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PROPOSING A FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT TOOL TO PROMOTE GROWTH MINDSET IN HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY AT THE LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a set of ongoing assessment tools to promote a "Growth Mindset" in junior high school students in History and Geography. In the context of implementing the 2018 General Education Program, the research aims to translate psychological theories into concrete classroom interventions, addressing the gap in the mechanisms by which assessment impacts learners' belief systems.

The research methodology includes: synthesizing and analyzing theories to establish a scientific foundation; studying legal texts as a legal basis; employing expert methods to assess the validity of the tools; and conducting case studies through real-world teaching scenarios to demonstrate feasibility.

The most important result of the study is the design of a progress-oriented, ongoing assessment toolkit, including observation and feedback tools, self-assessment, and peer assessment with techniques such as "not yet" feedback, the 3-2-1 technique, the "KWL" technique, and "Two Stars, One Wish." These findings are valuable in shifting assessment from a "measure of results" to an "educational process," helping students normalize mistakes and believe in their own potential for growth. The research product serves as a useful reference for teachers, administrators, and researchers in concretizing the "Assessment as Learning" model in current secondary schools.

KEYWORDS: Formative assessment, growth mindset, self-assessment form, peer assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Under the powerful influence of global integration trends and the imperative for general education reform aimed at fostering adaptive skills for the younger generation, Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum has shifted its focus from knowledge transmission to the formation and development of student competencies and virtues. Within this roadmap, nurturing a "Growth

Mindset"—the belief that intelligence and abilities can be cultivated through effort and the right strategies [6] - has become an urgent educational goal. Particularly for lower secondary students, who are in a critical psycho-physiological transition, developing a growth mindset helps them build resilience and the capacity to recover in the face of increasing challenges in academic subjects and educational activities.

However, a fundamental research question arises: How can a psychological theory like "Growth Mindset" be transformed into concrete classroom interventions through assessment activities?

International studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between beliefs about intelligence and academic achievement. Notably, a longitudinal study by [3] showed that students with a growth mindset maintained a significantly better upward trajectory in grades compared to those with a fixed mindset when entering lower secondary school.

In Vietnam, although Circular 22/2021/TT-BGDĐT has established a legal framework for innovating formative assessment toward a competency-based approach, practical implementation still faces numerous barriers. Many teachers still perceive formative assessment as a tool for grade control rather than a "lever" to support learning. Previous domestic studies have often focused on assessment techniques or general teaching methods but have yet to clarify the mechanism by which formative assessment impacts the shift in students' belief systems (mindset) within specific subjects like History and Geography.

This study was conducted to address that gap. The paper goes beyond systematizing theory to clarify practical value by designing and seeking expert feedback on a progress-oriented formative assessment toolkit (such as "Not Yet" feedback, the 3-2-1 technique, and peer assessment). The significance of this research lies in demonstrating that assessment is not merely a measurement of results; rather, it must be an educational process that helps students normalize mistakes and believe in their own potential for growth. This represents a novel contribution of the paper in concretizing the "Assessment as Learning" model in today's general education schools.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Theoretical analysis and synthesis: The authors systematized core concepts of Carol S. Dweck's growth mindset and formative assessment models. This method aims to establish a logical connection between formative assessment techniques and the activation of growth mindset manifestations, thereby creating a scientific foundation for the toolkit's design. A thorough review of legal and regulatory documents—centering on the 2018 General Education Curriculum and Circular 22/2021/TT-BGDĐT—serves as the legal basis for defining the learning outcomes and formative assessment methods in lower secondary History and Geography. This review ensures that the proposed toolkit aligns with subject objectives while remaining feasible within current instructional timeframes.

Expert consultation: To ensure the validity of the proposed tools, the authors employed the expert consultation method. Drafts of the toolkit (including rubrics, feedback forms, and self-assessment

techniques) were sent to experts in educational measurement and experienced History and Geography teachers for feedback. The peer reviews focused on: the compatibility of the tools with the psychological characteristics of lower secondary students and the appropriateness of the assessment language in encouraging student effort.

