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INFLUENCE OF STUDENTS' MINDSET AND GRIT ON THEIR LANGUAGE APTITUDE

A low level of language aptitude in university students in spite of teaching resource availability and open borders has been a problem of topical scientific interest of psychologists and pedagogues for decades. This article is devoted to the investigation of essential motivational factors contributing to forming successful foreign language aptitude in students. Growth mindset is considered to be significant in learning a foreign language. Students' attitude to learning foreign languages and their awareness of the importance of speaking several foreign languages in the modern world also influences their academic performance. The aim of the study is to establish the connection between the students' academic performance in learning foreign languages, their mindset type and grit results. The methods applied in this study included series of tests: a placement test to define the students' level of English, a Questionnaire on the students' attitude to learning foreign languages, content-analysis of the students' written answers, the Mindset Test by C. S. Dweck and Grit test by A. Duckworth. The results of questioning revealed higher aptitude of high-performers in one foreign language for learning more languages. The grit data also proved the questioning results stating the high-leveled students being more self-motivated and ready to overcome difficulties in learning languages. The students having growth mindset showed higher results both in general and foreign language performance. The positive influence of growth mindset and high grit results on the students' academic performance supports A. Devers, C.S. Dweck and A. Duckworth's theories making it possible to continue research in this field.
Keywords: aptitude, attitude, fixed mindset, grit, growth mindset, performance

Introduction

In today's world of international relations, globalization and information abundance the problem of acquiring foreign language skills is still relevant and under discussion by many pedagogues and psychologists. Poor foreign language skills in students make researchers think of possible obstacles and challenges the learners face. A great variety of scientific works are dedicated to studying different factors affecting the learning process and searching for different ways to motivate students to learn foreign languages. While pedagogues offer innovative techniques and exercises to overcome students' reluctance to study, psychologists try to look into the problem of interrelation between academic performance, intelligence, motivation, and self-efficacy.

Aim and Tasks

The aim of this study is to establish the connection between the students' academic performance in learning a foreign language and the students' attitude to their intelligence as fixed or growth mindset. Grit and attitude to learning foreign languages are considered to be essential in achieving academic success. It is assumed that grit and tenacity foster intelligence development as well as aptitude for learning languages.

The main research tasks are as follows: 1) to establish the students' awareness of learning foreign languages importance in their life; 2) to define the number of students having growth mindset compared to those having fixed mindset; 3) to test students' grit level within each group; 4) to establish the connection between students' mindset and grit and their academic performance.

Research Methods

Four main instruments were applied to conduct this research. The first one was a placement test to establish the students' language level – A1, A2, B1 and B2 by Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) English levels. At the beginning of the academic year all students passed a placement test under the supervision of their teacher of English. The test contained vocabulary and grammar questions, as well as the tasks on understanding the main idea of the text and commenting upon it. The second instrument was a Questionnaire on the students' attitude to learning foreign languages. The main purpose was to find out how significant learning foreign languages was in students' life, how motivated they were to study and how gritty they were to overcome obstacles during their studies. The questionnaire contained eight closed and open questions in order to undergo both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The content-analysis of the students' answers helped to understand the reasons of their choice better.

The third instrument was the free online Test Your Mindset test by C. Dweck. Bearing in mind that most people consider themselves more successful in some areas of activities and less successful in others the purpose of this test was to establish the students' general attitude to their mindsets as fixed or growth. The statements in the test implied agreeing or disagreeing with 16 fixed or growth mindset items (strongly agree, agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, disagree and strongly disagree).

The forth test – Grit test by A. Duckworth – showed the students' perseverance and resilience to difficulties in

studies. The students responded to 10 items with the answers offered and assessed by a Likhert-type scale (very much like me, mostly like me, somewhat like me, not much like me, not like me at all).

To see the significance of the results received in the above-mentioned tests comparing figures in groups A1 and B2 the F-test by R. Fisher was applied.

Research Results

Intelligence issues are widely discussed in the fields of neuroscience, human resource management, organizational psychology as well as pedagogical psychology.

Richard E. Nisbett studied to what extent human intelligence is biologically determined comparing to cultural and educational impacts (R.E. Nisbett, 2010). He implied that societal influences have a decisive effect on intelligence development, although he admitted great importance of its genetic origin.

W. Joel Schneider and Kevin S. McGrew studied C-H-C human ability taxonomy in order to better explain human cognitive performance *(W. J.* Schneider and K. S. McGrew, 2012).

Charlie L. Reeve, Charles Scherbaum and Harold W. Goldstein dealt with connecting measurement of intelligence and studies of individual cognitive abilities that propelled further research in intelligence and its impact in the modern world (C.L. Reeve, C. Scherbaum and H.W. Goldstein, 2015).

The theory of multiple intelligence offered by Howard Gardner in 1983 makes reconsider the nature of human intelligence and leads to various debates of scholars of intelligence. The author points out that widely spread standardized intelligence tests measure mainly logical-mathematical and verbal-linguistic intelligence while there exist eight major types of intelligence. He emphasizes the importance of taking individual differences into account in human intelligence test creation and measurement (H. Gardner, 1994). His ideas were supported by Thomas Armstrong, David G. Lazear and Mary Ann Christison research and their further implementation in the classroom activities. The researchers developed criteria for defining intelligence types (T. Armstrong, 1994; M.A. Christison, 1998) and techniques of

developing different types of intelligences as well as multiple intelligence approaches to assess students' academic progress (D.G. Lazear, 1999).

