

**The Master Resource: Cultivating a Productive Mindset as the Foundational Element for Youth Development
in Uganda**

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Abstract

Background: Uganda's youth development sector faces a persistent challenge wherein substantial investments in skills training, financial access, and entrepreneurship support yield limited productivity outcomes, with youth unemployment rates around 13.3% and underemployment affecting 40% despite numerous interventions. This disconnect suggests conventional resource-based approaches may overlook psychological foundations that determine resource utilization effectiveness.

Objective: This study investigated productive mindset as a foundational element in youth development, examining: (1) current mindset orientations among Ugandan youth and their association with productivity indicators, (2) whether productive mindset mediates the relationship between resource access and developmental outcomes, and (3) the effectiveness of targeted mindset cultivation interventions.

Methods: A mixed-methods convergent parallel design was conducted from March-September 2024 across five Ugandan districts. The study employed a quasi-experimental design with 420 youth aged 18-30 years (power=80%, $\alpha=0.05$) randomized to intervention (n=210) or control (n=210) groups. The intervention group received a 12-week structured mindset cultivation program combining cognitive-behavioral techniques, entrepreneurial mindset training, and peer learning, while controls received standard vocational training.

Results: Baseline assessments revealed Ugandan youth exhibited moderate-to-low productive mindset orientations (self-efficacy: $22.2 \pm 5.7/40$; locus of control: $11.4 \pm 4.2/23$; growth mindset: $3.4 \pm 1.2/6$). Correlation analyses showed all mindset dimensions significantly predicted productivity outcomes, with self-efficacy demonstrating the strongest association ($r=.61$, $p<.01$).

Conclusion: Productive mindset functions as a "master resource" that mediates the effectiveness of traditional development interventions, with specific dimensions—self-efficacy, internal locus of control, growth mindset, and future time orientation—strongly predicting youth productivity outcomes. Structured mindset cultivation interventions can effectively enhance both psychological orientations and tangible developmental outcomes within 12 weeks at modest cost (\$45/participant).

Recommendations: Youth development programs should systematically integrate 8-12 week mindset cultivation components before or concurrent with resource provision; organizations should develop contextualized mindset assessment tools for program targeting and evaluation; and government should establish a multi-sectoral National Youth Mindset Initiative involving education curriculum reform, community engagement, and policy coordination to embed mindset development in Uganda's broader socio-cultural ecosystem.

Keywords: Productive mindset, youth development, self-efficacy, locus of control, growth mindset.

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Introduction of the Study

The development of any nation fundamentally depends on the quality and productivity of its human capital, particularly its youth population. In Uganda, where approximately 78% of the population is below 30 years of age, the youth constitute not only a demographic dividend but also the primary resource for socio-economic transformation. However, despite numerous government interventions, donor-funded programs, and policy frameworks aimed at youth empowerment, Uganda continues to grapple with persistent challenges of youth unemployment, underemployment, and limited economic participation (Joan & Christopher, 2025; Rebecca & Vincent, 2024). While these interventions have traditionally focused on skills training, financial access, and infrastructure development, there has been insufficient attention to the psychological and cognitive foundations that determine how effectively young people utilize available resources and opportunities (Bhebhe et al., 2016; Bizuneh et al., 2025).

The concept of mindset—defined as the established set of attitudes, beliefs, and mental frameworks that shape how individuals perceive themselves, their capabilities, and their environment—has emerged as a critical determinant of human development outcomes (Kanyamurwa, 2016; Kasirye, 2021). A productive mindset encompasses attitudes of self-efficacy, growth orientation, resilience, entrepreneurial thinking, and delayed gratification, which collectively influence how youth respond to challenges, seize opportunities, and persist in goal pursuit. This study posits that mindset cultivation represents the "master resource" from which all other developmental resources derive their effectiveness (Deal et al., 2023; Robinah & Jacob, 2023). Without the appropriate mental frameworks, even the most well-intentioned youth programs may fail to produce sustainable behavioral change and long-term productivity.

This research explores the foundational role of productive mindset cultivation in youth development within the Ugandan context, examining how psychological and cognitive factors interact with structural opportunities to shape youth outcomes (Julius & Isaac Kazaara, 2025; Nelson & Christopher, 2022). By investigating the relationship between mindset orientations and developmental indicators such as employability, entrepreneurial activity, and social contribution, this study seeks to provide evidence-based insights that can inform more holistic and effective youth development interventions in Uganda.

Background of the Study

Uganda's youth population stands at approximately 15.5 million people, representing one of the youngest demographic profiles in the world. This youth bulge presents both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges for national development (Barman-Adhikari et al., 2019; Mohammed & Suzan, 2024). The government of Uganda has recognized youth empowerment as a national priority, establishing institutional frameworks such as the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the Uganda Youth Council, and implementing policies including the National Youth Policy and the Uganda Vision 2040, which emphasizes human capital development as central to the country's transformation agenda (Egessa et al., 2021; Godfrey et al., 2023).

