

# JOURNAL



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## First steps towards change

8 Research Summaries to inspire the  
education community



Redefining  
Research



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## ELNE Partners



EUROPEAN  
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Association for Teacher Education in Europe





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## *Letter from the Editors*

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the second edition of the ELNE Journal, which will take you on a journey across Europe through some of the most innovative research, highlighting critical issues in education and finding viable solutions to tackle them.

The inaugural edition of the ELNE Journal focused on showcasing exemplary educational practices, underscoring the power of collaboration among all education stakeholders. In this edition, the spotlight shifts towards research. With these Research Summaries, the ELNE aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, all the while remaining true to the essence of one of the ELNE's main objectives; providing a platform for relevant education stakeholders to dialogue.

As you read through the Journal, you'll get a glimpse into who we are and what we do. However, the Booklet of Research Summaries is undoubtedly the centrepiece of this journal. This collection of works brings together the efforts of dedicated researchers whose work is paving the way for innovative solutions and change in education. Their research, enriched by the contributions of the ELNE Research Committee, offers a wealth of knowledge.

We encourage you to reflect on the themes and findings and consider how they might be applied to your own context. Remember, the journey does not end with research - it is merely the beginning towards the transformation into learning communities.

Our best wishes,

Silvia, Valentina and Axelle

## Who are we?

The ELNE is the Educational Leadership Network Europe, a passionate and committed community of education stakeholders working to enhance and strengthen collaborative leadership in education in Europe. It has the ultimate goal of improving the learning outcomes for students and is founded on the conviction that quality education is at the heart of social progress.

This Europe-wide, ever-growing network is currently composed of 60 partner organisations from 34 countries, including European-level networks, universities, and various national, regional, and local institutions in the

education and training sector. These ELNE members represent the voices of tens of thousands of education employers, teachers, school heads, parents, students, researchers, policymakers, and more.

The ELNE provides its community with a platform to 1) showcase and disseminate exemplary educational research, practices, and social programmes; 2) participate in a meaningful dialogue with representatives from other stakeholder groups and break the silos; and 3) get inspired and empowered to shape the future of education.

## Our work

Every year the ELNE launches a set of calls for applications in search of the most inspiring practices and research from different places across Europe. These showcases have collaborative leadership as a focus, as a means, and as an ultimate goal. They aim to empower our audience to transfer the successful examples into their own context, adapting them to seize the opportunities and tackle the challenges specific to their situation.

To share and spread the first-hand knowledge acquired from our community of key stakeholders, the ELNE has two main tools:

**The European Educational Leadership Week (EELW)**, a week-long online forum made up of dynamic and innovative webinars. These are collaboratively organised by the ELNE partners, associated networks, and other national organisations and universities, where educational research, school best practices, and ongoing policy work are shared with a wide audience of stakeholders in a live format, actively engaging in the conversation.

**The ELNE Journals**, the main dissemination material of the ELNE. There will be three publications a year. Although each ELNE Journal will be different, they will all provide information about the latest work of the Network and provide a

platform for the ELNE Community to give visibility to their work. It will therefore keep readers updated about the ELNE and provide them with valuable insights from the members of its community.

In addition, the ELNE will publish annual research conclusions and policy recommendations, informing the policy work of one of its primary stakeholders, international organisations such as the European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and national-level decision-makers, supporting practice- and evidence-informed policymaking and research implementation.

As a result, the ELNE offers a unique value proposition to the different groups of stakeholders that it encompasses: visibility of their work; a source of inspiration for practice and research; the possibility of contributing to collaboratively finding solutions for some of the biggest challenges in the education sector; and access to a wide network of education stakeholders. The ELNE offers its members the opportunity to shape the future of education together.

# ELNE Annual Conference 2024

The ELNE hosted its inaugural Annual Conference on April 23rd of 2024, gathering around 100 education stakeholders from across Europe to celebrate its first year and to shape its future direction. The Conference emphasised collaborative leadership, learning communities, and the nexus between educational practices, research, and policymaking in Europe. Participants, representing diverse stakeholders including practitioners, researchers, policymakers, students, and parents, engaged in discussions and activities aimed at co-designing the future of education in Europe. The Conference covered key themes including the attractiveness of the teaching profession, educator well-being, and stakeholder engagement and cooperation.

Central to the Conference was the exploration of collaborative school leadership, with participants contributing to define this concept collectively. Success stories from practitioners and insights from the Policymaker's Panel underscored the importance of collaborative leadership and evidence-informed policymaking. While acknowledging progress, there was consensus on the need to strengthen collaboration and improve education quality, focusing on areas such as research literacy, peer learning, and long-term policy goals. The Conference served as a platform for reflection on past achievements and for laying the groundwork for the ELNE's future, emphasising the vital role of collaborative leadership in addressing challenges and enhancing education quality across Europe.

In the full report, find more details from the Conference, some visual highlights, and tips on how to get involved in the ELNE over the coming year.