Allyson Devers decided to check the theory of the impact of students' attitude to their intelligence on their academic performance (A. Devers, 2015). She conducted a research and divided the participants into two groups: those who hold fixed mindset beliefs and those with growth mindset beliefs. The students who had a stronger growth mindset performed better than the other group. Although the results of that study and intervention were not always effective due to the size of the sample and time limitations the theory is worth closer attention. It seems to be perspective in terms of changing students beliefs in their mindsets to be malleable that can improve their academic performance.

An interesting and challenging idea about grit being essential to growth mindset development was offered by Angela Duckworth, an American psychologist. She gathered evidence to prove grit as an important factor contributing to high accomplishment and further achievements in life (A. Duckworth, 2007).

J. Hanson held a series of tests on establishing the relationships between school level and academic mindset in the classroom. The researcher investigated self-efficacy, individual mindset, sense of belonging in the classroom and task relevance and found positive correlation between them. These results implied that teachers should provide psycho-social support to students at the secondary level and develop positive classroom cultures during the transition period between school levels (J. Hanson, 2017).

To see how motivated to learning foreign languages the students are and what the role of grit and mindset is in their academic performance the following research was conducted on a sample of 125 students of the 1st year of studies in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University. In September 2017, according to the placement test the students were divided into four groups: A1, A2, B1 and B2 (in order from the lower to the higher level of English). The number of the students participating in this research within each level is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Quantity of students speaking English at levels A1, A2, B1 and B2

A1	A2	B1	B2	Total
16	25	55	39	125

In October 2017, all students were offered to answer the questions in the Questionnaire on their attitude to learning foreign languages. The first question had a variety of options to choose: *What do you need to study English for? (to pass an exam, to become competitive in a job market, to move abroad, for self-development, for pleasure, other)* and was aimed at defining the students' vision

of the foreign language importance in the future. The students could choose several options to answer and add their own reasons for learning English so the figures received in the survey show the percentage of choices made by the students of all levels (see Figure 1).
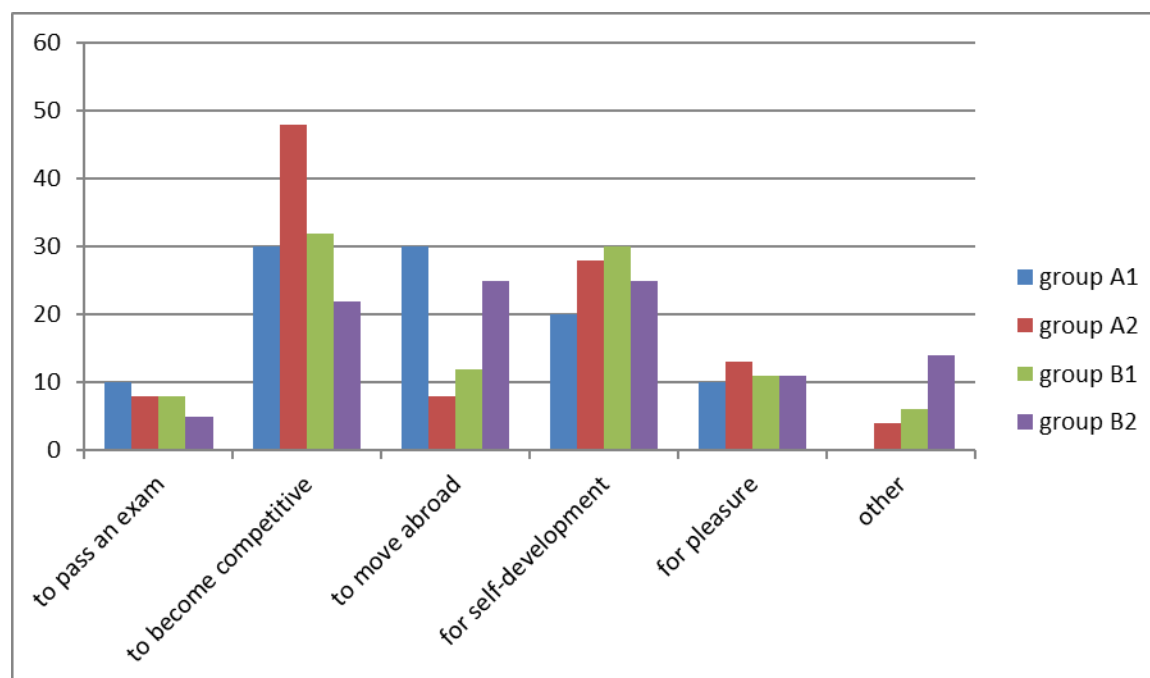
Fig.1. Percentage of students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2 stating the reasons for learning English

According to the results, 30% of all students chose to become competitive in a job market, 27% learn English for self-development and 11% do it for pleasure and traveling. 17% of all students want to move abroad and only 7% need to learn English to pass exams. Among other answers the students mentioned communication with foreigners (8%). The analysis of the percentage of all answers within each group of the students (levels A1, A2, B1 and B2) showed that the necessity to learn foreign languages in order to pass an exam was the highest in group A1 (10%) and the lowest one was in group B2 (5%). Competition in a job market was mentioned in 48% of all answers in group A2, the figures being almost the same in groups A1 (30%) and B1 (32%) and much lower in group B2 (20%). Surprisingly enough the highest percent of students willing to move abroad was among the representatives of groups A1 and B2 (30% and 25% respectively). Self-development was mentioned in 30% of answers in group B1, 28% in group A2 and 25% in group B2 gaining the lowest number in group A1. It is interesting to note that the students did not associate pleasure and travel with self-development. They mentioned pleasure and travel only in 10% of answers in group A1, 4% in group A2, 13% in group B1 and 11% in group B2. The option *other* as the possibility to give their own answer was chosen mainly by the students in group B2 stating communication with foreigners as the reason to learn English in 14% of answers, the students in groups B1 and A2 mentioned communication in 6% and 4% of answers respectively.