Case study method: The authors utilized specific teaching scenarios within the History and Geography curriculum to simulate the operation of the toolkit. The analysis of these hypothetical situations, grounded in actual pedagogical observation data, serves to demonstrate the feasibility of the toolkit within a real-world classroom environment.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Theoretical Basis

3.1.1. Developmental Thinking in the Context of General Education

The concept of a Growth Mindset, pioneered by Professor Carol S. Dweck (Stanford University), establishes a belief system in which an individual's core abilities, intelligence, and talents are not viewed as static or immutable entities. Instead, they are seen as dynamic qualities that can be cultivated and expanded through personal effort, the application of flexible learning strategies, and support from the surrounding environment [6].

In contrast, a Fixed Mindset frames intelligence within a predetermined limit, causing learners to tend to avoid challenges to protect their "veneer" of competence, thereby easily giving up in the face of cognitive difficulties. This opposition creates two entirely distinct developmental trajectories in the learning journey (See Figure 1).



Figure 1: The contrast between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset [6]

The essential attributes of a Growth Mindset are embodied in four pillars:

Effort as a Lever: Effort is considered a prerequisite for mastery, rather than relying solely on innate talent. Effort here is not mechanical repetition, but strategic effort [18]. When students struggle with a

complex geographical chart, experimenting with different calculation methods transforms their abilities from imitation to understanding the essence of the data.

Attitude toward Challenge: Shifting from a feeling of being threatened to viewing difficulties as opportunities to break through current limitations. This pillar addresses the fear of failure. Instead of seeing a difficult History task as a "threat" to their assessment results, students see it as an opportunity to break through their current cognitive limitations [3].

This is the process of building academic resilience. When students no longer feel pressured by what they don't know, they become more confident in hypothesizing, debating, and expressing independent thinking. This reflects an increase in the learner's self-confidence [1].

Feedback from failure: Mistakes are no longer a "sentence" on ability but essential feedback data for refining learning methods.

The Power of Yet: This concept establishes a psychological mechanism that helps students maintain perseverance even when they haven't achieved their goals immediately [5]. The word "yet" helps break down rigid boundaries between groups of students. It affirms that every individual is on a path of self-growth. A student's failure to memorize historical events is not the end result, but rather a signal that more time and a more appropriate approach are needed [19].

These four pillars constitute a foundation for sustainable learner progress. When teachers seamlessly integrate effort recognition, a mindset of embracing challenges, constructive feedback, and the power of the word 'not yet' into formative assessment activities, they truly empower students. This process helps them master their learning path, transforming the specific difficulties of History and Geography into milestones marking their growth in both cognitive abilities and personal character.

From the different analyses of growth mindset and fixed mindset, we can generalize the manifestations of students in the following situations.

Table 1: Comparison of students' thinking characteristics in learning

Situation	Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
Concept of competence	Believing that being good at a subject is due to innate "talent" that cannot be changed.	Believing that historical thinking abilities and geographical skills can be improved through practice.
Facing challenges	Avoiding difficult tasks (drawing complex maps, analyzing events from multiple perspectives) for fear of revealing weaknesses.	Be ready to accept challenges and view them as opportunities to improve your data processing skills.
Attitude towards mistakes	Viewing low scores or incorrect answers as failures can lead to discouragement and giving up.	View mistakes as valuable feedback to understand how you need to adjust your learning methods.
Personal effort	They consider effort useless without the necessary "intelligence."	Consider effort and perseverance as the inevitable

	They often rely on rote memorization to cope with the situation.	path to achieving intellectual mastery.
Responding to criticism	Feeling offended or defensive when a teacher points out mistakes in learning.	Listen to and learn from constructive feedback to improve the learning product.
Your success	Feeling threatened or envious when others perform better on a test than you.	Feeling inspired by the success of peers and actively seeking to learn from their strategic approaches to learning.

The differences between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset, and their impact on the psychology and academic performance of lower secondary students, were demonstrated through a longitudinal study by [3]. The results indicated that when entering the challenging stage of lower secondary school, students possessing a growth mindset tended to maintain a sustainable upward trajectory in achievement. In contrast, those with a fixed mindset often experienced stagnation or a decline in grades as academic content became increasingly complex (See Figure 2).

