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DATA MUST SPEAK

Schools that inspire change: Research on positive deviant schools in Madagascar

Executive Summary

Although education is one of the priorities of the Government of Madagascar under the National Development Plan, a number of challenges still need to be addressed to guarantee quality education for all. Primary school students continue to show significant learning gaps in mathematics and reading, and only 50 per cent of students complete the primary school cycle (UNICEF Innocenti et al., 2023). In a context of budget restrictions, innovative solutions must be identified to improve the performance of the education system.

The Data Must Speak (DMS) research on positive deviance approaches aims to find solutions to these types of challenges, by identifying the behaviours and practices that explain why some schools perform better than others, despite similar contexts and resources, and to map out actionable ways to scale these up.

This report endeavours to identify the behaviours and practices observed in positive deviant schools in Madagascar, and to support the development of future educational policies. This research was designed and implemented in partnership with the Malagasy Ministry of Education and other actors in the country. It is based on mixed methods.

The research findings show that some schools are more successful than others at managing difficult situations.

The following key conclusions were drawn from the analysis:¹



School leadership and management:



Head teachers of positive deviant schools take a more global and varied managerial approach when evaluating performance and ensuring the quality of work delivered by teachers (frequent class visits, systems for making up lost hours, regular meetings with teachers, consideration of a wide range of indicators for monitoring teacher performance).



Financial management is more transparent in positive deviant schools, making it possible to cover school expenditure despite limited funds.



Student absences are better documented in positive deviant schools, thanks in particular to the use of communication channels with parents.

Educational practices:



Positive deviant schools carry out assessments on a more regular basis and offer targeted revision sessions for students in the final year of primary school to improve their performance as they prepare for the national exams.



In some positive deviant schools, **students who are struggling benefit from a wider range of support measures**.

Community participation:



The community plays a more active role in the financial management of positive deviant schools, especially with regard to the challenges of paying unsubsidized teachers.



Positive deviant schools have more measures in place to optimize the coordination of the decision-making process, in close collaboration with the community.

¹ Detailed results from Stage 3 of the DMS research, including behaviours and practices from positive deviant schools, can be found in the longer version of the report.

Decentralized administration:



Education advisers visit positive deviant schools more frequently.



Support from education advisers is perceived as being more holistic and of higher quality in positive deviant schools.

These results allow for several recommendations to be made:



1. Build upon the training provided for head teachers on school time and budget management, education supervision for teachers and teacher performance evaluations.



2. Continue efforts to provide teachers with contracts and continuous training.



3. Build upon the introduction of regular student assessments, in the form of continuous assessments, to ensure progress ahead of exams.



4. Identify students with learning difficulties through continuous assessment and improve initiatives surrounding additional classes and targeted mentoring for these students.



5. Encourage government efforts to facilitate regular school visits from education advisers and heads of local education administration districts (ZAPs in French).



6. Promote instructional support from education advisers on a wide range of topics during their school visits.



7. Promote the provision of effective communication channels between schools and parents with regard to student attendance.



8. Explore grant options for community teachers (known as “Fikambanan’ny ray aman-drenin’ny mpianatra” [FRAM] teachers) in more detail.

Stage 4 of the DMS research will further these recommendations, with a view to scaling up positive deviant practices and behaviours as part of a concrete plan developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, alongside technical and financial partners.