An in-depth review of the literature on 'best practices' for the prevention of early school leaving in schools with intercultural contexts

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aim of the report and caveat

This report aims to provide the overall research findings on the best practices to prevent Early School Leaving (ESL) in European schools[2], and pays particular attention to the prevention practices used in Italy, Spain, Croatia, and Portugal.

Eurostat defines ESL as leaving the formal school system before obtaining an upper secondary education degree for youth between the ages of 18-24. Embedded in this definition is the notion of educational failure which refers to leaving schooling without having acquired the compulsory education diploma (Fernández-Macías et.al, 2013)[3].

ESL is a major concern within the European Union (Rambla, 2018; Rambla & Fontdevila, 2015). In 2009, more than one million students were already early school leavers (Cabrera, 2020). Since then, the rates have been incrementally growing, although national interventions in some countries have led to some decreases (Donlevy et al., 2019). With the Covid-19 pandemic closing schools, confining families and maintaining social distance, as well as students not being in school, becoming accustomed to alternative teaching methodologies requiring technological equipment and training will no doubt place a strain on already technologically depleted economies (Cabrera, 2020).

ESL is closely tied to educational and economic productivity. As such students will need to meet the demands required by countries tied into the production of knowledge and economic outcomes as part of many European countries' neoliberal stances (Ross & Leathwood, 2013). Out of

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[2] Domiziana Turcatti, Doctoral Candidate at University of Oxford, reviewed a total of 104 articles. In addition to the 104 articles reviewed, Turcatti also included 20 articles previously reviewed in a scan literature by Rabiya Chaudhry, Master's student at the University of Amsterdam and included 14 articles reviewed by Rabiya Chaudry on ESL prevention strategies in specific European countries. Dr. Martha Montero-Sieburth supervised the development of the report, edited and expanded the educational sections and reviewed 49 additional articles. The total number of articles covered in this report is 187 and the list is presented in the **Appendix.**

[3] González-Rodríguez et al. (2019) cite that there is a variety of terminology associated with ESL which includes abandonment, dropout, withdrawal, attrition, etc. This terminology is mostly focused on academic factors that lead to ESL, rather than non-academic variables such as individual, family environment, and friends. Thus, it is difficult to measure its outcomes and to track indicators of change. For this reason, this report used the Eurostat definition.

these concerns, the European Council of Ministers (2011, p. 4) recommendations put forward a three-pronged policy set of measures to tackle ESL:

1. *Prevention policies* aimed at reducing the risk of ESL by focusing on education and training for learning outcomes;

2. *Intervention policies* aimed at avoiding ESL by improving the quality of education and training at the level of the educational institutions, by reacting to early warning signs, and by providing targeted pupil support to those at risk of ESL, starting from early childhood education and care to upper secondary education;

3. *Compensation policies* aimed at helping those who left school prematurely to re-engage in education, offering routes to re-enter education and training to gain the qualifications they missed.

In this report, ESL prevention and intervention policies will be mostly addressed under the idea of best educational practices in intercultural contexts and concepts used in ESL research, which have generally been agreed upon within the European Union and will be presented early on. The notion of best practices has been adapted from Montero-Sieburth's culling of the research literature on best practices in education (Leithwood, 2008; Walberg & Paik, 2000). The operant definition of best practices used in this report relates to "the actions, activities, programs, and particular practices and policies that have emerged from evidenced-based research, have been tested in different contexts, and have been correlated with having positive outcomes for students of diverse background" (Montero-Sieburth, personal communication, March, 2020).

While much of the literature stems from academic sources and is based on extensive empirical research on ESL, this report couches the findings, where possible, into language which is accessible to practitioners. Charts, tables and figures will be presented as visual aids to the use of academic terms so that this report can become a practical tool to guide those working in schools. Before delving into the content of this report a caveat is made, since worldwide schools have been

greatly affected by the current Covid-19 pandemic, raising questions not only about ESL but also about online teaching and learning and home schooling.

In many countries, as a consequence of the lockdowns, schools have had to modify their teaching and delivery formats, dramatically affecting the learning of students. Being forced to stay home due to social distancing, students must learn through digital means and home schooling provided by their parents. In such a transition, for the delivery of quality in the academic programs and online teaching, the role of teachers, parents, and school administrators will be of concern, since the required changes towards technology are immediate and require on-the-spot learning of technology and its formats.

Notwithstanding such changes, university academics, educators, policy makers, and practitioners are now confronted with reconsidering the ways we think of schools. The need for alternative and creative resources for students who are not physically in school has compelled schools to reassess

1. What schools can do to make sure students do not drop out in these moments when students are not physically present in schools;
2. How teachers can continue to engage students;
3. How parents can be supported in their teaching at home and
4. What kind of quality education can be delivered.

This report considers these issues in presenting the best practices that counteract ESL in European schools with intercultural contexts.

1.2 Focus, definitions, and target audience

This report conceptualises ESL as a process which is induced by both *exogenous factors*, namely those factors that the school cannot control (e.g. students' socio-economic backgrounds, the

cultural capital of families, gender, ethnic origin, national educational policies), and *endogenous factors* dependent on educational norms and regulation, namely in-school factors that induce ESL (Araújo et al., 2019; Vallejo & Dooly, 2013).

This report is heavily influenced by the research literature drawn from the U.S., where the issue of "dropouts" has been extensively studied for over 60 years (Montero-Sieburth, 2000). This report also draws from studies in Australia and several European countries, where research on ESL has started to emerge more recently. While the research literature included in the report comes from countries with major contextual differences, it offers insight towards the identification of patterns and best practices to counteract ESL in European schools.

One of the prevailing considerations for identifying best practices is how they operate within schools which have different intercultural contexts, namely schools that directly deal with diversity and inclusion. According to the European Commission (2017), *diversity* includes not only cultural diversity, but also class-based, gender, sexuality, and learning-related diversity. European schools have much to gain in confronting the challenges and opportunities they face in teaching students who are from different ethnic, religious, migration, and socio-economic backgrounds but who may not only be fluent in a language other than the language of instruction in school but speak multiple languages.

Among the indicators of diversity which shape the educational outcomes of students in European schools, there is the notion of disability and learning difficulties which have gradually become incorporated into the delivery of educational programs over the past two decades. The 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities conceptualised persons with disabilities as "those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (Article 1, paragraph 2, p. 4).

Schools today devise and account for strategies of inclusion to ensure that diversity becomes something everyone benefits from. Some schools are also starting to challenge the idea that inclusion is about identifying the physical aspects of an individual's life as impeding their education and moving towards including broader aspects and more other significant factors that play a role in ESL. The European Commission (2017) defines *inclusion* as "an environment that allows our differences to thrive and be accepted and valued" (p. 5).

Hence, in the context of education, the meaning of inclusion includes treating students fairly, with respect, while guaranteeing equal access to the opportunities and resources necessary for students to thrive, access, and participate in education. More precisely, inclusion means securing the access to education not only to those students labelled as 'problematic', 'at risk', or 'minorities', but to all students irrespective of their backgrounds and of their physical, psychological, emotional needs and circumstances. It also involves strengthening the participation rights of children and young people with disabilities (Navarro, 2014).

In reporting on the vast research for ESL prevention and reduction practices, this report will only focus on the best practices that are *implicitly or explicitly* used by schools to prevent and reduce ESL identified by the research literature. As such, this report does not include best practices that go beyond the school as this are not within the scope of this report. By identifying in the research literature tested best practices in schools that prevent and reduce ESL, this report aims to draw attention to what European schools can do with the resources available to them to counteract ESL. Therefore, this report is not intended to be an academic report but rather a practitioner user-friendly analysis directed at administrators and teachers and those who work within schools on a daily basis.

To organize the literature for use by practitioners, three levels of analysis are presented which relate to the *Institutional, Instructional, and Interpersonal* practices schools deploy to effectively reduce ESL. This is the three I's model by Montero-Sieburth (2005) which allows for the analysis of the school at the structural level (rules, policies, and regulations), the instructional (teaching and

learning, peer groups, teacher backgrounds) level, and the interpersonal level (which includes all types of dialogues and interactions, inter and intra) (Table 1).

Table 1. The 3 Is Model (Montero-Sieburth, 2005)

Institutional Practices	Instructional Practices	Interpersonal Practices
Policies, regulations, mandates, rules about suspension, retention, detention, absence policies about the hiring of personnel and criteria used.	• Training of teacher (pre-service and post • Teaching formats, pedagogy, • assessment, testing, types of materials and curriculum, • provisions of assistance for inclusion • Curricular formats and projects and activities • Formal and informal practices	Types and quality of social relationships and interactions between teachers and students, students to student (peer groups and cross-groups) teachers and teachers, teachers and administrators, as well as between students and their parents

1.3 Methodology

Literature review: Inclusion/exclusion criteria

This review on the best prevention practices for Early School Leaving (ESL) includes US, European and Australian studies explaining the causes behind ESL and identifying school-driven ESL best prevention/reduction practices. Furthermore, we selected governmental literature published by the European Commission proposing and evaluating ESL practices. In conducting a holistic review of the literature on the best practices for the prevention of ESL, the studies selected for this report focused on

1. Exogamous factors that cause ESL;
2. In-school factors that cause ESL;
3. School initiatives, policies, and approaches effective in reducing/counteracting ESL;
4. Teachers' instructional practices aimed at the prevention of ESL;

5. Programs and strategies in schools that reduce ESL;

6. Experiences of students and early school leavers and

7. School climate characteristics that may prevent or foster ESL.

Sampling method for the review of the research literature

A total of 187 articles were identified and reviewed (**Appendix**) by the researchers. Domiziana Turcatti, Doctoral Candidate at University of Oxford, undertook the major review of 104 articles. In addition to these 104 articles, Domiziana Turcatti also included 20 articles previously reviewed in a scan literature by Rabiya Chaudhry, Master's student at the University of Amsterdam. Domiziana Turcatti and 14 country specific articles on prevention strategies in ESL for Spain, Italy, Croatia, and Portugal also reviewed by Rabiya Chaudhry. Dr. Martha Montero-Sieburth suggested additional articles, reviewed a total of 49 articles written in English and Spanish that dealt with cultural diversity, best practices, instructional learning, ESL, and the impact of Covid-19 in education and edited the report in its entirety.

To identify the articles, a systematic search of ERIC and the ERIC Education databases for articles published between 2015 and 2020 was conducted using the following keywords in combinations: early school leaving, drop out, practice, solution, prevention, program, project, whole school approaches, teacher's practices, classroom practice, migrant youth, intercultural strategies, practices of inclusion. We also included articles identified in a non-systematic fashion. All the articles were selected based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria highlighted above. Duplicates were removed/rejected.

