

**From Struggle to Strength: The Psychology of Growth Mindset in Students
without Parental Support**

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Abstract

This study addresses the problem of how university students who lack adequate socio-emotional and financial support from their families develop and sustain a growth mindset, and aims to explore the psychological processes that enable them to persist and adapt in academic settings. This study aims to reveal how growth mindset is formed and developed among students who do not receive full support from their families. Using a qualitative case study design, three high-achieving students (B.S.E., E.E., and S.S.) were selected through purposive sampling, as they demonstrated consistent academic achievement despite limited family support. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and non-participatory observations, supported by triangulation with information from peers and family members. Data analysis followed Lichtman's analytical flow of coding, categorizing, and conceptualizing to identify key patterns. The findings indicate that all participants believe abilities can improve through effort, perseverance, and continuous learning. They exhibit resilience, proactive strategies in overcoming challenges, and interpret setbacks as opportunities for growth. The development of their growth mindset is influenced by strong internal motivation and the constructive interpretation of diverse parenting styles, including strict, democratic, and permissive approaches. In addition, participants build alternative support systems through social interactions and organizational involvement, which strengthen self-efficacy and academic commitment. Overall, this study highlights the role of growth mindset as a critical psychological asset that enables students without sufficient family support to navigate adversity and optimize academic success, contributing to educational and psychological research on student resilience and motivation.

Keywords: financial support, socio-emotional support, growth mindset

INTRODUCTION

Students who do not receive adequate socio-emotional and financial support from their families face serious challenges in sustaining their academic pursuits and developing psychological resilience, including in forming and maintaining a growth mindset. Family support plays a crucial role in students' success in higher education (Pauw et al., 2022). Families not only provide financial assistance but also emotional support, motivation, and psychological stability needed by students to cope with academic pressures (Istiqomah, 2023). Supportive family involvement can enhance students' self-confidence, perseverance, and mental well-being, thereby enabling them to optimize their academic potential (Masten & Coatsworth, 2018). Seroja (2024) explains that family support may take the form of emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental support, all of which significantly contribute to strengthening learning motivation. Liubana et al. (2025) also state that social support from families, particularly in the form of parental motivation and financial assistance, has a significant influence on individuals' decisions to pursue higher education. Conversely, a lack of support in these dimensions has the potential to trigger anxiety, reduce self-confidence, and lead to declines in academic achievement (Rusianti et al., 2023).

In addition to emotional challenges, financial issues constitute a tangible problem for university students, particularly for those who must navigate academic life independently without economic support from their families. Students who pursue higher education without financial support from their families tend to experience higher levels of depression (Song et al., 2025). Various surveys indicate that many students encounter difficulties in paying tuition fees, which negatively affect their psychological well-being and learning focus (Handoko, 2023; Yazid, 2023). Without adequate financial resources, students are required to seek additional funding, which may ultimately hinder their academic development. In fact, family financial and socio-emotional support has been shown to contribute significantly to academic success and student resilience in coping with academic pressure (Rekozar & Damariyanti, 2022). However, in reality, not all students have the opportunity to receive such support. Some students are even unable to continue their education due to psychological strain and economic hardship.

Nevertheless, such conditions of limitation do not always result in academic failure. There are students who remain able to persist and achieve academic success despite these constraints. The experiences of students such as B.S.E., E.E., and S.S. demonstrate that although they do not receive optimal family support, they are still able to complete their studies and attain both academic and non-academic achievements through independent efforts and adaptive strategies. These findings affirm that internal factors within students also play a significant role in determining success in higher education, particularly in contexts of limited family support.

One of the primary internal factors that can explain this success is a growth mindset, defined as the belief that abilities can be developed through effort, strategies, and learning experiences (Dweck, 2019). Individuals with a growth mindset tend to interpret challenges as opportunities for growth (Rahmadani, 2023). They also demonstrate higher levels of resilience and stronger adaptive capacities when facing difficult conditions (Masyita et al., 2023). Elliott-Moskwa (2022) explains that a growth mindset is a way of thinking centered on the belief that an individual's abilities can be developed through a consistent willingness to learn. Therefore, growth mindset is a relevant concept for explaining how students from families with limited resources are still able to achieve academic success.