[Click here to read and download the full Conference report.](#)

# **Booklet of best Summaries**

*By the ELNE Research Committee*



# Introduction to the Booklet

In the first ELNE call, we invited various actors in the field of European education to submit proposals for webinar themes, inspiring showcases of practice, and research summaries. During the ELNE Webinar Week, from the 12th to the 16th of February 2024, we wanted to give visibility to the best of them and to provide various stakeholders in the field of education an opportunity to learn from them and to discuss them. We will further use these webinars, showcases and summaries to make education policy recommendations together for transforming schools into learning communities, which is the overarching goal of the first ELNE year.

ELNE Journal 1 handles the inspiring showcases of practice, ELNE Journal 2 deals with the research summaries, and ELNE Journal 3 will compile the work of the first ELNE year, including policy recommendations. In addition to the webinars, showcases and summaries, these will include surveys to EELW participants and the outcomes of the Annual Conference, held on the 23rd of April 2024. The focus of ELNE Journal 3 is to analyse the process of the year, to present education policy recommendations for transforming schools into learning communities, and to prepare the continuum for the second ELNE year. This serves the ultimate goal of ELNE to establish a 360-degree susta-

nable learning community to make European education policy in a sustainable and evidence-informed way.

This booklet of best summaries contains those research summaries among the first ELNE call that were considered to convey the most relevant and usable presentations to support processes for transforming schools into learning communities. In all, the booklet contains eight summaries. Seven of them were also included in the ELNE webinar week. Two of the summaries focus on the transformation of the learning context and environments, three on the transformation of the educational profession in/to leadership practices, and a further three on innovative research on educational leadership for the shortage of educational staff and empowerment of educators.

With relevance as a selection criterion, we referred to the focus of the call. For the first ELNE year, the focus is on transforming schools into learning communities with the aforementioned three underlying foci as the various focus areas of the summaries in this booklet. The relevance criterion presupposed the leadership focus in one way or another.

For usability, the main criterion was that the summary was transferable to other schools either as an adaptation/

customisation and/or offering ideas for other kinds of practical applications. To be usable, the presentation of the showcase had to be complete, objective, and accurate.

Following the completeness criterion, we expected the presentation to provide enough details on the context, challenge answered, actions introduced, and people benefiting from the initiative. A complete presentation had to provide enough information for colleagues across Europe to be able to fully understand the practice, to adopt it, and to subject it to necessary modifications based on cultural and local contexts. The information also had to be objective and accurate so that the usability of the summary would be based on firm grounds.

For the commentaries of the best summaries in this booklet, we relied on the conceptual framework we had created to guide our work. Hence, in the commentaries, you will repeatedly come up with a systemic and transformative approach for the development of schools into learning communities. This approach, we believe should include enacting leadership from the bottom to the top to empower teachers and to create learning environments founded on collaborative leadership. In addition, when we succeed in all this, we believe that knowledge production, mediation, and transfer will develop to meet the European Commission's objectives and

expectations. This means that the 360-degree learning community is together constructing knowledge, reflecting on the knowledge, and transferring knowledge into practice, research, and policy in novel ways to make a sustainable future in the complex and dynamic world.

# Research Summaries

## Transformation of the learning context and environments

What makes a good learning environment and how can this be achieved sustainably? How have learning contexts, the conditions for learners to build knowledge, been transformed in recent times, and how can we best keep up with these ever-changing environments? The following Research Summaries show how learning environments prompt collaborative and transformational leadership in schools.

### Research Corner: Learning environments

In this webinar, speakers presented their findings on the evolution and transformation of learning environments. The research was selected as part of the ELNE call for research summaries and introduced by Katalin Tóth-Pjeczka (Hungary) and Ana Cristina Torres (Portugal) who delved into exceptional examples of learning environments, their creation and their management.

The discussion from the two research papers, focusing on school management's role in institutional absorption capacity and promoting sustainability-conscious students whilst using technology, highlighted the need for more collaboration with research in schools, an element that many educators are unable to participate in due to lack of time and the European-wide issue staff shortage in education. Speaker Fergal McCarthy (Ireland) shared the methods used by Kinsale Community School to become a research institute for practice emphasising the value of providing teachers with the opportunity to reflect and improve in addition to conversations with teaching and learning at their core, linking back to research practices.



## **The role of school management in institutional absorption capacity**

(Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary)

Dr Ágnes Fazekas, Katalin Tóth-Pjeczka, Tamás Kersánszi

This study underscores the importance of absorptive capacity in public education institutions. With a Hungarian public education organisation as a case study, the researchers sought to answer the following questions: What is the importance of absorption capacity in public education institutions? What is the importance of absorptive capacity in an organisation? What examples of good management practice can we observe in the Hungarian public education system?

Absorptive capacity is the ability of institutions to adapt effectively to new knowledge, technologies, and environmental changes and to be able to apply innovative solutions and create innovative learning environments. Amidst a rapidly changing social environment, an institution that can develop a close network of links is more flexible in its methodology and tools and, thus more open to innovation. Further, the management of an institution operating a networked school management system, which is rarely observed in the public education subsystem, can provide the school

with external resources that can hardly be provided by cooperation with the maintainer alone. By embracing grassroots initiatives and fostering international networking, educational organisations can harness the collective expertise of diverse stakeholders to drive sustainable educational development. Thus, the development of absorptive capacity through networked management emerges as a potent strategy for promoting innovation and enhancing the resilience of education systems in an ever-changing world.

