

# Beliefs Matter: Experimental Evidence on Growth Mindset in Bangladesh Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

Growth mindset interventions attempt to increase the perceived returns to effort by teaching students that the brain physically grows more powerful while we study. Such interventions have been shown to increase learning, especially among vulnerable populations, in the United States but their mechanisms are not thoroughly understood and they've yet to be tested in a developing country setting. I evaluate the impact of a growth mindset intervention in secondary schools in Dhaka using a field experiment designed to isolate the central claim in the literature that the intervention's impacts are due to changing students' beliefs about the malleability of intelligence. I do this by including a placebo arm that includes all of the same messaging on the returns to effort but makes no comment on whether the brain actually changes when we learn. I find the intervention increases test scores by  $0.12\sigma$  on average and that the impact is heterogeneous across initial effort and gender, with the hardest working students at baseline receiving no impact and with a larger impact on girls than boys. Furthermore I find growth mindset significantly outperforms the placebo and I cannot reject that the placebo had no effect, corroborating theory.