International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT), 2025, Vol. 21, Issue 2 (Part 1), pp. 67-72

ICT tools in the Serbian Second Chance School: an example of Erasmus+ learning mobility

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the short-term mobility of a team of teachers from Serbian Second Chance School within the ongoing Erasmus+ KA1 project on digital inclusion of adult learners. The aim of mobility was to improve the digital competences of educators through the adoption of innovative methods for using ICT tools in teaching and learning. Five subject teachers learned about current trends in education through two simultaneous trainings in Italy, with special attention focused on online teaching, game-based learning and outdoor education. Reflective notes of trainer from the host organization, personal notes of Serbian teachers and the mobility document (Europass Mobility) were used as data sources. The study suggests that the benefits are reflected not only in the introduction of new ICT tools and the development of digital competences, but also in the development of competences for cooperation and intercultural exchange.

Keywords: *ICT tools; Second Chance School; professional development; Erasmus+*

INTRODUCTION

Professional development of in-service teachers in Serbia is achieved through various activities inside and outside the institution(s) where they work. Adult education (AE) has the potential to implement international mobility projects (Šarčević & Šarčević 2023), and there is empirical evidence that teachers from different types of public schools want to participate in Erasmus+ projects (Çimşir 2024). Learners in Second Chance Schools (SCSs) are mostly from socio-economically disadvantaged areas (Kiprianos & Mpourgos 2022). Others may also be part of marginalized groups, as is the case with the Roma population, which also makes up the vast majority of learners in Serbian SCSs. They must be at least 15 years old to enroll in this type of formal education (Šarčević 2024), and they are introduced to ICT tools from the lower grades.

When it comes to the use of ICT in teaching and learning, school teachers are required to constantly adapt to new digital tools and educational resources. Practitioners in Turkey have already pointed out that the greatest value of the Erasmus+ project is the use of technology in lessons (Günbayi & Vezne 2016).

This study provides insight into how non-EU countries are involved in projects that support the professional development of teachers in different types of schools. Topics such as ICT skills or digital inclusion are among the most frequently chosen for the implementation of Erasmus+ projects. What skills will be developed depends on the school and the target group. Understanding the context in which Erasmus+ projects are implemented is important for reflection on professional development through teacher mobility since "there has been limited research into the impact of Erasmus+ on adult education (AE) compared to other educational sectors" (Buiskool, de Greef & Mulder 2023, p.4). This paper reports on the effects of the short-term mobility of Serbian teachers within the Erasmus+ KA122-ADU project and their learning activities in professional development courses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Erasmus+ KA1 projects

Erasmus+ is a well-known EU program that provides funding for mobility and cooperation projects in areas such as higher, VET or adult education. The Tempus Foundation [1] is in charge of implementing the Erasmus+ program in Serbia. Its role is to support all institutions and organizations that apply for projects within the program. Institutions that can fully participate in the Erasmus+ program must belong to member states of the European Union or third countries associated with the Program (all countries of the European Union, Serbia, North Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey).

This program consists of three key activities:

- Key Activity 1 (KA1) are mobility projects for learning and acquiring new skills;
- Key Activity 2 (KA2) are projects of institutional cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices;
- Key Activity 3 (KA3) are projects to support the reform of educational policies and are intended for institutions that create and implement public policies in the field of education and youth.

Projects within KA1 attract a lot of attention from educators and/or managers from different school settings, especially in Turkey (Günbayi & Vezne 2016; Tokgöz & Korucu 2024). Putting practitioners in a position to decide for themselves which courses to attend abroad or to learn how to collaborate with other organizations can be a tremendous motivating stimulus for them. KA1 mobility usually lasts one or two weeks, which is enough to realize the most important activities within the project without taking too much away from school duties. In addition to learning new teaching methods and techniques, the benefits of Erasmus+ mobility for teachers and administrators include the improvement of digital skills, raising the quality of education, and a positive contribution to permanent learning (Tokgöz & Korucu 2024).

ICT tools for teachers and adult learners

The list of available ICT tools is constantly changing and expanding and the need for training in the use of these tools is increasing. However, attending national ICT courses is not always a guarantee that practitioners will be able to apply what they have learned. As one of the reasons for the insufficient integration of technology in the teaching process, school teachers point out that the trainers of the trainings they attended do not know enough about their needs (Esfijani & Zamani 2020). Another reason could be educators' resistance to new technology, which is especially present among experienced teachers and/or those who have not used ICT tools during initial education.

There are numerous tools and devices that adult education practitioners can use in their daily practice, and many are already used in primary or secondary education. Mucundanyi and Woodley (2021) described personal experiences in using following digital tools: Google Classroom, Google Docs, Google Scholar, Screencast-O-Matic, QuickTime Player and YouTube. These tools have been used in and out of the classroom for some time, and YouTube has been particularly popular during the Covid-19 pandemic for distance learning. Pixton is used in language classes through the creation of digital and printed versions of comics (Šarčević 2024).

