

Summary and conclusion of the country reports on early school leaving (ESL)

I. Needs analysis

Expanzio prepared an online questionnaire to help the partnership to analyse the possible target groups' needs regarding the planned ESL platform.

The preconditions of the needs analysis were:

- teachers, team of teachers and core groups from 'frontline'¹ schools– min. 50 filled in questionnaire / country
- school leaders of 'frontline' schools – min. 20 filled in questionnaire / country
- Service providers – min. 20 filled in questionnaire / country

Beside the questionnaire, focus group discussions were advised as well. Focus group research required to create three focus groups (*minimum* 6 persons per group) in each participating country:

- a homogenous group of teachers and core group around them (where relevant) coming from schools where problem of ESL occurs due to the level of drop-out.
- a homogenous group of school directors coming from schools where problem of ESL is relevant due to the level of drop-out.
- and service providers – with a mix of policy-makers (regional or local) where relevant, depending on the country's ESL-tackling system.

The needs analysis expectations were partly fulfilled by the partner countries (see data below) which led Expanzio to draw some conclusion concerning the ESL platform and its services.

Country	Nr of questionnaires	Focus group discussion
DE	30 schools fulfilled it	3 focus groups, interviews with 2-4 participants
HU	259 fulfilled questionnaires	3 focus groups with 6-8 participants
NL		
SE	17 fulfilled	1 focus group with 8 participants
RO		

¹ Frontline refers to those schools who tackle with ESL regularly

II. Target groups

Both the questionnaires and the focus group discussions could give important information on the target groups described in the concept paper (Concept of an online portal of good practices to tackle ESL, 04/04/2016). The paper concluded the following target groups:

- The primary target group of the good examples will have a “within school” view. It includes:
 - o teachers, team of teachers and the core group around them.
 - o Together with the teachers, the other target group of good examples are the school leaders (directors, principals, decision-makers at school level)
- The second target group has an “outside school” view. It includes mainly service providers. This group comprises the local / regional child protection authorities, pedagogical service providers, municipalities’ (owners, maintenances of schools) related staff at local / regional / national level depending on the country’s system.
- Policy makers will be the third target group.
- Researchers and knowledge workers are not our target groups although they can be involved in the focus group discussion.
- Parents and/or students could be targeted indirectly.

In case of the Hungarian needs analysis the order of the main responsibility was: parents / teachers / decision-makers / student health services (education and career counsellors, counsellors, special education teachers, school psychologists etc.). This order was almost in line with the German questionnaire’s outcomes, except one point: they put heads of schools on the 2nd place in the row (instead of decision-makers). Sweden shares a different point of view, since the main responsibility was placed on the schools (especially on school directors and principals and professionals). But decision makers and professionals in the municipality were named as well. Parents were not mentioned here.

The focus group discussions also added new information and broaden the circle of the possible target groups:

- The schools’ target group has to cover both primary and secondary (VET) level as well. And we have to mention the teachers’ education level, since ESL is not part of the teachers’ training
- Since the dropout is a problem mainly in VET, the role of the employers and companies cannot be avoided.
- Policy-makers were voted important as well

All in all, the relevance of listed target group was validated by the questionnaire and the focus group discussions too. The first three target groups’ importance was out of question.

But we can conclude some conclusions which form the concept paper’s statements, hence the concept of the ESL+ platform and its services:

- Parents and students as target groups: since the role of parents was highlighted several times it suggests that they should not be left out from the target groups.

- Although parents' (level of) responsibility is argued by Germany and Sweden: They argued that parents should take on this responsibility, but could often not be counted with because of little education or lack of social security and stability. Though schools and teachers struggle to involve them and it works rather personal or school level than at EU project level. Hence we suggest that parents should be targeted by the platform as well, but indirectly. As the part of the good examples we have to dedicate a separate topic for them and other possibilities should be thought over.

- Teachers have to mentor the students and the parents as well – these tasks put too much liability on them. They are overburdened and they lack not the capacity and methodology together with the school directors. Hence ESL is a complex, overall problem, whole school approach is necessary – all actors share the responsibility.

Since the needs analysis was not representative, we have to bear it in mind when draw conclusions, but we can see, that in Hungary and probably in Eastern European countries they lack the supporting system, teachers are mostly left alone when combating ESL. We can see from the German and Swedish feedbacks that there is a system which should be better utilised and improved.

In both cases cooperation and/or enhancing cooperation is necessary.

III. Platform and its possible services

The feedbacks of the target group concerning the ESL platform, its planned services and compared with their Internet-usage were a bit contradictory.

All countries, regardless its ESL situation confirmed that face-to-face cooperation, trainings and personal information exchange are the source of information and help they need.

Online, individual learning was popular among less than 10% of the responders, but at the same time the target group is eager to look for and download good practices.

As a result of the focus group discussions it was revealed that there is an urgent need for networking systematically and on a regular and steady basis. So participants would benefit from working together closely with clearly defined ways of communication, networking with other stakeholders and institutions.

All in all, we have to admit that at the moment the responders prefer static use of Internet: downloading, reading/using good examples instead of being active (participating in online courses, writing blogs, commenting). When they use the internet for professional use, they do it mostly on their own language. Foreign language also hinders them from active using – their language knowledge (or as they feel it) is suitable for passive roles on Internet.

Most participants in the questionnaire are not yet familiar with online courses, blended learning courses or MOOC. At the same time, they are interested in contacts to experts and institutions that deal with ESL and social networking was rated important for them.

These results led us to draw the following conclusion:

- Cooperation should be in the focus of the ESL+ platform and boost it as much as we can, since this is the main need of the target group. Although they want personal meetings, but we have to examine how the platform can substitute it via an online surface (market place, learning space area... etc.).
- Examples of cooperation as good practices should be highlighted as well.
- Since bigger part of the target groups are practitioners, it is clear that they need practical solutions rather than scientific studies – nevertheless there are target groups (policy makers) which would prefer the latter information as well. So it is advised to put practical information in the focus, but should not forget about the background studies, researches either.
- Responds showed that the target group is interested in trainings. We have to examine how to raise their attention to online trainings in spite of the fact that they not really active in that sense. But if the training's topic is a niche in the field of ESL, then there is a higher chance to involve the target group.
- In order to convince our target groups to use the ELS+ platform, the online content has to be very high quality: proved, "certified" examples, experts should be available there. Hence very strong quality assurance is necessary before putting examples on the platform.
- To reach that we have to identify the good practice holders, sharers and those pioneers who are familiar with the ESL problem and active in the world of Internet too, and who use online tools, apps while teaching, solving a problem.
- To find the good practice holders, an award could be announced - a prize not only for individuals, teachers but for teams as well, especially focusing on cooperation and even to highlight the cross-sectoral ones.
- Examples can give inspiration in case the context is similar (local conditions, similar challenges, organisational culture... etc.).
- It is worth considering to involve "respected", acknowledged institutions, authorities, as the Swedish colleague wrote: *"The focus group participants also stated that school professionals are reluctant to put theory into practise/use and implement interventions/materials/ideas etc. unless it is distributed from national authorities in their field such as the Swedish Agency of Education, Universities or other "trusted agents"."*
They could be partners and/or certifying the good examples, or use them in other roles and make them visible.

IV. AOB

The platform should take into consideration those actual topics which effect or might effect education in Europe, such as education and training of refugees and immigrants.

In order to facilitate communication among parties in foreign language, glossary of professional terms was advised in the Swedish country report.