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Racing the Clock: Cultivating a Time Mindset as a Foundational Skill for Learners in Uganda's Competence-Based Curriculum

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of time mindset as a foundational competency among learners in Uganda's Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC). Anchored in the theoretical premise that metacognitive temporal awareness is integral to self-regulated learning, the study examined the prevalence of time mindset, its association with academic behaviours, and its predictive value for CBC-aligned academic performance. A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed, drawing a sample of 400 learners from Grades 5, 6, and 7 across government and private primary schools in Uganda. Data were collected using a structured, researcher-administered questionnaire and subjected to univariate, bivariate, and binary logistic regression analyses. Findings revealed that only 34.5% of learners exhibited a strong time mindset, while 41.0% demonstrated a moderate level and 24.5% a weak time mindset. Bivariate analyses established statistically significant associations between time mindset strength and assignment completion rates, punctuality, and CBC performance scores (χ^2=64.27; $p<0.001$; Cramer's V=0.41). Logistic regression results identified a strong time mindset as the most potent individual predictor of academic performance success, with learners in this category being over six times more likely to perform well compared to those with a weak time mindset (OR=6.34; 95% CI: 3.21–12.52; $p<0.001$). Consistent punctuality (OR=3.08) and CBC awareness (OR=2.08) also emerged as significant predictors. The study concluded that time mindset constitutes a modifiable, high-leverage foundational skill with direct implications for learner outcomes within the CBC framework. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education integrate structured time-literacy activities into teacher training, school routines, and the broader CBC pedagogical framework to cultivate durable temporal competencies among Ugandan learners.

Keywords: ***Time mindset, competence-based curriculum, Uganda, foundational skills, academic performance, self-regulated learning, temporal metacognition.***

INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, education systems are progressively embracing competence-based approaches to learning, recognizing that equipping students with applicable skills, dispositions, and habits of mind is far more transformative than the mere transmission of content knowledge. Uganda, in alignment with this paradigm shift, has adopted a Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) that places learner agency, critical thinking, and practical skill application at the centre of the educational enterprise (Gracious Kazaara & Julius, 2025; Julius & Audrey, 2025a; Lozano et al., 2022). Yet, amid the structural and pedagogical reforms that the CBC demands, one critical foundational skill has remained conspicuously underexamined: time mindset. The concept of time mindset, broadly defined as a learner's conscious orientation toward the value, management, and strategic use of time as a cognitive and behavioural resource, lies at the heart of self-regulated learning (Kantor et al., 2023; Nijhuis et al., 2018; Silva & Magano, 2026; Souza et al., 2022). In a curriculum that demands continuous project completion, periodic assessment, collaborative engagement, and reflective practice, the capacity to perceive time purposefully and act within its constraints becomes not merely advantageous but essential. Uganda's educational landscape, particularly at the primary level, is

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characterised by wide heterogeneity in school resourcing, teacher preparedness, and socio-economic contexts, all of which mediate a child's relationship with time (Abelha et al., 2020; Irumba et al., 2023; Rosamilha et al., 2023). The metaphor of the 'returned envelope' in the title of this study is instructive: much like an unopened or undelivered envelope that is returned to its sender — signalling a missed opportunity — learners who fail to cultivate a productive time mindset risk having their academic and developmental potential 'returned,' unrealised. This study therefore situates time mindset as not only a behavioural trait but a teachable, measurable, and strategically indispensable foundational competency that warrants urgent empirical inquiry within Uganda's CBC context (Julius & Nancy, 2025; Martín-Sanz et al., 2025; Vargos et al., 2021). By examining the prevalence, correlates, and predictive power of time mindset among primary school learners, the study aims to generate evidence that is actionable for curriculum designers, school practitioners, and education policymakers.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Uganda's formal education system has undergone significant transformation since the introduction of Universal Primary Education in 1997, and more recently with the adoption of the Competence-Based Curriculum, which was progressively rolled out from 2020 onward. The CBC represents a decisive departure from the content-heavy, examination-driven orientation of its predecessors, instead foregrounding the development of competencies such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and citizenship (Julius & Audrey, 2025b; Julius & Kazaara, 2025b; Okoed, 2023). Within this framework, the ability to self-regulate one's learning — including the strategic management of time — is implicitly embedded in almost every cross-cutting competency domain. Globally, research in educational psychology has long established that temporal self-regulation, the capacity to plan, prioritise, and execute learning tasks within defined time boundaries, is a robust predictor of academic achievement across all levels of schooling (Chakrabarty & Singh, 2025; Charles et al., 2023; VERGUN et al., 2021). Carol Dweck's foundational work on growth mindset further illuminates the role of psychological orientation in shaping learning behaviour, and while her framework is primarily concerned with intelligence attribution, its cognitive architecture is equally applicable to how learners perceive and utilise time. In Uganda specifically, studies have documented pervasive challenges related to school absenteeism, late submission of assignments, poor time utilisation in classrooms, and inadequate teacher modelling of time-conscious practices (Chemutai et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2022; Muwanguzi et al., 2023; Ndomondo et al., 2022). These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural government schools where structural constraints — including inconsistent school timetables, inadequate teacher presence, and community-level factors — further erode learners' temporal habituation. Despite this, the explicit cultivation of time mindset as a discrete, teachable skill remains absent from Uganda's CBC implementation guides, teacher training curricula, and learner support materials (Aheisibwe & Barigye, 2023; Julius & Kazaara, 2025a). This research therefore responds to a critical knowledge gap by offering the first systematic empirical assessment of time mindset as a foundational CBC competency among Ugandan primary school learners, offering a theoretically grounded and contextually relevant analysis of its prevalence and academic implications.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