**Want to read more?**  
**Click here for the full text in English**  
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This research summary demonstrates the value of building partnerships between the school and the industry as well as academia for the benefit of students and teachers. The value of the partnership sits in the generation of resources and the maximisation of shared knowledge in a sustainable manner that can support the schools by providing solutions to their various needs. Such resources may include infrastructure and funds, applicable ideas, expertise and skills from parents and generally anything that can be utilised for the enrichment of the school and the improvement of the student's learning. An important element of this

initiative is that the development of the partnerships goes beyond a simple exchange of ideas to achieving long-lasting effects which have a positive impact on schools.

This is an example of knowledge transfer and enactment that enables schools to harness knowledge that has practical applications for their functioning. It shows how the initiation of specific networked activities may improve the well-being of students and teachers. One key example shows how the collective work of the school with a specific company enabled new forms of learning in foreign languages first and then moving on from that to learning across history and STEM subjects. This was made possible through the incorporation of new tools into the school environment, which would not have been possible without the existence of the partnership.

The research team was comprised of researchers from three Hungarian universities which were part of the network that developed the conditions for the institutional absorption capacity by synthesising scholarly inquiry from three earlier studies.

The methodology for this research study used mixed method research. The researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data focusing on models of teachers learning, educational innovation and STEM.

They were able to elicit examples of networked-based school leadership approaches. From that they developed a school management model based on networked partnerships.

Its relevance in education points to the enactment of educational leadership throughout the community and the development of networks inherent in the community. These initiatives lead to the transformation of education in promoting authentic contexts for learning and achieving long-lasting effects. The knowledge generation emerging from the collaborative approach in providing solutions to educational challenges offers a modern and more effective approach to school leadership as well as new ways of continuous professional development that point to the transformation of schools into learning communities. The concept of absorption capacity is directly linked to organisational learning and the management of knowledge to respond to societal challenges and environmental demands through innovation.

This example matches the aims of the EU to work towards systemic and transformative approaches in education that promote cohesion, inclusion and active citizenship in ways that help society in an empowering manner.

## **esGarden – School Gardens for Future Citizens**

(FPCEUP, Portugal & University of Valencia, Spain)

Ana Cristina Torres, Angélica Monteiro, Natália Zanon, Sara Blanc Clavero & Ana Eloisa Carvalho

The basis of this research served to create a framework which connects schools with technology for future-minded students. The pan-European project is based on the need to transfer technological advances to schools in addressing social concerns, environmental responsibility, and sustainability. The esGarden exemplifies the enhancement of the digital era in educating young people and children. Centring on the role of schools in shaping socially and environmentally conscious citizens, the collaboration between formal and non-formal education entities facilitated the creation of a community which addresses ICT integration in schools cooperatively, considering technological innovations, research, and real school needs.

The project's quality assessment encompasses four key dimensions: collaboration, effectiveness, innovative curriculum management and impact and sustainability. Qualitative metrics used for evaluating this framework included

academic success, student motivation, critical thinking, responsible attitudes, cooperative behaviours, and engagement in social challenges. This multidimensional quality evaluation framework and instruments enhance the transfer of theoretical and practical knowledge among stakeholders, making it a significant contribution to the broader community, particularly those involved in designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating European projects in school and academic contexts.

**Want to read more?**

**Click here for the full text in English**

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This research summary is a wonderful example of how to integrate research and practical development in an Erasmus+ project. As described in the Webinar Week's Research Corner, the focus of esGarden – School Gardens for Future Citizens was not on research but on developing schools in five European countries to produce and sustain school gardens as hands-on and community-engaging educational tools. The role of the research was to monitor the development process and the impact of the project by providing research information to the sixteen schools that were responsible for designing and enacting the project.


The research team consisted of researchers representing three universities from three different countries. The research team collected data during the development process on the sixteen learning activities that constituted the development process that lasted for one and a half years.

The data collection used surveys, observations, and participants' reports. There were both pre- and post-online surveys for the students and another set of surveys for the other participants of the school development communities. The observations targeted the enactment of the learning activities supported by the teachers' own reports on the learning activities.

In addition to providing the project developers with information about their development processes and their impact, the research team came up with two main means of support for the school project teams and other similar efforts. The first was providing a research framework on applying technology in holistic education within school settings, drawing interest from associations advocating values such as coherence, care for people and the planet, equity, co-responsibility, solidarity, and transparency. The second was creating a multidimensional quality evaluation framework and instruments to enhance the transfer of theoretical and practical knowledge among stakeholders, making it a signi-

ficant contribution to the broader community, particularly those involved in designing, developing, enacting and evaluating European projects in school and academic contexts.

The research summary on esGarden – School Gardens for Future Citizens provides a highly relevant example of how to apply the systemic and transformative approach to transform learning contexts and environments as collaboration among practitioners and researchers. In this collaboration, we can identify enacting leadership from the bottom to the top to empower teachers and create learning environments founded on collaborative leadership. In addition, the knowledge production, mediation, and transfer in the project beautifully meet the European Commission's objectives and expectations for knowledge management. Supported by the project website, the summary also provides complete, objective, and accurate information to enhance the usability of the research.