The answer to the second question *How many foreign languages do you speak?* showed the participants' aptitude for learning languages assuming that the more foreign languages the person is able to learn the more flexible his/her mind is. The results are shown in Figure 2.

The students were divided into groups by the number of languages they speak (1, 2 or 3 foreign languages). Percentage was counted inside these groups. As expected, the number of the students speaking three foreign languages is the highest in group B2 (58%) as compared to the number of students in group B1 (42%). Among all students who can speak two foreign languages the least percentage was represented by the students in group A1 (5%) following by group A2 (11%) comparing to percentage of students in groups B1 and B2 (46% and 38%, respectively). The number of the students speaking one foreign language was the lowest in group A1 (9%) and the highest in group B1 (50%). That confirms the assumption of high performers in speaking at least one foreign language being ready to overcome difficulties in learning other languages and showing aptitude to flexible thinking. Successful foreign languages learning is impossible without learning the culture of other nations and their ways of thinking. So it requires certain skills and qualities, such as grit, tolerance, open-mindedness and flexibility to accept other people's opinions and beliefs because they influence the vocabulary and grammar peculiarities.
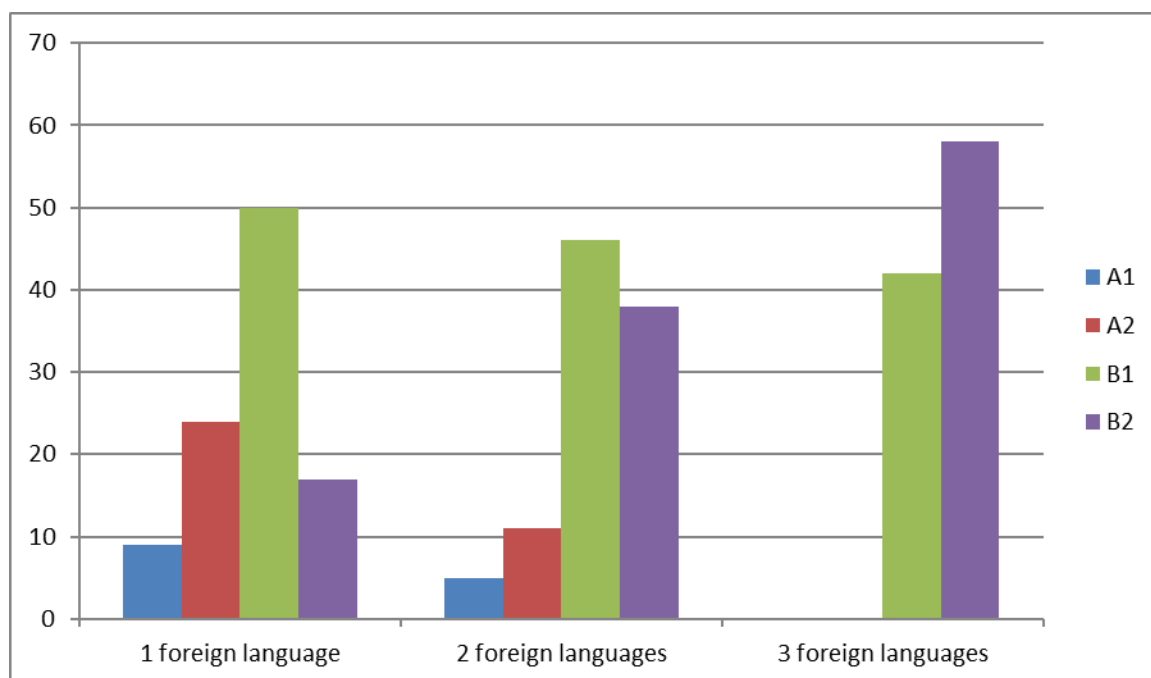
Fig.2. Percentage of students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2 speaking several foreign languages

