

DATA MUST SPEAK

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

Executive Summary

In recognition of the importance of education to the development of Togo, the Togolese Government is committed to improving the quality of and access to primary education in the country (Togolese Republic, 2020b). However, despite considerable investment in the sector, a number of challenges remain. Primary school students in Togo continue to show significant learning gaps in mathematics and reading (UNICEF Innocenti *et al.*, 2022). In addition, regional disparities in primary school admission rates and gender inequality in promotion rates still represent obstacles to access to education for all. Furthermore, budget constraints have led to an increased use of volunteer teachers, who often lack sufficient qualifications and experience difficulties because of their performance (Peirola and Játiva, 2021).

The Data Must Speak (DMS) research initiative aims to find solutions to these types of challenges by identifying behaviours and practices that enable certain schools to achieve better results than others, despite being contextually similar, and ways to scale these up. This report focuses on identifying the behaviours and practices observed in positive deviant schools in Togo and aims to inform the development of future education policy. This research was designed and implemented in partnership with the Togo Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education and is based on mixed methods.

The following key conclusions were drawn from the analysis:¹



School management:



Head teachers at positive deviant schools ensure that students and teachers attend school.

They encourage students to come to school, monitor absences more closely or ensure that students make up for missed lessons. In addition, teacher attendance is the result of more effective teacher management.



Participatory management also makes a difference in positive deviant schools.

Participatory leadership in positive deviant schools is characterized by the involvement of individuals with various roles within the school in decision-making, in addition to open and transparent communication between the head teacher, teachers and the community, and regular discussions with other schools.

Pedagogical practices for teachers:



Local languages are used more often in positive deviant schools, helping to overcome any difficulties that students have with the French language.



Teachers in positive deviant schools communicate better with the parents of students who are struggling.

Community participation:



COGEPs are generally more active in positive deviant schools. Not only do they show a greater level of commitment towards students and the rest of the community, they also exert greater influence over the management of the school and fundraising efforts, particularly when it comes to soliciting financial aid from outside of the school.



Students' parents are more involved. Greater parental involvement in many positive deviant schools means they are better able to meet infrastructure needs and look after the needs of teachers. These schools are also more successful in mobilizing parents to support their children's learning and in communicating with them about disciplinary issues with students.

¹ Detailed results, including positive deviant practices and behaviours, can be found in the longer version of the report.

In addition to identifying the practices employed by positive deviant schools, the results highlight the high prevalence of nutritional deficiencies among students and the major challenge that this poses to learning in Togolese schools. As many students do not have the opportunity to eat before lessons begin or while at school, their ability to concentrate is very much restricted. The report also highlights the difficulties encountered by volunteer teachers, who experience issues with accessing training, as well as irregular pay.

These results allow for several recommendations to be made:



1. Continue facilitating the appointment and training of teachers.



2. Strengthen the ability of school head teachers to monitor absences and ensure that students and teachers follow good standards of conduct.



3. Emphasize the prerogatives of committees when training Public Primary School Management Boards (COGEPs), in addition to the awareness-raising and monitoring role that these committees could play in schools.



4. Support COGEPs in drawing up and implementing development plans for educational establishments.



5. Encourage and continue government efforts to institutionalize the school feeding programme.



6. Explore in greater detail the underlying behavioural factors that motivate children to attend school.

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 Primary, Secondary and Technical Education.