Analysis

The selected articles were analysed using thematic analysis, the process whereby the researcher identifies substantive sub-themes and themes in the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then reads the articles and ascribes a code or a word that describes the content of the highlighted piece of information. These codes are then re-grouped into sub-themes and finally

grouped into emergent themes based on the combinations made. Identified were school factors, teachers, and interpersonal interactions that may lead to ESL and the in-school factors that cause ESL which have been tested. From this, the tested practices used by schools to counteract ESL were also identified. The practices that emerged were categorised based on whether they dealt with institutional, instructional, and interpersonal issues.

1.4 Outline of the report

Having described the aims, focus, objectives and methodology used to conduct this review, Chapter 2 defines and outlines in more detail the causes and mechanisms behind ESL and provides an overview of ESL in the European context, with a particular focus on ESL prevention practices in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Croatia. Chapter 3 presents the overall research findings on the best school practices that prevent Early School Leaving (ESL) and after discussing the kind of school culture that seems to work best in preventing ESL, Chapter 3 also lists the institutional, instructional, and interpersonal practices taking place in schools found in the literature reviewed to counteract ESL. The report offer recommendations in Chapter 4 gleaned from this review of the best practices that work in schools with intercultural contexts to prevent and reduce ESL and concludes with Chapter 5 suggesting considerations of cultural changes of schooling in the midst of Covid-19.

2. ESL IN EUROPE AND IN THE COUNTRIES SELECTED

This chapter defines and outlines the causes of ESL and provides an overview of ESL rates in the European context, with a particular focus on Italy, Spain, Portugal and Croatia.

2.1 Understanding early school leaving

ESL: A process, not an event

In the European, American, and Australian context, ESL is often referred to as "leaving school"—early departure, non-completion, dropping out or giving up. The European, American and Australian literature shows that the students most likely to leave school early are migrants and refugees, second generation youth, ethnic and racial minorities, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and students with learning and physical disabilities (Donlevy et al., 2019; Mallet, 2015). ESL rates differ by gender as males are more affected than females (Donlevy et al., 2019; Mallet, 2015) and in some cases by ethnicity, nationality and socio-economic status (Vallejo and Dooly, 2013).

The official definition of ESL in Europe refers to the percentage of youth between 18 and 24 that have not attained secondary or lower diplomas, including students in vocational education (Donlevy et al., 2019). The European Commission defines ESL as pre-primary, primary, lower secondary or a short upper secondary of less than two years. As such, ESL is applied to youth who have dropped out from the end of compulsory education; who have completed but not gained upper secondary qualifications, in pre-vocational and vocational education but who did not qualify for secondary school level (Donlevy et al., 2019).

However, understanding ESL applied to the percentage of youth who have not attained secondary and lower school diplomas is problematic, because it does not recognise ESL as a process that starts when students are still in school. What is needed is an understanding of ESL as a process induced by both *exogenous factors*, namely those factors that the school cannot control (e.g.

students' backgrounds, national educational policies) and *endogenous factors*, namely in-school factors that induce ESL (Araújo et al., 2019).

ESL Non-school factors

Gubbles et al. (2019) and González-Rodríguez's et al. (2019) research considers the academic and non-academic factors leading to ESL, providing a comprehensive model of the exogenous and endogenous factors that lead to ESL. Among the non-academic factors identified by González-Rodríguez et al. (2019) and Gubbles et al. (2019) (Table 2), there are:

- *Individual factors* related to the students' socio-economic, health-related, and psychological conditions in specific life situations and the negative attitudes they may have towards school

- *Family-related factors* include not only the socio-economic and cultural background of the parents and the broader family, but the health and psychological situations of the parents. Being poor and not having adequate economic resources might prevent students from continuing their education. In addition, families that do not value education or that perceive education as being in opposition to their cultures or as a threat to their family's cultural reproduction may lead to ESL.

- *Friendships-related factors.* González-Rodríguez et al. (2019) also include data on the kind of friendships students have that may lead to ESL. In situations where friends have high levels of absenteeism, and have dropped out themselves, they exert negative influences on students. On the contrary, Cardinali et al. (2016) identify the significance of cross-group friendships and ethnic identity in improving the academic attitudes of ethnic minority youth who may be at risk of ESL.

As Vallejo and Dooly (2013) argue, these factors cannot be extricated from the ESL rates which countries encounter in the labour market. Vallejo and Dooly (2013) explain that working students have a limited school life expectancy in completing compulsory education and simply being negatively labelled within the educational system already adversely affects ESL.

A not often considered factor which needs to be taken into account when explaining the cause of ESL is students' resilience. Resilience is not simply about thriving despite the odds or being immune to stressful moments of life. As Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) explain "resiliency does not preclude feeling stressed or depressed" (p. 230). Rather, resiliency is a contextually 'optimal' response to stress, and "optimal response, or the most desirable or suitable course of action, is contextual and subjective and not without cost […] the optimal response may be tolerating one stressful situation to prevent an even more stressful one" (Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2005 p. 230-231).

Table 2. Non-academic ESL factors. Adapted from González-Rodríguez et al. (2019)

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS	
Gender	• Males have a higher risk of ESL than women. • Females have a higher risk of ESL than males in countries of Southeast Europe. • Gender stereotypes and culture influence educational expectations of males and females.
Disorders or syndromes	• Generalised anxiety disorders, • Social phobia, • Suicidal ideation, mood disorders, specific learning disorders, attention deficit with or without hyperactivity, behavioural disorders, oppositional defiance disorders, antisocial personality, foetal alcohol spectrum disorders.
Personality	• Low self-esteem, • Low motivation • Low self-confidence, • Feeling of inferiority, • Self-defeat • Anti-social
Health problems	• Somatic complaints (headaches and stomach aches) • Serious diseases
Substance use/abuse	• Cannabis, • Nicotine, • Cocaine, • Alcohol,

	• Other illicit drugs, amphetamines, general drugs, non-medical use of prescription
Aggression	Verbal and physical
Legal issues	• Troubles with the law, • Legal issues related to documentation and migrant status.
Premature Relationships	• Young pregnancy, • Teen parents, • Sexual and child abuse.
Work	• Working more than 20 hours a week, • Greater stress at work, Helping the family work, • The appeal of attractive wages for young people still in education.

FAMILY RELATED FACTORS	
Parents **(low income, low cultural and human capital, health problems, psychological disposition & legal issues)**	• Low income or low income combined with family disruption • Employment of parents • Material available in homes • Parents with unstable or multiple jobs • Educational level of each parents and labour aspirations that parents expect from their children • Cultural capital of parents for their children • Legal health issues of parents • Parental mental illness • Socio-psychological health of parents
Family environment	• Parental substance abuse • Household mobility (e.g. migration) • Marital discord • Single-parent households • Family conflict • Limited interest in the education of children • Parental support or involvement • Child maltreatment • Corporal punishment • Inconsistent parental discipline • Parental rejection • Limited family support • Parenting practices • Modelling of behaviours
Family-Related Socio-Cultural Factors	• Status migration, • Intergenerational culture clashes • Ethnic and racial background

FRIENDS-RELATED FACTORS	
Features of Friends	- Socially discriminated - Unpopular - Uninterested in school or dropped out of school - Poor grades - No university plans - Negative influence - Disengaged - Negative peers or cross group friendships - Absence from school - Uses non-medical prescription drugs or illicit drugs

ESL school factors

Regarding the in-school factors that may lead to ESL, González-Rodríguez et al. (2019) identified four major clusters: students, classmates, teachers and schools. These factors are represented in Table 3.

- *Student-related factors* include students' academic performance, absenteeism, and the use of the native language of the students.

- *Classmate-related factors* include not having friends within the school, being rejected by their peers, and bullying.

- *Teacher-related factors* have to do with level of qualification and training, pedagogical approach to research, teacher expectations, and resources available to teachers.

- *School-related factors* include the area or location of the school, school environment, school policies, and the economic, human, cultural and social resources of the school.

Table 3. Academic ESL factors. Adapted from González-Rodríguez et al. (2019)

STUDENTS	
Academic performance	• Low achievement in general • Lack of participation, and interest in classes, • Repetition of grade level, • Over-age students, Suspended, • Poor executive functions, • Does not like to work hard in school, • Zero hours of homework completed per week, • Low learning skills in math, English and reading, • Low academic achievement on high school exit exams
Satisfaction	Satisfied with educational program Not satisfied with the way education is going
Absenteeism	• Absenteeism in general, repeated absences, • Skipping of classes mixed with attendance, • Complete absence during a certain period of the school year, • Complete absence from school for an extended period of time, • School attendance accompanied by period of non-attendance, • Repeated misbehaviour in the morning to avoid school, • Repeated tardiness in the morning
Low participation	Student does not participate or shows low participation in programs and extracurricular activities
Maturity	Low degree of maturity in relation to his/her peer group
Language	Inequalities linked to language, Language of instruction is not the mother tongue
Mobility	Student has moved schools or countries
CLASSMATES & SCHOOLMATES	
Interaction with classmates/schoolmates	• Student does not have many friends at school, is rejected by others, is avoided by others or is unpopular, • Has antisocial behaviour
TEACHER	
Teacher Features	• Number of students per teacher, • Teacher rates students as disruptive to class, • Low qualification, lack of experience and pre-and post-training on issues of diversity, inclusion, and pedagogy, • Pedagogical approach of the teacher is not the most appropriate for the group of

	students that the teacher is instructing,
	• Teacher's attitudes,
	• Teacher does not expect students to graduate and be successful
SCHOOL	
Organisation & Policies	• School' policies and regulations , • Structural organisation, • Hiring of staff and teachers • Stated mission and vision for the school • Policies on absenteeism, grades, grade retention, school conduct • Operation of building and facilities
School Location	• Distance from school, • School located in poverty areas • School in unprotected areas (crime, dilapidated buildings, etc.)
School Environment (physical and social environment with notions of respect and acceptance)	• Bad school environment (negative behaviours, displays of violence) • Socio-economic composition of the student body, • High ratio of student body to school staff
School Resources	Limited school human and economic resources Lack of school breakfast or lunches Limited staffing for school facilities Limited material resources in school (rooms, playground facilities, etc.) Absence of or limited school lunches

While the model provided by González-Rodríguez et al. (2019) traces key factors that may lead to ESL, it omits the importance of students' school engagement which have been shown to be related to ESL by other scholars who demonstrate that low levels of school engagement are strongly correlated to ESL. Fredricks's et al. (2004) study provides a multidimensional model of school engagement based on three key dimensions:

- *Behavioural engagement*, which refers to student participation in classroom and school activities, that is, the degree to which students participate in these

- *Emotional engagement*, which refers to the kind of affective bonds students create with their schools, teachers and peers, which influence students sense of belonging to the school

- *Cognitive engagement*, which refers to the extent students are challenged from a cognitive perspective to learn, refers to the ways in which students perceive themselves and identify themselves as learners and their motivation to learn.

