

POSITIVE DEVIANCE STUDY • August 2026

Community & Family Drivers of Children's Learning Outcomes in Uganda: Positive Deviance Study Findings

Joseph Kasasa | Mary Goretti Nakabugo

Uwezo Uganda



Promoting Equitable Quality Education for All





What the research set out to do



01

Explore learning behaviours

Identify the factors — especially behaviours — at community and family level that contribute to effective learning by children.



02

Find what's replicable

Focus on behaviours that could be adopted more widely, without major additions of resources.



The positive-deviance approach

Relatively successful local communities and families were identified through an analysis of children's achievement in English reading and numeracy in the Uwezo national assessment of 2024.



Children's standardised scores were regressed on eight variables representing well-known institutional, socio-economic and locational factors. Communities and families scoring above prediction became the cases for study.



Eight independent variables

Well-known institutional, socio-economic and locational factors controlled for before residuals were computed.



Sub-regional poverty rate

1



Child's grade level (Baby Class–S4)

2



Two or more years of preschool

3



Attending a private school

4



Household head's level of education

5



Female household head

6



Household possessions index

7



Control for sub-regional stratification

8



Selecting districts & local communities

Four districts, different achievement levels & regions

Two high

One medium

One low



Kotido · Rubirizi · Kabale

In each of these three districts we selected one EA with positive mean residuals and another with small mean residuals for comparison.



Wakiso

Two successful EAs were selected to illustrate different occupational patterns, plus one average EA.



Selecting families & children



2 + 2

Households per EA

Two with strong positive residuals, compared with two that had small residuals.



Two children per household

Interviewed alongside one or both parents, or the guardian.



Balanced selection

By gender and by age, wherever this was possible.



Research methods



Focus group discussions

With community leaders and school representatives, local council members, school managers, teachers, parent representatives and religious leaders.



Semi-structured interviews

One-to-one conversations with parents and with children about household practices and learning.

Community level → focus groups

Household level → interviews with parents & children



Community influences

Leadership & collective support at village level.



FINDINGS

Local leadership makes the difference



Strong council leadership

Two cases (Kabale & Wakiso) show the value of a village-council chairperson who leads on education — especially in sustaining high attendance.



Unrestrained school charges

A criticism: councils could have done more to restrain charges by under-funded public primary schools (e.g. Rubirizi).



A contrasting context

This did not apply in Kotido, where ex-pastoral schools charged very little and were not strict about uniforms or shoes.



Where collective effort worked — and its limits



An active founding body

In one Kabale community, the school's founding body actively encouraged high standards. There is scope for this to happen elsewhere.

REPLICABLE



Collective parental support

In the more successful urban communities of Wakiso, PTAs employed supplementary teachers — but this cannot easily transfer to poorer communities.

CONTEXT-DEPENDENT



Useful practices at the family level



Provision for lunch

Either at school or at home.



Safe drinking water

Not available in some schools.



Time & space for homework

A dedicated slot and place to study.



Balanced daily routine

Dividing time between study, chores and play.



Everyday numeracy

Buying, selling & related calculation (many cases).



Books to encourage reading

Provided in very few cases.



Other factors at the family level



Support beyond the parents

In typical agricultural communities, help from adults additional to the parents is an advantage.



Pressures on single mothers

Single working mothers struggle to pay fees and attend school events (many cases in Wakiso).



Finance strains monitoring

Financial issues between parents and schools reduce parents' ability to monitor their children's progress.



What it all points to



A strained social contract

Basic education, as framed in the Constitution and 2008 Education Act, is under-served by the state: teachers, classrooms and capitation grants are insufficient and unequally distributed.



Tension over money

This creates tension between schools and parents over finances, and makes it harder for poorer parents to meet basic obligations for food and clothing.



Councils can bridge welfare

Local councils could help link poorer families with welfare support, where it is available.



Encourage reading at home

Home-reading interventions would be useful — as attempted by the Reading Association of Uganda.



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Thank you

Exploring Community & Family Influences on Children's Learning Outcomes — a Positive Deviance Study.

Uwezo Uganda

Corner House, Plot 436/437 Mawanda Road, Kamwokya, Kampala • info@uwezouganda.org



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