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CONTRIBUTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING TO THE REDUCTION OF YOUTH CRIME AMONG RECONSTRUCTED LIVING LABS BENEFICIARIES IN IRINGA MUNICIPALITY, TANZANIA.

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the contribution of entrepreneurship training to the reduction of youth crime among **Reconstructed Living Labs Beneficiaries** in Iringa Municipality. A mixed-methods research approach was employed using a cross-sectional research design. The study involved 92 youth respondents selected through simple random sampling and 8 key informants selected purposively. Primary data were collected using questionnaire and interview guides, while secondary information was obtained from relevant reports and official documents. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that entrepreneurship training contributed to youth crime reduction by improving business knowledge, practical entrepreneurial skills, self-employment readiness, problem-solving skills and the ability of youth to engage in lawful income-generating activities. The findings further indicated that entrepreneurship training encouraged responsible decision-making and reduced engagement in risky behaviours associated with youth crime. However, limited access to some entrepreneurship support services affected the extent to which the training could translate into sustainable economic opportunities for youth. The study concludes that entrepreneurship training contributes to the reduction of youth crime by enhancing youth employability, self-reliance and participation in lawful economic activities. The study recommends strengthening practical entrepreneurship training and improving access to complementary business support

to enable trained youth to apply the skills acquired and sustain lawful income-generating activities.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Youth crime remains a social problem in many parts of the world, particularly where young people face unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and limited economic opportunities. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2022) highlights the need for preventive approaches that address the conditions contributing to youth involvement in crime. Entrepreneurship training can provide young people with business knowledge, practical skills and preparation for self-employment, creating opportunities for lawful economic participation. In Africa, unemployment and limited access to productive activities remain important concerns among young people (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2020).

In Tanzania, youth empowerment is an important development priority because young people aged 15–35 years accounted for 34.5% of the national population in the 2022 Population and Housing Census (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2024). Providing young people with practical skills and opportunities for self-employment is therefore important for strengthening economic participation. However, the persistence of criminal activities highlights the need for effective prevention approaches that address the circumstances affecting youth. Entrepreneurship training may contribute to crime reduction by improving business management skills, encouraging productive activities and creating opportunities for legitimate income generation. Its actual contribution, however, needs to be established through evidence from specific local settings.

In Iringa Municipality, entrepreneurship training provided by Reconstructed Living Labs (RLabs) offers an opportunity for youth skills development and crime reduction. Although entrepreneurship training aims to equip young people with business knowledge and practical skills, limited empirical evidence exists on its specific contribution to reducing youth crime in the municipality. Previous studies on youth self-employment and community policing, including Manyerere (2020) and Saidi et al. (2025), address related issues but do not establish the contribution of entrepreneurship training to youth crime reduction. Therefore, this study assesses the contribution of entrepreneurship training to the reduction of youth crime in Iringa Municipality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