Tarabini et al. (2019) provide a model of indicators for each dimension of school engagement based on a review of the research findings on school engagement (Table 4)

Table 4. Indicators of school engagement. Adapted from Tarabini et al. (2019)

DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT	INDICATORS
Behavioural engagement	- Regular assistance to classroom - Positive behaviour in the classroom - Active involvement in the classroom activities - Participation in non-academic or volunteer activities - Regular completion of homework or school assignments
Emotional engagement	- Opinion of teachers (pros and cons) - Trust in the teacher figure - Opinion of the school (pros and cons) - Perception of teachers' emotional support - Perception of discrimination, exclusion or labelling - Sense of belonging to centre - Sense of belonging with peers - Feelings being experienced at school
Cognitive engagement	- Motivation to learn - Interest in learning activities - Beliefs about the role and utility of schooling - Self-perception as student - Self-regulation of behaviour and learning strategies - Involvement in learning activities outsider the school

It is clear that while there are some in-school factors causing ESL that schools cannot address, there are other in-school factors causing ESL which schools can address and change through their everyday practices. For instance, schools may not be able to address the socio-economic background of the students, the poverty levels they may experience nor can they change the areas in which the school is located. However, the school may have the resources to change the school culture, the environment, the school ethos and even the relationships that students, teachers and school staff engage in. Having presented the general overall factors, the next section provides an overview of ESL rates in Europe, zooming specifically on the cases of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Croatia.

2.2 ESL rates in Europe
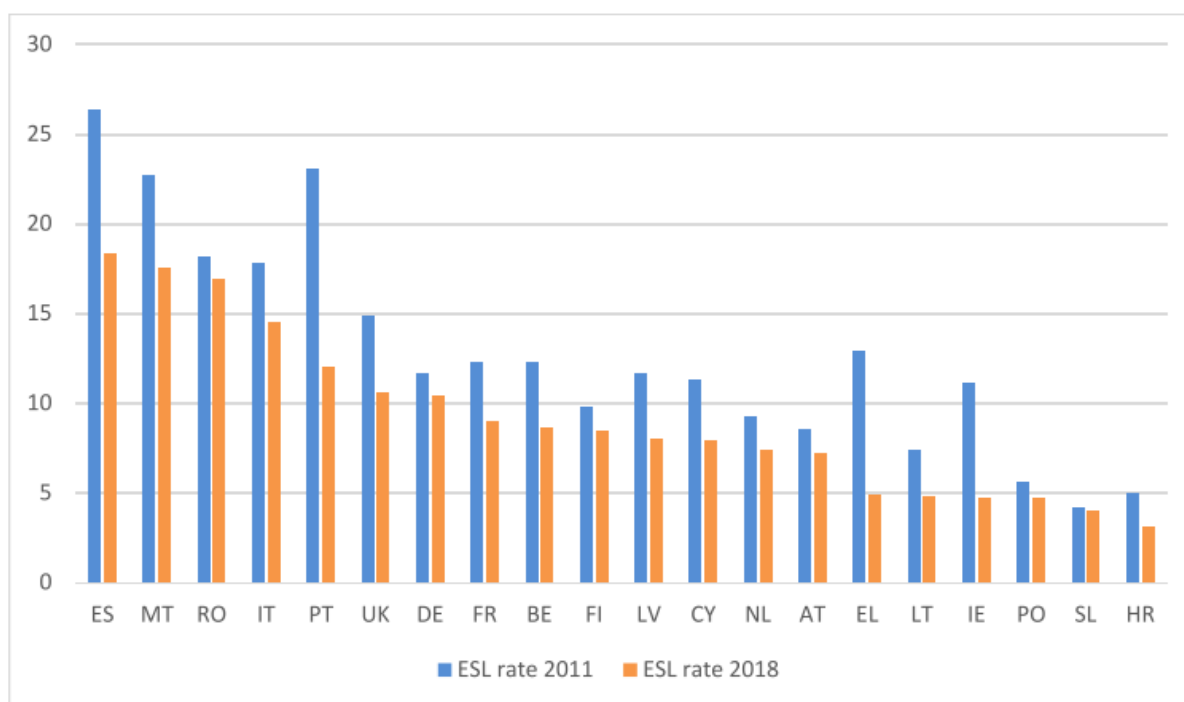
Figure 1. Progression of the ESL rate in EU Member States where ESL has decreased between 2011 and 2018. Retrieved from: Donlevy et al. (2019). Original Source: Eurostat

In 2019, the European commission published a report assessing the implementation of the 2011 European Council recommendations to reduce ESL in European countries (Donlevy et al., 2019) which had recommended the reduction of ESL rates in Europe to 10% by 2020. The recommended policies included prevention, intervention, and compensation measures to counteract ESL. The European Council also recommended that EU countries identify the main drivers of ESL in their countries, monitor ESL at the national level and establish a national strategy to combat ESL by 2012. The 2019 report shows how ESL rates in the EU countries have decreased between 2011 and 2018 (Figure 1).

Yet even though some countries had ESL rates below 10%, other EU countries continued to have ESL rates above the 10% target. Donlevy et al. (2019) report that the countries with the highest ESL rates in 2018 were: Iceland (21.5%), Spain (17.9%), Malta (17.5%), Romania (16.4%) and Italy (14.5%). In 2018, the countries with the lowest ESL rates were Croatia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ireland, Poland, and Lithuania, ranging from 3.1% to 4.8% (Donlevy et al., 2019). Donlevy et al. (2019) caution that such differences need to be understood in relation to the differences in national education policies, the resources available to schools in different countries, and the extent in which EU countries have been able to implement the EU guidelines for the prevention and reduction of ESL.

Moreover, designing policies that prevent ESL also requires identifying causal links to the measurement of costs and benefits. In this regard, Brunello and De Paolo (2014). have assessed the costs of ESL in Europe. In summarizing their findings, Brunello and De Paoplo (2014, p. 26) suggest the following guidelines:

1. It is not sufficient to focus simply on the endogenous factors, but the causal effect of education on earnings and health should be identified, using credible exogenous variation;

2. Early school leavers are heterogeneous and have heterogeneous returns to education. Therefore, empirical research should go beyond estimating the average return to additional

education and should consider how these returns vary at different points of the distribution of early school leavers;

3. In the absence of long longitudinal data, cross section data can be used only at the price of strong assumptions that have important implications on outcomes;

4. General equilibrium effects should be evaluated, especially if the proposed change in the share of early school leavers is large; Unemployment and health are key ingredients in the cost of early school leaving. In particular differences in the probability of employment may be more serious than differences in earnings.

The issue of unemployment and health, which is at the crux of the current pandemic, is certainly a cause for concern in figuring out prevention strategies or best practices in the prevention of *ESL.*

The sections below zoom in on the case of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Croatia because they represent different responses to the prevention and reduction of ESL and identify the policies and management strategies that have worked. In presenting each case, the ESL rates and performance of pupils are presented, along with the national and ad-hoc measures implemented in each country to reduce ESL rates in the past decade, as well as the challenges that Covid-19 is creating for schools and students in each country.

Italy: Absence of a clear overarching strategy to combat ESL

In 2018, Italy was one of the European countries with the highest ESL rate (14,5%). (Donlevy et al., 2019). Between 2011 and 2018, Italy reduced its ESL rates only by 3 percentage points (Donlevy et al., 2019). Yet ESL rates in Italy are unevenly distributed in the country (more in the south than in the north) and tend to affect boys with a migration background (OECD, 2017a). In 2018, the ESL rates for foreign-born individuals were particularly high (30,1%) (Donlevy et al., 2019). OECD (2017a) and Donlevy et al. (2019) report that the high ESL rates are related to the

Italian socio-economic situation, the funding available to school, the characteristics of the educational system, as well as the lack of a clear overarching strategy to combat ESL.

Italy is characterised by high levels of unemployment compared to other OECD countries, with migrants concentrated in the low-paid sectors of the labour market (OECD, 2017a). The OECD (2017a) explains the educational performance of pupils in Italy in terms of state's school expenditures. In Italy, the Ministry of Education, University and Research (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, MIUR) govern the educational system. MIUR sets nationwide minimum standards and central principles of education and allocates funds to schools on the basis of the schools' student body, type of school, and human resources available to schools (OECD, 2017a). With allocated funds, Italian schools have some degree of autonomy in deciding how to use these funds and have relative autonomy over curriculum and assessment (OECD, 2017a). The state's annual expenditure per student for all the levels of education combined was below the OECD average in 2013. In 2016, it continued being low compared to other countries (Figure 2).
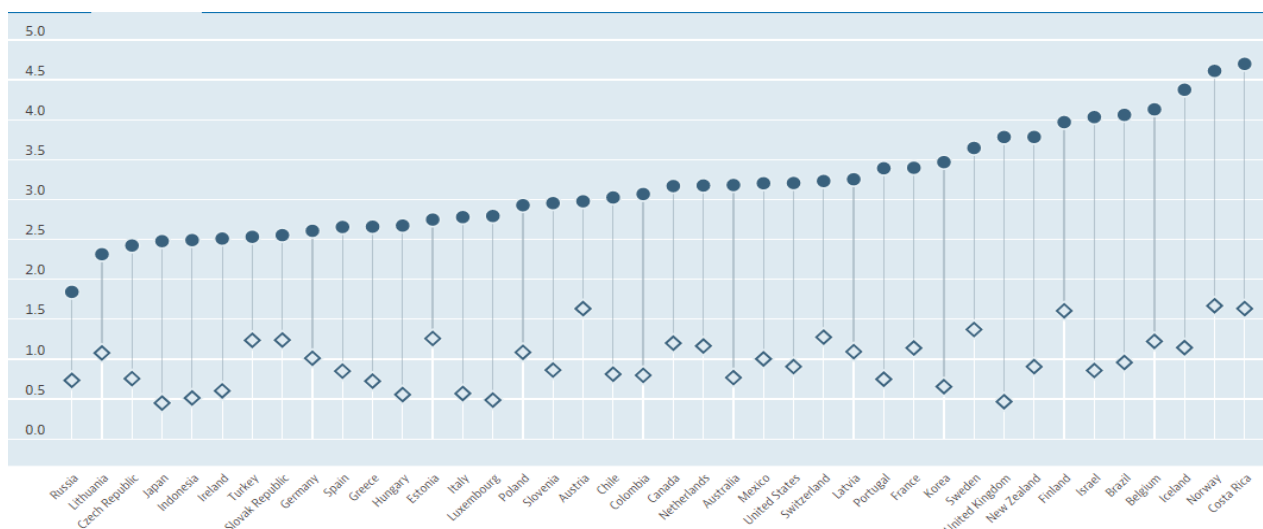
Figure 2. OECD countries' public expenditure in education in 2016 (OECD, 2016)

In addition, Italian schools have a high share of teachers who are fifty years old or older (OECD, 2017a) and teachers' salaries are below average in OECD countries. Despite recent reforms for compulsory teacher professional development and one-off yearly bonus for highly performing teachers and hiring of younger teachers, teachers face limited possibilities for career mobility. The OECD (2017a) expresses that "while recent policies aim to provide teachers in Italy with more possibilities for professional improvement, the continued strong link between teachers' seniority and their career progression may hinder efforts and motivation to improve" (p. 4). The most recent Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) reports that compared to other OECD countries a lower-than-average share consider their jobs to be valued in their society (OECD, 2017a).