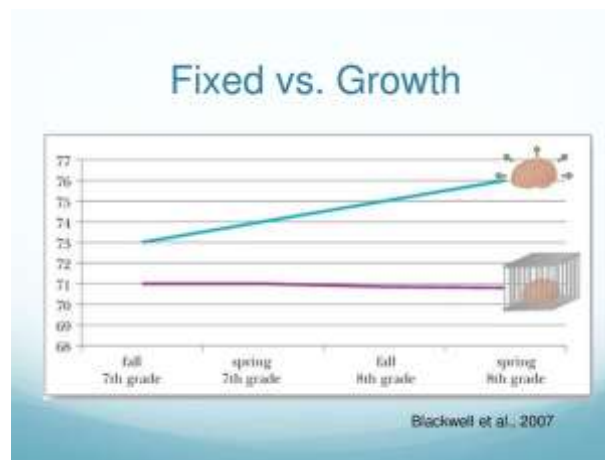


Figure 2: Divergence in Academic Achievement by Mindset Type [3]

In the teaching of History and Geography at the lower secondary level, nurturing a growth mindset serves as a powerful "endogenous engine," helping students develop historical and geographical competencies [14].

Regarding cognition, learners shift from rote memorization to accessing systematic geographical patterns and multidimensional historical processes. Instead of being limited by the prejudice of "lacking a gift for memorization," students actively seek metacognitive tools, such as mind maps or timelines, to master knowledge [18].

Regarding attitudes toward challenges, assessment results are no longer the sole measure of success or failure but become "constructive signals" for developing virtues and competencies. A low score is viewed objectively as an indicator of gaps in historical source-handling skills or geographical reasoning, thereby motivating students to establish plans for competency compensation [16].

Regarding persistence, the integrated nature of the subject requires complex interdisciplinary data connections. A growth mindset allows students to accept mistakes as an inevitable part of scientific debate, helping to sustain scientific curiosity and a passion for exploring new things instead of a mindset of avoiding failure.

3.1.2. The Nature of Competency-Oriented Continuous Assessment

In the spirit of innovation of the 2018 General Education Program, continuous assessment has moved away from the role of controlling scores to become an organic component, operating in parallel with the teaching and learning process [Ministry of Education and Training, 2021]. According to Circular 22/2021/TT-BGDĐT, continuous assessment is established as a mechanism to provide timely two-

way feedback, helping teachers refine methods and students adjust learning strategies to optimize the path of individual competency development [Ministry of Education and Training, 2021].

The fundamental difference between continuous assessment and periodic assessment lies in the shift in focus from "Assessment of Learning" to "Assessment for Learning" and "Assessment as Learning" [7]. The competency-oriented nature of this process is demonstrated through three core characteristics:

Timeliness and narrowing the cognitive gap: Feedback in continuous assessment is immediate, occurring directly during or immediately after each specific learning activity. Black and William assert that this continuous interaction is key to narrowing the gap between learners' current level and the required competency goals [2]. In the History and Geography sub-disciplines, timeliness allows teachers to immediately identify and address cognitive "blind spots" (such as confusions about natural geographical laws or inaccuracies in historical data) before they become systematic misconceptions.

Dialogue and the construction of metacognitive capacity: Formative assessment breaks down the one-way, imposed assessment structure from the teacher, replacing it with a space for dialogue through self-assessment and peer assessment. This mechanism transforms students from objects of assessment into subjects of the assessment process, helping them to reflect their personal thinking through assessment standards and the perspective of the learning community. This process not only cultivates metacognitive capacity but also forms the foundation for building resilience and perseverance in learning [4].

Prioritizing strategic thinking and problem-solving processes: Unlike assessment based on right/wrong answers, competency-oriented assessments place particular emphasis on the way students arrive at results. In analyzing multidimensional historical processes or complex geographical phenomena, skills in handling diagrams, the ability to connect data, and logical reasoning are prioritized over concise answers. When the process is valued, students will realize that thinking is a "muscle" that can be trained and developed, thereby strengthening their belief in their own capacity growth [6]-[10].