This study is guided by Strain Theory, developed by Robert K. Merton in 1938, which explains that crime may occur when individuals face difficulties in achieving socially accepted goals through legitimate means. Limited access to employment, income and other economic opportunities may create pressure among youth and increase their risk of engaging in criminal behaviour (Merton, 1938; Agnew, 2017; Agnew, 2020). In relation to this study, entrepreneurship training can help reduce such strain by equipping youth with business knowledge, practical skills and self-employment capabilities that provide legitimate economic opportunities. The Strain Theory provides a relevant basis for explaining how entrepreneurship training may contribute to the reduction of youth crime in Iringa Municipality by enabling young people to pursue lawful income-generating activities.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Empirical studies show that entrepreneurship training develops business skills, practical competencies and readiness for self-employment among young people. Anosike and Oluwatobi (2021) found that entrepreneurship education developed skills in business planning, market intelligence and record keeping among students in northern Nigeria. Similarly, Nade and Malamsha (2021) found that agri-entrepreneurship training was associated with entrepreneurial intentions among youth in Tanzania. Al-Swidi et al. (2020) and Bjorvatn et al. (2021) also highlighted the importance of practical and interactive training in developing usable business skills. These findings suggest that entrepreneurship training can strengthen young people's ability to establish and manage productive economic activities. Entrepreneurship training can also strengthen self-employment readiness and problem-solving skills, which may provide alternatives to involvement in crime. Melyoki (2021) found that the STRYDE youth enterprise intervention strengthened young people's capabilities and supported enterprise development and employment in Tanzania. Kim et al. (2020) reported that entrepreneurship education improved creativity, social problem-solving and opportunity identification among young people. Rusibamayila and Magali (2026) similarly highlighted the contribution of entrepreneurship education to skills development and career opportunities. However, these studies mainly examined entrepreneurial skills, intentions and employment-related outcomes rather than direct youth crime reduction. Therefore, the present study examines how business skills acquisition, practical training sessions, self-employment readiness and problem-solving skills gained through entrepreneurship training contribute to the reduction of youth crime in Iringa Municipality.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed research approach and a cross-sectional research design to examine the contribution of entrepreneurship training to the reduction of youth crime in Iringa Municipality. A mixed-methods approach enables the collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data to develop a broader understanding of a research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study was conducted at RLabs, which provides entrepreneurship training to young people. The population consisted of 120 youth aged 15–35 years who participated in RLabs entrepreneurship programmes and eight key informants, including five RLabs facilitators, two Community Development Officers and one Ward Executive Officer. A sample of 92 youth was selected using simple random sampling, while the eight key informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge and experience of entrepreneurship training and youth development (Kothari, 2004).

Quantitative data were collected using questionnaires and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26. Frequencies, percentages and mean scores were used to summarise the findings. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically by identifying and organising recurring ideas into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis focused on business skills acquisition, practical training sessions, self-employment readiness and problem-solving skills in relation to youth crime reduction. Ethical principles were observed by obtaining research permission and informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and using the collected information for academic purposes only (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Contribution of business skills acquisition to the reduction of youth crime

This subsection presents findings on the contribution of business skills acquisition to the reduction of youth crime among RLabs participants in Iringa Municipality. The analysis focuses on the types of business skills received, whether the acquired skills enabled youth to start their own businesses, challenges faced when applying the skills and the ways in which business skills contributed to reducing youth involvement in theft.

4.1.1 Business skills training to RLabs Beneficiaries

The skills provided through RLabs training were concentrated more on marketing and financial management than on business planning and customer care. The distribution shows that practical attention was given to skills needed to attract customers, manage income and

organize business activities. This pattern shows that the training addressed basic capacities needed for lawful economic participation, which is relevant to reducing youth involvement in theft. Table 1 shows marketing skills accounted for 33.7%, making them the most commonly reported skill and indicating strong emphasis on product promotion and customer identification. Financial management accounted for 29.3%, showing substantial attention to managing business income and expenditure, while business planning at 21.7% indicates preparation for organizing business activities. Customer care recorded 15.2%, showing comparatively less exposure to skills for maintaining customer relationships.

Marketing, financial management and business planning provided knowledge used in productive economic activities, giving youth legitimate ways of earning income instead of relying on theft. The RLAbs Programme Coordinator, further clarified the practical content of the training:

Marketing is one of the important areas covered during the training. Participants learn how to identify customers and present their products. They also learn ways of reaching customers and promoting their businesses. Financial management helps them understand how to use business income properly (Interview with RLAbs Programme Coordinator, June 2026).

The skills involved practical business activities rather than training based only on theory. This supports the researcher's observation that business skills contributed to theft reduction through preparation for lawful income-generating activities. It also agrees with Nkurunziza et al. (2022), who reported that entrepreneurship training strengthened entrepreneurial competencies among youth. The present finding shows that the skills acquired through RLAbs were connected with lawful economic engagement, which formed one of the observed pathways towards reducing youth involvement in theft.