The question *Would you like to study other foreign languages? Why/why not?* was asked to find out the students' awareness of the importance of foreign languages in the modern world as well as the readiness of students to overcome difficulties as learning a new language is al-

ways a challenge. The reasons the students were to give while answering that question proved their aptitude to deal with problems. The Figure 3 shows the percentage of all students willing to learn a new language.
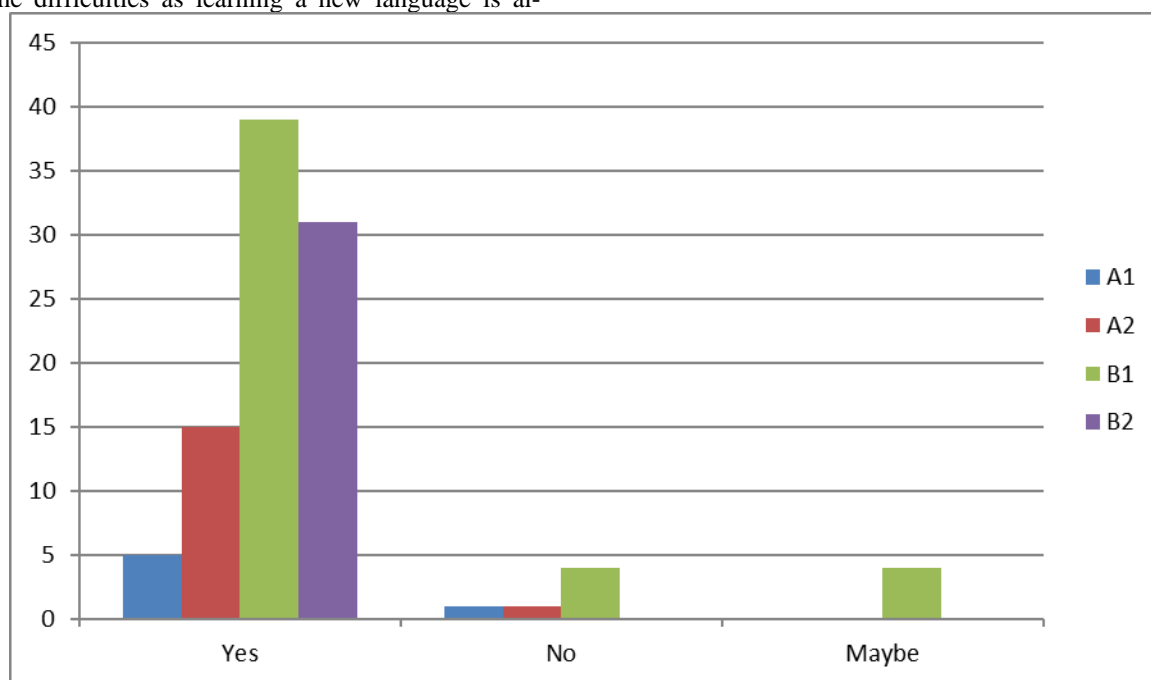

Fig.3. Percentage of the students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2 willing to learn a new foreign language

90% of the students expressed their willingness to learn other foreign languages, the biggest percentage being in group B1 (44%) and B2 (34%) stating self-development and career as the main reasons. Taking into account that those students already speak two or three

foreign languages, their readiness to acquire new knowledge proves the idea of their cognitive flexibility. Those students who refused learning another foreign language claimed that speaking English was enough for them.

The fourth question's purpose was to define the level of students' self-management. The question was *Which is the best way to learn a foreign language for you: individually or with a teacher/tutor? Why?* And the answers showed who and what motivated the respondents to learn languages (see Figure 4).
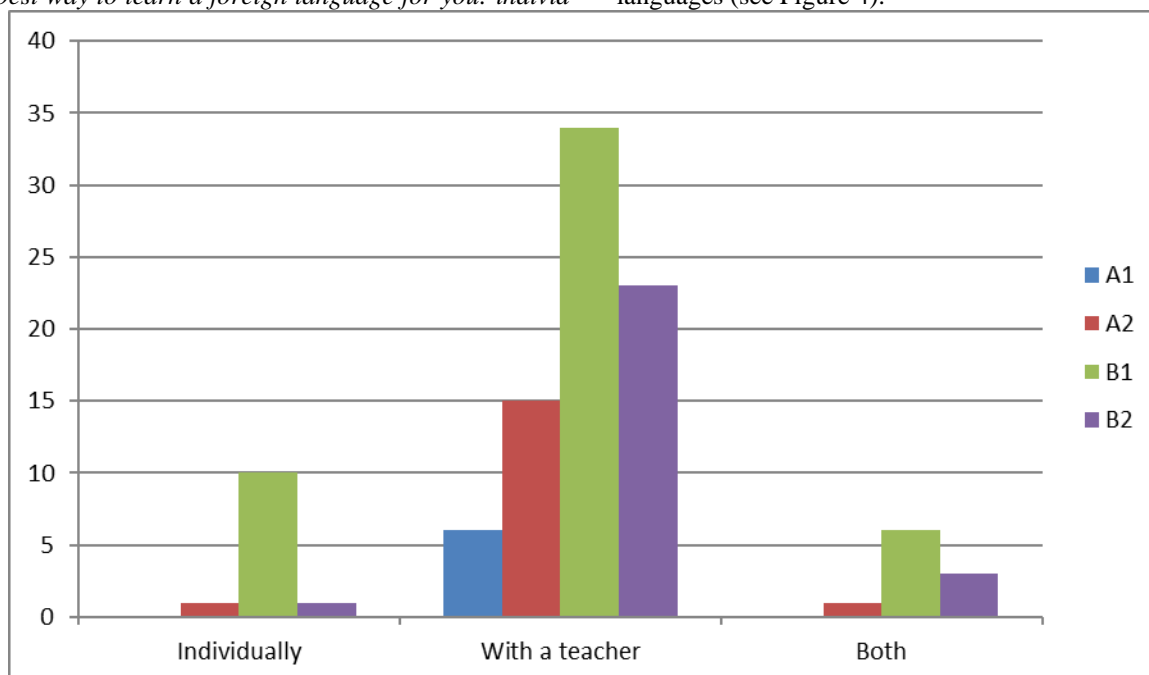