In addition to knowing modern software, educators must also have certain knowledge of the hardware they use. It comes through the use of available devices. A systematic review of Erasmus+ projects related to ICT showed that both teachers and students most often use desktop computers

[1] More about Tempus Foundation available at: https://tempus.ac.rs/erasmus/ (Accessed: 5 November, 2024)

and laptops (Alonso de Castro & García-Peñalvo 2023). Students in SCSs often do not have access to these devices at home. On the other hand, "it is also reasonable to assume that many adult learners own a smartphone–and that this trend will only increase" (Inverso, Kobrin & Hashmi 2017, p.56).

DESCRIPTION OF THE MOBILITY EXPERIENCE

Considering that in Serbia exists a limited number of trainings for the professional development of in-service teachers in AE (Šarčević & Šarčević 2023), participation in an international project can be seen as an important step forward in current practice. Therefore, five subject teachers of a SCS from central Serbia were mobility participants in an institution that organizes professional trainings in the southern region of Italy.

This description of learning activities is mainly based on the reflective notes of trainer from the host organization, as well as on personal notes of Serbian teachers. Another important source is *Europass Mobility*, an official proof of participation in mobility for each individual and a certificate of recognition of acquired skills. Two teachers attended one training and the remaining three attended another training named as follows:

1. ONLINE TEACHING – GAMIFICATION&GAME BASED LEARNING. How to find a balance. Supporting teachers to face the new frontiers of the digital transformation.
2. TICO TRAINING – Teaching is Innovation, Communication and Outdoor education.

Learning activities lasted five days and due to the similarity in the contents of both trainings, they had the same trainer. First day started with an outdoor game called "Mission Impossible". The purpose of this game is to practice English and initial learning of the Italian language, encourage cooperation among teachers, get to know the local population and bridge cultural barriers. Intercultural exchange was achieved also through daily contact with educators from other countries. In the next three days, simultaneous trainings took place through seven modules:

- Module 1: Terms, definitions and actual trends in education. Distance teaching/learning, smart teaching/learning, blended teaching/learning. Gamification vs Game based learning;
- Module 2: EU guidelines and points of reference. The happening digital transformation;
- Module 3: Online teaching, sharing practices and common strategies;
- Module 4: Competences and skills to be developed by teachers, new approaches and competences built in students;
- Module 5: Making distinction between tools and most used apps and understanding the good balance;
- Module 6: Practices and methods nowadays to integrate digital tools in teaching;
- Module 7: My learning pathway. Design my way of learning on the topic and transfer it to daily teaching.

On the last day of the training, the teachers visited the local market to learn about the typical products of the region. This was followed by a visit to a historic coastal village and the discovery of local art. At the end, the training was evaluated and the teachers shared plans for the next steps in the project.

Ramirez and Inga (2022) argue that the strategy for improving adult learning consists of: 1. training teachers to use new technologies and 2. preparing adult learners for self-learning. Through the aforementioned activities, teachers had the opportunity to become familiar with the concepts of learning promoted in the EU zone – online and blended learning/teaching, game-based learning and outdoor education. The trainer demonstrated a number of applications and tools, some of

which are shown below (Table 1). Applications were used on teachers' smartphones to solve certain tasks during training.

Table 1: *Digital tools for teachers and adult learners*

Name	Purpose
https://quizlet.com/	Easier understanding of the teaching material with quizzes and associations
https://www.wolframalpha.com/examples/mathematics	Solving mathematical problems
https://evernote.com/	Creating notes
https://www.canva.com/sr_rs/ https://www.capcut.com/ https://www.inshot.com/ https://genially.com/	Creating presentations and short videos
https://nearpod.com/ https://edpuzzle.com/	Interactive platforms and tools
https://www.storyjumper.com/	Writing stories and books
https://chatgpt.com/	Auxiliary tool in work

Some of the offered websites and applications were encountered by teachers for the first time, while others were already used in various types of schools. Genially is used for interactive learning of mathematics in primary education (Garzon & Inga 2023), which is a suitable educational context for adults from marginal social groups in Serbian SCSs.

However, it is not just about presenting a large number of digital tools to practitioners. It is about motivating them to use new technology properly. Adequately prepared and motivated teachers thus become positive role models for adult learners in the school setting. Mobility for learning is only one part of this KA1 project. Integration of what has been learned into the school curriculum, different paths of knowledge dissemination and project evaluation are to come.

CONCLUSION

Educators in modern schools need new approaches to teaching and learning. Mobility as a learning opportunity is increasingly common among schools across Europe. Erasmus+ projects can be the base on which teachers from different types of schools build their professional path. The value of this form of professional development of in-service teachers is not only in developing specific work-related skills. The importance of intercultural cooperation is often emphasized, which increases the quality of the training content.

As Günbayi and Vezne (2016) suggested, there is a need for teachers to be introduced to the specific courses they can take through KA1 projects because they can lead to professional development. The need for such courses is perhaps most visible in schools working with specific target groups. An active approach to professional development took a group of practitioners out of their comfort zone, where routine training was replaced by an innovative way of learning about ICT

tools and possibilities of using them in teaching. In order to gain a deeper insight into the significance of the project activities, further research is needed after the implementation phase is completed.

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