



#1 Policy Paper on School-led Initiatives (SLI)

The Palestinian Authority with support from the Belgian Development Cooperation implemented from 2011 till 2015 the project "E-learning Curriculum in Primary and Secondary Education" in several hundred Palestinian schools. The aim of the project was to utilize ICTs in school education in order to enhance student-centred learning and stimulate 21st Century Skills in Palestine.

An Intervention Action Research was conducted in 2014-15 with the main aim to provide upstream policy advice to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education towards improving and advancing E-learning resources and practices for teachers, students and families. The Action Research was assigned to a consortium of the Open University of Cyprus and the Al-Quds Open University which produced the following Policy Papers:

0. Policy Paper on Information and Communication Technology in Education (ICTE)
1. **Policy Paper on School-led Initiatives (SLI)**
2. Policy Paper on Digital Educational Resources (DER)
3. Policy Paper on mobile Learning (m-L)
4. Policy Paper on Teacher Professional Learning (TPL)
5. Policy Paper on 21st Century Skills (21CS)

The policy papers are based on a "Most Significant Change" study from over a hundred school communities (teachers, students, headmasters, parents, administrators) that participated in the e-Learning project, on two 4-month long Action Research projects in two sets of ten schools, on extensive discussions and feedback from supervisors and MoEHE staff, and detailed review by the staff from the Belgian Development Agency. A two-day seminar was held by MoEHE in April 2015 in Jericho in which initial versions of the papers were presented and reviewed by policy makers and practitioners. Thus, although the authors of the papers have full responsibility, they cannot take full credit. In December 2015 the results were presented and discussed publicly in Ramallah.

Each policy paper includes a subject definition, followed by objectives of the policy under discussion, continuing with policy issues, questions and decisions to be made; related challenges, risks and opportunities are outlined and the relation to the curriculum is highlighted, concluding with Policy Recommendations. The main detailed part is prefaced by a single-page outline.

The purpose of the six policy papers, to be used in combination, is to provide policy advice to the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education given its strategy, as specifically expressed:

- "the shift from teacher to student-centred learning, considering that frontal teaching, lecturing and rote learning are still the predominant methods of teaching in Palestine" (cf. MoEHE, 2008a, 34; MoEHE, 2008b, 8; PEI, 2009, 14)
- "... that ICT in education plays an important role as an enabler for promoting pedagogical innovation and developing the quality of teaching and learning. ... ICT may be an effective tool for learning or part of a learning environment designed to achieve specific learning objectives, often not related to ICT content" (Strategic framework of the Palestinian Education Initiative)
- "... special focus on quality improvement in learning environments and students acquiring the so called 21th Century skills" (ToR of the Action Research)

This series of Policy Papers was produced in 2015 by a team of educators from the Open University of Cyprus, Al-Quds Open University, the Belgian Development Agency (BTC) and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of Palestine coordinated by Thanasis Hadzilacos, Professor of Educational Technology at the Open University of Cyprus.

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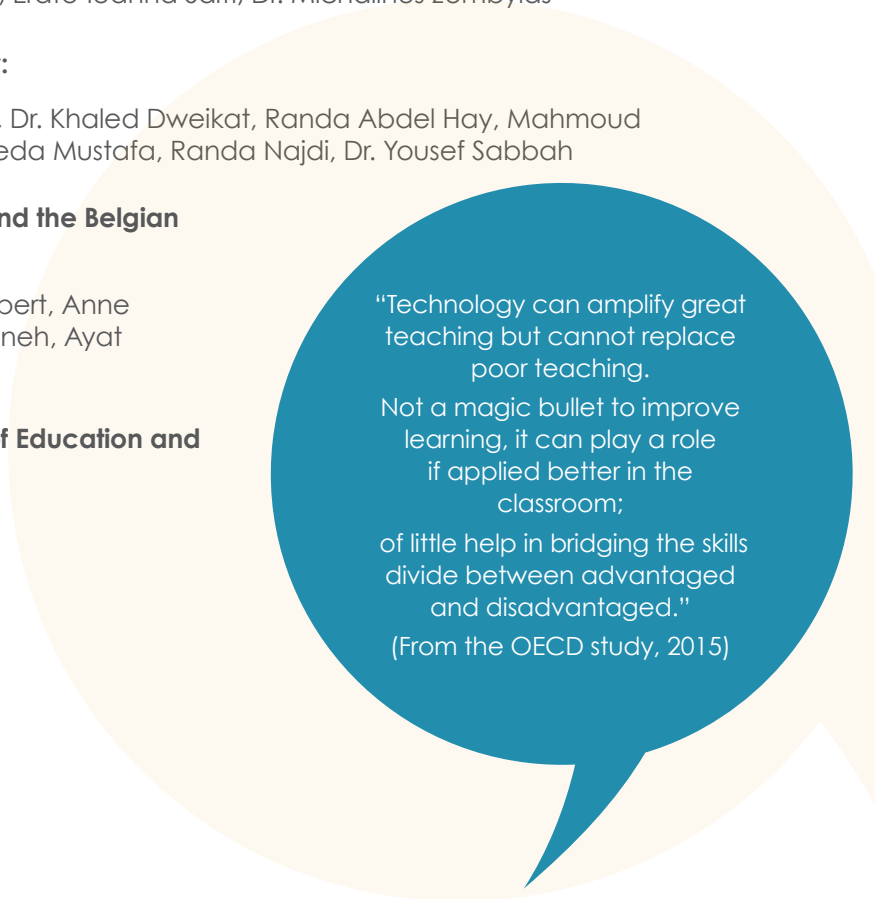
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"Technology can amplify great teaching but cannot replace poor teaching. Not a magic bullet to improve learning, it can play a role if applied better in the classroom; of little help in bridging the skills divide between advantaged and disadvantaged." (From the OECD study, 2015)