Fig.4. Percentage of the students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2 choosing the way to learn languages: individually, with a teacher or both (% within each type of answers)

78% of the students in all groups chose to study with a teacher or a tutor. Their number comprises 6%, 15%, 43% and 23% of students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2 respectively. The reasons to study with a teacher were as follows: he/she provides help, organizes the whole process of learning and makes students feel more responsible for their progress. 12% of the students preferred individual learning and thought that living in a foreign language environment could help to learn better than with a teacher. Among them there were 1%, 10% and 1% of the students of groups A2, B1 and B2 respectively. The main reasons for that choice were, on the one hand, an opportunity to communicate with foreigners on-line, watch movies in foreign languages and, on the other hand, being shy to show their poor knowledge in class and paying more attention to the material they needed. The students in group A1 did not consider that option at all. 10% of the students chose studying both with a teacher and individually as the best way to master a foreign language. This percentage comprises 1%, 6% and 3% of students in groups A2, B1 and B2 respectively. The main role of the teacher in this combination was to help with grammar and speaking practice. The students in group A1 did not opt for that. According to the data received in this research most students needed somebody to organize their studies. One the one hand, they admit the supervising role of a teacher in a learning process but, on the other hand, they try to shift responsibility for a successful outcome to a teacher stating that he/she can manage their time and make them study.

The fifth question was aimed at spotting the students' awareness of possible motivation techniques: *How do you motivate yourself to learn a foreign language? (make a plan and follow it, try to meet academic deadlines, ask someone to help me with my time-management, keep a picture of my success visualization in mind, apply a special autogenic training technique, I'm self-motivated enough, I don't need any additional techniques, other).* Answering this question the students expressed their beliefs in self-efficacy and successful outcome. The results are presented in Figure 5.

The number of the students making a plan for studies and following it was increasing in proportion to the level of English: A2 (18%), B1 (20%) and B2 (23%). The necessity to meet academic deadlines or pass an exam was more important for the students of lower levels A2 (18%) comparing to B1 (8%) and B2 (6%). The students of group A1 did not choose the above-mentioned variants. Success visualization seems to be more significant for the students of lower levels. 33% of answers were given by the students in group A1, 24% in group A2, 18% and 15% in groups B1 and B2, respectively. 50% of the students in group A1 claimed to be self-motivated enough and did not need any motivational techniques to study while the number of answers in other groups was rising in proportion to the English level (18% in group A2, 34% in group B1 and 44% in group B2).
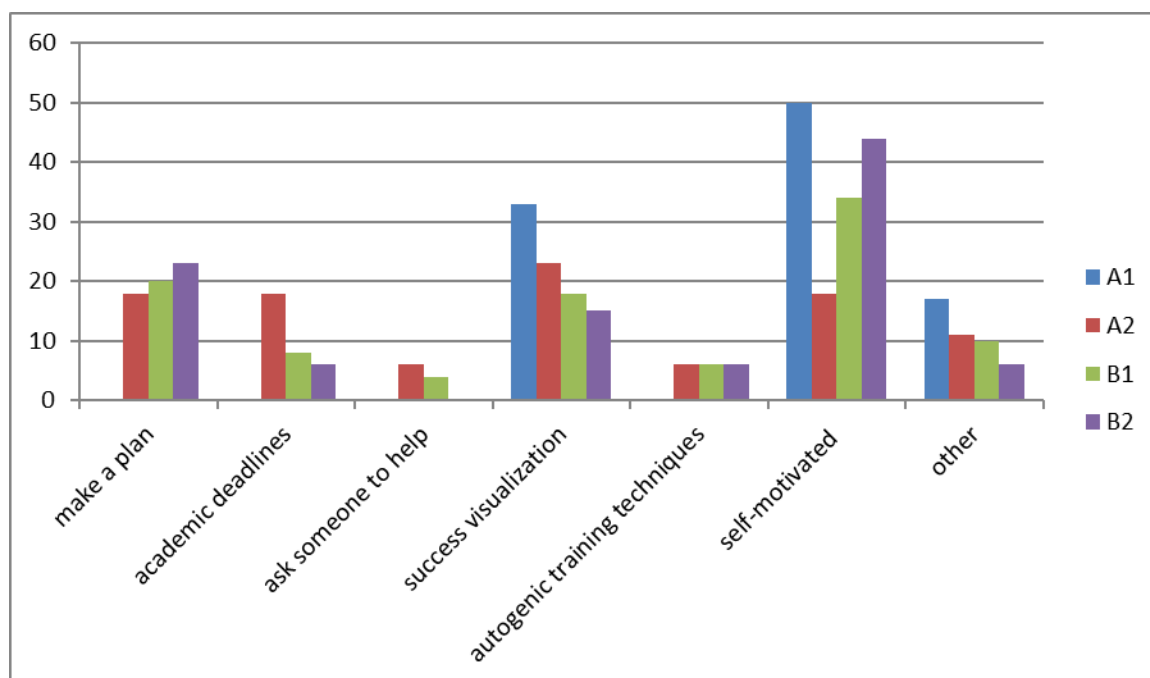
Fig.5. Percentage of students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2 using motivation techniques (within each group)

