

ETUCE Practical Guidelines on How to Prevent Early School Leaving through the Use of ICT in Education

Adopted by the ETUCE Committee on 14 - 15 April 2014

Background

These practical guidelines have been developed within the frame of the project *Teacher Unions Preventing Early School Leaving through the Use of ICT in Education*. They build on the project activities (four country case studies¹ and a project workshop) to which the ETUCE member organisations actively contributed. The guidelines address in the first line teacher unions in Europe and their affiliated teachers and other education staff as well as education employers, students and policy-makers in education, on the innovative use of ICT in education in support of the prevention of early school leaving.

In light of the austerity-driven budget cuts in the education sector, the ETUCE – EI European Region Conference defined the clear goal to advocate for the provision of quality education, in particular as regards the *EU 2020 Strategy* and its flagship initiatives. The project and guidelines therefore also stand in the light of European Commission communications on [Rethinking Education, Opening Up Education](#) and [Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda](#) and wish to contribute the specific teacher union's point of view to the implementation of the strategy. In addition, the project goes along with the global EI initiative [Unite for Quality Education – Better Education for a better world](#) in 2013/2014, which seeks to promote the provision of high quality education for all as one of the fundamental pillars of a just and equitable society.

Aim

The *EU 2020 Strategy* has set, amongst other priorities, the target to reduce the school drop-out rate below 10% and to raise by at least 40% the rate of 30-34 year olds completing third level education. Within this context, the ELFE-ESL project guidelines seek to enhance learning through ICT and to identify concrete ways of how innovative pedagogic use of ICT can help especially to motivate/(re-)attract potential drop-outs back to school and to learning. This is essential not at least in times of austerity, for the ultimate goal of high quality education.

Focusing on the crucial role of teacher unions, the project and guidelines wish to determine the specific skills/competences that teachers need to employ a favourable use of technology in class and to analyse how teachers can support the potential of ICT to bridge the gap between what pupils experience and learn at home and what they learn in compulsory education.

¹ In the EFLE-ESL project, four case studies to two upper secondary schools and one teacher education institution in Denmark, The Netherlands, Portugal and Azerbaijan were carried out. The reports of these case studies can be found at: www.elfe-eu.net.

It is clear that using ICT in education is not only the magic wand that will help pupils to integrate and solve early school leaving, however it is much more: it is a motivator and creative stimulus for lifelong learning that can help pupils to gain the skills they need to become responsible citizens in a modern society. This document therefore does not provide a one-size-fits-all solution for every country and every individual learner. Instead these guidelines should be used as a supporting tool, to be assessed and adjusted to the national context and conditions concerning the innovative use of ICT in education and early school leaving.

Guidelines

Building on the findings of the ELFE-ESL case studies, the discussions in the project workshop and the [policy recommendations](#) of the previous ETUCE project on eLearning (ELFE 2),² the guidelines address three main levels (European, national teacher union and school/local level) for specific actions. They result from the education needs which the research report clearly identifies as:

- to become more student-centred, to reflect the various needs, backgrounds, motivations and aspirations of the learner, important steps towards personalised learning;
- to acknowledge the evolution of informal learning which is promoted by online direct search, user created knowledge sources as well as social networks;
- to seek to combine the pedagogical skills and experience of teachers with the capabilities of modern information and communication technology;
- to develop pedagogies and models to realise the above objectives;
- to promote professional development of teachers in the adoption of pedagogies for the use of ICT;
- to carry out strategic projects to demonstrate the outcomes and benefits of such an approach.

Practical Guidelines at European Policy Level

The main objective at European level is to achieve the education goals of the EU 2020 Strategy as regards training subject competence, training 21st century skills, to prepare more students for tertiary studies and ensuring that 90 % of the pupils complete an upper secondary education.

To bring about a lasting change on the innovative use of ICT in education and the prevention of early school leaving, governments need to invest more in quality education. It is only with the appropriate funding for sustainable high quality education as concerns infrastructure, teacher training and teaching material, that a future generation of highly skilled professionals can be formed - a new generation which is badly needed to exit the economic crisis and make Europe a more competitive region. While it is paramount that this process expands on the social dialogue system and the

² The ELFE 2 project developed [practical recommendations on the pedagogic use of ICT in education](#).

involvement of the social partners in education, it is equally important to acknowledge the subsidiarity principle which implies that education policy is a national responsibility. The different education systems in Europe provide the grounds for mutual inspiration and learning among stakeholders from different countries.

The recommendations therefore address the European Commission, ETUCE and other education stakeholders at European level to:

1. Initiate and continue a dialogue between European education stakeholders, with an important role for the social partners in education, on how to reduce the current barriers to the systematic adoption of new teaching methods;
2. Develop a strategic approach to implementing sustainable interactive student centred learning projects in education institutions to increase pupils' attainment and hence reduce rates of early school leaving and to strengthen the relationship between learning in school and activities that take place outside of school;
3. Support the development of a framework for the specification of national curricula and assessment mechanisms to increase relevance and motivation and hence reduce early school leaving rates;
4. Develop a pedagogical framework and specification guidelines for technology enhanced learning to encourage the adoption of new methods relevant to increasing pupils' performance and therefore reducing early school leaving;
5. Support further research on the development of pedagogical methods that may reduce early school leaving and establish a staff development programme in pedagogical approaches to reducing early school leaving;
6. Create a virtual community of best practice, based on social and participatory media, to develop and evaluate new pedagogical methods and to exchange and share experience and methods for the reduction of early school leaving.