The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' points of view which are not necessarily shared by the Belgian Development Agency (BTC) or by the authorities of the countries concerned.

They include comments by the Palestinian colleagues from MoEHE and QOU after the Jericho meeting, April 2015. At all our visits we experienced a warm welcome from the people involved in supporting the educational process at primary and secondary schools in Palestine.

School-led Initiatives (SLI)

This page outlines the main recommendations for School-led Initiatives to utilize Information and Communication Technologies for Education (ICT@E), including objectives, related policy issues, challenges and opportunities. SLI refers to “bottom-up” technology-enhanced learning activities, which come as the result of creative initiatives by schools and individual teachers. MoEHE encourages, supports, monitors and evaluates SLIs but does not specifically direct them.

If ICT@E were government, SLI would be democracy.

SLI Objectives: Motivate, Experiment, Optimize, Decentralize, Disseminate

1. Motivate, Encourage and Mobilise
2. Innovate and Experiment
3. Optimize resource utilization
4. Decentralize
5. Disseminate

SLI Policy Issues/Questions that must be decided upon

- PR 1. Initiative vs Curriculum Balance
- PR 2. Budget allocation
- PR 3. Freedom vs. Evaluation
- PR 4. Innovation vs. Guidance
- PR 5. Innovators vs. Late adopters

SLI-related Challenges, Risks and Opportunities

- C1. Reaping the benefits: Permanent Structure for SLI
- C2. Participation and Excellence, not Competition
- C3. School networks and Teacher professional network
- C4. Beyond usual ICT use
- C5. Relation with the Curriculum

Policy recommendations for SLI: Select, Monitor, Evaluate, Disseminate

- PR 6. An 'SLI Office' in the Institute for ICT@E with 10-20% of the budget
- PR 7. Selecting SLIs
- PR 8. Monitor: Teacher encouragement, motivation, and guidance.
- PR 9. Teacher and School Networking
- PR 10. Reaping the benefits: Dissemination

Objectives regarding School-led Initiatives

Motivate, Experiment, Optimize, Decentralize and Disseminate

1. Motivate, Encourage and Mobilise

Because of their bottom-up, 'democratic' essence, SLIs are an excellent way to Motivate, Encourage and Mobilise the educational community for ICT@E. Teachers are more involved when they apply their own ideas and proposals than when they apply an externally specified curriculum.

2. Innovate and Experiment

MoEHE initiatives are large scale: they usually address all schools or at least a large number of them. SLIs usually refer to a single school or very few schools. This is why they are a very good way to experiment with new technologies and pedagogical methodologies. Careful, non-intrusive evaluation by the Ministry through appropriately trained supervisors will help select those innovative SLIs which, suitably adapted and modified, can be included in the large-scale curriculum.

3. Optimize resource utilization

Although MoEHE policy is to make available the same resources to all schools, in practice ICT infrastructure differs among schools. SLIs can use ICT resources optimally for each school. There are many ways for schools to spend a small amount of money for ICT and there is not one which is best in all cases. So when a school makes a specific request through an SLI, it is very likely to be highly suitable for its own needs.

4. Decentralize

Decentralization in education has many advantages, but also serious risks. SLIs provide a very good opportunity for decentralized high-quality but low-risk educational activities. They transfer responsibility to the school while MoEHE retains monitoring and evaluation.