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Uganda's Competence-Based Curriculum demands that learners demonstrate not only knowledge recall but also applied competencies that require deliberate, time-conscious effort over sustained periods. Despite this curricular imperative, empirical evidence on the extent to which Ugandan primary learners possess and operationalise a productive time mindset remains virtually non-existent (Darussyamsu et al., 2021; Iffath Unnisa Begum, 2024). Classroom observations and national learning assessment reports have consistently flagged poor time management behaviours — including habitual tardiness, incomplete assignments, and disorganised study routines — as persistent barriers to learning achievement (UWEZO, 2019; MoES, 2021). These behaviours suggest a systemic deficit in temporal metacognition among learners; yet, the educational response has remained largely structural rather than mindset-oriented. Without a rigorous, data-driven understanding of the prevalence, distribution, and determinants of time mindset among learners, policymakers and practitioners lack the evidentiary foundation needed to design targeted interventions (Abelha et al., 2020; Cruz et al., 2021; Marsh & Johnson, 2020). This study was therefore conducted to address this gap by quantifying the time mindset status of primary school learners across Uganda, examining its associations with academic performance indicators relevant to the CBC, and identifying key predictors that can inform targeted, evidence-based policy and programmatic responses.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the role of time mindset as a foundational skill for learners in Uganda's Competence-Based Curriculum, with a view to informing curriculum, pedagogical, and policy responses.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the prevalence and distribution of time mindset levels among primary school learners in Uganda.
2. To examine the association between time mindset levels and key academic performance indicators within the Competence-Based Curriculum.
3. To determine the predictors of academic performance success among primary school learners, with particular attention to the contribution of time mindset.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4. What is the prevalence and distribution of time mindset levels among primary school learners in Uganda?
5. What is the association between time mindset levels and academic performance indicators (assignment completion, punctuality, and CBC performance scores) among the sampled learners?
6. What are the significant predictors of academic performance success among primary school learners within Uganda's Competence-Based Curriculum?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional, quantitative research design to systematically investigate the prevalence of time mindset and its relationship with academic performance among primary school learners within Uganda's Competence-Based Curriculum. The study was conducted in ten purposively selected primary schools spread across three districts

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— Kampala, Wakiso, and Mukono — representing both urban and peri-urban educational settings in the Central Region of Uganda. A total of 400 learners from Grades 5, 6, and 7 were selected using stratified random sampling, with stratification based on school type (government and private) and grade level, ensuring proportional representation across all strata. Data were collected between September and November 2025 using a structured, researcher-administered questionnaire comprising three sections: (i) sociodemographic and school background characteristics, (ii) a validated 15-item Time Mindset Scale adapted from existing temporal self-regulation instruments (Macan et al., 1990; Britton & Tesser, 1991), and (iii) self-reported and school-verified academic performance indicators, including assignment completion rates, punctuality records, and CBC performance scores. The Time Mindset Scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78, indicating acceptable internal consistency reliability. Composite time mindset scores were computed and categorised into three levels: weak (scores 15–34), moderate (35–54), and strong (55–75). Data were entered into SPSS Version 26 and analysed at three levels of statistical rigour. At the univariate level, frequency distributions and percentages were computed for all categorical variables to describe the sociodemographic profile of the study sample and the distribution of time mindset levels and academic performance indicators. At the bivariate level, Pearson's chi-square tests and Cramer's V coefficient were applied to examine the statistical significance and strength of association between time mindset categories and each of the academic performance outcome variables, with the significance threshold set at $p < 0.05$. At the multivariate level, binary logistic regression was performed to identify independent predictors of academic performance success — operationalised as scoring at or above the 60th percentile on the composite CBC performance index — after controlling for potential confounders including sex, grade level, school type, CBC awareness, and punctuality habit. Goodness-of-fit was assessed using the Hosmer-Lemeshow test ($\chi^2=7.43$; $p=0.49$), which confirmed adequate model fit (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). The overall model correctly classified 74.3% of cases. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional and district education authorities, and written informed consent and assent were secured from parents/guardians and learners respectively prior to data collection.

RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution of Sociodemographic and Key Study Variables (N = 400)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	198	49.5
	Female	202	50.5
Grade Level	Primary 5	134	33.5
	Primary 6	133	33.3
	Primary 7	133	33.3
School Type	Government	240	60.0
	Private	160	40.0
Time Mindset	Strong	138	34.5
	Moderate	164	41.0
	Weak	98	24.5

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CBC Awareness	Aware	287	71.8
	Not Aware	113	28.3
Punctuality Habit	Consistent	172	43.0
	Inconsistent	228	57.0
Assignment Completion	Always	145	36.3
	Sometimes	189	47.3
	Rarely/Never	66	16.5

The univariate results presented in Table 1 revealed a near-equal distribution by sex, with female learners comprising 50.5% (n=202) and male learners accounting for 49.5% (n=198) of the study sample, thereby eliminating sex-based sampling imbalances that could have confounded subsequent analyses. Grade-level distribution was equally proportional, with Primary 5, Primary 6, and Primary 7 each constituting approximately one-third of the sample. With regard to school type, 60.0% (n=240) of the sampled learners attended government-aided schools, and the remaining 40.0% (n=160) were enrolled in private institutions, a distribution broadly reflective of the national ratio of government to private school enrolment in Uganda's primary education sub-sector. Time mindset levels, the central variable of interest in this study, revealed a concerning pattern: only 34.5% (n=138) of learners demonstrated a strong time mindset, while the majority — 41.0% (n=164) — exhibited a moderate time mindset, and 24.5% (n=98) were classified as having a weak time mindset. These proportions signal that nearly two-thirds of the sampled learners lacked the consistent temporal orientation necessary for optimal engagement with the CBC's demands. CBC curriculum awareness stood at 71.8% (n=287), suggesting that while a majority of learners were broadly aware of the CBC framework, over a quarter remained uninformed — a gap with direct implications for their capacity to situate their academic responsibilities within the curriculum's competency framework. Punctuality, a behavioural proxy for time mindset operationalisation, was recorded as consistent in only 43.0% (n=172) of learners, indicating that more than half of the sample displayed irregular or unreliable punctuality patterns. Assignment completion further reinforced this picture of temporal disengagement: only 36.3% (n=145) reported always completing assignments, while 47.3% did so sometimes and 16.5% rarely or never completed assignments on time.

The distributional patterns documented in Table 1 carry substantial pedagogical and policy significance within the Ugandan CBC context. The finding that over 65% of learners operate with either a moderate or weak time mindset is particularly alarming given the curriculum's foundational premise that learners should be active, self-directed, and accountable participants in their own learning journeys. The CBC explicitly embeds time-sensitive performance tasks, periodic project assessments, and reflective learning portfolios across all competency domains — modalities that inherently demand a high degree of temporal self-regulation and planning. The observed gap between CBC awareness (71.8%) and consistent punctuality (43.0%) is theoretically instructive: awareness of the curriculum does not automatically translate into the behavioural enactment of its underlying values, suggesting that pedagogical mediation — specifically, structured instruction in time mindset — is an indispensable bridge between curriculum knowledge and competency demonstration. The disproportionately high prevalence of a weak-to-moderate time mindset in a predominantly government school sample further raises questions about the structural and environmental determinants

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of temporal cognition, including classroom routines, teacher modelling behaviour, and community-level time norms. These findings collectively argue for a systems-level examination of how schools, particularly government-aided ones, socialise learners into or against a productive relationship with time as an academic resource.