4.1.2 Respondents' business establishment after RLAbs training

The movement from training into self-employment shows the extent to which acquired business skills were put into economic practice. The findings in Table 1 show that 58.7% had started their own businesses after training, while 41.3% had not. This pattern indicates that more than half had moved from skills acquisition to actual business activity, creating a direct link between entrepreneurship training and lawful economic engagement. The 58.7% who started businesses indicate practical application of the acquired skills, while the 41.3% who had not started businesses show that the transition into self-employment was not achieved by all. The researcher observed that those who started businesses had a structured economic activity that provided a lawful source of income and occupied their time. This pattern is relevant to vandalism, as regular involvement in business activities provides productive daily

engagement and reduces exposure to unproductive activities associated with disorder in the community. The practical application of the training was further explained by the RLabs Programme Officer, who explained that:

Some participants start their own businesses after completing the training. The businesses usually begin at a small level based on the resources available to each participant. Participants use the knowledge gained from training to manage their activities (Interview with Key Informant 2, Programme Officer, 2 July 2026)

The finding from this study is supported by the study from Cho and Honorati (2021), who found that entrepreneurship programmes improved employment and business outcomes among young people in developing countries. It also relates to Kluve et al. (2019), who found positive employment outcomes from youth programmes containing entrepreneurship components. In this study, starting a business represented a practical outcome of entrepreneurship training and provided structured economic activity associated with reduced involvement in vandalism such as destruction of properties.

Table 1: Respondents' business skills training and youth crime reduction.

Parameter	Frequency	Percent (%)
Business skills received		
Financial management	27	29.3
Business planning	20	21.7
Marketing skills	31	33.7
Customer care	14	15.2
Total	92	100.0
Started own business after training		
Yes	54	58.7
No	38	41.3
Total	92	100.0
Challenges applying business skills		
Lack of capital	19	35.2
Lack of market	7	13.0
Lack of business experience	1	1.9
Lack of equipment	27	50.0
Total	54	100.0
Contribution of business skills to theft reduction		
Improved lawful income activities	23	42.6
Reduced idle time	30	55.6
Improved self-reliance	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

Source: Field Data 2026.

4.1.3 Constrained to application of business skills

The application of business skills was constrained mainly by limited physical and financial resources rather than lack of business knowledge alone. The findings in Table 1 show that lack of equipment accounted for 54.3% of the respondents, followed by lack of capital which was stated by 32.6% of the respondents, lack of market reported by 12.0% of the respondents and lack of business experience reported by 1.1% of the respondents who had started businesses. The pattern shows that the main difficulty in converting acquired skills into sustained economic activity was access to resources required for putting the skills into practice. The lack of equipment indicates that business knowledge was not sufficient for activities requiring tools and materials. The 32.6% reporting lack of capital further shows that financial resources were a major condition for maintaining business activities, while the 12.0% reporting lack of market points to difficulty in converting products or services into income. These conditions limit the extent to which lawful economic activities are sustained, reducing the protective role of business engagement against theft and other forms of youth crime. The resource-related constraint was also reflected in the interview evidence. The Community Facilitator, explained:

Having business skills alone is not enough to start some businesses. Equipment is needed for certain activities and capital is also required to purchase materials and meet other business costs. Access to customers is another important part of running a business (Interview with Community Facilitator, 2 July 2026)

The high proportion associated with lack of equipment and shows that the gap between acquiring skills and applying them was linked to access to practical resources. The researcher observed that where skills were not converted into active businesses, the expected contribution of lawful economic engagement to reducing youth involvement in theft was less evident. The finding is consistent with Magali and Mbagwa (2022), who found that training, savings and credit facilities and start-up tools had positive relationships with youth employability in Tanzania. Nade (2021) also identified financial, training and material support as important elements of an enabling environment for youth enterprise start-ups in Tanzania and India. The present finding adds that lack of equipment and capital remained important barriers to translating business skills into sustained lawful economic activities.