The sixth question *What hinders you from learning a language?* Did not offer any options to choose and was aimed at finding what percentage of students considered the subjective reasons as obstacles for learning and what percentage found external reasons (see Figure 6).
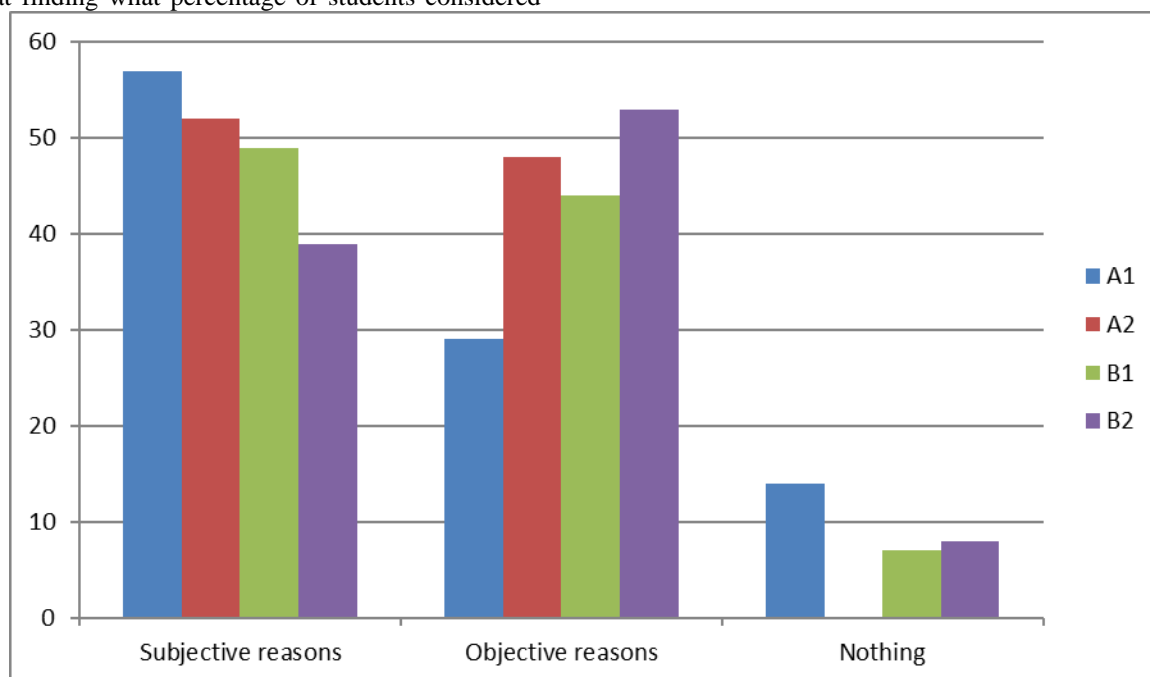

*Fig.6. Percentage of students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2 finding
subjective or objective reasons to hinder them from studies*

Subjective reasons the students gave included laziness, no patience, bad memory, no persistence, slow thinking, poor vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes. Objective reasons comprised lack of time, being busy with some work and family, lack of practice with native speakers, cost of extra classes, social networks, foreign language vocabulary and grammar complexity. There were also students finding nothing to hinder them from studies. Comparing figures in all groups it was interesting to note that the students of lower levels gave more subjective reasons than the objective ones stating laziness and lack of confidence as the main problem (group A1: sub-

jective – 57% and objective – 29%) while the students of higher levels found time, other people or things bothering them from learning properly (group B2: subjective – 39% and objective – 53%).

To support the students' opinions which they demonstrated answering the sixth question they were asked to comment on the following item: *Which is most important for the successful learning of a language? (a motivated teacher, self-motivation, entertaining materials,*

application of modern technologies in a learning process, other). The possible answers both given as the options and those given by the students themselves could be divided into subjective reasons (self-motivation, intelligence and good memory) and objective reasons (a motivated teacher, entertaining materials, application of modern technologies, living abroad, seeing progress, friendly atmosphere in class) (see Figure 7).
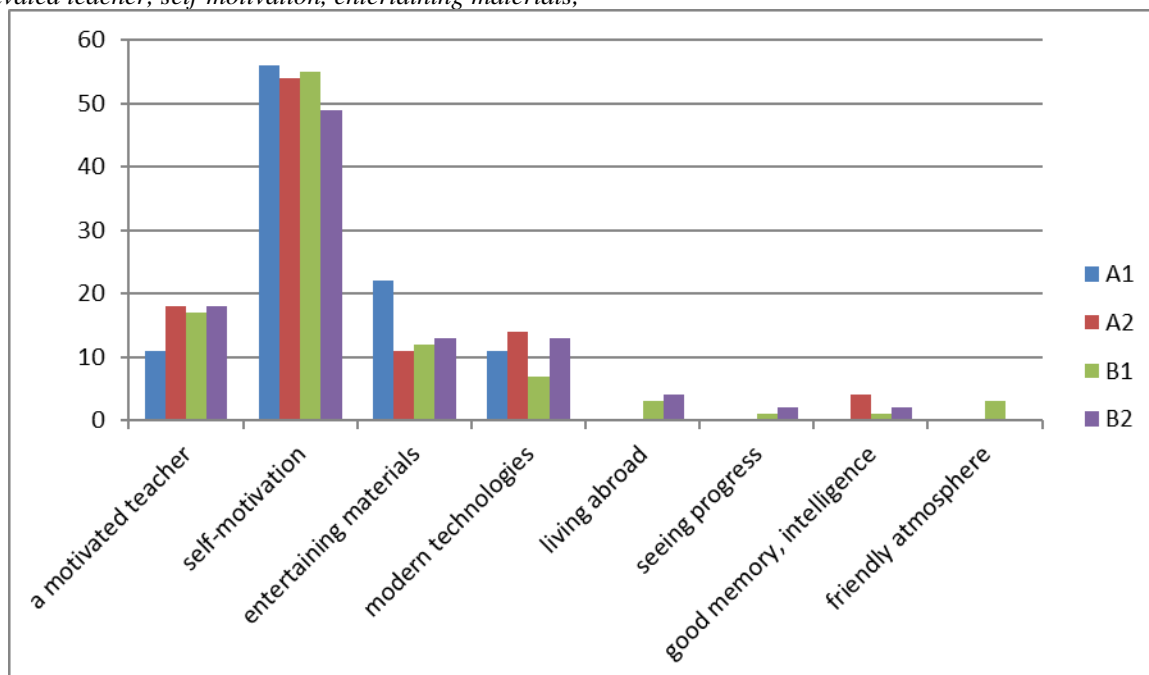