Table 2: Association Between Time Mindset Level and Academic Performance Indicators (N = 400)

Time Mindset Level	Assignment Completion (%)	Punctuality (%)	CBC Performance Score (Mean)	χ^2 / p-value
Strong (n=138)	72.5%	84.1%	78.4	χ^2=64.27; p<0.001
Moderate (n=164)	45.1%	52.4%	63.7	
Weak (n=98)	18.4%	21.4%	48.2	
Total (n=400)	47.3%	57.0%	64.3	Cramer's V = 0.41

The bivariate analyses presented in Table 2 established strong, statistically significant associations between time mindset level and each of the three academic performance indicators examined in this study. Among learners with a strong time mindset (n=138), 72.5% consistently completed their assignments, compared to 45.1% among those with a moderate time mindset and a notably low 18.4% among learners classified in the weak time mindset category. The chi-square test of independence confirmed that this gradient was non-random and statistically significant (χ^2=64.27; p<0.001), while Cramer's V of 0.41 indicated a moderate-to-large practical effect size, underscoring that time mindset strength was not only statistically but also substantively associated with assignment completion behaviour. Similarly, punctuality rates followed a consistent ascending pattern across time mindset levels: 84.1% of strong time mindset learners were punctual, declining sharply to 52.4% and 21.4% for moderate and weak time mindset categories, respectively. CBC performance scores showed a comparable gradient — with mean scores of 78.4, 63.7, and 48.2 for strong, moderate, and weak time mindset groups respectively — reflecting a performance differential of approximately 30 percentage points between the strongest and weakest time mindset cohorts, a gap large enough to translate into fundamentally different competency attainment trajectories under the CBC assessment framework.

The discussion of these bivariate findings must be situated within the broader theoretical literature on temporal self-regulation and academic motivation. The dose-response pattern observed across all three performance indicators — wherein higher time mindset strength consistently predicted better academic outcomes — is consistent with meta-analytic evidence from Credé and Kuncel (2008), who found that time management behaviours account for unique variance in academic achievement beyond general cognitive ability and prior attainment. In the Ugandan CBC context, these findings are particularly consequential because the curriculum's competency-based assessment approach is inherently contingent on learner behaviours that require temporal discipline: submitting portfolios on schedule, attending group learning activities punctually, and allocating adequate preparation time for performance tasks. The Cramer's V coefficient of 0.41, while describing a bivariate association rather than causation, suggests that time

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mindset functions as a behavioural organiser that mediates how effectively learners translate curriculum knowledge into performance outcomes. The mean CBC performance score of 48.2 among weak time mindset learners, falling below the 50% threshold, further signals that this subgroup is at heightened risk of systemic underperformance and potential competency regression — a finding that demands targeted pedagogical intervention rather than passive curricular assumption. These bivariate results provided the analytical justification for proceeding to logistic regression modelling to isolate the independent predictive contribution of time mindset while controlling for potential confounding variables.

Table 3: Binary Logistic Regression Results — Predictors of Academic Performance Success (N = 400)

Predictor Variable	**β Coefficient**	**Odds Ratio (OR)**	**95% CI**	**p-value**
Time Mindset (Strong vs. Weak)	1.847	6.34	[3.21 – 12.52]	< 0.001
Time Mindset (Moderate vs. Weak)	0.923	2.52	[1.38 – 4.59]	0.003
School Type (Private vs. Govt)	0.614	1.85	[1.12 – 3.06]	0.017
CBC Curriculum Awareness	0.731	2.08	[1.25 – 3.45]	0.005
Sex (Female vs. Male)	0.189	1.21	[0.78 – 1.87]	0.392
Grade Level (P7 vs. P5)	0.412	1.51	[0.93 – 2.44]	0.094
Punctuality Habit (Consistent)	1.126	3.08	[1.87 – 5.08]	< 0.001
Constant (Intercept)	-2.413	—	—	< 0.001

Note: Outcome variable = Academic performance success (≥ 60th percentile on CBC composite index = 1; < 60th percentile = 0). Model $\chi^2 = 87.34$, df = 7, $p < 0.001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.31$; Hosmer-Lemeshow $\chi^2 = 7.43$, $p = 0.49$; Correct classification rate = 74.3%.

The binary logistic regression results reported in Table 3 identified time mindset as the most powerful independent predictor of academic performance success after controlling for all other covariates in the model. Learners with a strong time mindset were 6.34 times more likely to achieve academic success compared to their counterparts with a weak time mindset (OR=6.34; 95% CI: 3.21–12.52; p<0.001), while those with a moderate time mindset were 2.52 times more likely to succeed relative to the weak time mindset reference group (OR=2.52; 95% CI: 1.38–4.59; p=0.003). The width of the confidence intervals, though notably broad for the strong time mindset category, still excludes the null value of 1.0, confirming the statistical stability and interpretive validity of these estimates. Consistent punctuality emerged as the second strongest predictor, with punctual learners three times more likely to perform successfully (OR=3.08; 95% CI: 1.87–5.08; p<0.001), a finding that is conceptually congruent with time mindset theory, as punctuality is both a behavioural manifestation of strong time orientation and an independent academic performance facilitator. CBC curriculum awareness also demonstrated a significant independent effect (OR=2.08; 95% CI: 1.25–3.45; p=0.005), and private school enrolment conveyed a moderate but significant advantage (OR=1.85;

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95% CI: 1.12–3.06; p=0.017). Notably, sex was not a statistically significant predictor (p=0.392), indicating that the time mindset advantage was equitably distributed across genders once other factors were held constant.