 Food for thought

- Have you experienced integrating research and practice as in esGarden?
- What challenges did you have in the integration and how did you solve them

## Transformation of the educational profession in/to leadership practices

Over recent years, the concept, roles, tasks and responsibilities of the educational profession have undergone significant changes, especially in and to leadership practices. This research presents new frameworks and innovative pedagogies and the changing responsibilities and tasks of teachers as educators and leaders in learning communities and environments.

### Research Corner: Transformation of the educational profession

How has the education sector evolved in the past years? How does this affect the educational profession and the work to enhance collaborative leadership in schools? How can educational policy, education systems, school organisations, and learning institutions better adapt to these changes? In this Research Corner webinar, three speakers, Katalin Tóth-Pjeczka (Hungary), Sarah Fichtner (Germany), and Loes van Wessum (Netherlands), shared their findings regarding new learning frameworks and environments and the changing responsibilities and tasks of educators and leaders in learning communities.

Following a roundtable discussion, the speakers emphasised the importance of lifelong learning, learning from one another both inside and outside the school setting, and even looking further out from the education sector for new research and holistic and systemic approaches. These elements would be part of the foundation to strengthen the 'culture of curiosity' and underpin the notion that a learning environment is more than just the school setting. Overall, the researchers affirmed that leadership practices should encourage the active participation of educators in new research, whilst maintaining that this should be collaborative and not an individual task of the educator.





## **The Cornelsen School Leadership Studies – School leaders’ perspectives on school transformation in Germany**

(FIBS, Germany)  
Dr Sarah Fichtner

The FIBS Research Institute is conducting a series of studies on school leaders’ perspectives on school transformation in Germany by order of the Cornelsen school book publishing house. One of the studies’ central focuses is on how school leaders perceive and manage their roles and tasks – shifting between administration, teaching and leadership. Providing a rounded view from these stakeholders, the studies present the challenges that they and their teams face when applying their transformative leadership vision for learning in a highly regulated, hierarchical and complex federal-state education system.

But they also highlight good practices of what school leaders value as “good” leadership for learning and the qualifications, ongoing learning processes and structural changes needed. Leadership for learning defined in a broad sense affects schools as learning institutions on three levels: it impacts the overall organisational learning, the professional learning of all employees as a professional learning community, and the pupils’ individual learning.

The studies also present school leaders’ visions of the schools of tomorrow, where many classified by the study as ‘reformers’ express the need to transform their roles and tasks from school administrators to autonomous, transformative leaders.

**Want to read more?**  
**Click here for the full text in German**  
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The Cornelsen School Leadership Studies are an example of exemplary research practice and offer significant advantages for addressing leadership issues and formulating policy recommendations.

Conducted by the independent FIBS Research Institute for the Economics of Education and Social Affairs, the studies present a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of school leaders’ perspectives on school transformation in Germany. Using qualitative, face-to-face interviews and a representative online survey, the research captures a detailed and diverse dataset. This methodological rigour ensures that the findings are both deep and broad, providing a well-rounded understanding of the issues at stake. One of the key strengths of this research is its focus on giving school leaders a public voice as practitioners of education. By regularly addressing the issues that concern school leaders in their day-to-day work, and by highlighting trends and visions

for the future, the studies bridge the gap between theoretical education policy and the practical realities faced by school leaders. This focus on real-world concerns enhances the relevance and impact of the research.

The studies make a worthy contribution to the discourse on leadership by examining how school leaders manage their roles amidst the challenges of a highly regulated, hierarchical and complex federal-state education system. The research highlights the importance of transformative leadership practices that go beyond mere administration to focus on strategic school development and student learning. This shift from administrative to leadership roles is critical to fostering innovative and effective learning environments.

Another valuable striking finding is the strong demand from school leaders for more autonomy. The majority of school leaders believe that disadvantaged pupils are not receiving the individual support they need and that greater autonomy at the school level is essential to address this issue. This call for decentralisation and increased local authority is not only relevant to the German context but also resonates with broader international discussions on educational governance and school leadership. The research urges policymakers to rethink current structures and support more auto-

nous, contextualised leadership models. The study also identifies good practice and the necessary qualifications for effective leadership. It highlights the value of shared leadership structures, collaborative team teaching and the integration of multi-professional teams supported by digital infrastructure. These practices are essential for creating a collaborative and supportive school culture that facilitates continuous professional development and improves student outcomes.

The policy recommendations that emerge from this research are both practical and forward-looking. They argue for a reappraisal of the current system of school governance, administration and inspection, and urge policymakers to give school leaders more autonomy. Such a shift would allow school leaders to focus more on strategic development and less on administrative burdens, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of schools. Furthermore, the research highlights the need for policy frameworks that support shared leadership and collaborative practices. Encouraging the development of collaborative team-teaching structures and multi-professional teams can lead to more effective and innovative educational practices. The integration of digital tools and resources is also highlighted as a critical component in supporting these collaborative efforts

and enhancing professional development opportunities. The dissemination of the Cornelsen School Leadership Studies ensures that the research findings reach a wide audience. The studies are available for free download and are presented at various conferences, school leadership meetings and policy roundtables throughout Germany. This broad dissemination helps to inform public discourse and supports the implementation of the research's policy recommendations.