Practical Guidelines at National and Regional Level

At national and regional level, education authorities need to ensure the appropriate conditions at the education institutions for the pedagogical use of ICT in view of preventing early school leaving. It is essential to engage in social dialogue with the social partners to assure the support of education staff, their representatives and school leadership in reducing the drop-out rate and to broaden common understanding that certain initiatives take place in compliance with the national curriculum goals. Furthermore, the work at school level should be supported by the overall national educational objectives, e.g. research can help schools and initial teacher education to connect better to the daily life and challenges at school level.

The recommendations therefore address teacher unions to:

1. Achieve better teaching conditions for education staff and learning conditions for students to allow for diverse pedagogic practices that address the individual needs of the students, in particular as regards the use of ICT, and obtain the reduction of early school leaving;
2. Actively participate in a dialogue with education authorities on adopting a favourable strategic approach to the pedagogical use of ICT and on creating incentives for schools of all levels and types to commit to national early school leaving goals;
3. Ensure that early school leaving is put on the agenda of the national social dialogue with education employers to discuss about the re-integration of drop-outs and those at risk of leaving school early. In this context, it is of particular significance to take into account the cultural and social background of pupils; teaching material needs to be produced that attracts pupils/adults back to school who have left school. Therefore adults who have not completed secondary education should be addressed with specifically adapted material.
4. Make efforts to form school and business partnerships with a view to improve the attractiveness of vocational education and training and to strengthen labour market relevance on the one hand and to build a link to work-based training on the other hand; to support teachers' continuous training.
5. Get involved in the discussion on the need for a curriculum change that includes ICT and its assessment and promotes student-centred education; combining more flexible education systems that offer various avenues and curricula of different duration with counselling and guidance to provide students second and third chances;
6. Promote the provision of sufficient and regularly updated IT equipment, including the adequate support to ensure an appropriate infrastructure for the pedagogic use of ICT both within and among schools with a view to motivate/(re)attract students to school;
7. Initiate further research on best practices as regards the pedagogic use of ICT for the prevention of early school leaving to build bridges between pedagogic research, ICT education and daily life and experience at school level;
8. Promote the inclusion of the pedagogic use of ICT in initial teacher training and in continuous professional development for both teaching staff and school leadership;
9. Raise awareness that teachers play an essential role when introducing blended learning, e.g. in determining the pedagogic approach to be adopted and their responsibility for implementing this pedagogic approach.
10. Support the involvement of teaching staff in the production of ICT teaching content and material and its use in education, e.g. the provision of time and appropriate resources for staff; and ensure that educational software is available in the language used in education and that it is adapted to the specific needs of learners;

11. Encourage the adoption of procedures and student management systems for early detection of risk of early school leaving and methods for encouraging the involvement of parents and local communities in the activities and support of schools.

Practical guidelines at School and Local Level

Based on the observations in the case studies, there are some initiatives that have proven to make a difference in the education institutions when implemented appropriately. Most importantly, to make a change in the classroom, it is essential that teachers feel an ownership to the goal, and that the point of view of the education staff is taken into account when a school develops its ICT/ early school leaving policy; doing so, will help to obtain the inspiration and necessary support from staff for the policy.

The recommendations therefore address teacher unions, school boards and other actors at school level to:

1. Discuss among staff, and school leadership and students how the use of ICT in education can make a difference to teaching, motivate students and improve the quality of education to the benefit of both staff and pupils;
2. Inspire the sharing of educational resources and experience both between authorities and schools as well as amongst schools and teachers;
3. Support teachers to require a competence development plan that includes the use of ICT and reassure them to learn from trial and errors and secure the funding for the plan;
4. Help teachers to improve teaching approaches that include the use of ICT, to get involved in the selection of educational materials, both soft- and hardware and ensure that teachers retain the responsibility of choosing methods and implementing the school's ICT vision; in this context, support the development of ICT teaching material together with teachers and students at risk of leaving school prematurely;
5. Stimulate joint co-operation of teachers and different stakeholders on the use of appropriate technology in class for the reduction of early school leaving, albeit ensuring that projects are educationally driven and not based on the availability of new software or technological capability;
6. Encourage schools to develop an explicit policy for the pedagogical use of ICT and on tackling early school leaving together with staff, students and parents, e.g. use the school's IT system to register pupils' absences for early detection of those at risk of dropping out of school;
7. Propel equal access and inclusion in education at local level by providing the appropriate infrastructure that allows for equal access for all to teaching/learning tools and material; and

ensure that adequate counselling structures are available to assist students at risk of dropping out;

8. In view of establishing a supportive community for ICT-based learning use schools' Learning Management Systems to inform pupils on homework and consider to upload teachers' notes or virtual lessons;
9. Promote the positive use of ICT and the image of internet in education and teach a responsible/respectful use of ICT in schools;
10. Explore carefully the opportunities of the favourable use of social media in education, e.g. consider the creation of social media groups around particular classes and activities which may help to establish a (virtual) community and hence reduce the risk of early school leaving;
11. Improve and encourage alliances with supporting teacher training institutions, in particular, researchers should be invited to advise and contribute to specific school initiatives; in this context, it might be useful to research which technology pupils actually use in class rooms to support teachers in the preparation of lessons.
12. Encourage teacher training institutions to include approaches to early school leaving within their curricula.