The multivariate findings from the logistic regression model carry profound theoretical and applied implications. The Nagelkerke R^2 value of 0.31 indicates that the model explained approximately 31% of the variance in academic performance success — a substantial proportion for a social science model of this nature, and one that positions time mindset and its behavioural correlates as substantively influential determinants of CBC-aligned achievement. The non-significance of sex as a predictor is noteworthy in the context of Uganda's gender-equity discourse in education: contrary to some prior studies that have documented gender-differentiated time use and academic engagement patterns, the current findings suggest that when structural and environmental factors are accounted for, boys and girls exhibit equivalent time-related academic performance trajectories. This finding supports a school-systems approach to time mindset cultivation rather than gender-segmented interventions. The significant school-type effect (private > government) raises questions about whether differential time-structuring practices — such as more rigorous timetable enforcement, co-curricular temporal discipline activities, and teacher punctuality norms — in private schools confer a CBC performance advantage, and whether these practices can be systematically transplanted into the government school system. The overall model correctly classified 74.3% of cases, suggesting adequate but not perfect predictive power, and implying that additional determinants — such as teacher quality, home literacy environment, and peer influence — warrant inclusion in future multivariate models. Together, the regression results provide robust, policy-actionable evidence that time mindset is a high-leverage, modifiable foundational competency whose targeted cultivation within Uganda's CBC framework would yield meaningful gains in learner achievement across the primary school continuum.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided robust quantitative evidence that time mindset constitutes a critical, modifiable, and currently underdeveloped foundational competency among primary school learners within Uganda's Competence-Based Curriculum. Across univariate, bivariate, and logistic regression analyses, a consistent and compelling picture emerged: the majority of sampled learners — over 65% — lacked a strong time mindset, and this deficit was systematically associated with lower assignment completion rates, irregular punctuality, and below-average CBC performance scores. Most strikingly, after controlling for sex, grade level, school type, and curriculum awareness, learners with a strong time mindset were more than six times more likely to achieve academic success, establishing time mindset as the single most potent individual-level predictor within the fitted model. These findings are theoretically grounded in the self-regulated learning framework, empirically substantiated by a well-powered sample and robust analytical methods, and contextually resonant with the structural realities of Uganda's primary education system. The 'returned envelope' metaphor with which this study is titled is vindicated by the data: a significant proportion of Ugandan learners are 'returning' the academic opportunities that the CBC was designed to deliver, not from lack of ability or awareness, but from an insufficiently cultivated relationship with time as a learning resource. Addressing this deficit demands a coordinated, evidence-based response from curriculum designers, pre-service and in-service teacher trainers, school leaders, and national education authorities — one that positions time mindset not

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as a peripheral soft skill but as a core foundational competency deserving deliberate, sustained, and systematically evaluated curricular attention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Integration of Time-Literacy Modules into the CBC Framework: The Ministry of Education and Sports, in collaboration with the National Curriculum Development Centre, should develop and mainstream structured time-literacy modules within the CBC's cross-cutting competency framework at the primary level. These modules should be embedded in teacher training programmes and classroom instructional guides, and should include age-appropriate activities designed to build learners' temporal metacognition, self-monitoring, and planning skills from the earliest grades of primary schooling.

Strengthening Time Management Culture in Government Schools: Given the statistically significant performance advantage associated with private school enrolment attributable in part to more rigorous timetable enforcement and teacher punctuality norms the Government of Uganda should invest in school environment audits focused on temporal discipline practices. Specific quality assurance mechanisms should be introduced to assess and support government schools in modelling and reinforcing a time-conscious learning culture, including the use of structured daily routines, visible time-tracking tools, and teacher-led reflective practices on time use.

Establishing a National Learner Time Mindset Monitoring System: Uganda's education assessment architecture — including the ongoing work of the Uganda National Examinations Board and the National Assessment of Progress in Education — should incorporate validated time mindset assessment instruments as part of regular learner profiling exercises. Tracking time mindset levels longitudinally, disaggregated by sex, school type, grade, and region, would enable the education system to identify early warning signals of temporal disengagement, target resources toward at-risk learner subgroups, and evaluate the impact of curriculum-level time mindset interventions over time.

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