The European Commission attributes Italy's limited reduction of ESL also to the lack of an overarching national strategy to counteract ESL (Donlevy et al., 2019). To counteract ESL, Italy implemented only few national measures aligned with the 2011 European Council's recommendations (Donlevy et al., 2019). As reported by Donlevy et al (2019), among these national policy or legislation measures were:

1. Measures to improve accessibility and affordability of Early Childhood Education and Care[4] (ECEC) to families with a disadvantaged background, including migrant and Roma children;

2. Measures to strengthen links between schools and local labour markets, via access to high quality work experience, and employer engagement in schools; and

3. Measures to promote inclusive and participatory school environments, including anti-bullying.

Despite Italy's implementation of these three main measures, several prevention, intervention, compensation measures suggested by the European Council in 2011 were not carried

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[4] Early childhood education and care refers to the arrangements implemented to provide education and care to children from birth to compulsory primary school age (Donlevy et al.., 2019).

out as top-down initiatives, but rather as ad-hoc measures carried out by some schools (Donlevy et al., 2019). These measures included:

1. Diversification of the composition of schools in disadvantaged areas via admissions,

2. Creation of policies to support multilingual teaching and learning and to promote linguistic diversity in schools;

3. Development of active measures to support parental involvement in schools;

4. Creation of networking measures between schools and external actors, that include health, youth and community services and civil society organisations;

5. Early warning systems for pupils at risk of ESL;

6. Provision of high quality extracurricular and out-of-school artistic, cultural and civic education activities for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (but not specifically ESL pupils at risk)

7. Access to targeted individual support for learners experiencing academic, social and emotional or personal difficulties;

The European Commission in 2018 (Donlevy et al., 2019) noticed that in Italy the following measures were not implemented at the national or at the local school level:

1. Promote flexible curriculum choices and pathways;

2. Promote rights-based education, including structures to support children's participation in decision-making (e.g. school councils or forums);

3. Guarantee access to high quality careers advice and guidance for learners at risk of ESL; and

4. Provide financial support for learners whose economic circumstances pose a risk of dropping-out, including subsidies or schemes linked to social benefits.

Clearly much more needs to be done in Italy to counteract ESL as well as to provide a better education to minority students.

Spain: Variability in ESL and legal disparities

The case of Spain presents some unique circumstances, since ESL rates in Spain relate to the highest level of youth unemployment within the EU (Vallejo and Dooly, 2013). Spain's high levels of ESL and its causes have been attributed to exogenous factors such as socioeconomic levels, class, gender, ethnicity, parent's cultural capital and endogenous factors within the Spanish educational system (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013). Yet Spain's coverage of education for children 6 to 14 years of age had been a success during the 1990s, since half of its population was illiterate at the beginning of the 20th century according to Vallejo and Dooly (2013).

However, during the past thirty years, six educational laws have been passed, decentralization has taken place and 90% of funds have been distributed to regional administrations (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013). Vallejo and Dooly (2013) also indicate that dual networks of public schools and dependent schools subsidized by the government exist. In 2013, 82% of at-risk students or migrant backgrounds attend public schools compared to 18% in dependent schools, creating an unequal distribution (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013).

	Spain		EU average	
	2014	2017	2014	2017
Education and training 2020 benchmarks				
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	21.9%	18.3%	11.2%	10.6%
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)	42.3%	41.2%	37.9%	39.9%
Early childhood education and care (from age 4 to starting age of compulsory primary education)	97.1% [13]	97.3% [16]	94.2% [13]	95.3% [16]
Proportion of 15 year-olds underachieving in: Reading	18.3% [12]	16.2% [15]	17.8% [12]	19.7% [15]
Maths	23.6% [12]	22.2% [15]	22.1% [12]	22.2% [15]
Science	15.7% [12]	18.3% [15]	16.6% [12]	20.6% [15]
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year) ISCED 3-8 (total)	65.1%	71.9%	76.0%	80.2%
Adult participation in learning (age 25-64) ISCED 0-8 (total)	10.1%	9.9%	10.8%	10.9%
Learning mobility Degree mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	1.4% [16]	:	3.1% [16]
Credit mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	7.7% [16]	:	7.6% [16]
Other contextual indicators				
Education investment Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	4.1%	4.0% [16,p]	4.9%	4.7% [16]
Expenditure on public and private institutions per student in € PPS ISCED 1-2	€5 465	€5 837 [15]	€6 494 [d]	: [15]
ISCED 3-4	€6 391	€6 925 [15]	€7 741 [d]	: [15]
ISCED 5-8	€9 170	€9 350 [15]	€11 187 [d]	: [15]
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24) Native-born	18.9%	15.6%	10.4%	9.6%
Foreign-born	37.8%	31.9%	20.2%	19.4%

Figure 3. ESL rates in Spain (European Commission, 2018b)

The high rates of ESL in Spain have gradually been dropping since late 2000s (Figure 3): from 31.2% ESL rate in 2009, to 26.5% in 2011, to 24.9% in 2012, to 21,9% in 2014 and to 17.9% in 2018 (World Health Organization, 2013; Fernández-Macías et al., 2013; Donlevy et al., 2019; European Commission, 2018b)[5]. This is notable since ESL rates between all regions of Spain had consistently been diminishing for the past five years despite austerity measures (World Health Organization, 2013). Yet even though ESL rates were reduced through the mid-nineties, such reduction has been limited (Fernández-Macías et al., 2013; Donlevy et al., 2019).

In 2015, Espinosa et al. (2015) found that 20% of the students in Spain were early school leavers: 24% were males and 15.8% were females. While this is notable, it appears most likely

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[5] It should be noted that different authors provide different set of statistics with the latest from the European Commission Report of 2018 showing a 5.9% drop out rate for Spain.

linked to illiteracy rates in the population as shown in Figure 4. In 2018, among 15-24 years old, close to 7,145 males and 5,593 females were illiterate. In 2018, among those above 15 years of age, 208,445 males and 414,307 females were illiterate. Gender plays a significant role. In 2013, 80.6% females over 69.6% males had higher graduation rates in compulsory studies (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013). Yet, the graduation rates were higher for male students except for subgroups of female students with immigrant parents (Vallejo and Dooly, 2013, p. 392).

Illiterate population aged 15-24 years

Illiterate population aged 15 years and older

	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	
Illiterate population				
15-24 years	12,738	7,145	5,593	(2018)
15 years and older	622,751	208,445	414,307	(2018)
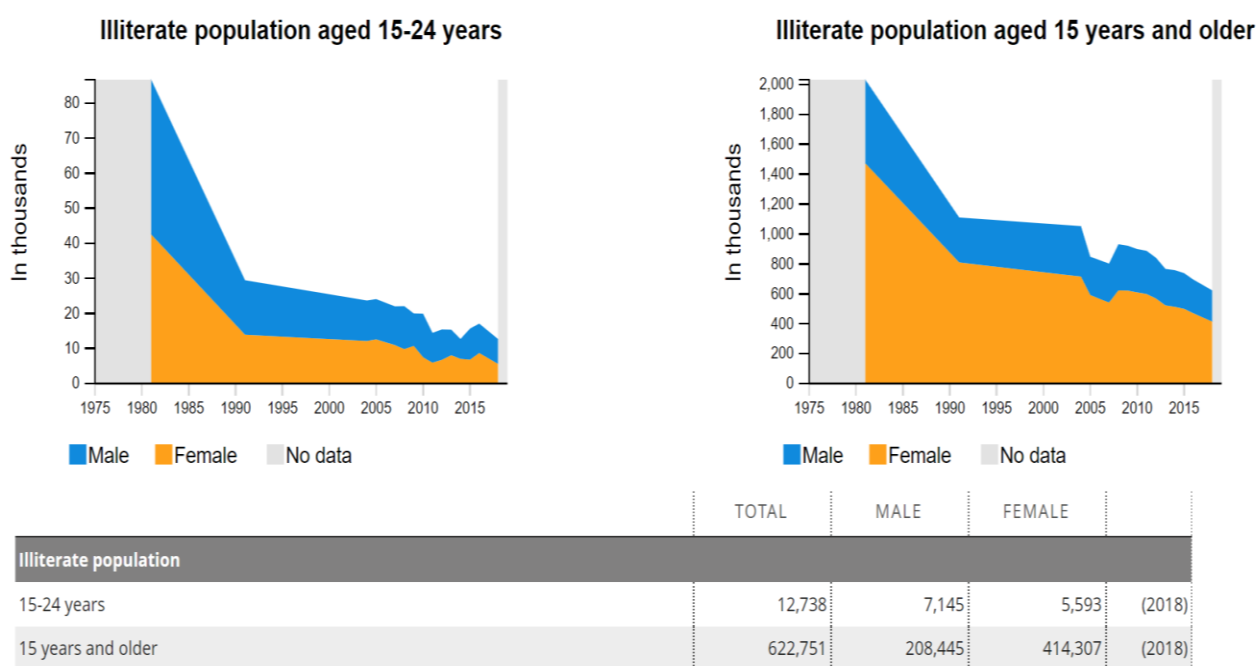
Figure 4. Illiterate population in Spain (UNESCO, 2020b)

Research has also shown a close relationship between the ESL and the mother's level of studies. In 2014, 21.9% of young people ages 18 to 24 who prematurely leave education and training were conditioned by their mother's education (Espinosa et al, 2015). In fact, 12.8% underwent ESL with mothers who have studies (5.4% and 7.4% primary school lower secondary school), 3.0% with mothers who had higher education (post-compulsory secondary school 2.2% and 0.8% tertiary education) and 6.2% with mothers with limited educational levels (Espinosa et al., 2015).

