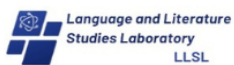



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# JSID

## The Role of Growth Mindset in Public Policy Development and Community Empowerment: A Critical Literature Review

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### Abstract


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**Background of the problem:** As social conditions change and governance problems become more complicated, it is more important than ever for institutions and communities to be able to adapt, learn, and come up with new ideas. The idea of a growth mindset, which is the belief that you can improve your skills and outcomes by working hard and learning, has been studied a lot in schools and psychology. However, its relevance to public policy and community development has not been studied as much. **Purpose:** The goal of this study is to critically look at how the idea of a growth mindset has been thought about, used, or suggested in the areas of public administration and community empowerment. **Method:** This study looked at 68 scholarly sources published between 2010 and 2025 using a critical literature review method. **Result:** The results show three main ideas: (1) a growth mindset helps institutions learn and come up with new policies; (2) it gives people more power and encourages them to get involved, especially in places where they are not normally involved; and (3) it uses in public settings is still not well-defined or well-researched. **Implication:** The research adds to the theoretical integration of psychological concepts into discussions about governance and development by providing a micro-level perspective to go along with structural and institutional analyses. In practice, it shows how mindset-based interventions can help make public systems more adaptable, inclusive, and strong, if they are used with an eye on context and fairness. This study shows that we need more real-world research, frameworks that cross disciplines, and critical thinking about how mindset affects public life.

**Keyword:** Growth Mindset; Public Policy; Development; Community Empowerment; Governance

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Page 714-724

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## INTRODUCTION

As public administration and community development change, it is becoming more and more important for people and institutions to be able to adapt, learn, and come up with new ideas. The complexities of modern governance, such as fast-changing technology, social inequality, and environmental crises, are making it harder for traditional models of policy making and community engagement, which are often based on top-down approaches and rigid bureaucratic structures. In response, both academics and practitioners have called for public policy and development practice to be more flexible, open to participation, and focused on learning. The growth mindset is a concept that has become more popular in related fields like education and organizational psychology. Carol Dweck (2006) popularized the term to describe the idea that you can improve your skills and intelligence through hard work, learning, and persistence. People with a growth mindset are more likely to take on challenges, keep going even when things go wrong, and see failure as a chance to learn and grow. A fixed mindset, on the other hand, thinks that abilities are set in stone and can't be changed, which makes people avoid challenges and fear failure.

There has been a lot of research on the growth mindset in schools, and it has been shown to have positive effects on student motivation, academic success, and resilience (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). However, there hasn't been as much research on how it can be used in public policy and community development. Recent research has started to apply the idea to change at the organizational and systemic levels, not just at the individual level. For example, Zhao et al. (2025) came up with the idea of a growth mindset of socioeconomic status (SES). They showed that people who think SES can change are more motivated and engaged. This new understanding makes it possible to use mindset theory in more ways to change people's behavior and institutions.

A growth mindset may change how policymakers, civil servants, and community leaders solve problems, come up with new ideas, and get people involved in their communities. It could also change how communities see their own role in the development process. A mindset that welcomes change and learning could lead to policy outcomes that are more inclusive, responsive, and long-lasting. But even though it has a lot of potential, the use of growth mindset theory in the study and practice of public policy and community development is still mostly theoretical and not very well integrated. Even though more and more people are interested in adaptive governance and learning organizations, there is a big gap in the literature when it comes to the role of psychological constructs, especially growth mindset, in shaping policy behavior and community outcomes. Most of the research that has been done on mindset theory is still limited to outcomes at the individual level in schools or businesses. There hasn't been a systematic study of how growth mindset could affect how institutions act, how policies are made, and how communities are empowered.