In conclusion, the Cornelsen School Leadership Studies represent good research practice through their robust methodology, comprehensive analysis and meaningful findings. They significantly enrich the leadership discourse by highlighting the transformative potential of school leaders and providing practical policy recommendations. By addressing the critical need for greater autonomy and shared leadership structures, the studies provide a roadmap for creating effective, supportive and adaptive learning environments that meet the needs of diverse educational contexts.

### **The role of adaptive leadership support in creating an institution-tailored learning environment**

(Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary)  
Krisztina Czető, Sándor Lénárd, Katalin Tóth-Pjeczka

**Through a qualitative research method, the practices of six innovative schools were explored to examine different processes of organisational learning and leadership support. How can a leader support the development of such a diverse learning environment? What makes a learning environment supportive in general and what are their common points? The case study strove to present that the optimal learning environment is organisation-dependent but can equally capture common elements of management processes and support that help to adaptively support different contexts.**

**Highlighting the ability to create an organisational vision needs to be more strongly integrated into the learning of heads of institutions, gearing the leadership and members of the organisation to understand what goals are to be achieved. Additionally monitoring teaching-learning processes and establishing a learning-centred organisational climate are key elements of supportive learning environments.**

**The creation of organisational knowledge is facilitated and encouraged when managerial tasks and activities are shared, and middle managers play an active role in the functioning of the organisation. Optimally, when leadership roles and tasks are shared, cooperation between members is spontaneous and power roles and hierarchies are flexible, which helps to internalise values and goals among members.**

**Want to read more?**

**Click here for the full text in Hungarian**

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This study stands out as an exemplary piece of research with valuable implications for leadership discourse and policy recommendations. The thorough grounding in established educational theory and research, with citations from influential scholars such as Hargreaves, Kelchtermans, Meijs and Sachs, provides a robust theoretical foundation. This ensures that the study is built on a solid foundation of existing knowledge, thereby enhancing its credibility and relevance. The use of a qualitative case study approach is particularly compelling. By delving deeply into the practices of six innovative schools, the research captures the complexities and nuances of adaptive leadership support in diverse learning environments.

This detailed examination of different organisational learning processes and leadership practices allows for a thorough understanding of the dynamics at play, which is crucial for drawing meaningful conclusions.

The diversity in the selection of schools- in terms of type, ownership and location - ensures that the findings are not limited to one type of institution. This broadens the applicability of the findings and makes them relevant to a wide range of educational contexts. In addition, the involvement of principals, teachers and students in both the research process and the writing of the case studies brings in multiple perspectives. This participatory approach not only validates the findings but also makes them more applicable to real-world settings. It underlines the importance of involving different stakeholders in the development and implementation of educational strategies.

From a leadership perspective, the study makes a valuable contribution by emphasising the importance of adaptive leadership. It shows how leaders can support the development of learning environments that are tailored to the specific needs of their institutions. Adaptive leadership is shown to be crucial in navigating the complexities of educational settings and fostering a supportive learning environment. The

advocacy of shared leadership roles and responsibilities is another important finding. The study shows that this approach leads to more spontaneous collaboration and flexible power hierarchies within schools. This promotes a more democratic and inclusive approach to school leadership, fostering a collaborative and supportive organisational culture. The emphasis on creating and communicating a clear organisational vision is particularly important. This aspect of leadership is essential for aligning the goals and efforts of all members of the school community, thereby fostering a cohesive and purposeful environment. A strong organisational vision helps to guide professional learning and institutional culture change.

The policy recommendations derived from this study are both practical and impactful. The need for both formal and non-formal preparation for middle management roles is highlighted, suggesting that policymakers should develop targeted professional development programmes. This would equip aspiring middle managers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support teacher learning and organisational development. In addition, the study highlights the importance of recognising and integrating informal learning opportunities into professional development frameworks. This ensures that valuable informal learning experie-

nces are recognised and capitalised upon, thereby enhancing overall professional development. The suggestion to encourage collaboration and networking between schools is another valuable recommendation. Policymakers should encourage initiatives that facilitate collaboration between schools, such as professional learning communities, joint workshops and digital platforms for sharing resources.

These efforts can lead to the dissemination of good practices and continuous professional development. The potential of digital tools to enhance professional development is also noted. Supporting the integration of digital resources and platforms would enable teachers to access online databases, participate in webinars and engage in virtual professional communities. This digitisation can streamline the sharing of knowledge and resources, making professional development more accessible and effective.

In conclusion, this paper exemplifies good research practice through its comprehensive methodology, stakeholder engagement and practical focus. It contributes to the leadership discourse by promoting adaptive and shared leadership practices and offers valuable policy recommendations for improving teacher learning and professional development in educational institutions. By addressing

these critical areas, the study provides a roadmap for creating effective, supportive and adaptive learning environments tailored to the needs of different educational contexts.