In Spain, ethnicity and nationality also play a relevant role in ESL. Espinosa et.al., (2015) details that in 2014, students with foreign nationality, ages 18 and 24 years had double ESL rates (41.6%) than students with Spanish nationality (21.9%). While in 2005, the rate of school leavers in all of Spain was 31.0%, for Spaniards, it was 28.6% and for foreigners it was 49.3% (Espinosa et al., 2015). By 2014 these values were 21.9% for all young people, 19.1% for Spaniards compared to 41.6% for foreigners, indicating the relative differences between the two groups have increased (Espinosa et al., 2015).

Another significant factor influencing ESL rates are the regional disparities between the North and the South. In 2011, Navarra had a 12% ESL rate and the Basque Country, 13%, below the European average which was situated then at 13.5% and which in 2017 was 10.6%. In six of the autonomous regions (Castilla-La-Mancha, 31.6%, Ceuta and Melilla, 32.2% and Andalusia 32.5%) the ESL rates exceed 30% in comparison to the rest of the autonomous regions where the ESL rate stands at around 20%. There are also striking differences between the rural areas of Spain as alleged by Santamaria Luna (2015) with rural areas having ESL rates as high as 15%.

More surprising is the fact that immigrant ESL rates in 2011 reached 44% and in 2012 had only been lowered to 43.6% with ESL being higher among males, 31%, than among females, 21% (World Health Organization, 2013). Many, including Roma and immigrants from Latin America and Africa, show differences in the OECD average. Problems of social or educational integration, even for those who left their initial education back home, place such students at higher risk of educational failure and it seems that the slight increase in ESL rates in the last few years can be attributed to the massive waves of migration, which is an external factor and not directly the result of the failure of the educational or social system in providing adequate levels of education to its population (Fernández-Macías, et.al, 2013).

ESL in Spain has been described by some scholars as an administrative failure, since many students do not take external examinations to obtain required certificates which tie them into non-

alternative paths. In not completing compulsory secondary education, their academic performance tends to fail, and the diversity of students is not considered as schools tend to be oriented to pre-university tracks rather than vocational training or other means of being retooled (Vallejo and Dooly, 2013).

The current situation of both central and local governments in increasing the ratio of students per class by 20%, augmenting teacher's hours, eliminating grants and scholarships, suppressing compensatory tools, have all a negative impact on already disadvantaged youth (Vallejo and Dooly, 2013). Vallejo and Dooly (2013) emphasize Spain's need to invest more in education for longer term benefits, and budget for national research on ESL, while managing its diversity both in terms of students and distributions to at risk students and individual networks of private and public schools. They strongly suggest that Spain needs to provide schools with timetable flexibility, smaller class ratios, qualified teachers, better promotion standards, early diagnose schema of ESL, revised accreditation system of compulsory education, and professionalization of its teachers.Vallejo and Dooly (2013) also argue that ESL should be considered as an indicator, which "serves as a marker of educational inequality with comparisons of levels of functional literacy achieved by specific groups" and as a cause of social disadvantage, which affects "the lack of access to these opportunities" (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013, p. 395).

Portugal: Combating ESL as a national priority

Portugal is one of the European countries that has reduced its ESL rates by the most percentage points between 2011 and 2018 (Donlevy et al., 2019). In 2011, Portugal's ESL rates were 23% but as of 2018, they were 12% (Donlevy et al., 2019). Despite these significant improvements, Portugal's ESL rates currently remain among the highest in Europe (Donlevy et al., 2019). The impact of family background and gender on ESL tends to be stronger in Portugal (Arqueiro et al., 2016) and in 2018, the ESL rates among males were five percentage points higher than those for females (Donlevy et al., 2019).

The European Commission report (Donlevy et al., 2019) does not identify ESL rates for pupils with a migration background, but the OECD (2017b) report showed that students with a migration background and from lower socio-economic backgrounds had higher repetition rates in Portugal. In 2015 across OECD countries 20% of socio-economically disadvantaged students reported having repeated a grade at least once, and in Portugal it was more than 50% (OECD, 2017b).

The high rates of ESL in Portugal can be understood by examining Portugal's annual expenditure per student which is low in comparison to other OECD countries (OECD, 2017b). In 2015, 80% of education resources were spent on staff compensation in maintaining a low student-teacher ratio, particularly in secondary education (OECD, 2017b). The OECD (2017b) concluded that this management of resources has not led to the decrease in grade repetition among students from low socio-economic background.

Another factor in explaining ESL rates in Portugal is the quality of teachers and teaching. OECD (2017b; 2014) highlights the improvements Portugal has made in strengthening teacher qualifications by having teachers undertake initial training, and compulsory continuous training while in the profession as well as receiving higher salaries compared to the OECD average (OECD, 2014). However, OECD (2017b) reports that while 85% of the teachers undergo professional developments, only a small share of teachers receive training on how to teach to students with special needs, despite the fact that this is an area where teachers reported greater need for professional development.

Finally, the OECD (2017b) highlights that another factor which strongly affects Portugal's ESL rates and grade repetition is the centralised nature of the education system and the relatively little autonomy that schools have in Portugal. Schools receive funding per class and have little influence on the class size. Furthermore, teachers' allocation is centralised with teachers being assigned to schools based on their classification in the national ranking and the years of teaching

(OECD, 2017b). Such a centralised system does not meet the needs of special schools and high proportions of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in remote areas who are staffed with early-career teachers on temporary contracts (OECD, 2017b).

While ESL rates in Portugal remain high, how can the significant reduction of ESL rates in Portugal be explained? Such significant reduction is attributed by the European Commission to the fact that Portugal made combating ESL their national priority (Donlevy et al., 2019). Portugal reduced ESL through the Programme to Combat School Failure and Early School Leaving (Programa de Combate ao Insucesso e Abandono Escolar), a priority since 2012 when clear synergies were achieved between national and EU policy frameworks for tackling ESL (OECD, 2014). This program aimed at supporting students in risk of dropping out, reintegrating those who had dropped out and strengthening vocational education (OECD, 2014).

Among the ESL prevention measures covered explicitly within Portugal's national policy or legislation identified by the European Commission in 2018 (Donlevy et al., 2019) were:

1. Improving the accessibility and affordability of ECEC to families with a disadvantaged background, including migrant and Roma children;

2. Introducing flexible curriculum choices and pathways, including measures to prevent early streaming, and training options beyond the age of compulsory education;

3. Measures that ensure access to high quality vocational education and training,

4. Measures that strengthen links between schools and local labour markets, via access to high quality work experience.

Apart from clear prevention measures, in 2018 Donlevy et al. (2019) also identified the intervention measures to combat ESL covered explicitly within Portuguese national policy. These included:

1. Local or regional governance arrangements to support learners at risk of ESL through, for example, school clusters or networks and the provision of specialist resource centres;

2. Support for teachers and school leaders working with learners at risk;

3. Access to targeted individual support for learners experiencing academic, social and emotional or personal difficulties through one-to-one academic tutoring;

4. Caching or mentoring programmes, and psychological support (e.g. emotional counselling).

Aside from following the national guidelines, many schools in Portugal implemented the following ad-hoc measures to counteract ESL (Donlevy et al., 2019)

1. Establish network structures between schools and external actors, including health, youth and community services and civil society organisations;

2. Work towards inclusive and participatory school environments measures including anti-bullying and wellbeing policies within schools;

3. Work towards the provision of high quality extracurricular artistic, cultural and civic education activities for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, including youth exchange and volunteering programmes.

However, Donlevy et al. (2019) reported that there were some recommendations made by the European Council in 2011 which were not implemented at any significant level in Portugal by 2018. These included:

1. Promotion of active anti-segregation policies;

2. Policies to support multilingual teaching and learning and to promote linguistic diversity in schools,

3. Active measures to support parental involvement in school life;

4. Early warning systems for pupils at risk of ESL;

5. Measures to promote rights-based education, including structures to support children's participation in decision-making;

6. Support for teachers and school leaders working with learners at risk to solve difficult teaching situations;

7. Access to high quality careers advice and guidance for learners at risk of ESL;

8. Financial support for learners whose economic circumstances pose a risk of dropping-out.

It is therefore clear that while Portugal has done much to reduce ESL, more remains to be done.

Croatia: Low ESL rates but the question of inclusivity remains

In 2018, Croatia was among the European countries with the lowest ESL rates (Donlevy et al., 2019). Between 2011 and 2018, the ESL rates in Croatia dropped from 5% to 3%. In 2014, when the ESL rates in Croatia were still low, the European Commission (2015) commented that while these percentages were to be celebrated, they should be taken with caution. As the European Commission (2015) remarked, "challenges over the inclusiveness and quality of primary and secondary education continue to affect many students' educational performance and later labour market outcomes" (p. 3).

While the Program for International Student assessment (PISA) reported that in 2018 there was no statistically significant difference in reading performance between immigrant and non-immigrant students in Croatia, socio-economic background did influence pupils' performance in reading and mathematics (OECD 2018a). Furthermore, the outcomes of PISA show that in 2018 students from lower socio-economic background had lower ambitions compared to the students from higher socio-economic status, even when controlling for educational performance (OECD 2018a). Apart from socio-economic background, gender also influences the educational performance of students as girls are more likely to proceed to tertiary education compared to boys (European Commission, 2015).

Among the reasons for the educational performance of pupils in Croatia, there are several linked to educational expenditures and teachers. The national expenditure in education in Croatia is close to the EU average (European commission, 2019). In 2017, 4.7% of Croatia's GDP was spent on education. The EU average in the same year was 4.6% (European Commissions, 2019). The 2018 PISA study shows that schools reported to have a similar level of staff shortages than the OECD average and teachers in Croatia tend to younger, with an average of 42 years of age which is lower than the EU country average age (OECD, 2018a). In 2018, Only 24% of teachers in Croatia were older than 50 years old, while the OECD average is 34%. Teachers in Croatia tend to be highly educated since teachers undertake pre-teaching training, in service professional development training and peer learning and coaching (OECD, 2018a:2018b) and there are many qualified teachers in schools with lower resources.

While the 2018 PISA study concluded that teachers undergo periodic training, the same study indicates that teacher training for multicultural settings is missing, even though teachers and school leaders state they believe in the importance of learning about diversity and different cultures (OECD, 2018b). Teachers reported the need to have more training on how to deal with pupils with learning disabilities and special needs (European Commisison, 2015; OECD 2018b).