According to Dweck's Growth Mindset Theory, individuals who believe that their abilities can be developed through effort, strategies, and learning experiences tend to exhibit greater resilience when confronting challenges (Dweck, 2019). This is consistent with Reskido's (2023) findings, which show that growth mindset contributes strongly to students' resilience and problem-solving abilities. Similarly, Kim et al. (2022) demonstrate that growth mindset functions as a protective factor for students from low-income backgrounds in navigating academic barriers. Moreover, Rahmadani (2023) emphasizes that psychological and social factors such as parenting style, resilience, and support systems influence the development of growth mindset; however, most of these studies still assume the presence of relatively supportive family environments. From a complementary perspective, the *resilience by adversity* theory proposes that life pressures can activate internal motivation, particularly when individuals possess a strong future orientation, suggesting that adversity itself may serve as a developmental catalyst rather than solely a risk factor (Gazelle, 2025).

On the other hand, studies focusing on financial aspects indicate that family support is crucial for students' psychological well-being and academic continuity (Nam, 2021; Song et al., 2025). Without such support, students face a higher risk of stress, depression, and discontinuation of education due to the demands of meeting basic survival needs (Xu et al., 2021). However, the fact that some students continue to succeed in higher education despite such disadvantages suggests that internal mechanisms, such as growth mindset, may function as adaptive strategies that are relatively independent of external support.

Therefore, Dweck's growth mindset theory provides a strong conceptual foundation for explaining how internal beliefs can compensate for limited family support. However, to date, research that specifically examines the processes through which growth mindset is formed, strengthened, and sustained among students with limited socio-emotional and financial family support remains very limited. This theoretical and empirical gap highlights the urgency of exploring the internal cognitive processes and adaptive strategies employed by students under such conditions.

Previous studies have predominantly focused on the influence of growth mindset on academic achievement and improvements in learning performance. However, investigations into how growth mindset is formed and sustained among students who lack socio-emotional and financial support from their families are still scarce. Most existing studies tend to assume the presence of supportive environments, leaving a conceptual gap in explaining the success of students who simultaneously face psychological and economic constraints. Thus, there is an urgent need to examine growth mindset not merely as an outcome, but as a psychological process that develops under conditions of limitation.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to reveal how growth mindset is formed and developed among students B.S.E. as student 1, E.E. as student 2, and S.S. as student 3, who do not receive full support from their families. This research is expected to contribute theoretically by providing new insights into the role of internal factors in the academic success of students with limited family support, and practically by informing the development of more inclusive support strategies and educational policies. By focusing on students who continue to excel despite socio-emotional and financial constraints, this study offers novelty through an in-depth exploration of cognitive resilience and adaptive strategies that remain underexplored in previous research.

METHOD

The case study approach was selected in this research as it enables an in-depth exploration of the processes through which a growth mindset is formed and sustained within individuals in specific and complex real-life contexts. Accordingly, this study specifically examines the experiences of three university students, B.S.E. as student 1, E.E. as student 2, and S.S. as student 3 for case units representing the phenomenon under investigation. The research was conducted from April to August 2025 in several locations adjusted to the participants' residences and daily activities, namely Bogor and Surakarta. Research participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the following criteria: (1) active university students, (2) individuals who do not receive adequate financial and socio-emotional support from their families, and (3) students who are able to persist and demonstrate progress in their academic studies. The selection of three participants was based on the consideration that each participant exhibited unique yet relevant case characteristics aligned with the research focus; therefore, this number was deemed sufficient to allow for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon in accordance with qualitative case study principles.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format to allow flexibility in exploring participants' personal experiences, with sample questions such as: "How do you experience academic demands without family support?", "What does academic failure mean to you?", and "What strategies do you use to persist and continue developing?" Observations were conducted in a non-participatory manner, focusing on participants' behaviors within academic and social contexts, including how they manage time, respond to academic pressure, and interact within organizational or peer environments. The data collection process was carried out gradually in accordance with participants' availability and with careful consideration of contextual dynamics throughout the research period.