### **Instructional School Leadership Scenarios from the Perspective of Croatian School Principals**

(University of Rijeka)  
Vesna Kovač, Monika Pažur

**This paper presents empirical findings from a study examining Instructional School Leadership (ISL) characteristics. Focusing on 46 Croatian school principals, the study addressed the following research questions: how do school principals articulate and evaluate the ISL practices implemented within their institutions? and how do school principals perceive and navigate the factors influencing the initiation and execution of these ISL practices? Two pivotal themes were essential to this research 1) the principal's role in enhancing student capabilities and academic achievements and 2) the principal's influence on bolstering teacher capacities and enhancing teaching effectiveness.**

**Structured interviews operationalised these themes within the interview framework. Principals consistently highlight the pivotal role of the teachers they engage with**

**in determining the success of ISL initiatives, presenting a significant challenge in their roles. In particular, successful ISL scenarios emerged in schools where principals collaborated with motivated teachers, thus deploying appropriate strategies to engage with resistant or indifferent teachers.**

**Want to read more?  
Click here for the full text in English**  
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This research summary presents a genuine scientific study on the subtopic of the transformation of the educational profession into leadership practices. In addition to the brief and commentary, the publications of the study linked to this research summary provide complete, objective, and accurate information for the study's usability. Based on the information, the study is highly relevant to the overarching topic of ELNE year one. In addition, the study is transferable to other studies as adaptation, customisation and offering ideas for other kinds of practical research applications. In addition, the results appear significant and can be used as contextual enactments in other school contexts.

The researchers used the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), which is, according to them,

a leading and influential instrument for the examination of instructional school leadership across the world.

The study is founded on the instructional leadership theory, which according to the authors “is a set of roles and tasks of principals (and other subjects involved in school leadership) focused on the improving of learning process and teaching through guidance, support and ensuring resources for teachers and students in those processes”. One of the reasons for applying instructional leadership in the study was that it was especially mentioned in the OECD TALIS Report 2020 for the Croatian education context. Hence, we identified a systemic approach integrated into the study.

Another element that inspired us was that the authors emphasised viewing instructional leadership as investing in the development of students’ social and academic capacities and the development of teachers’ professional and intellectual capacities. We regarded this as a transformative approach to support students and teachers to enact leadership from the bottom to the top founded on collaborative leadership.

As answers to our further questions to the researchers, they highlighted the collaboration of schools and universities so that schools could benefit from

researchers’ work and universities learn from schools’ work. This should also affect how we provide education at universities to people working in education. Furthermore, you can find in the articles of the study information on how policymakers could support the use of research. This includes, for example, clear definitions of professional tasks, co-working, providing more autonomy and support, revising legislation, supporting quality work, and revising professional development.

 Food for thought

- What opportunities do you have for school-university collaboration?
- What support do you need for this from policymakers?
- In our Research Committee, we discussed the various theories connected with leading learning, for example, instructional and pedagogical leadership. What theories are you founding your work on and why?

## Innovative research on educational leadership for the shortage of educational staff and empowerment of educators

The shortage of educational staff is a pressing issue in education, requiring sustainable solutions. The following research explores empowering the workforce through alternative teaching conditions, improved work environments, reduced teacher stress, increased attractiveness of the profession, and new career paths based on evolving roles.

In response to the ELNE Call for Research Summaries, speakers shared their innovative research on 'educational leadership for the shortage of educational staff and empowerment of educators'. In the Research Corner below we heard from Ágnes Hornyák (Hungary), Lindsay Malone (Ireland), Mariya Gaydarova, Todor Atanasov and Manol Manolov (Bulgaria).

Following a presentation on their work and findings, the speakers explored the role of research in alleviating education staff shortages and empowering educators in a roundtable discussion. The speakers concurred on the importance of motivational factors in providing educators with a sense of agency, but also to be motivated beyond themselves and to champion other educators, which is where the benefit of more cohesive mentoring systems would be critical. Additionally, the use of technology and digital content as a means of empowerment was brought out. Speakers discussed the benefits and drawbacks of using digital approaches but ultimately agreed that it should not be a replacement for human contact, but an alternative which also aspires for greater participation of actors to be a part of the educational process.





## **Transformation of Bulgarian education in the age of digitalization. Review of developments and challenges.**

(World Education Forum Bulgaria, Bulgaria)

Mariya Gaydarova, Manol Manolov

**This research conducts a review of studies focused on innovation and method implementation in Bulgarian education over the past seven years. After a complete reform of the education system in 2016, embracing the decentralisation of educational programmes, it has demonstrated an intense and proactive approach to the modernisation and improvement of various aspects of the educational process.**

**Focusing on reducing teacher stress, implementation of innovative teaching methods and the provision of the necessary well-qualified human resources to the education system, the study focuses on teachers and headteachers from primary and secondary schools in Bulgaria. It highlights that despite the rapid development over the past decade, there is still a need for more qualified specialists to occupy the different roles in the process of transformation of the school into an integrated environment for building flexible personalities and leaders, ready to meet the requirements of the 21st century.**

**Want to read more?**

**Click here for the full text in English**

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This study is a review of research aimed at the innovation and implementation of the methods and approaches in Bulgarian education in the last seven years. It explores the evolution of traditional learning methods into the modern era of technology. The introduction sets the stage by highlighting the integration of digital resources, which has been shown to significantly improve learning outcomes, especially in distance learning contexts. It notes that by 2022, 85% of educators globally had incorporated some form of digital learning tools into their curricula.