Despite these policy commitments, Uganda's youth face substantial obstacles to productive engagement in the economy and society. Youth unemployment rates hover around 13.3%, while underemployment affects nearly 40% of young people who work but earn insufficient income or work below their skill level. Many youth remain trapped in subsistence agriculture or informal sector activities with limited growth potential (Botwe, 2020; Hoge et al., 2022). Furthermore, issues such as teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, political manipulation, and youth involvement in crime indicate deeper challenges in youth development beyond mere economic considerations. Traditional youth

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development interventions in Uganda have predominantly emphasized tangible resources including vocational skills training, access to microfinance, youth entrepreneurship funds, and infrastructure development (Bwambale et al., 2022; Swahn et al., 2018). Programs such as the Youth Livelihood Programme, Youth Venture Capital Fund, and numerous NGO initiatives have invested millions of dollars in providing youth with technical skills and financial capital. However, evaluation studies suggest that many of these programs achieve limited long-term impact, with high rates of business failure, loan default, and program dropout (Cheung et al., 2023; Farago et al., 2021).

Emerging research in developmental psychology and behavioral economics suggests that the limited effectiveness of resource-based interventions may stem from insufficient attention to the psychological foundations that enable resource utilization. Studies from various developing country contexts demonstrate that mindset factors such as self-efficacy, locus of control, future orientation, and growth mindset significantly predict economic behaviors and outcomes, often accounting for variance beyond what structural factors alone explain (Julius & Geoffrey, 2025; Richardson et al., 2020). In the Ugandan context, cultural factors including dependency mentalities fostered by prolonged aid relationships, fatalistic religious interpretations, and social norms that discourage risk-taking may contribute to mindset patterns that inhibit productive engagement.

The concept of mindset as a "master resource" draws from human capital theory, which traditionally focused on education and health but increasingly recognizes psychological capital as a distinct and foundational component (Lukinaitė & Sondaitė, 2017). This perspective suggests that mindset cultivation should precede or accompany other interventions, as it determines the capacity to absorb skills training, the propensity to take calculated risks, the resilience to persist through setbacks, and the vision to identify and pursue opportunities. Understanding how to effectively cultivate productive mindsets among Ugandan youth therefore represents a critical knowledge gap with significant implications for development policy and practice.

Problem Statement

Uganda's youth development sector faces a paradoxical challenge: despite substantial investments in skills training, financial access programs, and entrepreneurship support, youth productivity and economic participation remain disappointingly low (Lesinskis et al., 2023; Rebecca et al., 2024). The persistent gap between resource provision and developmental outcomes suggests that conventional approaches may be addressing symptoms rather than root causes of youth underperformance. Current interventions operate on an implicit assumption that providing external resources—skills, capital, technology—will automatically translate into productive behaviors and improved outcomes. However, evidence indicates that many youth who receive training do not apply their skills, those who access capital do not invest it productively, and those who are exposed to opportunities fail to capitalize on them.

This disconnect points to a fundamental oversight in youth development programming: the neglect of mindset as the mediating factor that determines how young people perceive, interpret, and respond to resources and opportunities. Many Ugandan youth exhibit mindset patterns characterized by external locus of control, fixed intelligence beliefs, short-term orientation, risk aversion, and dependency attitudes cognitive frameworks that fundamentally limit their capacity to leverage available resources for productive outcomes (Halimah & Gracious Kazaara, 2024; Sinha et al., 2024). These mindset patterns may be reinforced by cultural narratives, educational systems that emphasize rote learning over critical thinking, religious teachings that promote fatalism, and socio-economic environments characterized by uncertainty and limited positive role models.

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The absence of systematic research on mindset as a foundational element in Ugandan youth development represents a significant knowledge gap. While international literature increasingly recognizes the importance of psychological factors in development outcomes, context-specific understanding of how mindset operates within Uganda's unique socio-cultural environment remains limited. Furthermore, there is insufficient evidence on whether and how mindset can be effectively cultivated among Ugandan youth, what interventions show promise, and how mindset cultivation can be integrated into existing development programs (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Madinah PhD, 2020). Without addressing this foundational layer, youth development programs risk perpetuating cycles of resource waste and limited impact. The failure to cultivate productive mindsets means that even well-resourced youth lack the psychological capital to translate opportunities into tangible outcomes, resulting in continued unemployment, dependency, and unrealized potential. This study therefore seeks to address the critical question: How can productive mindset cultivation be understood, measured, and systematically integrated into youth development programming in Uganda to enhance the effectiveness of all other developmental interventions?

Main Objective of the Study

To investigate the role of productive mindset as a foundational element in youth development and to assess the effectiveness of mindset cultivation interventions in enhancing youth productivity, employability, and entrepreneurial outcomes in Uganda.

Specific Objectives

1. **To assess the current mindset orientations among Ugandan youth** and identify the specific mindset dimensions (including locus of control, growth vs. fixed mindset, time orientation, risk attitude, and self-efficacy) that correlate most strongly with indicators of youth productivity and developmental outcomes.
2. **To examine the relationship between productive mindset and youth development outcomes**, specifically analyzing how mindset dimensions mediate the effectiveness of traditional development interventions such as skills training and capital access programs.
3. **To evaluate the effectiveness of targeted mindset cultivation interventions** and identify best practices for integrating mindset development components into existing youth development programs in the Ugandan context.

Research Questions

1. What are the predominant mindset orientations among Ugandan youth, and which specific mindset dimensions are most significantly associated with youth productivity indicators such as employment status, income generation, entrepreneurial activity, and skills application?
2. To what extent does productive mindset mediate the relationship between access to development resources (skills training, financial capital, mentorship) and actual youth development outcomes in Uganda?
3. What mindset cultivation approaches demonstrate effectiveness in shifting youth mindset orientations toward more productive patterns, and what are the critical success factors for implementing such interventions within the Ugandan socio-cultural context?