4.1.4 Respondents' business skills and theft reduction

Respondents were asked to state how of the business skills contribute to the theft reduction in study area. The findings in Table 1 show that 55.4% of the respondents identified reduced idle time, while 42.4% of the respondents identified improved lawful income activities and

2.2% of the respondents reported improved self-reliance. The distribution indicates that keeping youth engaged in productive activities was the strongest reported pathway through which business skills contributed to reducing involvement in theft.

About 55.4% of the respondents reporting reduced idle time shows that business skills were linked with increased engagement in productive activities, while the 42.4% of the respondents reported improved lawful income activities show a strong connection between skills and legitimate income generation. The researcher observed that these two forms of change reduced the conditions associated with theft by providing productive use of time and lawful ways of obtaining income. The small proportion of 2.2% of the respondents reported improved self-reliance indicates that this was less frequently identified as the direct contribution to theft reduction. The finding is supported by the interview evidence from the Community Development Officer, who described how business activities affected the use of time:

Business activities give participants productive ways of using their time. Participants who engage in these activities spend their time working and earning lawful income. The skills also help participants identify opportunities within their communities (Interview with Key Informant 5, Community Development Officer, 2 July 2026)

The business skills were connected with productive use of time and lawful income generation. This supports particularly the high proportion identifying reduced idle time and lawful income activities as pathways to theft reduction. The finding is supported by Heller (2022), who found that youth employment programmes consistently reduced criminal-justice involvement across several employment experiments. Kessler et al. (2022) also found that participation in a youth employment programme reduced arrests and convictions, with stronger effects among youth at higher risk of criminal-justice involvement. In the present study, business skills were linked with theft reduction through productive use of time and participation in lawful income-generating activities.

4.2 Practical training sessions and the reduction of youth crime

Practical training focuses on applying acquired skills through activities that relate to real-life work and business situations. The findings examine how practical training was delivered and applied within RLabs programmes. The analysis also considers how this training contributed to reducing youth involvement in physical assault.

4.2.1. Business training session and among RLAb beneficiaries

The duration pattern shows the extent of continued exposure to practical training within RLAb programmes. Longer attendance provides more sustained contact with structured learning and practical activities. The distribution also shows the period within which most of the reported training-related behavioural changes were experienced. Table 2 show that 40.2% attended training for 5–7 months, making this the largest duration category. The 39.1% attending for 1–4 months shows that a nearly equal proportion received training for a shorter period, while 14.1% attended for 8–11 months and 6.5% for one year and above, showing that prolonged attendance was less common. The study observed that practical training was mainly received within seven months, while the crime-related results recorded improved discipline, improved communication, improved conflict handling and reduced involvement in fights as reported forms of physical assault reduction. Amo-Adjei et al. (2025) reported that youth interventions combining skills development and life-skills components were associated with reductions in violence-related outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa.

4.2.2 Respondents' business training duration

Respondents were asked to state the training methods use to deliver business training to the respondents. The findings in Table 2 show that 83.7% of respondents have reported that seminar method. The seminars were the dominant training method. 15.2% of the respondents identify games and sports, showing that activity-based learning had a smaller role, while 1.1% of respondents identified group discussions, that showing limited use of the methods. The study observed that structured seminars formed the main training environment, while the reported crime-reduction results showed improved discipline, communication and conflict handling, together with reduced involvement in fights. Iseselo et al. (2022) found that entrepreneurship-related training was associated with reduced exposure to community violence among young men in Dar es Salaam.

4.2.3..Business Practices attended by the respondents in study area

Respondents were asked to state RLAb business practical-activities they have ever attended. In the study area. Business practical reported were business exhibitions, business practice and group projects.. Table 2 show that 39.1% of the respondents participated in business exhibitions, making this the most common activity. Other, 31.5% of the respondents involved in business practice show substantial direct application of skills, while 28.3% of the respondents involved in group projects show considerable exposure to collaborative activities. Only 1.1% of the respondents participated in product development, indicating very limited involvement in this activity. The main activities involved interaction and cooperation,

while the crime-related findings recorded improved communication, improved conflict handling and reduced involvement in fights as forms of physical assault reduction. Amo-Adjei et al. (2025) reported reductions in violence-related outcomes among youth exposed to interventions incorporating life-skills and economic-strengthening components.