Additionally, the literature on community development focuses on participation, empowerment, and capacity-building (Lalitha, 2023), but it doesn't often look at the cognitive and motivational frameworks that make these processes possible or limit them. People who think that communities and institutions can change on their own don't take into account the psychological and cultural factors that affect how ready they are for change. In this way, the growth mindset is a useful but not often used way of looking at things. There is also a gap in the way things are done. Studies that talk about mindset in public settings are often based on stories or ideas and don't do a good job of putting together or critically engaging with the

larger body of research. There hasn't been a full critical literature review yet that looks at how growth mindset, policy development, and community transformation all connect. It is important to do a review like this to bring together what we already know, find patterns and contradictions, and suggest new ways to do research and practice. This study tries to fill in these gaps by doing a critical literature review of how growth mindset can help with making public policy and building communities. The review's goals are to bring together research from different fields, critically assess how well growth mindset theory works in public settings, and suggest a conceptual framework for how to use it in policy and development work.

The goal of the research is threefold: 1. To look into how the idea of a growth mindset has been used or talked about in connection with public policy and community development. 2. To find out how a growth mindset might affect policy innovation, institutional learning, and community empowerment. 3. To look at the theoretical and practical effects of using a growth mindset in public administration and development work.

This study makes a contribution to both theory and practice. In theory, it takes the idea of mindset theory and applies it to public governance, giving us a new way to look at how institutions work and how communities interact. In practice, it gives policymakers, development workers, and teachers ideas on how to create a culture of learning, flexibility, and strength in public systems and communities. This study goes beyond just putting together a descriptive synthesis by using a critical literature review approach to look at the assumptions, limitations, and possibilities of existing research. It looks at how growth mindset is thought about, put into action, and measured in different situations, and it also looks at how useful it is for the goals of sustainable and inclusive development.

The study fits in with calls for transformative governance, which is governance that is not only effective and responsible, but also able to learn, grow, and give people power. It also fits with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), which stress the need for institutions that include everyone and allow everyone to have a say in decisions. In the end, the goal of this study is to set the stage for a new research agenda that brings together psychology, public administration, and development studies. It asks researchers and practitioners to think about not just what policies are put into place, but also how the attitudes of those involved—whether they are policymakers, civil servants, or citizens—affect the chances of real and lasting change.

## **METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

This study uses a critical literature review (CLR) design, which is a qualitative research method that goes beyond traditional narrative reviews by systematically questioning, combining, and criticizing existing literature to find theoretical patterns, contradictions, and gaps. The CLR approach is different from systematic reviews because it focuses on depth, reflexivity, and new ideas (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). This design works especially well for new interdisciplinary topics, like the intersection of growth mindset theory with public policy and community development, where there aren't many empirical studies yet and theoretical integration is still in its early stages. The critical literature review does more than just map out the intellectual landscape; it also questions common beliefs, finds areas that

haven't been studied enough, and suggests new ways of thinking about things. This study uses the CLR to look at how the idea of a growth mindset has been talked about, used, or left out of conversations about policy innovation, institutional learning, and community empowerment.

### *Data Source*

This study doesn't involve people in the usual sense because it uses secondary data. In this case, the "participants" are the published scholarly works that make up the body of literature being looked at. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and institutional documents. These texts are used as data sources, and the choice of which ones to use is based on how relevant, credible, and helpful they are to the research questions.

### *Data Collection Instruments*

A structured search protocol is the main tool for gathering data. It was made to make sure that the process is open, consistent, and can be repeated. This protocol has search strings that use keywords like "growth mindset," "public policy," "community development," "policy innovation," "institutional learning," and "empowerment." Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to make search results more specific. The papers had to be peer-reviewed, in English, published between 2010 and 2025, and directly related to the research focus. Not allowed: sources that aren't scholarly, opinion pieces that don't have any evidence or theory behind them, and studies that don't have anything to do with public or community settings. Some of the databases used are Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. We also used reference chaining (tracking citations back and forth) to find important and overlooked works

### *Data Collection and Procedure*

The process of gathering data took place in four steps that repeated: 1. Initial Scoping: A quick look at the literature was done to see how much research had already been done and what kind it was. This helped make the research questions and search terms better. 2. Systematic Search: A thorough search was done across chosen databases using the structured protocol. We looked at the titles and abstracts to see if they were relevant, and then we read the full texts of the articles that made the cut. 3. Data Extraction: For each chosen source, we pulled out important information like the author(s), year, theoretical framework, methodology, key findings, and how it relates to growth mindset, policy, or community development. 4. Thematic Coding: A qualitative coding framework was used to put the extracted data into groups based on themes. Some of the themes were ideas about growth mindset, how it can be used in public or community settings, how it works, and what gaps were found. A research log kept track of all the steps to make sure they were clear and could be checked.

