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Programme to support the management of quality: what is new about this?

The starting point is simple and is supported by an abundant literature: despite massive efforts over the last few decades, the quality of learning is lacking. While many more children now have access to school, what they learn and retain remains below expectations. The « learning crisis » is reflected in unsettling school achievements, with a large majority of children not mastering basic literacy and numeracy skills at the end of primary school¹.

Changing the focus of analysis for a better understanding

We now have at our disposal a large volume of data, particularly from sector analyses, together with recommendations for achieving the much sought-after improvements. However, the abundance of recommendations contrasts sharply with the poor results in terms of an improvement in pupil performance. If each country has endeavoured to develop policies and strategies that, on paper, seem relevant and coherent in light of the problems identified, where is the sticking point? To answer this question, it seems that a change of perspective is needed, and this is the starting point of the Programme to support the management of education quality.

The Programme looks at the issue of quality from an angle that has barely been analysed to date: the role of the actors.

- Do they manage to make the most of the context (available information, mobilisation of existing tools, etc.) in order to point educational actions in the desired direction?
- What is really being done in their workplaces to improve the quality of education?
- Are their actions relevant, organised, coherent and directed towards improving the quality of education?

The Programme chooses to focus on the analysis of existing practices, those “already there”, rather than on the shortcomings identified in the system. Its postulate is that this is the basis for identifying and proposing effective measures to improve the quality of education over time. This analysis must be conducted with and by the actors themselves.

Deconstructing preconceived ideas on the obstacles to quality education

The programme to support the management of education quality has three specific features:

-No assumptions are made concerning the obstacles: the programme strives to discover these through immersion with the actors, leading to a shared diagnosis. The teams base their work on educational policy regulatory texts but also on what is stated by the actors and on what is observed by those conducting the analysis.

¹ Cf. World Bank. 2018. « *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise.* » Washington, DC: World Bank. doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-1096-1. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO

- It does not have a pre-established solution for improving the quality of education: proposals for improvement are developed with the different actors giving priority to promising practices that already exist within the system.
- It does not just make recommendations: on the contrary, it places the emphasis on the conditions required at individual level and at system level for the actions adopted to generate the expected improvements, thus increasing the chances of successful implementation.

Going beyond the analysis stage and supporting the change in practices

The Programme proposes a three-phase highly participatory approach featuring methodology inspired by action research that aims to foster support for a change in practices.

- The first phase consists in conducting a targeted participatory diagnosis, co-constructed by the actors from within the system based on the analysis of their practices, and not solely on the system's quantitative data. This means observing routine practices at every level of responsibility, linking them to expectations and analysing their relevance, effectiveness or again the purpose of these practices. On this basis, promising practices can be highlighted as can those considered as not very effective or even detrimental.
- The second stage consists in supporting the identification of practical actions to strengthen the effectiveness of the practices observed. Not being content with simply criticising practices, but helping actors to transform and improve them, this is also one of the added values of the support offered, particularly through the input of expertise at key moments.
- Finally, a third and final stage aims to support the implementation of these actions: if successful, they should then be included in the action plan of the Ministry concerned.

Rather than seeking to analyse the actors' practices, the Programme intends therefore to aim at strengthening the capacity of the actors to analyse and regulate their practices in favour of the quality of education. Since there are numerous and above all evolving issues and challenges facing the education systems, the emphasis placed on the capacity of the actors to act and react in a constantly changing context is seen as a factor for success.

Obtaining sustainable results

Finally, by acting on and from the actors' actual practices, the intention is to embed new methods of working and of collaboration in the systems for the long term. Thus, it can be noted that all the actions proposed or encouraged are built around the following objectives, considered as decisive:

- Instil reflective practice at all levels of the education system
- Involve the actors in charge of implementation, in the decision-making process
- Build a relationship of trust / empowerment with the actors
- Enable more collaboration
- Strengthen experience sharing

Supporting education authorities to diagnose and regulate their practices at all levels is the central issue on which the Programme intends to provide added value and contribute to the efforts made to enable access to inclusive and quality education for all.

Continuing to conduct reforms without improving the capacities of the Ministry in this respect, will not be more productive.