



Press Release | 27 August 2019

Against all odds, schools find new, exciting ways to make sure children learn Twaweza's 'positive deviance' inquiry unearths six critical school and teacher-driven strategies to promote learning

27 August 2019, Kampala: In districts with historically low learning outcomes, a Twaweza study has identified schools that are performing well despite having no extra access to resources or other privileges. These schools stand out as strong performers in difficult contexts. The schools and their strategies were identified through a rigorous research process called positive deviance.

These findings were released by Twaweza in a research brief titled *How are some children learning when most are not? Positive deviance in Uganda's primary schools*. The brief is based on a qualitative investigation of 17 schools in 10 purposively selected districts using the positive deviance methodology. These observations were collected during one week per school in the second half of 2017 and early 2018. The resulting findings were validated in community sessions involving the study schools and others in the area.

The inquiry unearthed six critical school and teacher driven strategies to promote learning:

One: Promoting community involvement in schools

Ensuring the wider community and parents are engaged in what is going on at school can help children to learn better by inspiring community members to take action directly to enhance learning as well as providing a supportive environment for the school. Schools can encourage the community to get involved through outreach activities and showing they understand parents' circumstances.

For example, in one school, storage boxes were introduced for P1 and P2 children to safely keep their scholastic items at school thereby reducing the financial burden on parents by preventing repeated loss and other damage.

Two: Encouraging a culture of effort, openness and achievement in schools

All school actors have to focus on achievement, ensuring children learn. Teachers and learners are encouraged to exert effort, the head teacher and the management committee are transparent in managing school resources, the head teacher leads by example and everyone's actions are driven by the desire to create a friendly environment that positively nurtures learning for all children.

For example, all head teachers in these successful schools taught classes, generally the candidate classes, even though they have many other school responsibilities. This leading by example encouraged greater effort from teachers as well.

Three: Ensuring children achieve mastery in schools

In these schools that perform well, there is a strong effort placed on ensuring children really understand what they are being taught. The schools have introduced practices with this in mind and this increased effort and energy in turn inspires more creativity and hard work.

For example, in many of the schools studied, subject teachers move grades with their cohort of students. This means that teachers understand their pupils better, can support them more effectively and that they cannot blame anyone else for skills gaps.

Four: Teacher support and motivation in schools

All key players in these school communities appreciate the need for teachers to be supported and motivated to perform. Most schools in the study offer teachers public praise or certificates as a way of recognising and rewarding achievement. The schools also had peer-led professional development sessions to enable teachers to learn from their more experienced peers.

For example in one school, the head teacher has performance contracts with all of the teachers to show what they need to achieve. And at the end of the year, the head teacher has a celebration for the teachers whose pupils perform well in the exams.

Five: Engaging school bodies

Although every school in Uganda has a School Management Committee and a Parent Teacher Association, these can be inactive. These bodies can provide important support to the head teacher for the day to day running of the school and can ensure strong links between school and community. For example, in some of the schools, these bodies play a direct role in assessing the performance of teachers.

Six: Teachers caring for and prioritising learner needs

At the subject level, there is lots of potential for creative strategies to promote learning. The effort and creativity of individual teachers can go a long way in helping children to learn. For example, in one school, the English teachers asks children to talk about the stories of films they have watched and encourages them to participate in debates in order to master the language.

Julius Atuhurra, Regional Research Coordinator on What Works in Education at Twaweza, said *“The schools in this study are beacons of hope for all of us interested in education. Against all odds, and with no additional resources or special circumstances, these 17 schools are making a real positive difference to children’s learning. Through the actions of committed individuals, children are learning more and better. Let us use the types of strategies unearthed by this research to amplify the voices and experiences of teachers, to influence policy and support more and more children to learn.”*

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Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org
- Twaweza works on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Follow us at Twaweza Uganda (Facebook), @TwawezaUganda (Twitter), Twaweza East Africa (Instagram)
- To identify the schools, Twaweza completed a trend analysis of two sets of data: (i) district-level Uwezo basic competence assessment results in literacy and numeracy, and (ii) the end-of-primary exam (PLE) results for the years 2011-2016. Positively deviant schools and teachers were then selected through a three-step process, focusing on public primary schools which house the majority of primary-level enrolments in Uganda.
- Schools studied are in the following districts: Bugiri, Butebo, Iganga, Kaliro, Luuka, Manafwa, Mayuge, Namisindwa, Paliisa and Tororo.