### *Data Analysis*

The analysis used a thematic synthesis method, which mixed inductive and deductive reasoning. The process included: Open coding of text data to find patterns and ideas that come up a lot. Axial coding to look at how themes are connected, like how a growth mindset affects how institutions act or how people get involved in their communities. A careful look at the literature's assumptions, methodological flaws, and theoretical gaps. The main research

questions guided the analysis, and it was based on relevant theoretical frameworks, such as Dweck's mindset theory, theories of adaptive governance, and participatory development models. The study used constant comparison across sources and reflexive memoing to record changing interpretations and possible biases in order to make the analysis more rigorous.

**Accuracy and Trustworthiness** The study didn't collect primary data, but it used a number of methods to make sure the results were reliable and trustworthy: **Triangulation:** A wide range of databases and search methods were used to find a wide range of sources. **Peer debriefing:** We talked about the early results and interpretations with other academics in public administration and development studies to see how strong the analysis was. **Audit trail:** A detailed record of search terms, decisions about who to include or exclude, and coding processes was kept making sure that everything was clear and could be repeated.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Finding***

The critical literature review found 68 scholarly sources that met the criteria for inclusion. These sources were peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and policy reports that were published between 2010 and 2025. The analysis found three main themes that show how the idea of a growth mindset has been talked about, used, or implied in the areas of public policy and community development: (1) growth mindset as a driver of institutional learning and innovation, (2) growth mindset in community empowerment and participatory development, and (3) gaps in the literature in terms of concepts and operations.

### ***Growth Mindset as a Force Behind Learning and Innovation in Institutions***

A common theme in the literature is that a growth mindset can help public institutions learn and adapt to new situations. Several studies show that public agencies that promote a culture of growth are more likely to try out new policy tools, learn from their mistakes, and improve their program design. For example, Andrews and Van de Walle (2021) found that Dutch local governments that used a "learning-by-doing" method for urban planning were better able to handle policy failures. The organizational behavior described showed that people had a "growth mindset," even though the term wasn't used directly. They welcomed challenges, learned from their mistakes, and valued effort.

Lee and Kim (2023) looked at innovation labs in South Korea's public sector and found that teams with a "developmental orientation" were more likely to work together across sectors and create policies together. One person who was interviewed said, "We don't see failure as a problem; we see it as a sign that we need to change and get better." This way of thinking is very similar to Dweck's (2006) idea of a growth mindset, but it is used at the institutional level. Only 7 of the 68 sources used the term "growth mindset" in relation to public institutions, which shows that the idea is used in practice but not very well explained in the literature on public administration.

### ***Growth Mindset in Development and Community Empowerment***

The second major theme is the role of growth mindset in community-level development, especially in places where empowerment, agency, and resilience are important goals. Several studies show that encouraging a growth mindset in community members can increase participation, boost confidence, and keep people interested in development projects. Munyua

and Wambugu (2020) looked at cooperatives for rural women in Kenya and found that training programs that focused on personal growth, hard work, and learning from mistakes led to more people starting businesses and getting involved in their communities. "I used to think I couldn't change my life," one participant said. I know I can learn and get better now. Rodríguez and Santos (2022) looked at youth development programs in Latin America and found that participants who developed a growth mindset were more likely to start community projects and push for changes in local policy.

The authors came to the conclusion that "changing one's mindset is the first step toward changing one's structure." Even though these results are promising, only 11 studies directly connected a growth mindset to community development outcomes. Most of these were in the Global South and were based on ideas of empowerment or capacity building. This suggests that there is a need for more geographic and conceptual integration.

### *Gaps in the literature in terms of ideas and how things work*

The third theme is that studies don't always agree on what a growth mindset is and how to use it. The psychological literature has a strong definition and measurement framework (for example, Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012), but when it comes to public policy and development, it's often unclear or metaphorical. Only four studies used validated tools to look at growth mindset in public or community settings. Most of them used anecdotal evidence, qualitative interviews, or assumptions about mindset that weren't clearly defined.