5. Disseminate

SLIs provide an alternative channel for the diffusion of good practices in ICT. As they come from teachers and take into account the reality, restrictions and practicalities of school life, they are likely to be adopted by other teachers.

SLI Policy Issues/Questions to be decided upon

PR 1. Initiative vs. Curriculum Balance

Policy for SLIs in ICT must balance teacher initiative with curriculum directives. Teachers should be allowed, to an extent, to stray from the curriculum. Normally SLIs should be aiming to meet learning goals specified in the curriculum in innovative ways which look after 21st Century Skills (21CS) for the students. In most cases it is sufficient to ask teachers to explain the rationale of their proposed initiative and its connection with the curriculum and then monitor the results. It is very rare for an SLI to be rejected for the reason that it counteracts the curriculum.

PR 2. Budget allocation

The many advantages of SLIs notwithstanding, they should constitute only a small part of the overall MoEHE resources (money and effort) for ICT in schools. A good heuristic is to assign between one tenth and one fifth (10% - 20%) of the ICT budget to SLIs. The policy for SLI should also include simple procedures for the schools to spend the money allocated.

PR 3. Freedom vs. Evaluation

SLIs are an expression of institutionalised freedom, whereby the Ministry encourages initiatives by teachers and schools. Some of the SLIs will be worthy of generalising, so SLIs should feed back to the whole educational system in order to reap the benefits. The policy issue is how to monitor and evaluate them without stifling freedom and innovation. MoEHE select good practices among SLIs to diffuse among teachers and finally integrate into the curriculum.

PR 4. **Innovation vs. Guidance**

Often SLIs express an innovative idea in a way that is incomplete technologically or pedagogically. A policy is needed to combine SLIs with teacher education and infrastructure for the school, for example to design in-school teacher training stemming from the local SLI and to give special priority to school infrastructure related to the SLI.

PR 5. **Innovators vs. Late adopters**

SLIs usually are driven by the most active and innovative teachers, those few who not only see a need for change, but are also ready to act for it. Some innovative teachers already have ICT skills and utilize them in class; others ask IT teachers for help. Policies are needed to motivate the other end of the spectrum, the teachers called “late adopters” of technology. Note that some very good, innovative teachers are not fond of technology.

SLI-Related Challenges, Risks and Opportunities

C1. **Reaping the benefits: Permanent Structure for SLI**

It is easy to start SLIs and then forget about them –and thus restrict most of their benefits to the specific school, teacher, and class. A ‘permanent’ structure is needed in the Ministry to conduct open calls, evaluation of proposals, support of execution, non-intrusive evaluation, diffusion of good practices and integration in the curriculum. Such a structure would also make best utilization of the funds by external donors who often have money and ideas but no appropriate procedures for schools.

C2. **Participation and Excellence, not Competition**

Competition in society can be a road to improvement. Competition in education is especially tricky: one winner and many losers do not contribute well to national progress. The Ministry can organize an annual conference for the SLI schools to present their work and award several prizes among them. This will give the opportunity for dissemination and encourage future participation.

C3. **School networks and Teacher professional network**

Active cooperation with schools in other countries is important in all cases, but especially so for Palestine. A good exemplar is the EU Program “E-Twinning” (in which currently Palestine is not included.) Online professional communities are very useful when successful, but they often fail to mature, especially among teachers. Since teachers involved in ICT SLIs are among those who use ICT regularly, organizing SLI-Teacher online communities could be useful not only for them but also for MoEHE to draw general conclusions from.

C4. **Beyond regular school ICT use**

Communication is important among 21st century skills. Students participating in SLIs can form inter-school online communities where communication skills would be cultivated. MoEHE needs to set out a policy for this, which will determine access to social networking environments otherwise not allowed, privacy policy, learning goals, monitoring, evaluation etc.

C5. **Relation with the Curriculum**

Serve the curriculum and go further: By definition any initiative is a divergence from the normal curriculum. Since the use of ICT is broadly specified in the curriculum, ICT initiatives can enjoy more independence: they should serve the overall curriculum learning objectives in innovative ways. In particular, and this should be a criterion for choosing among SLI proposals, ICT SLIs should cultivate student-centred learning and 21st century skills.

In general ICT in education should be pedagogically-led and not technology-driven. However, since SLIs are small-scale, some experimentation with new technologies can be allowed which has as a main goal to research the affordances of a new technology, i.e. a (technological) solution looking for a (pedagogical) problem.