Table 2: Business Practical Activity sessions among RLabs beneficiaries.

Parameter	Frequency	Percent (%)
Duration of attending training sessions (months)		
1–4	36	39.1
5–7	37	40.2
8–11	13	14.1
11 and above	6	6.5
Total	92	100.0
Methods used during training		
Seminars	77	83.7
Games and sports	14	15.2
Group discussions	1	1.1
Total	92	100.0
Practical activities participated in		
Business practice	29	31.5
Group projects	26	28.3
Product development	1	1.1
Business exhibitions	36	39.1
Total	92	100.0
Practical training supported self-employment		
Yes	60	65.2
No	32	34.8
Total	92	100.0
Contribution of practical training to physical assault reduction		
Improved conflict handling	9	15.0
Improved communication	10	16.7
Reduced involvement in fights	7	11.7
Improved discipline	34	56.7
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

4.2.4 Practical training by supported and self-employment

Self-employment provides an income-generating activity through productive work. This pathway addresses theft by providing a lawful alternative to obtaining income through unlawful means. The findings in Table 2 show that 65.2% reported that practical training supported self-employment, showing that nearly two-thirds linked the training with entry into economic activity. The 34.8% reporting no support shows that this transition did not occur for

more than one-third. The researcher observed that the larger group had moved from practical training into self-employment, while the crime-related findings recorded improved lawful income activities and reduced idle time as reported contributions to theft reduction. Outwater et al. (2021) found increased income following entrepreneurship training among young men in Dar es Salaam, supporting the link between entrepreneurship training and lawful economic activity.

4.2.4 Contribution of practical training to physical assault reduction

The crime-related pattern identifies the behavioural changes associated with reduced physical assault. Improved discipline, communication and conflict handling address behaviour that influence how disagreements and confrontations are managed. Reduced involvement in fights provides the direct measure of change in assault-related conduct. As shown in Table 2, 56.5% of the respondents identified improved discipline, making it the strongest reported contribution. 16.3% of the respondents identified improved communication, showing a behavioural change in interpersonal interaction, while 15.2% identified improved conflict handling, showing a direct change in managing disagreements. 12.0% of the respondents identified reduced involvement in fights, providing direct evidence of reduced physical-assault behaviour. The researcher observed that physical assault reduction was reflected through both direct and behavioural indicators, with discipline forming the strongest reported pathway. Iseselo et al. (2022) found that entrepreneurship-related training was associated with reduced exposure to community violence among young men in Dar es Salaam.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that entrepreneurship training contributes to the reduction of youth crime in Iringa Municipality by equipping young people with business skills, practical entrepreneurial knowledge, self-employment readiness and problem-solving skills. The findings show that training enabled many youth to start businesses and engage in lawful economic activities, while practical training supported self-employment and productive use of time. Problem-solving skills also contributed to improved conflict resolution, communication, decision-making and self-control, which helped reduce behaviour associated with youth crime. However, limited access to equipment and capital constrained some youth from applying the skills acquired through training. Overall, entrepreneurship training provides youth with legitimate economic opportunities and behavioural skills that can contribute to reducing their involvement in crime. The study recommends that RLAs and

other youth development stakeholders should strengthen practical entrepreneurship training by providing more hands-on business activities, business planning, marketing and financial management skills. Entrepreneurship training should also be linked with access to start-up equipment, affordable capital and markets so that youth can effectively apply the skills acquired and establish sustainable businesses. In addition, problem-solving, communication and conflict-resolution skills should be integrated more consistently into entrepreneurship training to strengthen responsible behaviour among youth. These measures would increase the ability of entrepreneurship training to provide sustainable lawful economic opportunities and contribute further to the reduction of youth crime in Iringa Municipality.

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