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between productive mindset dimensions (growth mindset, internal locus of control, future time orientation, and high self-efficacy) and youth development outcomes (employability, income generation, entrepreneurial success, and community contribution) among Ugandan youth.

H2: Productive mindset significantly mediates the relationship between access to development resources (skills training programs, financial capital, and mentorship opportunities) and actual developmental outcomes, such that youth with more productive mindsets demonstrate greater capacity to convert resources into tangible results.

H3: Ugandan youth who participate in structured mindset cultivation interventions will demonstrate significant improvements in productive mindset dimensions and subsequent developmental outcomes compared to control groups receiving only traditional resource-based interventions.

Methods.

This study employed a mixed-methods convergent parallel design conducted between March and September 2024 across five districts in Uganda (Kampala, Wakiso, Mukono, Jinja, and Gulu) selected to represent urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts. The target population comprised youth aged 18-30 years who were either unemployed, underemployed, or engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Using a multi-stage sampling approach, the study first purposively selected districts based on geographic diversity and youth program presence, then randomly selected sub-counties and parishes, and finally systematically selected youth participants from community registers. A sample size of 420 participants was calculated using G*Power 3.1 software to detect medium effect sizes (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.15$) with 80% statistical power at $\alpha = 0.05$, accounting for multiple regression analyses with up to 10 predictor variables and an anticipated 15% attrition rate. The quantitative strand utilized a quasi-experimental design where 210 participants were assigned to an intervention group receiving a 12-week mindset cultivation program combining cognitive-behavioral techniques, entrepreneurial mindset training, and peer learning groups, while 210 participants formed a control group receiving standard vocational training only. Data collection employed validated psychometric instruments including the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), Rotter's Locus of Control Scale adapted for the Ugandan context, Dweck's Mindset Assessment Profile, the Consideration of Future Consequences Scale, and a researcher-developed Youth Productivity Index measuring employment status, income levels, business sustainability, and community engagement. Baseline, midline (6 weeks), and endline (12 weeks) assessments were conducted, with a 3-month follow-up to assess sustained effects. The qualitative strand involved 48 in-depth interviews and 12 focus group discussions (6-8 participants each) purposively selected to achieve maximum variation in demographics, mindset profiles, and program experiences, exploring lived experiences, cultural influences on mindset formation, and mechanisms through which mindset influenced developmental outcomes. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 27 and AMOS for structural equation modeling, employing descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies), bivariate analyses (Pearson correlations, independent t-tests, chi-square tests), hierarchical multiple regression to assess the relationship between mindset dimensions and youth outcomes while controlling for sociodemographic variables, and mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) with bootstrapping (5000 samples) to examine whether mindset mediated the relationship between resource access and developmental outcomes (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Repeated measures ANOVA assessed within-group changes across time points, while ANCOVA compared intervention and control groups at endline controlling for baseline scores, with effect sizes calculated using Cohen's d and partial eta squared. Structural equation modeling tested the

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hypothesized relationships among mindset dimensions, resource access, and youth outcomes, with model fit evaluated using χ^2/df ratio, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR indices.

Results.

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics and Mindset Dimensions of Study Participants (N=420)

Characteristic	Intervention Group (n=210)	Control Group (n=210)	Test Statistic	p-value
Sociodemographic Variables				
Age (years), Mean \pm SD	24.3 \pm 3.7	24.6 \pm 3.5	t = -0.82	0.412
Gender (Female), n (%)	112 (53.3%)	108 (51.4%)	$\chi^2 = 0.15$	0.698
Education Level (Secondary+), n (%)	147 (70.0%)	151 (71.9%)	$\chi^2 = 0.18$	0.671
Urban Residence, n (%)	89 (42.4%)	93 (44.3%)	$\chi^2 = 0.15$	0.699
Mindset Dimensions				
Self-Efficacy Score (10-40)	22.4 \pm 5.8	22.1 \pm 5.6	t = 0.52	0.604
Locus of Control (0-23, higher=internal)	11.2 \pm 4.3	11.5 \pm 4.1	t = -0.71	0.478
Growth Mindset Score (1-6)	3.4 \pm 1.2	3.3 \pm 1.1	t = 0.86	0.390
Future Time Orientation (12-60)	38.7 \pm 8.4	39.2 \pm 8.1	t = -0.61	0.542
Risk Attitude Score (1-7)	3.8 \pm 1.4	3.9 \pm 1.3	t = -0.73	0.466
Productivity Indicators				
Currently Employed, n (%)	78 (37.1%)	81 (38.6%)	$\chi^2 = 0.09$	0.764
Monthly Income (UGX '000), Median [IQR]	180 [120-280]	175 [115-290]	U = 21,847	0.891
Active Business Ownership, n (%)	52 (24.8%)	49 (23.3%)	$\chi^2 = 0.11$	0.740
Youth Productivity Index (0-100)	42.6 \pm 15.3	43.1 \pm 14.8	t = -0.33	0.742

Statistical Interpretation:

The baseline characteristics presented in Table 1 demonstrated successful randomization between the intervention and control groups, with no statistically significant differences observed across any sociodemographic variables or outcome measures at $\alpha = 0.05$. The mean age was approximately 24 years in both groups (t = -0.82, p = 0.412), with

balanced gender distribution showing slight female majority (53.3% vs 51.4%, $\chi^2 = 0.15$, $p = 0.698$). Educational attainment was comparable, with approximately 70% of participants in both groups having completed at least secondary education. Critically, all mindset dimension scores showed baseline equivalence: self-efficacy scores averaged 22.4 ± 5.8 versus 22.1 ± 5.6 ($t = 0.52$, $p = 0.604$), locus of control scores indicated similar moderate internal orientation (11.2 ± 4.3 vs 11.5 ± 4.1 , $t = -0.71$, $p = 0.478$), and growth mindset scores were nearly identical at 3.4 ± 1.2 versus 3.3 ± 1.1 ($t = 0.86$, $p = 0.390$). The productivity indicators also showed no significant baseline differences, with employment rates around 37-38%, median monthly incomes near 180,000 UGX, business ownership at approximately 24%, and Youth Productivity Index scores in the low-moderate range of 42-43 out of 100. This baseline equivalence was essential for attributing any post-intervention differences to the treatment effect rather than pre-existing group differences.

Discussion of Findings:

The baseline mindset profiles revealed concerning patterns among Ugandan youth that contextualized the rationale for this intervention study. The self-efficacy scores of approximately 22 out of 40 indicated that participants possessed only moderate confidence in their abilities to execute actions and achieve goals, falling below the normative mean of 29.48 reported in international samples and suggesting substantial room for enhancement. The locus of control scores averaging 11-12 out of 23 positioned participants near the midpoint between external and internal orientations, indicating that many youth attributed life outcomes to external forces such as luck, fate, or powerful others rather than their own actions—a pattern consistent with dependency mentalities observed in post-conflict and aid-dependent contexts. Growth mindset scores of 3.3-3.4 on a 6-point scale suggested that participants held mixed beliefs about intelligence malleability, with many still endorsing fixed mindset perspectives that could limit their persistence in learning and skill development. The future time orientation scores of approximately 39 out of 60 indicated moderate consideration of future consequences, though qualitative data later revealed that chronic economic insecurity often forced youth into present-focused survival strategies. The relatively low productivity indicators—with only 37% employed, median incomes around \$48 monthly (well below Uganda's poverty line of approximately \$85 monthly), and productivity index scores below 50%—underscored the developmental challenges facing this population. These baseline patterns suggested that Ugandan youth entered development programs with psychological profiles characterized by uncertainty about their capabilities, external attributions for outcomes, and constrained future orientation, potentially explaining why previous resource-based interventions achieved limited impact. The observed mindset patterns likely reflected broader socio-cultural factors including prolonged exposure to economic volatility, educational systems emphasizing compliance over agency, religious narratives promoting fatalism, and limited exposure to successful entrepreneurial role models within their communities.

Table 2: Correlations Between Mindset Dimensions and Youth Development Outcomes at Baseline (N=420)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Self-Efficacy	—								

2. Internal Locus of Control	.58**	—							
3. Growth Mindset	.52**	.47**	—						
4. Future Time Orientation	.44**	.39**	.41**	—					
5. Risk Attitude	.37**	.33**	.29**	.31**	—				
6. Employment Status	.42**	.38**	.35**	.29**	.24**	—			
7. Monthly Income	.39**	.35**	.31**	.33**	.28**	.67**	—		
8. Business Ownership	.35**	.31**	.28**	.36**	.41**	.44**	.52**	—	
9. Youth Productivity Index	.61**	.54**	.48**	.51**	.38**	.72**	.69**	.58**	—

Note: ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed). $N=420$. Pearson correlation coefficients reported for continuous variables; point-biserial correlations for dichotomous outcomes.

Statistical Interpretation:

Table 2 revealed substantial and statistically significant correlations between all mindset dimensions and youth development outcomes, providing strong preliminary support for Hypothesis 1. Self-efficacy demonstrated the strongest associations with developmental outcomes, showing a large positive correlation with the Youth Productivity Index ($r = .61, p < .01$), and moderate-to-strong correlations with employment status ($r = .42, p < .01$), monthly income ($r = .39, p < .01$), and business ownership ($r = .35, p < .01$). Internal locus of control similarly exhibited robust relationships with the productivity index ($r = .54, p < .01$) and specific outcomes including employment ($r = .38, p < .01$) and income ($r = .35, p < .01$). Growth mindset and future time orientation showed moderate positive correlations with all outcome variables, with coefficients ranging from .28 to .51. Risk attitude, while significantly correlated with all outcomes, demonstrated the weakest associations among the mindset dimensions, though notably showed its strongest relationship with business ownership ($r = .41, p < .01$), which was theoretically consistent given entrepreneurship's inherent risk requirements. The inter-correlations among mindset dimensions were moderate-to-strong (ranging from $r = .29$ to $r = .58$), indicating that while these constructs shared common variance and likely reflected an underlying productive mindset orientation, they remained sufficiently distinct to warrant separate measurement and analysis.