The summary emphasises the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in enhancing science education through experiments and observations, as well as facilitating project-based learning. It describes how ICT supports dynamic group formation and collaborative learning, and shifts the teacher's role from a traditional knowledge source to a facilitator of learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digitisation of education worldwide, prompting a survey among Bulgarian teachers to examine the adoption and

effectiveness of modern learning methods. The literature cited indicates that this shift has globally boosted the use of digital tools in education.

First of all, it is crucial to establish collaborative networks between universities, research institutions, and schools. Encouraging teachers to conduct action research and share findings through professional development sessions, journals, and conferences will support this integration. A mixed-methods research approach should be used to gather comprehensive data and implement evidence-based practices, leveraging digital platforms for data-driven decision-making and ongoing professional development. Fostering a culture of reflective practice and peer feedback is essential. Additionally, advocating for supportive policies and funding to make these initiatives possible is vital. Publishing research findings in academic journals and open-access repositories will support wider dissemination and document research efforts. Organising thematic meetings, master classes, and discussions will further integrate research and practice, emphasising the roles of principals and teachers as leaders, mentors, and facilitators. Documented research information can shape practical guidelines for learning communities and provide relevant data on AI in education, exploring its benefits, risks

and enactment challenges.

Teachers identify numerous advantages of distance learning, including personalised learning, increased student engagement, and the development of digital skills, allowing students to work at their own pace and manage their time more effectively. However, they also highlight challenges such as a lack of social interaction, difficulties in physical education, technical issues, and increased stress for students, teachers, and parents, along with the significant time investment required for lesson preparation and feedback. Despite these challenges, the research indicates that ICT has become an indispensable part of education, with teachers planning to continue using these tools in traditional classroom settings, demonstrating its essential role in modern education.

These findings support the European Commission's objectives of enhancing digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, and fostering innovation in teaching and learning practices. The emphasis on personalised learning and the integration of digital tools directly aligns with the Commission's goal to ensure inclusive and high-quality education for all learners. Through enhanced support and effective use of technology, the education system can become more sustainable and

appealing to current and future educators.



### Food for thought

- Does your centre have some kind of collaborative network with other institutions?
- In what ways are you using digital resources and ICT tools to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes?
- What strategies do you use to balance the benefits and challenges of the use of ICT tools in your lessons?

### **Mind the Ladder: An exploration of the Lived Experiences of women in senior leadership roles in higher education.**

(Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board, Ireland)  
Dr Lindsay Malone

This research took an interpretivist approach to understanding the lived experiences of women in senior leadership roles in higher education in Ireland. In order to inform future policies and practices for gender equality in higher education in Ireland, the study aimed to ascertain if the current gender equality measures are affecting any real change for women by generating empirical evidence of the lived experience of women. This was done by examining and understanding the barriers they have encountered during their career.

The findings indicated systemic

injustices faced by women in senior leadership roles within higher education. The analysis was framed around Fraser's (2003) view that equality and social justice are principally problems of parity of participation. Redistribution, representation, and recognition are three conditions which must be met to achieve this. Under the lens of redistribution, women encounter patriarchal stigma associated with flexible working arrangements and unequal distribution of care work, limiting their independence and value. Secondly, through the representation lens, the dominance of men in HE creates the conditions for the bullying of women, affecting their respect and cultural values. Lastly, under the recognition lens, women do not have an equal political voice as social actors.

**Want to read more?**

**Click here for the full text in English**

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This research summary targeted at the call topic of 'Innovative research on educational leadership for the shortage of educational staff and empowerment of educators' with a focus on female leaders within higher education. We considered the summary relevant for the overarching objective of ELNE's first year, transforming schools into

learning communities, as it provides an insight into inclusive learning communities with gender equity at the core.

Our criteria for including systemic thinking is met with the methodological framework. As the researcher explains, there is quantitative research on female leaders in higher education. This presents both how low the numbers of female higher education readers have been in Ireland and how the numbers have been increasing through women challenging persisting policies in legal courts and having these policies revised. As often, the quantitative research does not tell how female leaders experience their situation. So, the researcher decided to complement the existing information with a phenomenological qualitative study. This is something we can recommend also more broadly, to conduct various kinds of research on the same phenomenon to obtain a more many-sided picture of it.

When tackling a totally new phenomenon, we can investigate it with a tabula rasa data-grounded method, just collecting it without any preconceptions and trying to see what the data tells us. When there already is existing research and information on the phenomenon, one can strengthen the usability of one's own study by applying earlier applied concepts,

theories, and methods. This study used two earlier lenses for this purpose. With Lois McNay's agency and Nancy Fraser's recognition, representation, and redistribution lenses, she could build on other researchers' work and compare her own findings with those found earlier using the lenses. The methodological setting also provides an opportunity for methodological improvements.

As for the completeness, openness, and accuracy criteria, the research summary video provides a lot of information on how the study was conducted to both evaluate the study and to use it to support one's own research. For example, the context, methodology, participants, and timeline of the study are explicitly presented for further adaptation, customisation and offering ideas for other kinds of practical applications for research applications.

As described in the brief, the findings indicate that although the number of female leaders in higher education has been increasing in Ireland, there is still work to be done both for female leaders to have more equitable career paths for higher education leadership positions and better equity working in them. The policy recommendations presented in the video provide a transformative approach for more inclusive learning communities in higher education.

