

# How Mentors Build Skills for Success



***Grace Mueni Kalondu, a successful beekeeper, inspires other young people to start their own businesses and support their families.***

In the final months of her pregnancy, Grace Mueni Kalondu, 28, an Educate! trainer and mentor in Kitui, Kenya, was still on her feet. Passionate about supporting out-of-school youth to start businesses, she worked tirelessly until a few weeks before the birth of her second child.

Studies have shown that [mentorship is critical](#) to improving outcomes for youth, [especially young women](#), in regions where access to quality education and formal employment are limited. While academic secondary school and most skill development programs focus on classroom instruction with some hands-on components, they often overlook the value of continuous personalized feedback that a mentorship model can provide.

As one of Kitui's few female beekeepers and a counselor for young people living with HIV, Grace is uniquely placed to inspire youth to become economically active through Educate!'s [livelihood bootcamps](#). These bootcamps provide practical skills and business experience to support youth who missed out on formal secondary education.

Grace is also challenging traditional gender expectations, showing women that they too can succeed. She supports both young men and women to unpack gender stereotypes, describing Educate!'s sessions on gender equity as "an eye opener that creates a lot of debate, stories, and discussions."

## Fostering a Growth Mindset

For Educate! participants, especially those who can't complete secondary education due to early pregnancy, losing their parents, or other difficulties, mentors provide tailored support from someone who understands their struggles. What youth believe about what they can or cannot achieve – their mindset – is just as important as hard skills like budgeting and financial literacy. Mentors like Grace teach the importance of a growth mindset – believing in their ability to overcome obstacles and build skills.

“I love changing the lives of youth. Some of them have gone through hard situations, and at times they've given up,” says Grace. “Most are focused on white collar jobs and being employed. Their belief is ‘Since I didn't get my school certificate, the path to a good job is closed to me.’ Through lessons on a growth mindset, we change how they view their lives and how they rebuild.”

## Peer-to-peer Learning Drives Growth

Mentorship is also at the heart of Educate!'s work in schools. In Uganda, where our team guides secondary students through leadership and entrepreneurship sessions, mentors close in age to the students provide continuous coaching to better prepare them for the labor market.

Many mentors, like Isaac Oumo, 27, in Kampala, Uganda, once participated in [Educate!'s in-school model](#) themselves. Having realized his potential through the same curriculum and then starting a second-hand clothing business which employs two people, Isaac is more than qualified to support students in navigating obstacles. For young people, his experience is a source of inspiration and a reminder that success is within reach.

“They see me as one of the youth. I'm like them. So, it's so easy for them to converse with me, or get guidance from me. They feel that if he can do it, and he is one of us, then even us, ourselves, can do it too.”



By recruiting mentors who are business owners, we ensure they can offer firsthand insights into how the skills in the Educate! curriculum translate into real-world gains. Like Grace and Isaac, Babalanda Yosam, 27, is a small business owner with an agribusiness selling bananas and passionfruit. A former Educate! participant in secondary school, he also has a degree in agriculture and community development.

Babalanda's lessons at a bootcamp near Jinja, Uganda, carry weight as they demonstrate to youth how building skills can lead to tangible achievements. "I build their morale and spirit," he explains. "Many of them stay in touch with me after the bootcamp and send me pictures of their businesses."





*Babalanda proudly celebrates one of his students for completing a livelihood bootcamp in Uganda.*

## Educate!'s Core Approach and Mentorship Model

As a core component of Educate!'s approach, mentors are more than instructors delivering essential skills to transition to work, they're role models.



As Meghan Mahoney, Educate!'s Global Director of Research, Measurement, & Evaluation, emphasizes, “The reason we consider mentoring a critical component of the student experience is that skill development requires more than just attending classes. While it’s important for classes to be practical and hands-on, there must also be a strong connection between learning inside and outside the classroom. Students benefit from guidance and support from trusted mentors to navigate challenges effectively. Providing a course and practical exercises isn't enough; without that mentorship, students often struggle when

faced with obstacles. Mentors also genuinely care that youth are showing up and are invested in how they're doing, which can make all the difference.”

The impact of Educate!’s mentorship approach is clear. In Kenya and Uganda, bootcamp participants are experiencing **relative income gains of 50% or more** just three to six months after participation — for some, the difference between relying on family support and meeting their own needs independently. Graduates of Educate!’s in-school model in Uganda also earn nearly [double the income of their peers](#) toward the end of secondary school.

## Looking Forward

As Educate! continues to extend our impact across East Africa, mentorship remains a vital part of our approach. From Kenya to Uganda, mentors like Grace, Isaac, and Babalanda are equipping young people in their communities to address local challenges, and contributing to youth skills development and employability.

As Grace says: “My happiness comes from walking around town — you hear someone calling your name and you find out that you helped them change their life. That’s a good feeling!”