3.1.3. The relationship between continuous assessment and growth mindset

Continuous assessment is not merely an administrative procedure but acts as a "scaffolding"—a key concept in Vygotsky's theory [17] - to support students in building their own competencies in the "zone of proximal development." This relationship operates through the following three core mechanisms:

In educational psychology, the type of feedback students receive determines their thinking patterns. Dweck demonstrated that praising innate intelligence reinforces fixed thinking, making learners afraid of failure [6]. Therefore, continuous assessment needs to shift its focus to praising effort, strategy, and methodological choices. According to Hattie and Timperley, effective feedback must answer three questions: "Where am I going?", "How am I going?" and "Where do I go next?" [10]. In History and Geography, this feedback helps students understand that their abilities are not limited. A practical example: Instead of a deterministic comment like "You have a knack for Geography," the teacher might respond: "The way you combine data from the statistical table with the diagram to support your

argument about population distribution is very logical; this shows you have mastered the skill of analyzing spatial data." Thus, the body speaks of the feedback mechanism as it orients the process and the formation of belief systems.

Activating metacognitive abilities and learning control. Growth mindset is only truly nurtured when students understand that they have the ability to control and regulate their own learning process. Frequent assessment, through self-assessment and peer assessment tools, activates metacognitive abilities – the ability to think about one's own thinking [8]. Students engage in a continuous process of reflection: "How did I perform this step?", "Why is this reasoning unconvincing?", and "What strategy adjustments do I need to make to analyze this historical event more deeply?". When students identify their own thought processes, they build confidence in their self-efficacy, believing that progress is the result of the right strategy rather than relying on "luck" or "talent" [1].

Normalizing errors and the "Power of the word 'Not Yet'". In summative assessment, errors are often seen as the "end point" of a process and are accompanied by a penalty in terms of points. Conversely, in ongoing assessment, errors are redefined as an essential part of the learning process and a valuable source of data for improving competence. Teachers focusing on small, daily tasks helps students understand the "Power of the word 'Not Yet'" [5]. The fact that students "have not" been able to complete a difficult task such as "identifying the differences in the causes of the bourgeois revolutions in England and France" is not a permanent failure, but rather a signal that more effort is needed or a change in approach to modern world history is necessary. This mechanism helps students reduce their fear of making mistakes – the biggest barrier to fixed thinking – and encourages them to engage in more complex learning challenges.

3.2. Designing assessment tools to promote growth mindset

3.2.1. Observation and feedback tools

A proposed rubric for the practical exercise "Understanding the Northern Key Economic Region" in Lesson 13 of the 9th grade Geography curriculum [11] asks students to draw and analyze an economic structure diagram.

Instead of simply grading based on whether the student's diagram is correct or incorrect (static result), this rubric focuses on the teacher's assessment of the student's efforts in mastering data processing skills and overcoming calculation difficulties.

Table 2. Rubric for growth mindset in Geography practical skills

Criteria	Level 1: Making an effort (1-2 points)	Level 2: Improving (3- 4 points)	Level 3: Proficien t (5 points)
Data processing and analysis	Still hesitant when calculating percentages; often waits for ready- made formulas from the teacher.	Knows how to review calculation steps when discovering that the total percentage does not equal 100; has experimented with different rounding methods.	Proactively identifies errors and adjusts calculation strategies; knows how to question the meaning of changes in numbers.
Attitude towards skill challenges	Easily discouraged or giving up on drawing when the graph is too complex or requires high precision in the angle of the scale.	Persevere in completing the drawing even if it requires multiple attempts; know how to seek help from friends on how to use the protractor.	View mistakes in the drawing as opportunities to improve meticulousne ss; be willing to experiment with different visual representatio ns to make the graph more intuitive.
Use feedback to improve.	Only correct errors when directly requested by	Proactively adjust your work based on teacher feedback;	Respect errors and consider them "learning signals";

	the teacher; pay little attention to why you made a mistake at that step.	begin to understand the connection between errors and the method used.	develop your own optimal process to share and support other classmates.
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In the rubric, the assessment content shifted from 'judging drawing ability' to 'evaluating effort in mastering the skill'. By using the rubric, the teacher helped students realize that proficiency in geography skills (such as calculations and graphing) is not an innate talent but the result of continuous trial and error and strategic adjustment. Acknowledging the level of "Progress" when students self-review their mistakes is a concrete way of demonstrating the "Power of the word 'Not Yet'" in the classroom: a student who "hasn't" drawn correctly doesn't mean they can't, but rather that they are in the process of perfecting their skill.