*Fig.7. Percentage of students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2 finding
subjective or objective factors contributing to successful learning*

The percentage of subjective reasons for successful learning was almost the same in groups A1 (56%), A2 (58%) and B1 (56%) being slightly lower in group B2 (51%) which supports the answers to question 6 where the students in group B2 claimed to be busy with other things. Objective factors were mentioned in 44% of answers in group A1, 43% in group A2, 44% in group B1 and 49% in group B2.

The last question *How do you assess your aptitude for learning foreign languages? (excellent, good, medium, poor, very bad)* was aimed at checking the current level of students' self-confidence and ability to assess their own aptitude for learning foreign languages (see Figure 8).

83% of the students in group A1 admitted that they were poor at learning foreign languages, 86% of the students in group A2 claimed they had the medium level of being confident in learning languages. 44% of the students in group B1 decided they were good at learning languages and 44% admitted they were at the medium level. Only 17% of the students in group B2 considered having excellent aptitude for learning languages, 55% chose good skills and 24% believed in having medium aptitude. It is interesting to see that 5% of the students in group B1 and 4% in group B2 stated their aptitude as

poor, 2% in group B1 claiming even very bad aptitude for learning foreign languages.

The following tests were conducted in October 2017 aiming at defining the mindset type of the participants and their grit level. Both tests were offered in their free online versions justified by relevant amount of items and convenience of assessment. The students passed a Test Your Mindset test online from BloomBoard collection which took 10 minutes and showed immediate results. The students had to agree or disagree to each of the 16 statements by clicking the number corresponding to their opinion. The results revealed the number of statements of each mindset type given by each participant. Those students who gave more growth mindset answers than the fixed ones were classified as growth mindset holders. As this research did not consider the group of 'hesitating' participants, the students who gave equal amounts of both growth and fixed mindset answers or more fixed mindset answers referred to as fixed mindset holders. Thus the percentage of students having growth mindset within each group was the following: 40% in group A1, 68% in group A2, 73% in group B1 and 82% in group B2.
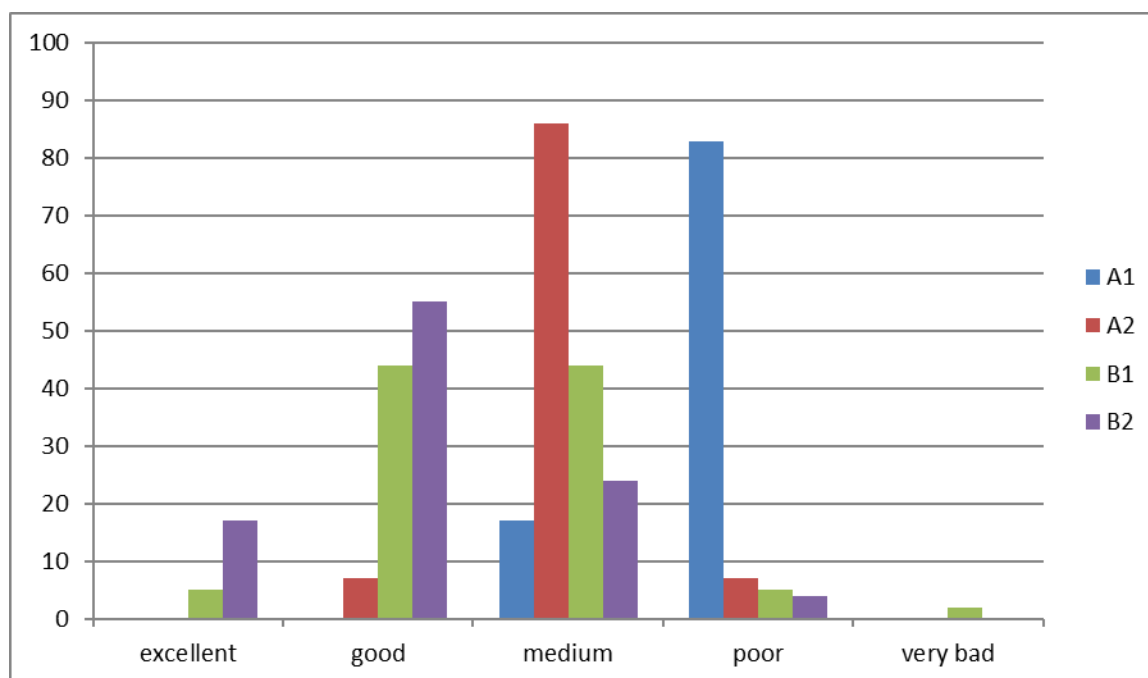
Fig.8. Percentage of students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2 assessing their aptitude for learning foreign languages