Apart from these structural features, Croatia has also implemented numerous national policies aimed at the prevention of ESL (Donlevy et al., 2019), including:

1. Measures to improve accessibility and affordability of ECEC to families with a disadvantaged background, for migrant, Roma children, and measures for awareness raising among Roma parents about education;

2. Flexible curriculum choices and pathways, and measures to prevent early streaming, and training options beyond the age of compulsory education;

3. Promotion of active anti-segregation policies;

4. Policies to support multilingual teaching and learning for linguistic diversity in schools; (5) Measures to ensure access to high quality vocational education that provide routes from vocational education to tertiary education;

5. Measures that strengthen links between schools and local labour markets;

6. National measures to combat discrimination in accessing education. With regards to the latter point, Croatia has implemented a national plan to improve refugee children's fluency in Croatian language for entry into mainstream education.

While Croatia has implemented many prevention measures at the national level, the same cannot be said for national intervention policies combating ESL (Donlevy et al., 2019). The national intervention policies counteracting ESL rates identified by the European Commission in 2018 (Donlevy et al., 2019) included:

1. Local or regional governance arrangements to support learners at risk of ESL;

2. Measures to promote rights-based education, through structures that support children's participation in decision-making;

3. Financial support for learners (subsidies or social benefit schemes) whose economic circumstances pose a risk of dropping-out.

The national intervention policies to counteract ESL rates which have were not identified by the European Commission in 2018 in Croatia (Donlevy et al., 2019) included:

1. Early warning systems for pupils at risk of ESL, including monitoring and taking action where learners become disengaged from school or where behavioural or attendance issues arise.

2. Measures to promote inclusive and participatory school environments, anti-bullying and well-being school policies.

3. Support for teachers and school leaders with learners at risk.

4. Support for teachers and school leaders working with learners at risk to solve difficult teaching situations (e.g. conflict resolution skills) and enhance teaching staff competences for a positive learning environment

5. Provision of high quality extracurricular and out-of- school artistic, cultural and civic education activities for disadvantaged learners;

6. Targeted access to support individual learners experiencing academic, social and emotional or personal difficulties.

It should however be noted that some ESL intervention measures were implemented at the local school level, including:

1. Networking structures between schools and external actors, including health, youth and community services and civil society organisations and

2. High quality careers advice and guidance for learners at risk of ESL access (Donlevy et al., 2019).

Clearly Croatia has done much to prevent ESL rates. Yet such changes have not been in terms of intervention measures but rather ad hoc intervention measures since a monitoring system that identifies students at risk of ESL is absent. Schools determine what such intervention measures should be and left on their own, negotiate and implement the measures of inclusion and diversity they need.

Summary & the Covid-19 aftermath for identified countries

It is clear that ESL is not only a complex but complicated measurement concern which is closely tied to the broad implemented governmental policies but also the economic outlay of education in each country. In other words, poorer countries who are already disadvantaged continue to disadvantage their students due to the lack of resources especially when experiencing ESL and those with more funding do better.

Comprehensive reforms directly affecting individual choices are hard to come by in such cases. This is why more localized programs that filter into the schools are being proposed and implemented. It is clear that a more cohesive effort of cooperation between local and national prevention, intervention, and compensation strategies to reduce ESL is needed with the realization that the stakes have now become with the corona virus pandemic much higher. These prevention, intervention, and compensation strategies will need to take into account the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on schools and ESL. In the current global pandemic of Covid-19, we should not assume that ESL rates will remain low.

How will Croatia continue to keep its students engaged and in school is particularly difficult, given the fact that the country's educational system lags behind in digital literacy. In 2014, the European Commission reported that while Croatia was working on improving the digital skills of teachers, the country still lagged in its digitalisation of teaching practices. The European Commission 2015 report shows that on average there were 26 students for every computer in Croatian schools and students' confidence in using digital technologies for educational purpose was below the EU average. Croatia has responded by launching in 2014, a national program called eSchools, aiming to fully equip schools with digital technologies, train teachers to use digital technologies, and create critically minded, creative and digitally educated students ready to meet the demands of the labour market (European Commission, 2015). However, the 2018 TALIS survey of teachers reported that teachers needed more training in digital literacy (OECD, 2018b).

Currently, during this pandemic, the Croatian Ministry of Education has adopted the following measures, as reported by the World Bank (2020). For grades 1-4 of primary school classes are being organized via public television TV. Teachers are also sending additional exercises for students via their parents. For grades 5-8 of primary school and for secondary school, video lessons are being filmed for every day, 15 minutes per subject, according to the national schedule and are available via TV or online. Schools are also organising virtual teacher meetings and virtual

classrooms where teachers communicate daily with their pupils, instruct them and check completion of their homework. For children with learning disabilities or special needs, school staff specialised in supporting these children are to design online courses for them. The effectiveness of these measures will need to be evaluated.

However, at this time, given the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers and researchers have raised concerns about the ways in which they can effectively tackle and combat ESL. In Italy, students have stopped going to school since March and, as in other countries in the world, teachers face the challenge of keeping students in school while not being physically present at school. The Italian government has created a website to support schools to activate different forms of distance learning that is free of charge and where teachers can find useful tools (World Bank, 2020). On the 10th of March, during the first online meeting of education ministers organised by UNESCO (2020a) Italy announced an €85 million package to support distance learning for 8.5 million students and improve connectivity in isolated areas.

Yet Italian schools have historically faced digital challenges. Access to digital environments are significantly lower in Italy than in most EU countries, and are different across regions, with most southern regions still quite below an acceptable standard (Balbinot et al., 2016). In 2016, Balbinot et al. (2016) reported that only 5.3% of Italian students reported using laptops at school compared to numbers in Denmark which are 13 times higher (73.2%). Agcom's (2018) study revealed that many teachers lacked media literacies/competencies. In 2017 less than half of teachers (47%) in Italian schools used technologies on a daily basis and only slightly more than one school out of ten had an ultra-broadband connection, which is a fast Internet connection (Agcom, 2018). Most schools in 2018 had a slow internet connection (Agcom, 2018). Similarly, only 17.4% of families in Italy had an ultra-broadband connection in 2018 (Agcom, 2018). It is clear how in the current global pandemic poorer schools may struggle the most to keep their students in schools and continue providing them with educational opportunity and their right to education.

Spain is also beset not only with the short term but long-term effects of Covid-19 in its schooling and in the confinement of students, teachers and families. Currently there are close to 10 million students, one million teachers and 7 million families that have been critically affected by the shutdown of all services according to Cabrera (2020). Moreover, Cabrera (2020) argues that the shift to telematic education will only increase the inequality of education opportunities for youth, especially due to material shortages of electronic devices in already disadvantaged households, and mostly for public school students. Those most affected will be the Southern autonomous communities, Galicia and the Canary Islands and those most hit will be students who are currently disadvantaged (Cabrera, 2020; Cabrera, et. al 2020).

With regards to Portugal, there is the risk that Covid-19 may slow down the process of combating ESL which has been a national priority since 2012. Similarly to other countries, Portugal will need to assess how the current global pandemic will affect teaching, learning, and ESL rates. This is because, in the case of Portugal, Information Communication Technology (ICT) based activities are uncommon, with 54% in 2016 not using the computer and with students relying on private resources for digital literacy in schools (Arqueiro et al., 2016). Furthermore, in 2106, 47% of students are in classes with only one computer available for reading (Arqueiro et al., 2016). The absence of training in digital literacy needs to be coupled with the fact that some pupils and schools are located in areas with poor or no internet connectivity (UKFIET, 2020).

It seems that in many EU countries, e-learning in times of COVID-19 may not be a potential solution and may instead exacerbate existing inequality of access to education. Only time and research will reveal how the current situation will impact students who are already at risk of ESL.

3.BEST PRACTICES FOR THE PREVENTION OF ESL

This chapter presents the research findings on the best school practices for preventing and counteracting ESL. After presenting the kind of school culture that seems to work best in preventing ESL, this chapter lists the institutional, instructional, and interpersonal practices found to be the most effective for preventing and counteracting ESL.

3.1 School cultures that work

Of major significance in the prevention of ESL is the identification of the kind of school culture and practices that are effective. By school culture, Stoll (1998) refers to the deeper level of basic assumptions, beliefs and practices that are shared and enacted by the members of the schools[6]. Defining the culture of a school is significant in determining how teachers, administrators, staff, students and parents interpret such culture or cultures and how they can live out their practices. Among traditional educational anthropologists such as Frederick Erickson (1978), culture in schools is conceived of as consisting of 1) bits of of information, or as 2) conceptual structure and symbols, or as 3) meanings generated in political struggle which students and teacher create in their everyday encounters with each.

However, Montero-Sieburth (Personal communication, 2020) strongly believes that school culture is visible and invisible, not static, but flexible and ever changing, and can be symbolic but also political and critical, and is constantly being refueled by students, teachers, and their families. This means that while students *may be products of the given culture that is evident in the schools, they are also reproducing their own understanding of such cultures*. In such a process, it is not simply the idea of reproducing or mirroring the power dynamics within cultures but migrant groups and families and children build "mechanisms of validation of their cultural capital, negotiate the

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[6] This includes in many cases, the mission, vision and purpose of the school and why it exists, on what basis and for whom.

ethnic majority and migrant institution and networks cultures" as Umut Erel (2010, p. 642) so poignantly remarks.

Research indicates that a school culture that is centred on students, their needs, cultures, and aspirations and which supports students who may otherwise fall through the cracks is needed (European Commission, 2016). From the research reviewed, the key characteristics of a school culture that is centred on the needs and identities of the students' attempts to:

1. Embed the culture of students within the school through symbolic representations and language

2. Promotes a critical intercultural education that fosters intercultural understanding among students without essentialising their cultures or people's experiences

3. Aligns the culture of students' families with the school culture

4. Develops a school culture that strives to get to know students

5. Monitors students as part of the school culture

6. Encourages a school culture that is self-reflexive and open towards critical and realist self-evaluations.

Embed students' culture in the school

Scholars have shown that embedding students' culture in the school becomes important to prevent ESL. O'Gorman et al. (2016) conducted a review of effective practices on enhancing school belonging and reducing ESL. The findings reveal that students whose culture was embedded and welcomed by the school have a stronger desire to continue their education. There are a variety of ways this can be done: through visual means such as self-portraits of students, videos or blogs created by students, pictures they have taken, or through the display of murals and movements in performances that students create and that can be temporal or permanent. This notion is extended by O'Gorman's et al. (2016) research which shows that an effective way of embedding students' culture

in the school is by allowing students to speak their native languages and to have their symbolic representation become part of the school.