The teacher added a checklist to observe learning attitudes during group discussions in History/Geography:

- + Do students use the word "Not Yet" when talking about difficulties?
- + Do students proactively ask "How can I do better?" instead of "What score did I get?"

3.2.2. Self-assessment tools

These forms utilize the "3-2-1" or "K-W-L" technique to help students identify knowledge gaps and plan how to fill them. This is an extremely effective tool for students to reflect on their own thinking after each History and Geography lesson.

Sample "3-2-1" self-assessment form for students:

POST-CLASS FEEDBACK FORM 3 things I learned that I didn't know or misunderstood before. 2 skills I worked on improving during this lesson (e.g., map reading skills, historical argumentation skills). 1 question or difficulty I am still facing and my plan to overcome it (Ask a friend? Look it up? Or try again?)

Proposed "3-2-1" technical self-assessment form to be applied after completing a lesson on the topic of History: Lesson 12. The Resistance War against the Song invaders (11th century) - History Grade 7 [9].

Self-reflection objectives	Content of student self-assessment
3 areas of knowledge/skills I have mastered	1. Understand the reasons why Ly Thuong Kiet chose the Nhu Nguyet River defensive line. 2. Analyze the meaning of the famous poem "Nam Quoc Son Ha" (Mountains and Rivers of the Southern Country). 3. Know how to read a battle map.
2 efforts I have made	1. I proactively raised my hand to speak about the military art of "striking first to gain the upper hand." 2. I discussed with my classmates to understand why the Ly Dynasty ended the war through a peace treaty.
1 difficulty I have NOT overcome and my plan	Difficulty: I still find it hard to remember the detailed timelines of the resistance war. Plan: I will draw a timeline using images and colors to make it easier to visualize instead of memorizing it.

The "3-2-1" self-assessment form is not simply a testing tool, but serves as a platform for progress, helping students clearly identify their learning journey. This tool helps students shift from rote memorization of facts to evaluating their own progress and identifying strategies to overcome challenges (Nguyen Cong Khanh & Dao Thi Oanh, 2015). The phrase "1 difficulty I HAVE NOT overcome" helps students normalize difficulties and proactively develop "new strategies"—a typical manifestation of a growth mindset. Encouraging students to independently plan to conquer what they don't yet understand transforms the often-stressful assessment process into a journey of self-discovery and self-improvement for each learner.

Proposed self-assessment form "KWL" for students. Grade 8 Geography lesson: Population distribution and types of settlements (Dao Ngoc Hung et al., 2024)

K (what i know)	W (what i want to know)	L (what i learned)
(Students fill this in at the beginning of the lesson)	(Students fill this in at the beginning of the lesson)	(Students fill this in after the lesson ends)
Suggestions: - Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups. - The Kinh ethnic group is the majority. - The population is concentrated in large cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.	Suggestions: - Why do ethnic minorities often live in mountainous areas? - How can we determine if a place is "densely populated" or "sparsely populated" (calculation formula)? - Why does the	Suggestions: - I understand how to calculate population density. - I know the difference between different types of residence (urban and rural). - Self-assessment: I made an

	government encourage population redistribution?	effort to read the map to identify population distribution instead of just waiting for the teacher to explain.
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Column W (Want) forces students to set goals for themselves. Instead of passively receiving information, students become "knowledge hunters" to answer their own questions. Column L (Learned) is not just a summary of knowledge but also a place where students reflect on the gap between their "starting point" and "finishing point." This helps them see how their efforts have yielded concrete results. This "KWL" technique acknowledges that starting a lesson with knowledge gaps is perfectly normal. What matters is the journey from K to L.