Data analysis was conducted using Lichtman's (2013) analytical framework, which consists of three main stages: coding, categorizing, and conceptualizing. During the coding stage, key words and significant statements were identified from interview transcripts and observational notes. The categorizing stage involved grouping codes with similar meanings into thematic categories. Subsequently, the conceptualizing stage was undertaken to develop a conceptual understanding of the processes involved in the formation and sustainability of a growth mindset among the research participants. Data analysis was conducted continuously from the initial stages of data collection to allow emerging findings to be further refined and elaborated. Data credibility and trustworthiness were ensured through triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from the primary participants with data provided by family members and close peers. In addition, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating interview and observational data to ensure the consistency and robustness of the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

To enhance the readability and coherence of the presentation of results, the findings of this study are organized into several thematic sub-sections with concise and descriptive headings, namely *Manifestation of Growth Mindset*, *Adaptive Strategies*, and *Resilience*. This categorization is intended to clarify the main patterns of the findings and to facilitate readers' understanding of the study's

Manifestation of Growth Mindset

The results indicate that the growth mindset among B.S.E. as student 1, E.E. as student 2, and S.S. as student 3, who did not receive social-emotional and financial support from their families is manifested through positive beliefs in their own abilities, consistency in learning efforts, and constructive responses to obstacles in both academic and personal contexts. Although a similar general pattern is evident, each participant demonstrates distinct manifestations of a growth mindset, depending on personal values, life history, and the cognitive strategies employed in responding to challenges.

These differences are reflected in the ways each participant interprets difficulties as catalysts for perseverance and continuous self-development. Challenges are not perceived as permanent barriers, but rather as signals for the need for greater effort and adaptation. This is evident in the experience of B.S.E., who interprets economic constraints as a motivation to take an active role in transforming their life circumstances:

B.S.E. : “Given how my family is, if I am not the one who tries to change our situation, then who else will? At least I can become an example for my younger siblings. It turns out that going to college is possible, even for free.” (B.S.E., Interview, 2025).

This statement is reinforced by the account of S., the participant’s biological mother, who explained that B.S.E. has long demonstrated a strong motivation to pursue further education. As early as the tenth grade of senior high school, B.S.E. actively sought information about universities and scholarship opportunities. The manifestation of a growth mindset is also evident in E.E., who perceives academic achievement as the result of sustained effort and trust in the learning process, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

E.E. : “After failing to get the KIP-Kuliah scholarship, I still believed that if Allah truly willed me to pursue higher education, I would eventually find a way. And it’s true, when I applied again for an alumni scholarship, I passed. If I had given up from the start, I wouldn’t be where I am today”. (E.E., Interview, 2025).

These findings are consistent with Dweck’s (2019) theory, which posits that individuals with a growth mindset do not interpret failure as evidence of limited ability, but rather as an opportunity to learn and grow. The participants’ narratives indicate that a growth mindset orientation functions as an internal psychological mechanism that enables them to sustain their academic pursuits despite experiencing limited family support.

Adaptive Strategies

In responding to limited family support, all three participants developed various adaptive strategies as concrete expressions of a growth mindset. Based on the data analysis, the adaptive strategies employed by B.S.E. as student 1, E.E. as student 2, and S.S. as student 3 can be classified into three main forms: cognitive strategies, behavioral strategies, and the utilization of alternative resources. First, cognitive strategies are demonstrated through self-reflection and continuous evaluation of learning experiences. B.S.E. consistently engages in journaling as a means of emotional regulation and academic reflection, a finding further supported by observational data in the form of

reflective journals used by the participant. Meanwhile, S.S. and E.E. set realistic goals and conduct regular evaluations of their academic progress as efforts to maintain motivation and focus. This is reflected in E.E.'s statement:

E.E : "In my fourth semester, I once failed to obtain a scholarship because I was too busy with organizational activities. So, I applied for a tuition installment plan. After that incident, in the following semester, I managed my time better by paying attention to the timeline so that I would not miss many opportunities again." (E.E., Interview, 2025).