We believe that this can decrease teacher shortage and empower educators more widely. The recommendations include, among others, increasing awareness of the issues, clear and designated policies to improve the situation, renewing and providing continuous education, and offering professional opportunities that acknowledge the persisting situation.

### **The importance of teacher motivational factors in the development of educational innovations and retention in the teaching profession**

(University of Debrecen, Hungary)  
Ágnes Hornyák

**This study explored the motivational factors influencing teachers to innovate in disadvantaged schools. The research aimed to help develop an incentive system for teachers to help prevent them from leaving the profession, thus addressing the shortage of educational staff.**

Through semi-structured interviews with teachers, a qualitative content analysis compared teachers who developed educational innovations and those who did not. Answering the question “What are the motivational factors that can be identified as barriers to the development of innovations?”, the research identified both internal and

**external motivational factors related to the individual and workplace. Teachers who engage in extracurricular activities and maintain diverse professional networks are more likely to employ innovative practices.**

**The full text will be published in English in July 2024 in the Central European Journal of Educational Research, 2024 6(1)**

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What are the motivational factors that drive teachers to innovate in disadvantaged schools? How can we develop an incentive system to retain teachers and address the shortage of educational staff?

Student composition significantly affects performance, with Hungary showing greater disparities in student outcomes between schools compared to the OECD average. This research aimed to identify factors that can help overcome challenges related to student composition and promote educational innovation.

Through semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers in secondary institutions in disadvantaged regions, the study compared those who developed educational innovations with those who did not. Notably, teachers recognised for their innovative efforts were selected based on their registered

good practices, not self-declaration. These teachers highlighted the importance of collaboration in overcoming challenges related to student composition.

The research underscored the pressing issue of teacher shortages in Hungary, with declining interest in teacher training and high attrition rates. It emphasised the need to improve professional life, create better school atmospheres, and offer new career paths to make the teaching profession more attractive, especially in disadvantaged areas.

The results of the study identified both internal and external motivational factors as influencing teachers' willingness to innovate. Teachers who engage in extracurricular activities, maintain diverse professional networks, and seek professional self-realisation are more likely to develop innovation practices. The study confirmed that a lack of external motivational factors in early career stages hinders innovation. Additionally, parental involvement in pedagogical work was found to encourage teachers to innovate, highlighting the importance of external relationships and individual motivations in fostering educational innovation.

Implementing these strategies not only enhances the attractiveness of the teaching profession but also supports

the broader European aim of building resilient, inclusive, and forward-thinking educational systems. Thus, this study not only addresses local challenges in Hungary but also contributes to the overarching European agenda of educational excellence and equity.



### Food for thought

- Have you identified which teachers are registering good practices in your school? How are you promoting these good practices to be shared among the educational community?
- What specific strategies can be enacted in your school or institution to enhance teachers' willingness to innovate?
- How can collaboration between teachers and parental involvement be improved in your school to better address challenges related to student composition and performance?

## Evidence-informed education: a letter to policymakers

In the field of education and training, where progress is perpetual, one element always remains clear: informed decisions can pave the way for meaningful change. The work of the ELNE researchers addresses some of the most salient challenges in education. From the role of school management and gender inequality in leadership roles to motivation and innovation in the teaching profession, these studies are actively contributing to a better understanding of how we can enhance the learning experience for all.

We often reflect on the importance of evidence-informed education. However, the key is not just to understand the research but to actively take it into account when shaping policy and practice. As we have explored through the Booklet of Best Summaries, the outcomes of these studies, though pertinent for the most part to the context in which they were developed, can provide a roadmap for other stakeholders in education to instigate change in their own environment.

Educators can draw inspiration from these findings to explore or refine their teaching methodologies for more engaging classrooms. School leaders can utilise new frameworks to enact more effective leadership strategies, cultivating a positive school and institutional culture. By embracing the lessons learned from these research efforts, the entire educational community can move towards a future where every member has the opportunity to succeed.

But what would researchers wish for policymakers to take away from their research? In the following *Letter to Policymakers*, the ELNE Researchers shared what they would request or need from policymakers for the education and training sector to thrive.

*Dear education policymakers,*

Reduce teachers' workload to help them improve their professional knowledge by learning from each other, Dedicate time for regular professional collaboration and collaborative learning opportunities.

*- Katalin Toth-Pjeczka, Hungary*

School leaders request more autonomy from superior administrative and political structures, and urge policymakers to rethink the current educational system.

*- Sarah Fichtner, Germany*

Include women as active participants in the creation of policies. Include women in the review of the effectiveness of policies which are aimed at affecting positive change for them. Recognise that women lead differently than men and create policies that change the culture to allow both to thrive together!

*- Lindsay Malone, Ireland*

National policymakers could commission activities related to analysing and supporting the processes of transformative education and digitalisation at school level, organising joint initiatives to popularise the results of research carried out and starting work on the new values in education and curricula that have importance for the future sustainable digitalisation of the world, technology, AI.

*- Mariya Gaydarova, Bulgaria*

*Sincerely,*

*the EELW researchers*



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