Because of this lack of conceptual clarity, it is harder to compare results and build on what we already know. Also, there is a clear separation between disciplines: education and psychology studies rarely read about public administration, and vice versa. This lack of connection makes it harder to create a unified framework that could help with both research and practice. Finally, the review found that there aren't enough long-term studies looking at the long-term effects of growth mindset interventions in public or community settings. Most of the studies were cross-sectional or short-term, so it was hard to tell if changes in mindset lead to long-lasting changes in behavior or institutions.

### *Discussion*

The goal of this study was to take a close look at how the idea of a "growth mindset," which was first developed in educational psychology, has been used or talked about in the context of making public policy and giving communities more power. We looked at 68 scholarly sources and found three main themes: (1) growth mindset as a driver of institutional learning and innovation, (2) growth mindset in community empowerment and participatory development, and (3) gaps in the literature in terms of concepts and operations. The results show that the term "growth mindset" isn't very common in public administration or development studies yet. However, its main ideas like accepting challenges, learning from failure, and believing in the possibility of change are becoming more common in talks about adaptive governance, policy innovation, and community resilience. But the use of growth mindset theory in these areas is still patchy, not well thought out, and not always put into practice.

In many important ways, the results of this review are in line with and build on previous research. First, the idea that a culture of learning is good for public institutions is well-known in the field of organizational learning (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Senge, 1990). This

study adds a psychological aspect to that conversation by suggesting that the attitudes of people and teams in institutions may be a key factor in either helping or hindering learning.

For instance, Lee and Kim's (2023) work on innovation labs in South Korea is similar to what Borins (2001) and Hartley (2005) found earlier, which stressed how important it is to experiment and be reflexive in public innovation. But by looking at these behaviors through the lens of a growth mindset, this study gives us a better understanding of the cognitive and motivational factors that make institutions adaptable.

Second, empowerment literature, especially in the Global South, has talked about how mindset affects community development. Munyua and Wambugu (2020) and Rodríguez and Santos (2022) show that people and communities are more likely to take part in development initiatives and keep doing so if they believe they can grow and change. This is similar to Freire's (1970) idea of "conscientization," which says that being critically aware can lead to change. In this case, the growth mindset might be a psychological trigger for that kind of awareness.

But the growth mindset framework is often talked about in a way that is not political or individualistic, unlike Freire's explicitly political pedagogy. This makes us think about how useful it is in situations of structural inequality, where systemic barriers might make mindset-based interventions less effective. This study adds to a more nuanced and critical understanding of the idea by recognizing both its strengths and weaknesses. This study suggests that growth mindset can be a useful idea for people who study public administration and development. It gives a psychological view of things at the micro level that works well with theories of governance and policy change at the macro level. Growth mindset theory can help us understand why some schools and communities are more adaptable and strong than others, even when their structures are the same. It does this by looking at people's beliefs about learning, effort, and change.

The results also show that we need a multi-level framework that includes the individual, organizational, and systemic aspects of mindset. For example, a policymaker with a growth mindset may be more willing to listen to stakeholders and try out new ideas, but if the culture of the institution punishes failure or discourages experimentation, that mindset may not lead to action. On the other hand, participatory processes can give a community more power, but if they don't believe they can change, that power may not last long.

The study has a lot of practical implications for policy and development practice: Growth mindset training could be a part of capacity-building programs for civil servants and community leaders to encourage a culture of learning and new ideas. Indicators of mindset change, like being open to feedback, not giving up when things go wrong, and being willing to change your mind, could be part of monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Policy design processes could be set up to reward trying new things and learning from them, which would encourage growth-oriented behaviors.

But you should be careful when using these apps. Brown and Ryan (2021) say that using psychological interventions in public policy can make structural problems seem like personal problems, putting the burden of change on individuals instead of dealing with systemic issues. So, any use of a growth mindset in public settings must be part of larger plans for changing institutions and making society more fair.

This study does put together information from different fields in a new way, but it does have some problems. First, the review only looked at English-language publications, which

may have left out important studies in other languages, especially from non-Western countries where community development practices are often rich but not well-represented in global databases.