O'Gorman's et al. (2016) further elaborates upon the findings of Antrop-González (2006), showing that "the school environment used art as a medium to connect with students' culture" (p. 544) is useful. Antrop-González (2006) showed that having a school environment that reflects students' identities is crucial for enhancing students' sense that the school welcomes them. For instance, in the US school investigated by Antrop-González (2006), "the walls of classrooms and surrounding spaces were covered with posters and pictures of Puerto Rican, Mexican and African-American historical figures, while a row of student lockers were painted in the likeness of the Puerto Rican flag" (O'Gorman et al., 2016, p. 544). Montero-Sieburth (2018) also points out that pictures posted in school hallways and open areas which have been approved by parents, and the comments which accompany them, say much more about the school and how students feel about their being there, especially in highly differentiated schools.

Allowing students to speak their own native language is also fundamental. Migrant children or youth with a migration background are faced with the pressure to speak only the language of the host country (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012). However, this may cause students to lose their heritage language and may come across as demeaning rather than legitimizing of its value in the student's life. First language usage denial becomes a major mechanism by which migrant students receive the message that the school is not theirs, that they don't belong to the school unless they conform (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012). Manzoni & Rolfe (2019) stress that the embedding of the diverse cultures of students in the very fabric of the school is not only beneficial for migrants but also for non-migrant students, who learn about each other and to appreciate other cultures and other languages.

Provide learning opportunities for critical intercultural education

The concept of intercultural education is widely used throughout Europe and contrasts with the notion of multicultural education institutionalized in the U.S. Its emergence, unlike that of

multicultural education arising out of the Civil Rights movement, is based on the response of European countries attempting to deal with the diversity of migrants, their ideologies and ways of living in order to integrate them within the fabric of the EU (Montero-Sieburth and Alhadi, 2015, Faas et al., 2014). Intercultural education has been adopted as a way to ameliorate diversity in schools and encourage integration and is based, as Allemann-Ghionda (2008) alleges, on "improving understanding between different societies and different majority or minority groups in the same society" (p. 2). Its major pillars are showing respect, creating dialogue among individuals and co-living and co-existence, which is different from multicultural education's thrust to understand the cultures, languages and ways of thinking of different cultural and ethnic groups in the U. S.

Different approaches have been used in intercultural education which varies from targeting migrant students, to creating more dialogical situations and to understand human rights issues and social injustices, and teachers and students' responsibilities in deterring these. However, the implementation of intercultural education has been critiqued. While many countries identify the value of including diversity as part of their educational policies, they do not necessarily implement social equality practices, thereby allowing selectivity to occur among educational systems, segregating student populations, or neutralising the inclusion of diversity in the curriculum (Allemann-Ghionda, 2008; Aguado-Odina et.al, 2017). Thus, the intent, the delivery, and practice of intercultural education must go hand in hand.

In this regard, the importance of intercultural education in the prevention of ESL is of utmost importance (Araújo et al., 2019; Martínez-Usarralde et al., 2017; Ross & Leathwood, 2013). Cushner (2009) describes intercultural education in terms of its objective to "eliminate prejudice and racism by creating an awareness of the diversity and relative nature of viewpoints and thus a rejection of absolute ethnocentrism; assists people in acquiring the skills needed to interact more effectively with people different from themselves; and demonstrates that despite the differences that seem to separate people, many similarities do, in fact, exist across groups" (p. 2). As such, intercultural education

boost students' sense of school belonging and may also help to counteract bullying and the stereotyping peers engage in.

Intercultural education is also important for preparing all students to be able to function in a global world (Tupas, 2014; Deardoff, 2006). While Tupas (2014) does not focus on the relationship between ESL and intercultural education, he emphasises the importance of criticality in the teaching of intercultural issues. By this Tupas (2014) means that having "a critical perspective [which] assumes that culture is a dynamic, fluid and complex entity, as opposed to a static view wherein individuals stereotype specific groups of people" (p. 3) is crucial. Furthermore, he argues that intercultural education is not just about national cultures. Rather, "gender, class, subnational ethnicities, intergenerational relations and many others all come into play in intercultural interactions" (Tupas, 2014, p. 3).

The issue of developing a critical intercultural education starts in the classroom and Dimitrov and Hague (2016, p. 440) suggest a model for teachers' practices (Figure 5) that includes:

(a) *Foundational competencies* which focus on instructor's self-awareness and modelling of intercultural competences for students.

(b) *Facilitation skills* built on the foundational competencies, which allows instructors to interact with students and encourages interaction among students in ways that are respectful of diversity.

(c) *Curriculum design competencies* which reflect the skills of instructors who not only in responding to diversity in their classroom, but also intentionally engages students in global and intercultural learning activities or discussions of social justice issues in order to promote global learning outcomes
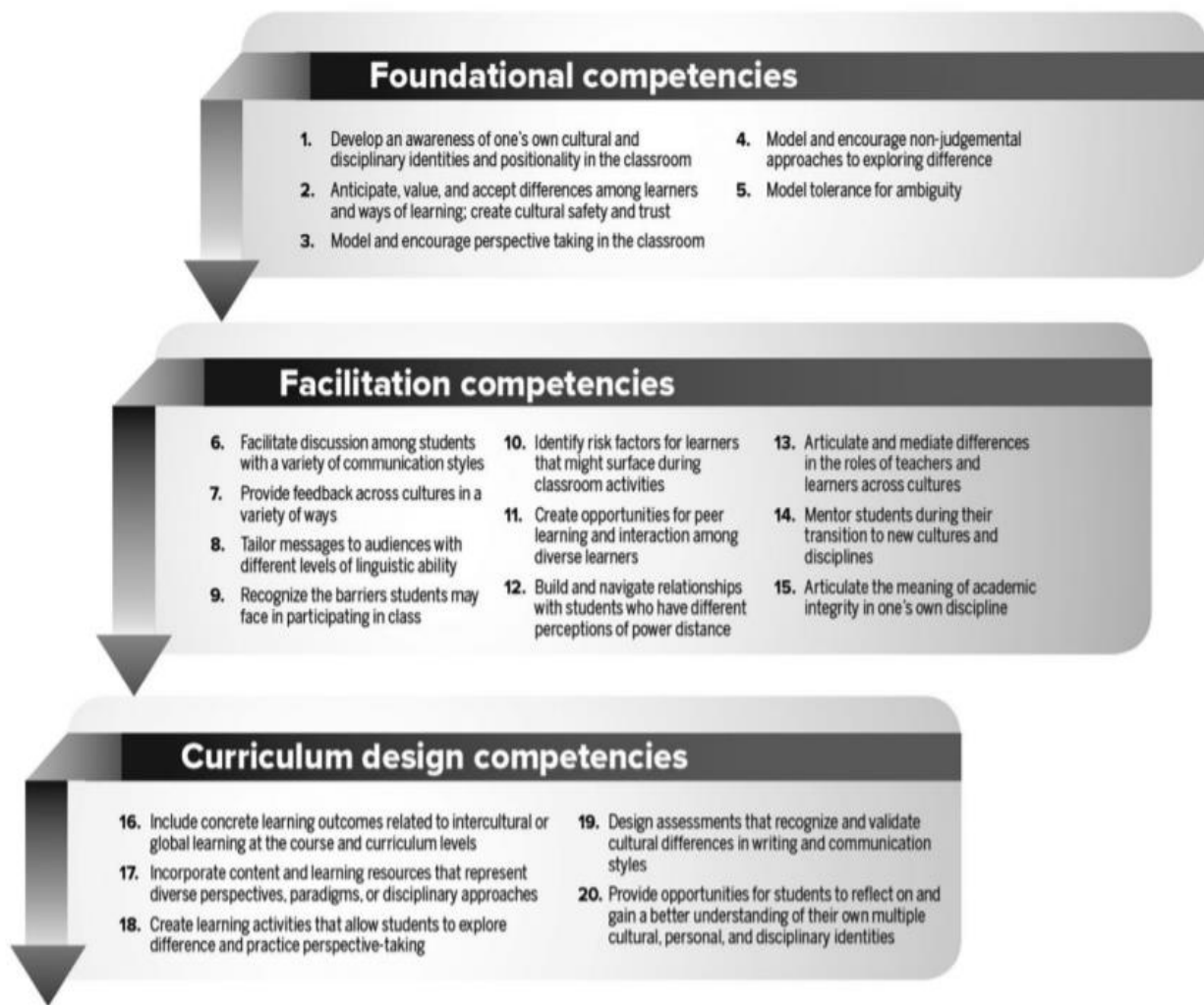
Foundational competencies

1. Develop an awareness of one's own cultural and disciplinary identities and positionality in the classroom
2. Anticipate, value, and accept differences among learners and ways of learning; create cultural safety and trust
3. Model and encourage perspective taking in the classroom
4. Model and encourage non-judgemental approaches to exploring difference
5. Model tolerance for ambiguity

Facilitation competencies

6. Facilitate discussion among students with a variety of communication styles
7. Provide feedback across cultures in a variety of ways
8. Tailor messages to audiences with different levels of linguistic ability
9. Recognize the barriers students may face in participating in class
10. Identify risk factors for learners that might surface during classroom activities
11. Create opportunities for peer learning and interaction among diverse learners
12. Build and navigate relationships with students who have different perceptions of power distance
13. Articulate and mediate differences in the roles of teachers and learners across cultures
14. Mentor students during their transition to new cultures and disciplines
15. Articulate the meaning of academic integrity in one's own discipline

Curriculum design competencies

16. Include concrete learning outcomes related to intercultural or global learning at the course and curriculum levels
17. Incorporate content and learning resources that represent diverse perspectives, paradigms, or disciplinary approaches
18. Create learning activities that allow students to explore difference and practice perspective-taking
19. Design assessments that recognize and validate cultural differences in writing and communication styles
20. Provide opportunities for students to reflect on and gain a better understanding of their own multiple cultural, personal, and disciplinary identities

Figure 5. Components of intercultural teaching competence by Dimitrov & Haque (2016)

Being critical in intercultural education also means being willing to confront issues which may be difficult but necessary in gaining deeper understanding of underlying causes. For example, Yvonne Leeman (2007) has shown that while teachers in the Netherlands have undergone intercultural training and are able to implement its premises in classrooms, when it comes to dealing with highly sensitive or political issues, teachers, fearing now knowing how to handle conflict, diffuse the discussions and avoid confrontation. Such a lack of criticalness has also been taken up by Teresa Aguado-Odine et al., (2017), by Paul Gorski (2006) and Stephen May (2009) who view

intercultural education as being watered down because it complies with political correctness and does not upset the status quo prompted by teacher's unwillingness to become politically assertive in teaching their students.

