

Final report on eLearning im Schulalltag (eLSA) Summary

eLSA – e-learning in everyday school life – is a project launched by the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture to exemplarily test the nationwide introduction of e-learning and blended learning in secondary schools. The project was carried out between 2002 and 2005. Initially, eLSA involved four schools and from the second year on, nine schools with each province being represented by at least one school. In spring 2002, Professor Dr Michael Schratz, head of the Department of Teacher Education and School Research at the University of Innsbruck, assisted by MA Sc Kurt Leitl (BRG/BORG Landeck), was asked to evaluate the eLSA project. Apart from the final report on hand, progress reports as part of the project were written, which led to a dynamic process. Taking the present findings into consideration, one can conclude that the project has had an impact on the school development, the personal development of the individual teachers as well as on the classes. On top of that, five case studies give an insight into the dynamics of individual schools.

The heads of the schools involved looked favourably upon the project. In their view, school development and the professional development of teachers play a major role. One reason for the success of the eLSA project is the fact that the principals of various schools as well as the school boards were involved. Consequently, the teachers were backed by the decision-makers in education, which was also necessary to improve the equipment in the respective schools. The principals also confirm better student performances in senior high schools as far as presentations go.

The number of the teachers having ICT skills rose from 58% to 80% by the end of the project, in other words, the project also encouraged older teachers to acquire ICT skills and to apply them in their classes. Apart from an increasing interest in ICT, there has been a technical upgrade in the classrooms with access to the Internet being provided and an increasing number of computers available both for teachers and for students, and projectors being installed.

According to surveys among teachers, job satisfaction has increased despite the extra burden put on them. The teachers also appreciate having acquired additional skills as for teaching methods. Initial scepticism about the project died away and teachers witnessed how valuable the meaningful use of e-learning and blended learning can be. Even after three years, the teachers involved in the project didn't feel fully competent and wanted continuing education in this field. If e-learning and blended learning are supposed to be introduced nationwide, attention has to be paid to comprehensive pre-service and in-service teacher education.

Although expectations on the part of the students were high, they could mostly be met. However, students and teachers must be aware of the fact that the computer replaces neither learning on the part of the students nor the teacher. Students began to take a more realistic approach to using computers in classes. They realized that the use of ICT in class does not always make sense and that teachers must think about when and how to use this technology in class.

eLSA has had its impact on all fields of education in Austria and has led to positive changes like no other project before. It has also brought about changes in the fields of pre-service and in-service teacher education, and is supposed to have an even more significant impact in these fields. Besides, it is desirable that the findings of these studies will result in a new orientation and requirements set up by those responsible for pre-service and in-service teacher education colleges and the Ministry of Education.

If investment into this project should lead to sustainable investment, more financial means have to be provided in the years to come to introduce e-learning and blended learning nationwide. eLSA has shown that blended learning is a new and important methodological approach applicable in (lower) secondary education and called for both by teachers and parents. There are no inhibitions whatsoever regarding this technology on the part of the children. Even the English version of “Blackboard” did not pose a problem at all, which is also true of children attending the first year of secondary education, as could be seen in Landeck.

eLSA has shown which beneficial circumstances are required to successfully implement e-learning and blended learning in everyday school life. eLSA has also revealed what steps have to be taken in the fields of pre-service and in-service teacher education to familiarize teachers with this new methodological approach so that they feel competent. Finally, eLSA has shown all the groups involved how valuable and important new opportunities and programs can be when computers are used in a classroom situation in a meaningful way.

Further Information:

<http://elsa.schule.at/>

<http://it-projekte.schule.at>

<http://edumoodle.schule.at>

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