The students' grit results were also collected from an online test by Angela Duckworth Grit Scale. The students had to read each of the 10 statements and choose 1 of 5 answers that showed their perseverance and compared them to other people. The test took 5 minutes for students to complete and revealed immediate results. The teacher recorded results from each student and used them to count the average point within each group separately for growth and fixed mindset students.

These figures were compared with general academic performance figures, taken from the University academic department and comprising every participant's average performance results in all subjects (maximum 5.0). The average points calculated within each group are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Average points of general academic performance and grit results of
growth and fixed mindset students in groups A1, A2, B1 and B2

	Group A1		Group A2		Group B1		Group B2	
Mindset	Growth	Fixed	Growth	Fixed	Growth	Fixed	Growth	Fixed
General academic performance (max. 5.0)	4.0	3.4	4.6	4.3	4.7	4.6	4.9	4.4
Grit (max. 5.0)	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.0	3.4	3.2	3.6	3.2

To see the difference between low-leveled and high-leveled students having growth or fixed mindset the F-test was applied, and the result turned to be significant (2.978). It assumes that there are more students having growth mindset in group B2 compared to the number of the students having growth mindset in group A1. Therefore it proves that growth mindset contributes to better academic performance.

Discussion

The results of this research are consistent with similar studies of A. Devers (2015), L.S. Blackwell (2007) and C.S. Dweck (2010) and showed a positive relationship between academic performance and growth mindset. This research also supported A. Duckworth's idea of a grit level being higher in the students with growth mindset which leads to higher general academic performance.

Conclusions

According to the questioning results those students who speak English at B1 and B2 levels can speak two other foreign languages and are ready to learn more. At the same time the students of lower levels of English experience are afraid to show their knowledge and state it as the reason that hinders them from studying. The importance of foreign languages for the career and self-development is acknowledged by most students in all groups stating self-motivation as the most significant factor for performing well in learning languages.

The test to define the students' mindset type showed that the majority of all participants demonstrated growth

mindset, the figure becoming bigger in groups with higher level of English.

As for grit results the students in group A1 did not support the general upward trend scoring 3.0 for fixed mindset students and 2.9 for growth mindset ones while students in other groups showed the growth in grit scores in comparison with fixed mind counterparts.

The results of the tests demonstrated a positive trend of growth mindset students having better general academ-ic results compared to the students with fixed mindset scoring lower points. So, the data of our research supported the idea of students' intelligence depending on their grit and mindset type.

The positive results of the research enable us to conduct further investigation in the area of forming beneficial environment for students' successful foreign language learning.

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ВПЛИВ ТИПУ МИСЛЕННЯ ТА ТВЕРДОСТІ ХАРАКТЕРУ СТУДЕНТІВ НА ЇХНЮ ЗДАТНІСТЬ ДО ВИВЧЕННЯ МОВ

Низький рівень володіння іноземними мовами у студентів вишів, незважаючи на доступність ресурсів та відкритість кордонів, залишається актуальною проблемою у навчанні, вирішення якої викликає науковий інтерес у психологів та педагогів протягом останніх десятиліть. Статтю присвячено дослідженню основних мотиваційних чинників, які сприяють формуванню здатності до успішного вивчення іноземних мов. Тип мислення студентів, спрямований на зростання, набуває суттєвого значення у вивченні іноземних мов. Ставлення до вивчення іноземних мов та усвідомлення важливості володіння кількома іноземними мовами у сучасному світі також впливає на академічну успішність студентів. Метою цієї роботи є встановлення зв'язку між академічною успішністю студентів у вивченні іноземних мов, типом їхнього мислення та твердістю характеру. У проведенні дослідження застосовувались такі методи: тест на встановлення рівня володіння англійською мовою, анкетування з метою виявлення ставлення студентів до вивчення іноземних мов, контент-аналіз письмових відповідей студентів, тест на тип мислення (за К. Двек) та тест на твердість характеру (за Е. Дакворт). Результати анкетування виявили високий рівень здатності до вивчення іноземних мов у тих студентів, які володіють англійською на високому рівні. Дані перевірки на твердість характеру також підтвердили результати опитування, в якому успішні у навчанні студенти є більш мотивованими та готовими до подолання складнощів у вивченні іноземних мов. Студенти з типом мислення, спрямованим на зростання, продемонстрували кращі результати як у загальному рівні академічної успішності, так і у рівні володіння іноземною мовою. Сприятливий вплив типу мислення, спрямованого на зростання, та високих результатів перевірки на твердість характеру академічну успішність студентів підкріплюють теорії Е. Деверс, К. Двек та Е. Дакворт, що дозволяє продовжувати дослідження у цій галузі.

Ключові слова: здатність, ставлення, твердість характеру, тип мислення, спрямований на зростання, успішність, фіксований тип мислення.

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