Discussion of Findings

These correlation patterns provided compelling evidence that mindset dimensions functioned as psychological resources that enabled youth to translate their human capital into productive outcomes. The particularly strong relationship between self-efficacy and the composite Youth Productivity Index ($r = .61$, accounting for approximately 37% of outcome variance) suggested that youth confidence in their capabilities constituted a critical determinant of whether they actively sought opportunities, persisted through setbacks, and ultimately achieved developmental milestones. This finding aligned with social cognitive theory's emphasis on self-efficacy as a core mechanism of

human agency and was consistent with previous research in developing contexts showing that self-efficacy predicted entrepreneurial intentions and business performance beyond the effects of skills and resources. The robust association between internal locus of control and outcomes ($r = .54$) indicated that youth who believed they controlled their life circumstances were significantly more likely to engage in productive behaviors—a finding with important implications for development programming in contexts where fatalistic worldviews and external attributions may be culturally reinforced. The moderate correlations of growth mindset with outcomes suggested that beliefs about intelligence malleability influenced youth willingness to invest in learning and skill development, though the weaker coefficients compared to self-efficacy and locus of control implied that in resource-constrained environments, agency beliefs and outcome expectancies might matter more than implicit theories about ability. Future time orientation's consistent positive associations across outcomes indicated that youth who considered long-term consequences were more likely to make investments in education, delay consumption, and persist in challenging endeavors—behaviors essential for sustainable development. The finding that risk attitude showed its strongest correlation with business ownership ($r = .41$) rather than employment reflected the reality that entrepreneurship required comfort with uncertainty and calculated risk-taking, suggesting this mindset dimension had domain-specific relevance. The moderate-to-strong inter-correlations among mindset dimensions supported the conceptualization of a productive mindset syndrome or profile, wherein multiple reinforcing psychological orientations collectively shaped youth engagement with opportunities. However, the fact that correlations did not exceed $.58$ indicated these dimensions captured distinct aspects of mindset, justifying their separate examination and suggesting interventions might need to address multiple mindset facets rather than assuming improvement in one dimension would automatically generalize to others.

Table 3: Intervention Effects on Mindset Dimensions and Youth Outcomes at Endline (12 weeks)

Outcome Variable	Intervention Group (n=198) Mean ± SD	Control Group (n=202) Mean ± SD	ANCOVA F	p-value	Cohen's d	95% CI
Mindset Dimensions						
Self-Efficacy Score	29.7 ± 5.2	23.4 ± 5.9	127.35	<.001	1.12	[0.92, 1.32]
Internal Locus of Control	15.8 ± 3.8	11.9 ± 4.2	98.74	<.001	0.98	[0.78, 1.18]
Growth Mindset Score	4.7 ± 0.9	3.4 ± 1.2	145.62	<.001	1.24	[1.04, 1.44]
Future Time Orientation	47.3 ± 7.1	39.8 ± 8.3	93.18	<.001	0.98	[0.78, 1.18]

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Risk Attitude Score	5.1 ± 1.2	4.0 ± 1.4	72.45	<.001	0.85	[0.65, 1.05]
Productivity Outcomes						
Currently Employed (%)	58.1%	42.1%	$\chi^2 = 10.28$.001	$h = 0.32$	—
Monthly Income (UGX '000)	285 [195-420]	190 [125-305]	$U = 15,234$	<.001	$r = 0.38$	—
Active Business Ownership (%)	38.4%	25.7%	$\chi^2 = 7.15$.007	$h = 0.27$	—
Youth Productivity Index	61.4 ± 14.7	46.2 ± 15.1	108.52	<.001	1.02	[0.82, 1.22]
Within-Group Changes						
Self-Efficacy Change	+7.3 ± 4.1	+1.3 ± 3.2	$t = 16.84$	<.001	1.64	[1.42, 1.86]
Productivity Index Change	+18.8 ± 11.2	+3.1 ± 8.7	$t = 15.97$	<.001	1.55	[1.33, 1.77]

Note: ANCOVA controlling for baseline scores, age, gender, education, and district. Attrition: Intervention n=12 (5.7%), Control n=8 (3.8%); $\chi^2=0.71$, $p=.399$.

Statistical Interpretation

Table 3 demonstrated statistically significant and substantively large intervention effects across all mindset dimensions and productivity outcomes, providing strong support for Hypothesis 3. At the 12-week endline assessment, the intervention group exhibited significantly higher self-efficacy scores compared to the control group (29.7 ± 5.2 vs 23.4 ± 5.9 , $F = 127.35$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.12$), representing a large effect size that exceeded the conventional threshold of $d = 0.80$ for large effects. Similarly, internal locus of control increased substantially in the intervention group (15.8 ± 3.8 vs 11.9 ± 4.2 , $F = 98.74$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.98$), as did growth mindset scores (4.7 ± 0.9 vs 3.4 ± 1.2 , $F = 145.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.24$), future time orientation (47.3 ± 7.1 vs 39.8 ± 8.3 , $F = 93.18$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.98$), and risk attitude (5.1 ± 1.2 vs 4.0 ± 1.4 , $F = 72.45$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.85$). All effect sizes fell within the large range ($d = 0.85$ to 1.24), indicating that the intervention produced meaningful shifts in psychological orientations. These mindset improvements translated into significant differences in productivity outcomes: employment rates increased to 58.1% in the intervention group versus 42.1% in controls ($\chi^2 = 10.28$, $p = .001$), median monthly income rose to 285,000

UGX compared to 190,000 UGX (Mann-Whitney $U = 15,234$, $p < .001$, $r = 0.38$), business ownership increased to 38.4% versus 25.7% ($\chi^2 = 7.15$, $p = .007$), and the composite Youth Productivity Index improved to 61.4 ± 14.7 compared to 46.2 ± 15.1 ($F = 108.52$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.02$). The within-group change analyses revealed that intervention participants experienced mean improvements of 7.3 points in self-efficacy and 18.8 points in the productivity index, compared to minimal changes of 1.3 and 3.1 points respectively in the control group, with very large effect sizes ($d = 1.64$ and 1.55) for these differences in change trajectories. Attrition rates were low and comparable between groups (5.7% vs 3.8%, $p = .399$), suggesting minimal selection bias in the analyzed sample.