Policy recommendations

School-led Initiatives: Select, Monitor, Evaluate, Disseminate

PR 1. An 'SLI Office' in the Institute for ICT@E with 10-20% of the budget

Establish a permanent structure ('department', 'office') for SLIs within the Institute for Educational Technology (see Policy Paper #0, on ICT@E) and ensure the cooperation of all related departments, especially Supervisors and Curriculum. This *Office for ICT SLIs*, in cooperation with other MoEHE departments, will be responsible for selecting and funding SLIs, monitoring, evaluating and disseminating them. The SLIs selected should encourage innovation and experimentation, should be allowed to fail, be monitored but not closely directed from above, be non-intrusively evaluated and some should be selected as best practices, integrated in the curriculum, and disseminated to the whole educational community.

There are some very good practices in the [EU Erasmus+ program for schools](#) which can be used as examples for policy setting.

The SLI Office will be responsible for soliciting external funding from donors and asking International and Palestinian companies to sponsor SLIs. Since the amount of money needed per school is relatively small, even EU schools could be sponsors of an SLI through e-twinning.

Regarding the budget, continuity is more important than the amount. Do not spend all the money upon a donor offering and be left with nothing the following years. The policy for SLI should also include procedures for the schools to spend the money allocated; such procedures should be simpler and less bureaucratic than the ones followed in large-scale procurements.

PR 2. Selecting SLIs

The proposed SLI Office will hold yearly open competitive calls for 1-2 year-long SLIs. It will set the criteria and select for funding SLIs that combine technology with pedagogy; require them to be explicit about student-centred teaching and specific about the [21st century skills](#) cultivated.

Criteria for selecting SLI should include the following:

- Innovation, pedagogical or technological, related to curriculum learning goals
- Quality, feasibility, and completeness
- Inclusiveness and participation: around 20% of the SLIs selected should be reserved for new teachers and schools participating for the first time, and whose proposals may be less mature
- Whole school participation: one of the most difficult goals for ICT@E is to create a whole school culture, so that most teachers in a school utilise ICT and not only a few of them. SLI proposals that include many teachers from the same school should be given priority.
- Diversity in geographical regions, in teacher specialty, in school type and student grade.

PR 3. Monitor: Teacher encouragement, motivation, and guidance.

Monitor and evaluate but do not criticise SLIs, since they are experiments. Organize Action Research around (some of) the SLIs in cooperation with Universities. Include teachers and students in a formative, not summative, evaluation process. Failures should be acknowledged and prized just as successes: they may be more valuable than successes in this case, as they help avoid errors in the large scale.

Failing is useful: We are not sincere about innovation and experimentation if we do not allow for the possibility of failing. Of course failing activities in school are a delicate matter. SLIs should be allowed to fail in that they may be too ambitious, or that the technology being tested is not ripe yet, or that it is not optimal for all students, but they should not fail in the sense of damaging the students. A simple risk analysis ("what will you do if something does not work out technologically or pedagogically?") should be part of the SLI proposals.

Teachers who initiate and participate in ICT SLIs should have some motivation and guidance.

Motivation could be in the form of reduced teaching load, taking into account in teacher professional evaluation, or other resource availability. Travel opportunities to international ICT@E conferences are extremely valuable for and welcome by teachers. (See Policy Paper #4, on Teacher Professional Learning.) Guidance could be through special in-school teacher education stemming from the specific local SLI as well as giving priority to school infrastructure related to the SLI.

PR 4. Teacher and School Networking

Establish policy for national and international school cooperation, like e-Twinning. Currently Palestinian schools are not part of the EU e-Twinning programme, but a national political effort to that effect combined with a bottom up ad hoc educational school to school cooperation, might be successful.

Ensure that teachers and schools are informed and have an opportunity to share practices and products. This can be done through online communities of teachers and students (at the MoEHE portal if possible, but in any social network if necessary) and through the National Learning Object Repository.

PR 5. Reaping the benefits: Dissemination

Organize a yearly conference, issue a yearly booklet and award several prizes for SLIs.

Competition around SLIs should be designed to have many winners: many SLIs should be approved and financed; diversity of teacher specialties and student grades should be encouraged; and several SLIs should be chosen for curriculum integrations and national dissemination. The names of the teachers who developed and participated should be publicized.

Draw conclusions from SLIs and submit them to MoEHE in the form of recommendations for curriculum changes and new activities. Successful SLIs should be a source of new ideas for the curriculum. Learning activities can be designed and incorporated in the curriculum based on successfully evaluated SLIs.