3.2.3. Peer Assessment Tools

The "Two Stars and One Wish" technique is applied when students comment on each other's work (mind maps, presentations).

Example 1: The following situation: After Group A presents on the topic "The Geographical Discoveries and the Formation of Capitalist Production Relations in Western Europe" - History Grade [9]. Group B will use the "Two Stars and One Wish" feedback form to comment on and provide feedback on Group A's presentation.

Star 1: "Our group commends the group for redrawing Magellan's voyage map to better understand the length of the journey and for their clear analysis of the emergence of capitalism after the expeditions."

Star 2: "We greatly appreciate the group's efforts in highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of geographical discoveries, demonstrating a multifaceted perspective on history."

A wish: "Our group wishes that you could describe in more detail the technological advancements (such as the Caraven ship, the compass) so that the class could understand

why they were able to accomplish such extraordinary things at that time."

Instead of using the word "criticism," the word "wish" encourages students to improve their work next time. The "Two Stars and One Wish" technique helps overcome students' fear of being judged. By calling their contributions "wishes," teachers cleverly transform shortcomings into inspiring goals for students to strive for next time. In a topic like "Geographical Discoveries and the Formation of Capitalist Production Relations in Western Europe," having their efforts to research beyond textbooks recognized by peers helps students believe that passion and exploration are the true values of learning, not just answering pre-prepared questions correctly. This is the ideal environment for developing critical thinking: where students progress together through encouragement and genuine suggestions.

Suggested feedback form "Learning Strategies" to be applied when performing skill-based exercises (drawing charts, reading maps).

Situation: In a Geography lesson in 8th grade, during a practical exercise on drawing and analyzing climate charts [12] two students sitting at the same desk cross-checked each other's drawings.

Content of the feedback form:

- ☐ What did you do well? (For example: The scale of the years on the horizontal axis was very accurate.)
- ☐ Where did you encounter difficulties? (For example: The legend overlapped the data columns.)
- ☐ A strategy I learned from you: "I found your method of using a pencil to lightly draw the alignment lines before drawing the columns very effective; it prevents the columns from being misaligned. I will apply this method to my assignment."

The "Strategic Learning" feedback form demonstrates the workings of the "Assessment as Learning" model. Instead of simply receiving scores from the teacher, students are placed in the position of observers and analysts. The key significance of this tool lies in concretizing Carol S. Dweck's perspective: people with a growth mindset always find inspiration and lessons in the success of others. Through documenting technical tips (such as how to use a pencil to lightly shade), students transformed abstract geographical skills into concrete, actionable actions, thereby reinforcing the belief that mastery is entirely within reach with the right strategy [6].

4. CONCLUSION

Research indicates that the implementation of a formative assessment toolkit oriented toward a growth mindset in lower secondary History and Geography is not merely a technical requirement of the 2018 General Education Curriculum, but also a humanistic solution aimed at unlocking learner potential. Through the implementation process, the following key conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, qualitative assessment tools, such as process-oriented rubrics and constructive feedback, have fundamentally transformed how students face difficulties. Instead of viewing an incorrect answer as a lack of ability, students have become familiar with the concept of being "not yet complete" and understand that effort, when directed correctly, leads to mastery. This is particularly crucial in History and Geography, where students must frequently process multidimensional information and complex natural patterns.

Secondly, the application of self-assessment and peer-assessment techniques has contributed to enhancing metacognitive competence. Students are no longer passive recipients of grades but have become active subjects who control their own learning process. An understanding of "how one learns" serves as the most sustainable foundation for a growth mindset.

Finally, the research findings show that the classroom environment has become safer and more open. When mistakes are accepted as an inevitable part of the knowledge discovery process, students are willing to experiment with new hypotheses, dare to critique, and express independent thinking—core qualities of 21st-century global citizens.

These represent the initial results in constructing the framework and seeking expert opinions on the appropriateness and feasibility of the formative assessment toolkit. In the next phase, the research team will conduct pedagogical experiments at a lower secondary school to quantitatively verify the effectiveness of this toolkit.

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