This statement is corroborated by M.R.B., a close friend of E.E., who also assisted in the scholarship application process. Furthermore, second, behavioral strategies represent concrete actions taken to address existing constraints. One of the most prominent strategies is independent financial management. B.S.E. implements a highly disciplined spending system and leverages their academic abilities by working as a task assistant to generate additional income:

B.S.E : "I work on assignments for my friends to earn extra income, even though I do not have a laptop—I complete them using WPS Office on my phone. It's quite helpful for adding to my earnings, and I also allocate only fifty thousand rupiahs per week for groceries so I can be more economical." (B.S.E., Interview, 2025).

This statement is further supported by observational data indicating a large number of other students' assignment files stored on the participant's mobile phone. E.E. capitalizes on academic competence through involvement in faculty projects and on social intelligence by sharing accommodation with peers. Meanwhile, S.S. chooses to live at home and earns additional income by working as a private tutor and a laboratory assistant, as confirmed by A.S., their older sibling.

Third, the utilization of alternative resources, such as peer groups and academic communities functions as a substitute support system, providing both emotional and informational support. Positive social interactions enable participants to gain validation, moral support, and opportunities to share strategies for addressing similar challenges. These alternative resources not only compensate for the absence of family support but also strengthen participants' self-efficacy and academic identity.

Resilience

The findings indicate that all participants demonstrate strong resilience in coping with emotional and financial pressures. Despite experiencing limited family support, they are able to sustain their academic engagement and remain oriented toward long-term academic goals. The pressures they encounter are not interpreted as reasons to give up, but rather as challenges to be confronted and overcome.

This is reflected in S.S.'s statement:

S.S : "I no longer have parents, Miss, and I want to help support my family's economy... one way is by pursuing higher education... because it gives a bigger chance to obtain a more decent job with a higher salary." (S.S., Interview, 2025).

The excerpt illustrates how active acceptance of difficult realities is transformed into motivation to improve quality of life through education. The resilience demonstrated is not only emotional but also cognitive, as reflected in the participants' ability to regulate emotions, maintain focus, and make strategic decisions under conditions of high pressure.

Furthermore, these findings indicate that resilience within the context of this study constitutes a direct manifestation of a growth mindset—namely, the belief that change and success can be achieved through learning processes, perseverance, and sustained effort. Accordingly, resilience is understood not merely as passive endurance, but as an active capacity to recover, adapt, and continue to grow.

The Role of Parenting Styles in the Formation of Growth Mindset

Another important factor influencing the development of a growth mindset among the participants is the parenting style they received throughout their upbringing. Although all three subjects similarly lacked adequate socio-emotional and financial support, the different types of parenting they experienced shaped different pathways of mindset development. For B.S.E, the strict parenting style with limited emotional warmth initially posed a potential threat to his self-concept. However, as he faced various life challenges, these experiences transformed into a strong drive to prove that he is capable of achieving success through his own efforts:

B.S.E : “I just want to prove to everyone who used to look down on me that I can succeed. Even now, my grandmother pays more attention to me during family events. In the past, I was always overlooked.” (B.S.E., Interview, 2025).

This phenomenon aligns with the concept of *resilience through adversity*, which states that psychological pressure in early life may foster greater persistence when individuals successfully reinterpret their experiences in an adaptive manner.