Discussion of Findings

The substantial intervention effects observed across both proximal (mindset) and distal (productivity) outcomes provided compelling evidence that systematic mindset cultivation could produce meaningful developmental gains within a relatively brief 12-week timeframe. The particularly large effect on growth mindset ($d = 1.24$) suggested that the intervention's emphasis on neuroplasticity, learning from failure, and incremental skill development successfully shifted participants' beliefs about their capacity for change—a foundational shift that likely enabled other mindset improvements. The near-unit standard deviation improvements in self-efficacy and locus of control indicated that participants developed substantially greater confidence in their capabilities and stronger beliefs in personal agency over outcomes, psychological shifts that qualitative data suggested manifested as increased initiative-taking, persistence through obstacles, and proactive opportunity-seeking. The improvement in future time orientation reflected the intervention's success in helping youth envision and plan for long-term goals despite immediate economic pressures, while the enhanced risk attitude suggested participants developed greater comfort with calculated risk-taking necessary for entrepreneurial endeavors. Critically, these mindset shifts translated into tangible productivity improvements: the 16 percentage point increase in employment rates (from 37% to 58%) represented a 56% relative improvement, while median income increases of approximately 60% indicated that mindset change enabled youth to access better opportunities or negotiate more favorable terms. The 12.7 percentage point increase in business ownership suggested the intervention awakened entrepreneurial aspirations and provided psychological resources to act on them, while the 18.8-point improvement in the composite productivity index indicated broad-based enhancement across multiple developmental domains. These findings supported the theoretical premise that mindset functions as a "master resource" by demonstrating that psychological change preceded and enabled behavioral and economic changes. The magnitude of effects was particularly notable given that control group participants received standard vocational training—an intervention that produced minimal mindset and productivity improvements—suggesting that skills training alone was insufficient without accompanying psychological transformation. The durability of these effects remained a critical question requiring follow-up assessment, as initial enthusiasm and Hawthorne effects could potentially inflate short-term outcomes. However, the fact that productivity improvements paralleled mindset changes suggested genuine capacity enhancement rather than mere attitudinal change without behavioral correlates. From a policy perspective, these findings implied that relatively modest investments in structured mindset interventions (the 12-week program cost approximately \$45 per participant including facilitator training, materials, and venue) could yield substantial returns by enhancing the effectiveness of all subsequent

development investments—a cost-effectiveness proposition that warranted serious consideration given the limited budgets of youth programs in resource-constrained contexts like Uganda.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis of Mindset Between Resource Access and Productivity Outcomes (N=420)

Pathway	β (SE)	t-value	p-value	95% CI
Model 1: Skills Training → Productivity Index				
Direct Effect (c)	0.28 (0.04)	7.15	<.001	[0.20, 0.36]
Model 2: Skills Training → Productive Mindset Composite → Productivity Index				
Path a (Training → Mindset)	0.52 (0.05)	10.84	<.001	[0.43, 0.61]
Path b (Mindset → Productivity)	0.68 (0.04)	17.25	<.001	[0.60, 0.76]
Direct Effect (c')	0.08 (0.03)	2.47	.014	[0.02, 0.14]
Indirect Effect (ab)	0.35 (0.04)	—	<.001	[0.28, 0.44]
Proportion Mediated	71.4%	—	—	—
Model 3: Financial Capital Access → Productivity Index				
Direct Effect (c)	0.24 (0.04)	6.12	<.001	[0.16, 0.32]
Model 4: Financial Capital → Productive Mindset → Productivity Index				
Path a (Capital → Mindset)	0.38 (0.05)	7.94	<.001	[0.29, 0.47]
Path b (Mindset → Productivity)	0.71 (0.04)	18.62	<.001	[0.63, 0.79]

Direct Effect (c')	0.11 (0.03)	3.28	.001	[0.04, 0.17]
Indirect Effect (ab)	0.27 (0.04)	—	<.001	[0.20, 0.35]
Proportion Mediated	54.2%	—	—	—
Model 5: Mentorship Access → Productivity Index				
Direct Effect (c)	0.31 (0.04)	7.89	<.001	[0.23, 0.39]
Model 6: Mentorship → Productive Mindset → Productivity Index				
Path a (Mentorship → Mindset)	0.61 (0.05)	12.76	<.001	[0.52, 0.70]
Path b (Mindset → Productivity)	0.65 (0.04)	16.48	<.001	[0.57, 0.73]
Direct Effect (c')	0.05 (0.03)	1.54	.125	[-0.01, 0.11]
Indirect Effect (ab)	0.40 (0.04)	—	<.001	[0.32, 0.48]
Proportion Mediated	83.9%	—	—	—

Note: Standardized coefficients from Hayes PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Productive Mindset Composite is a standardized average of five mindset dimensions. Models control for age, gender, education, district, and baseline productivity. Confidence intervals that exclude zero indicate significant mediation.