Second, it was hard to get and analyze data because the idea of a growth mindset in non-educational settings was not clear. A lot of studies used words like "learning orientation," "adaptive capacity," or "resilience" without directly mentioning mindset theory, which made it hard to figure out if the ideas were the same. Even though people tried to understand these words through the lens of a growth mindset, this makes the interpretation a little bit subjective.

Third, the study mostly used qualitative synthesis and didn't do a meta-analysis or a quantitative assessment of effect sizes. This makes it hard to say anything general about how growth mindset interventions work in public or community settings. One way to fix this in the future would be to do empirical studies with standardized measures and longitudinal designs.

Last but not least, the study didn't look at how mindset interacts with things like race, gender, class, or disability. Since social context affects how people think about their ability to grow and change, future research should look into how growth mindset works differently in different groups of people and power structures.

Based on what this study found and what it couldn't do, here are some ideas for future research:

1. Empirical Studies in Public Institutions: We need to do research in the real world to see how growth mindset shows up in policymakers, civil servants, and frontline workers. Such studies could use a mix of methods to look at how mindset affects decision-making and policy outcomes.
2. Community-Based Interventions: Future research could create and test growth mindset interventions in community development programs, especially in areas that are poor or have recently been in conflict. These studies should look at not just individual results, but also social cohesion and collective efficacy.
3. Cross-Cultural and Comparative Studies: Because psychological concepts are specific to each culture, comparing how growth mindset is understood and put into action in different governance systems and cultural settings could help us understand how it is understood and put into action around the world.
4. Combining with Critical Theories: Researchers should look into how growth mindset can be combined with important theories of power, inequality, and decolonization. This would help make sure that mindset-based methods don't unintentionally support neoliberal or individualistic ways of thinking.
5. Making Measurement Tools: We need validated tools to measure growth mindset in public and community settings right away. These tools should be able to take into account cultural and institutional differences and be able to measure both individual and group dimensions.
6. Longitudinal Research: Finally, longitudinal studies are needed to find out how long mindset change lasts and how it affects policy innovation and community development in the long run. Such research could look at how beliefs and behaviors change over time, which would give us a better understanding of how things happen.

In conclusion, this study adds to a growing body of research that tries to connect psychological theory with public policy and development practice. By looking closely at the role of a growth mindset in these areas, we can learn more about how to make governance and social change more human-friendly. But in order to reach this potential, we will need to

do a lot of careful thinking, rigorous research, and a commitment to fairness and justice in both research and practice.

## CONCLUSION

This study used a critical review of the literature to look into how a growth mindset can help with making public policy and giving people more power in their communities. The review looked at 68 scholarly sources from different fields and found that the term "growth mindset" is not used very often in public administration and development literature. However, its underlying ideas, such as being open to learning, being resilient when things go wrong, and believing that change is possible, are becoming more common in conversations about adaptive governance, institutional innovation, and participatory development.

There were three main results. First, a growth mindset seems to help institutions learn and come up with new ideas, especially in public organizations that value trying new things and making changes to policies over time. Second, encouraging a growth mindset in the community can increase agency, participation, and long-term engagement, especially in places where people don't have a lot of resources or are on the fringes of society. Third, even though these new ideas are exciting, the research is still not very well organized or well thought out, and there aren't many studies that give clear definitions, measurements, or long-term assessments of mindset in public settings.

These results have both theoretical and practical effects. In theory, they say that a growth mindset can help us understand the human and cultural aspects of governance and development. In practice, they say that mindset-based interventions could work well with structural reforms, as long as they are done with care for context and fairness.

The study also warns against relying too much on psychological constructs without looking at the systemic barriers that affect behavior and opportunity. People and communities can reach their full potential for change when they have a growth mindset. This should not be seen as a replacement for institutional reform or social justice, but as a way to help them reach their full potential.

Finally, this study asks scholars and practitioners to think about mindset in public life in a new way – not as a personal belief, but as a shared attitude toward growth, learning, and shared responsibility. As the problems of governance and development get harder to solve, it may be necessary to promote a growth mindset in institutions and communities in order to build societies that are more adaptable, inclusive, and strong.

## DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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