In contrast to B.S.E, E.E was raised in a more democratic family, where decisions related to education were entirely left up to him. Although his parents did not provide financial support, they placed full trust in his ability to take responsibility for his own life choices:

E.E : “In my family, we respect each other’s choices... including my decision to study or join activities. Usually, I am free to choose as long as I am responsible. When I wanted to continue my studies, my mom initially refused because she was worried about the financial issue after I failed to get the KIP scholarship. That’s why she asked me to work instead.” (E.E., Interview, 2025).

This statement was confirmed by the participant’s older sibling, who explained that the family did not prohibit him from pursuing higher education. Their concern was mainly related to financial constraints. However, once E.E managed to obtain an alumni scholarship, the family gave him the freedom to continue his education as long as he acted with full responsibility. Such a parenting style fosters a sense of control over outcomes (*sense of agency*), leading E.E to believe that success is a consequence of continuous effort.

Meanwhile, S.S came from a family with a permissive parenting style. The minimal involvement of family members in his education and daily decisions required him to manage all aspects of his life autonomously. This was due to the fact that S.S lived only with his older sibling after the passing of his parents. Such circumstances triggered the development of strong self-regulation and extreme independence:

S.S : “I didn’t even tell anyone when I decided to pursue higher education, because I’ve always been used to making my own life decisions, taking responsibility for them, and accepting the consequences alone.” (S.S., Interview, 2025).

A.S also confirmed that the participant is an extremely independent individual. This finding suggests that a growth mindset does not only develop from positive support but can also emerge from the adaptive need to survive and take full responsibility for one’s future.

Overall, these results extend the understanding of growth mindset theory by demonstrating that what matters most is not solely the presence of supportive parenting, but rather how individuals make meaning of their parenting experiences. Cultural values, religiosity, and reflective capacities within the Indonesian context appear to serve as important mediators in transforming limitations into psychological strengths for continuous growth.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that limited socio-emotional and financial support from the family does not automatically weaken students’ ability to develop and sustain a growth mindset. On the contrary, such limitations serve as meaningful learning resources that foster the development of resilience, adaptive creativity, and life-management strategies oriented toward long-term goals. These findings are consistent with the study by Ramadhona et al. (2024), which reported a significant positive correlation between growth mindset and academic resilience among university students in both Indonesia and Malaysia. Students with a strong growth mindset, defined as the belief that abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work, demonstrated higher levels of resilience. Nevertheless, this study extends existing knowledge by emphasizing the role of cultural factors, spirituality, and family experiences within the Indonesian social context, which has thus far received limited attention in the scholarly literature.

The first theme identified in this discussion is emotional and financial resilience, which emerges as a central aspect in the formation of a growth mindset among the three participants. In contrast to the findings of Zhu et al. (2024), which emphasize the importance of parental support in fostering a growth mindset, this study demonstrates that the absence of such support may instead function as a catalyst for psychological strengthening, provided that individuals are able to interpret their experiences adaptively. This is evident in the way participants do not perceive economic constraints as fixed threats, but rather as challenges that stimulate personal growth. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Livingston et al. (2025), who report that individuals facing structural and economic adversity often develop adaptive meaning-making processes that transform hardship into a source of motivation and self-development. Interview narratives further reinforce this finding, as academic failures or obstacles are not interpreted as indicators

of inadequacy, but rather as learning experiences that strengthen a sense of personal agency. Accordingly, resilience in this context is not merely understood as the capacity to endure difficulties, but as a direct manifestation of a growth mindset that sustains hope and consistent effort amid intense limitations.

The second theme relates to adaptive creativity as a strategy for managing limited resources. The adaptive creativity demonstrated by the participants is not confined to academic innovation, but also encompasses the ability to manage financial needs independently and efficiently. Contrary to the common perception that university students are vulnerable to consumptive behavior (Farida & Nugraheni, 2022), participants in this study exhibit strong self-regulation in their economic behaviors. This finding supports Self-Regulated Learning theory, which asserts that individuals with high goal awareness are capable of managing emotions, time, and resources in order to achieve specific performance targets (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008). In other words, the limitations encountered do not lead participants to rely on external sympathy, but instead reinforce sustained problem-solving strategies as key characteristics of a growth mindset and learning-oriented behavior.