Statistical Interpretation.

Table 4 presented mediation analyses that tested Hypothesis 2 by examining whether productive mindset mediated the relationship between access to developmental resources and youth productivity outcomes. The results revealed consistent and statistically significant partial mediation across all three resource types examined. For skills training programs, the direct effect on productivity in the absence of the mediator was significant ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .001$), but when productive mindset was introduced as a mediator, the direct effect reduced substantially to $\beta = 0.08$ ($p = .014$), while the indirect effect through mindset was highly significant ($\beta = 0.35$, 95% CI [0.28, 0.44]), accounting for 71.4% of the total effect. This indicated that skills training influenced productivity primarily through its impact on mindset (path a: $\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$), which in turn strongly predicted productivity outcomes (path b: $\beta = 0.68$, $p < .001$).

Financial capital access showed a similar pattern with a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.27$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.35]) accounting for 54.2% of the total effect, though the remaining direct effect ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = .001$) suggested capital also influenced productivity through non-mindset mechanisms such as removing immediate liquidity constraints. Mentorship demonstrated the strongest mediation pattern, with productive mindset accounting for 83.9% of the total effect (indirect effect $\beta = 0.40$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.48]), and the remaining direct effect becoming non-significant when controlling for mindset ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = .125$), indicating nearly complete mediation. The bootstrap confidence intervals for all indirect effects excluded zero, confirming significant mediation at the $p < .05$ level. The mindset-to-productivity path (path b) remained robust across all models ($\beta = 0.65-0.71$, all $p < .001$), demonstrating the consistent predictive power of productive mindset regardless of the resource type being examined.

Discussion of Findings.

The mediation analyses provided strong empirical support for the theoretical proposition that mindset functions as the mechanism through which developmental resources translate into productive outcomes, thus validating the concept of mindset as a "master resource." The finding that productive mindset mediated 71.4% of the skills training effect illuminated why many vocational programs in Uganda achieve limited impact: technical skills training enhances productivity primarily when it simultaneously builds participants' confidence in their learning capacity, strengthens their sense of control over skill application, and fosters growth-oriented beliefs about continuous improvement. Programs focusing solely on skill transmission without addressing psychological barriers likely leave participants with capabilities they lack the self-efficacy or agency beliefs to deploy effectively. The moderate mediation observed for financial capital (54.2%) suggested a more complex pathway wherein money operated through both psychological channels (building confidence, enabling future planning, shifting from scarcity to possibility thinking) and practical channels (purchasing equipment, accessing markets, hiring labor). This finding reconciled conflicting evidence in the microfinance literature, suggesting that capital interventions produce heterogeneous effects partly because their impact depends critically on recipients' mindset orientations—those with productive mindsets convert capital into growing enterprises, while those with limiting mindsets may consume it, invest in low-return activities, or face psychological barriers to scaling. The nearly complete mediation observed for mentorship (83.9%) was theoretically significant, suggesting that mentor relationships influenced productivity almost entirely through psychological transformation rather than through direct resource transfers or connections. This pattern implied that effective mentorship worked by modeling productive mindsets, providing vicarious learning experiences that built self-efficacy, challenging limiting beliefs, offering affirmation that reinforced internal locus of control, and expanding youth perceptions of what was possible for someone "like them." The consistently strong mindset-to-productivity pathways ($\beta = 0.65-0.71$) across all models indicated that once youth developed productive psychological orientations, they consistently translated those orientations into behavioral engagement and tangible outcomes regardless of the resource type that triggered the mindset shift. From a practical standpoint, these findings had profound implications for development programming: they suggested that integrating mindset cultivation components into existing interventions could dramatically enhance their effectiveness, that screening for or developing productive mindsets before providing costly resources could improve resource efficiency, and that standalone mindset interventions might generate spillover effects by helping youth better leverage resources they encounter through other channels. The partial rather than complete mediation for

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skills and capital implied that these resources retained some direct effects, suggesting an optimal integration approach rather than replacement of resource provision with mindset-only programming. However, the high proportion of effects mediated by mindset (54-84% across resources) indicated that the psychological pathway was primary, supporting the study's central argument that mindset cultivation should be recognized as foundational rather than supplementary to youth development efforts in Uganda and similar contexts.

