provide diverse success experiences across multiple learning contexts to achieve lasting transformation.

These mechanisms operated in developmental sequence: social validation created behavioral confidence, enabling strategic experimentation, which generated evidence fueling identity reconstruction. This cascading interdependence reflects Mezirow (1991)'s phasing of transformative learning—surface changes create conditions for deeper transformations.

The process began externally through social reassurance and environmental cues, then gradually internalized into self-sustaining motivation. Learners first borrowed confidence from peers and later converted it into self-trust. This sequence resonates with socio-constructivist views of agency as co-constructed before becoming individualized (Gao & Riley, 2010). The cumulative effect was a community discourse shift: from I can't do English to I can try, and finally to I know how to learn English.

### **Theoretical and Cultural Implications**

Our findings extend Dweck (2008)'s mindset theory by revealing that belief transformation is multidimensional, culturally mediated, and temporally layered. The fixed-growth dichotomy proved too coarse; students exhibited

mixed mindsets across dimensions, confirming Oruç (2025) that language mindsets function as interrelated belief networks shaping self-regulation and engagement. Crucially, cognitive belief change alone was insufficient. In collectivist settings, learners might intellectually accept growth principles while emotionally fearing judgment. Behavioral change occurred only when cognitive, affective, and social dimensions aligned, indicating that mindset operates within complex dynamic systems (Larsen–Freeman, 2019; Mercer, 2012). Critics might argue this complexity makes mindset interventions impractical. However, understanding these interconnections enables more precise targeting—addressing affective and social dimensions alongside cognitive instruction produces more robust transformation than cognitive-only approaches.

Growth mindset principles can flourish in collectivist contexts but require cultural reframing. In our Thai context (Hofstede individualism index: 20), agency manifested not as radical autonomy but as autonomous action aligned with collectivist values. Students reinterpreted participation not as individual assertiveness but as contribution to collective progress (Gao & Riley, 2010; Jang, 2022)—an expression of relational agency aligning with interdependent autonomy (Palfreyman, 2003). This reframing operated by aligning agentic action with collectivist values rather than opposing them. When participation was framed as “helping the group learn together” rather than “displaying personal knowledge,” it ceased to conflict with cultural norms of humility and group harmony. Behavioral agency emerged through communal permission, particularly through peer validation, rather than individual confidence. This supports Palfreyman’s (2003) concept of interdependent autonomy, extending it by demonstrating the mechanism: agency develops not despite collectivist values but through culturally-congruent reinterpretation.

Participation beliefs served as a gateway: social validation preceded cognitive shifts in ability beliefs. The universal principle that abilities develop through effort manifested through culturally specific forms emphasizing interdependence. Persistent discomfort around mistakes indicates that agency may manifest as acting despite unease rather than from self-assured confidence, supporting Mercer (2012) and Larsen–Freeman (2019)’s view of agency as affectively and socioculturally embedded. Learners achieved growth by reinterpreting local values through dialogic participation—consistent with collectivist pedagogy in Asia (Amalia et al., 2023; Noriey & Javanmiri, 2025). Developmentally, findings support viewing agency as heterarchical rather than linear (Larsen–Freeman, 2019). Early behavioral shifts appeared to initiate recursive feedback loops that supported deeper identity change, consistent with The Douglas Fir Group (2016) model. Identified mechanisms—peer validation, information-plus-experimentation, and

accumulated evidence—map onto distinct belief layers operating at different temporal scales.

Dialogic interaction emerged as the key facilitator. Consistent with Noriey & Javanmiri (2025), Jang (2022), and Amalia et al. (2023), dialogic scaffolding redistributed epistemic authority, allowing learners to perceive their voices as consequential and participation as transformative.

Finally, temporal heterogeneity challenges brief dose interventions. Participation and motivation beliefs shifted within weeks, while ability-related self-concepts evolved gradually, supporting Yeager and Dweck (2020)'s argument for sustained, embedded interventions. Different mindset dimensions require differentiated support mechanisms and realistic timeframes: behavioral changes emerge within weeks, while identity transformation requires sustained practice over months.

Our integrated model advances theory by mapping Mercer's agency dimensions and Thayati et al.'s mindset dimensions onto Mezirow's transformative learning process, tracing how belief shifts accompany increasing expressions of learner agency. This fills a critical gap: previous research showed agency and mindset are related but did not explain how these constructs evolve together over time. Our model provides that link, demonstrating that learner agency in collectivist education emerges through culturally grounded social interaction as a hierarchically organized belief system.

### Limitations

Three limitations warrant acknowledgement. First, the gender composition (23 female, 2 male) reflects the demographic reality of Elementary Education programs in Thailand but limits generalizability; gender's role in face-concern dynamics warrants direct investigation in future studies. Second, the small sample constrains statistical power and transferability: while all 25 participants contributed quantitative data and learning logs, in-depth interviews drew on six focal participants who cannot fully represent the broader population. Third, the first author's dual role as researcher and course instructor introduces potential social desirability bias, mitigated through anonymous learning logs and independent coding. Findings should be interpreted as exploratory and hypothesis-generating, with replication across larger, more gender-balanced samples warranted before broader conclusions are drawn. Transferability is further bounded by contextual conditions specific to this setting: collectivist cultural orientation, a teacher-centered instructional baseline that created clear contrast with the dialogic approach, and face-concern norms that made peer vulnerability modeling particularly salient. Findings may resonate in similar Asian EFL

contexts—such as Vietnamese or Japanese classrooms—where these conditions converge, but direct replication studies are needed to establish contextual boundaries.

## Conclusion

This multi-method study examined how Thai EFL learners develop agency through reflective dialogue, revealing three interconnected pathways: rapid behavioral agency through peer validation, moderate cognitive agency through experimentation, and gradual identity agency through accumulated evidence. By tracing 25 learners' experiences across six weeks through 100 learning logs and six in-depth interviews, we illuminated the lived processes, critical moments, and cultural negotiations characterizing agency emergence.

Three key insights emerge. First, agency is not a unitary trait but a hierarchically organized multidimensional capacity where different dimensions develop at different rates through different mechanisms. Second, cultural contexts fundamentally shape agency development, requiring culturally-responsive approaches that align agency with collectivist values rather than opposing them. Third, realistic timeline expectations matter—behavioral agency can develop within weeks, but identity transformation requires extended periods beyond brief interventions.

For language educators working with Thai students and similar Asian contexts, these findings offer both encouragement and a realistic perspective. Even learners with deeply fixed mindsets can develop agentic capacity through structured reflective dialogue emphasizing peer validation, experimentation, and systematic evidence accumulation. However, this transformation requires extended timelines, differentiated support, and culturally-responsive approaches.

The journey from passive recipient to active agent represents a profound educational transformation. Understanding how this journey unfolds—through distinct pathways, at different paces, shaped by cultural contexts—enables educators to more effectively support learners navigating their own paths toward agency.

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## About the Authors

**Sitah Thayati:** A lecturer in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University in Chiang Mai, Thailand. She completed her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction at the Faculty of Education at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interests include language curriculum and instruction development, technology-enhanced language learning and language learner agency.

**Ruedeerath Chusanachoti:** An Assistant Professor in the Division of Foreign Language Teaching, Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interests include language curriculum and instruction development, speaking and oral communication instruction, out-of-class and autonomous learning, and multimedia and technology for language instruction.

**Wichai Sawekngam:** An Assistant Professor at the Division of Curriculum and Instruction, Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. His research interests include curriculum development, instructional quality improvement, and teacher development.

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