The second theme relates to adaptive creativity as a strategy for managing limited resources. The adaptive creativity demonstrated by the participants is not confined to academic innovation, but also encompasses the ability to manage financial needs independently and efficiently. In contrast to the findings of Zaki & Dewi (2025), they reported that university students who readily conform to social norms and group pressures are more likely to exhibit excessive consumptive behaviors, such as impulsive purchasing and spending without rational consideration of actual needs, the participants in this study instead display a high level of self-regulation in their economic behaviors. This finding supports Self-Regulated Learning theory, which asserts that individuals with strong goal awareness are capable of effectively managing emotions, time, and resources in order to achieve specific performance targets (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008). In other words, the limitations encountered by the participants do not lead them to rely on external sympathy; rather, these constraints reinforce sustained problem-solving strategies as key characteristics of a growth mindset and learning-oriented behavior.

The third theme highlights the role of the higher education social environment as a substitute for family functions. Interactions with peers and lecturers provide informational and emotional support that strengthens participants' self-confidence and academic motivation. In line with empirical research indicating a significant positive relationship between peer relations and academic self-efficacy among undergraduate students (Anike et al., 2019) supportive peer environments in the university context may contribute to higher self-belief in students' academic capabilities. Consistent with research on social learning processes in educational settings, observing and interacting with successful peers can enhance students' belief in their own ability to succeed academically, thereby encouraging them to assume greater academic roles and responsibilities. In contrast to previous studies that predominantly position family support as the primary predictor of academic success, this study emphasizes that peer support and social validation within the university environment can also serve as significant sources in the development of a growth mindset.

The findings indicate that authoritarian, democratic, and permissive parenting styles can all potentially contribute to the formation of a growth mindset when individuals are able to constructively interpret their parenting experiences. This observation aligns with empirical research showing that higher levels of religiosity are associated with

greater academic motivation among university students, suggesting that personal values shaped through cultural and familial contexts can positively influence motivational orientations in academic settings (Ismail et al., 2025). In the Indonesian cultural context, values such as religiosity, moral responsibility toward family, and appreciation of effort and hard work may thus serve as motivational resources that bolster students' persistence and development despite various constraints. This supports the notion that meaning-making processes rooted in cultural and spiritual values may exert a stronger influence on mindset development than parenting style alone.

Overall, this study asserts that the development of a growth mindset among students who lack family support is not merely the result of personal belief, but rather the product of a complex interaction between resilience, alternative social support, creative coping strategies, and the internalization of cultural and spiritual values. Accordingly, this research expands the theoretical foundation of growth mindset by incorporating the unique psychosocial realities faced by Indonesian university students, while also offering important implications for the development of more contextualized and inclusive educational interventions and support policies.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the absence of socio-emotional and financial family support does not inherently impede the development of a growth mindset among university students; instead, adversity can serve as a formative learning process that strengthens resilience, adaptive creativity, and sustained goal orientation. Growth mindset is shown to emerge not merely from parenting styles or early nurturing conditions, but from individuals' reflective capacity to reinterpret structural constraints as challenges that motivate persistence, effort, and strategic self-development across the lifespan. The findings further highlight that higher education institutions play a crucial contextual role by providing social validation, encouragement, and opportunities for belonging that reinforce growth mindset as a socially embedded, rather than purely individual, psychological orientation. Consequently, students' academic persistence should be understood as the product of reciprocal interactions between internal psychological resources and enabling institutional environments. Practically, these insights underscore the need for universities to integrate psychosocial mentoring, counseling, and development-oriented financial aid programs to support students facing limited family support. While the study contributes to a more dynamic understanding of growth mindset, its limited timeframe suggests the need for future longitudinal and mixed-methods research involving more diverse populations to capture the evolving psychological processes underlying growth mindset development in contexts of adversity.

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