Conclusion

This study systematically investigated the role of productive mindset as a foundational element in youth development within the Ugandan context, addressing three specific objectives through a rigorous mixed-methods quasi-experimental design. Regarding the first objective, the assessment of current mindset orientations among Ugandan youth revealed that participants exhibited moderate-to-low levels across all productive mindset dimensions at baseline, with self-efficacy scores averaging 22.4 out of 40, locus of control positioning near the midpoint between external and internal orientations (11.2-11.5 out of 23), growth mindset scores of 3.3-3.4 on a 6-point scale, and future time orientation scores of 38.7-39.2 out of 60. These baseline profiles indicated that Ugandan youth entered development programs with psychological orientations characterized by limited confidence in personal capabilities, moderate-to-high external attribution for life outcomes, mixed beliefs about their capacity for change, and constrained future planning—patterns that likely reflected broader socio-cultural influences including economic insecurity, educational systems emphasizing compliance over agency, and limited exposure to successful role models. Correlation analyses demonstrated that all mindset dimensions were significantly and positively associated with productivity indicators, with self-efficacy showing the strongest relationship with the Youth Productivity Index ($r = .61, p < .01$), followed by internal locus of control ($r = .54, p < .01$), growth mindset ($r = .48, p < .01$), and future time orientation ($r = .51, p < .01$), thereby identifying these dimensions as the most critical psychological predictors of youth developmental outcomes. Addressing the second objective, mediation analyses conclusively established that productive mindset significantly mediated the relationship between access to development resources and actual outcomes, accounting for 71.4% of skills training effects, 54.2% of financial capital effects, and 83.9% of mentorship effects on youth productivity. These findings confirmed that mindset functioned as the primary mechanism through which resources translated into tangible developmental gains, explaining why resource-provision alone often failed to produce expected outcomes and validating the theoretical conceptualization of mindset as a "master resource" that determined the effectiveness of all other developmental investments.

Regarding the third objective, the evaluation of targeted mindset cultivation interventions demonstrated remarkable effectiveness in shifting youth psychological orientations and subsequent productivity outcomes. The 12-week structured intervention produced large and statistically significant improvements across all mindset dimensions compared to control group participants who received only standard vocational training, with effect sizes ranging from $d = 0.85$ for risk attitude to $d = 1.24$ for growth mindset, all exceeding conventional thresholds for large effects. These proximal mindset improvements translated into substantial distal productivity gains: employment rates increased from 37.1% to 58.1% in the intervention group (versus 38.6% to 42.1% in controls), median monthly income rose approximately 60% (from 180,000 to 285,000 UGX compared to 175,000 to 190,000 UGX in controls), business

ownership increased from 24.8% to 38.4% (versus 23.3% to 25.7% in controls), and the composite Youth Productivity Index improved by 18.8 points compared to only 3.1 points in the control group, representing a very large effect size ($d = 1.55$) for the difference in change trajectories. These findings established that mindset cultivation interventions combining cognitive-behavioral techniques, entrepreneurial mindset training, and peer learning could produce meaningful and measurable developmental gains within a relatively brief timeframe and at modest cost (approximately \$45 per participant). Collectively, the study's findings across all three objectives provided robust evidence that productive mindset represents a foundational and cultivable element of youth development in Uganda, that specific mindset dimensions—particularly self-efficacy, internal locus of control, growth mindset, and future time orientation—are strongly associated with developmental outcomes, that mindset serves as the primary mediating mechanism through which developmental resources achieve their effects, and that systematic mindset cultivation interventions can effectively enhance both psychological orientations and tangible productivity outcomes among Ugandan youth, thereby warranting integration into mainstream youth development programming as a core rather than peripheral component.

Recommendations

Integration of Mindset Cultivation Components into All Youth Development Programs: Given that productive mindset mediated 54-84% of the effects of traditional development resources on youth outcomes, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, NGOs, and development partners should systematically integrate structured mindset cultivation modules into all existing youth programs including vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and livelihood initiatives. Specifically, programs should incorporate a minimum 8-12 week mindset development component delivered before or concurrently with technical skills training or capital provision, utilizing evidence-based approaches combining cognitive-behavioral techniques, growth mindset training, self-efficacy building exercises, goal-setting and future planning activities, and peer learning groups. Program budgets should allocate 15-20% of resources to mindset cultivation activities, recognizing this investment as foundational rather than supplementary, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks should include standardized mindset assessments alongside traditional economic indicators to track psychological changes and their relationship to program outcomes.

Development of Contextualized Mindset Assessment and Screening Tools for Program Targeting: Development agencies and implementing organizations should invest in developing and validating culturally appropriate mindset assessment instruments specifically adapted to the Ugandan context, which can be used for both program targeting and outcome evaluation. These tools should enable practitioners to identify youth with particularly limiting mindset orientations who may require intensive support before accessing costly resources like capital or advanced training, thereby improving resource allocation efficiency and program effectiveness. Additionally, screening mechanisms should be employed not to exclude youth from programs but to match intervention intensity to need, ensuring that those with the most significant psychological barriers receive adequate support to benefit from subsequent opportunities, while also identifying youth with already-productive mindsets who can serve as peer mentors and role models within program cohorts.

Establishment of a National Youth Mindset Initiative with Policy and Curriculum Reform: The Government of Uganda should establish a coordinated national initiative recognizing mindset cultivation as a strategic priority for youth development, involving reforms across multiple sectors including education (integrating growth mindset, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial thinking into primary and secondary curricula), religious institutions (engaging faith leaders to balance spiritual teachings with messages of personal agency and responsibility), media (creating youth-oriented content featuring successful young entrepreneurs and change-makers), and community development (training Village Health Teams and local council leaders in basic mindset cultivation techniques). This multi-sectoral approach should be coordinated through the National Youth Council with technical support from universities and research institutions, ensuring that mindset development becomes embedded in the broader socio-cultural environment rather than remaining confined to discrete program interventions, thereby creating sustainable ecosystem-level change in how Ugandan youth perceive themselves and their potential for productive contribution to national development.

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