Yet in understanding intercultural education, it is important to identify students' experience with diversity and how they respond to intercultural education. Rengi and Polat (2019), in their study of student views in Germany, reported that students recognized cultural diversity in the courses they took, the cultural diversity and sensitivity of their teachers and their behaviours, the native languages they choose, courses, belief systems and preferences for materials. Thus, implementing intercultural education is not simply having culturally responsive teachers, or diversity learning curriculum. It is also about knowing what students view as cultural diversity practices in their schools (Gay, 2010). As Geneva Gay (2002) remarks, "culture simultaneously anchors and blinds us. It forms our centre in the dynamics of living and interacting with others while leading us to assume that our own ways of being and behaving are the only right way" (p. 617). This may lead to cultural blindness in which ethnic diversity is ignored. Hence the view of students counts.

Align school culture with family's cultures and engage families

The studies reviewed show that family engagement in students' education is central to reduce ESL and to enhance students' educational outcomes (Manzoni & Rolfe, 2019; Davis, 2017; González-Rodríguez et al., 2019). As Davis (2017) notes, the improvement of students' behaviour, attendance and academic performance can create spaces for targeted family and community activities. This is because when parents understand the educational system and embrace it, they influence their children at home to do well at school. Alternatively, when parents do not perceive the educational system as benefiting their children or they perceive it even against their own cultural values, parents may discourage children to embrace education and may contribute to the development of students' oppositional approach to school (Ogbu, 1992). In other words, the

relationship between families and schools is critical to maintain the continuity of school to home and the reinforcement of the values shared therein (Ogbu, 1992).

The question to be addressed is how schools can engage parents, making sure that the leadership they may have allows them to cooperate with school authorities. Research from Great Britain provides some ideas and research from the U.S. shows the power of parent leadership. At the most basic level, schools need to open up to parents since the beginning of the school year. This can be more difficult with migrant parents due to language barriers. As Monzoni & Rolfe's (2019) study of British schools shows, schools that develop constructive partnerships with parents from an early stage by inviting them to regular gatherings at schools and by offering translation and interpreting services were the schools that better integrated parents into the fabric of the school.

In another instance, Flores et al. (2019) discuss other effective strategies to include parents in the education. They documented the evolution of how a school in the US with a high proportion of Latino students attempted to improve parental and family involvement. Practices included monthly school gatherings during which a range of personal, social, academic, and professional topics were explored (e.g. family leadership, navigating the public-school system, college access test preparation). In addition, parent–teacher meetings and conferences, Parent Teacher Associations, Parent Advisory Councils and social tours to universities and colleges also helped establish parent-teacher relationships.

Training of parents is also vital because it helps parents develop themselves and helps migrant parents familiarize with the educational system of the host country. Such training should include sessions that deal with the structure of the educational system, the curriculum, and the assessment and evaluation they children undergo (Manzoni & Rolfe, 2019). Such training should also be clear about the objective of education and the ways in which the school respects, acknowledge, and includes the diversity of students. This enables parents to understand the value of education (Manzoni & Rolfe, 2019). In addition to such training, Manzoni & Rolfe (2019) show that

providing language classes to parents engages them and allows them to see the school as a resource for themselves and to participate actively in future activities and trainings organised by schools.

Training for parents can also be about how parents can support their children's learning (Manzoni & Rolfe, 2019). The importance of having parents gain skills on home-schooling has been shown in the current global COVID-19 pandemic. Due to lockdowns in many countries, parents have found themselves with the responsibility for home-schooling and for learning how to access digital educational programs. Reports and news have suggested that many parents are unprepared for this. Training parents to home-school becomes significant not just to because it continues to provide education to students, but also to keeps them in education even though they are not physically present in schools.

Know your students

The research literature shows that it is important for schools to know who their students are as a necessary step in designing interventions aimed at ESL prevention (Calvagna, 2015; Ainscow et al., 2004; Belghazi, 2019; Jasińska-Maciążek & Tomaszewska-Pękała, 2017). Clearly the socio-economic background of the students, their race/ethnicity, gender, as well as their previous mobility/migration histories means that some students may be more at 'risk' than others regarding ESL (Belghazi, 2019; González-Rodríguez et al., 2019). Yet, as scholars emphasise, knowing one's school's composition is not about labelling some students as more at 'risk' than others, but rather devising support mechanisms and intervention strategies that allow the students to feel included and attended to (Calvagna, 2015).

Calvagna (2015) identifies two ways that schools can get to know their students, namely through *a target-approach* and *individual approach*. A target approach requires identifying students that fall into 'risk categories' of ESL. Yet, as Calvanga's, (2015, p. 75) review of schools in Italy shows this approach needs to be complemented with an individual approach where "specific needs are assessed and determined on a case-by-case basis". In this respect, Ainscow et al. (2004) show

that partnering with universities may be an option for conducting research on the composition of the school and for training the school staff's in conducting research to obtain information and evidence.

Ross and Leathwood (2013) confirm that in identifying the individual needs of the students, where they come from, and how to meet these, training of staff, principal or headmaster, and teachers promotes possible retention of students. This is even more complicated for children of refugees as Belghazi (2019) exemplified in a London school, where children of refugees face not only traumatic experiences but also language barriers that may prevent them from doing well at school. He warns that having schools and teachers become aware of the specific challenges that children of refugees have, which can be transmitted through training is critically needed.

Monitor your students

Not only do schools need to know their students, especially those who need extra support or may fall become at risk of ESL, but they also need to monitor them. To prevent ESL, establishing an Early Warning System that detects those students who have started to disengage with the schools and may be more likely to drop out is critical (Calvagna, 2015; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Such an Early Warning System needs to be constructed early on, so that the process of preventing ESL is started. The indicators of ESL can be readily identified from patterns of absenteeism, drops in grades, socio-emotional distress, inappropriate behaviour (e.g. bullying disruption, disengagement) which are clear signs of students' disengagement (Önder, 2017; Clavagna, 2015). Some scholars argue that the most evident warning signs are grade retention and past history of absenteeism (Önder, 2017; González-Rodríguez, 2019).

In this regard, Calvagna (2015) and Doyle and Keane (2019) indicate that teachers who are in conversation with parents, may be able to identify changes in the students' circumstances that are causing distress and may result in students' disengagement with the school. As Calvagna (2015) remarks, for an effective monitoring of students, "the impact of critical life events (including

traumatic events) on the personal development of a young person should always be taken into account" (p. 141-142).

Further helping such assessment is the collaborative research that can ensue between universities and schools. Such cooperation can not only engender the development of effective research strategies that can appraise ESL warning signs but can also help devise data collection strategies as Ainscow et al., (2004) has shown.

Engage in critical and realistic school self-evaluation

Among the options available to schools is what is known as needs assessments, which Ainscow et. al (2004) and Tarabini et.al (2019) label as a realistic, evidence-based self-evaluation. What is meant by a critical and realistic evidence-based school self-evaluation is the process whereby the teachers, principals, and administration actively address the extent to which the school is causing ESL. This evaluation needs to be critical in the sense that schools should recognise what they are 'doing wrong', in other words, how schools are contributing to ESL. Ainscow et al. (2004) and Tarabini et al. (2019) promote three key notions:

1. Evaluations of the school conditions which engender ESL

2. Identification of the implicit notions of schools held by teachers and administrators

3. Understanding of what is doable or not within the school context that is directed at change and opportunities for renewal.

Scholars indicate that a needs assessment or critical and realistic school self-evaluation is necessary before implementing a program for the prevention of ESL (Ainscow et al., 2004; Tarabini et al., 2019). An evidence-based evaluation requires extensive use of data. The realistic evidence-based evaluation is about what schools can actually do by assessing the resources they have to improve the climate of schools to prevent ESL. In evidence-based evaluations, data resulting from previous monitoring of ESL (described above) and other monitoring of practices that promote ESL in

various schools' domains (e.g. classroom, schools' policies) are used (Ainscow et al., 2004).   This approach stands in contrast to what Ainscow et al. (2004) has noticed about teachers, staff, and headmasters in schools who formulate or even appraise problems based on their professional intuition. Yet such professional intuition may not only be limited in scope but at times contrary to the interests of students.

Another significant way that ESL can be reduced is to have the school conduct research in collaboration with universities: "this involves a process of collecting evidence of school development in a way that is separate from, and complementary to, the review and development processes used within the school" (Ainscow et al, 2004, p. 131). In other words, university research teams collect evidence about schools and their developments and communicate back to, engage with the school staff and reflect together on the findings (Ainscow et al, 2004).

Ainscow et al., (2004) and Calvagna, (2015) have also identified additional effective practices that enable schools to question their own practices based on: 1) mutual observation of classroom practices followed by structured discussion of what happened; 2) group discussion of a video recording of a colleague's teaching; 3) discussion of statistical evidence regarding test results, attendance registers or records of exclusion; and 4) school-to-school cooperation, including mutual visits to help collect evidence.

Calligham (2016) also highlights the importance of identifying students' evaluations and voices which provide not only critical student feedback but also enhance students' participation in school, which is considered important to reduce ESL. Calligham (2016) shows that students' voices can be included through questionnaires and student evaluations but also by having students conduct research of their own schools. Such an undertaking requires training students as researchers and setting up such training as course work taught through curriculum/activities or projects developed in the schools.

3.2 Institutional practices and interventions for the prevention of ESL

The following section presents four main institutional practices of schools identified from the literature as preventing ESL and fostering students' positive educational outcomes, namely:

1. Developing a school attitude towards students' success and leadership through concrete interventions

2. Challenging deficit discourses at all school levels through teacher in ESL and intercultural competence

3. Moving away from school policies that focus on punishing students

4. Developing school codes of conduct geared towards restorative justice rather than punishment

Develop a school's attitude towards students' success and leadership

In developing a school-wide attitude towards students' success, research indicates the importance of concrete interventions at the institutional level of schools. Some of these concrete interventions include:

1. Embedding students' success in the material culture of the school

2. Providing students with tutors who help them plan for their future in concrete ways

3. Offering students opportunities for academic and career development within and outside the school context.

4. Providing students with the means to be successful, including closing the digital divide so that students can effectively perform in a global and digital world.

Borck (2018) documented the perspectives of students in a New York high school and found that students learned they 'deserved the right to go to college' not just because of teachers who tell them that they can make it but also because the possibility of high school graduation and college readiness was literally built into the facade of the school. The front of the school was adorned by a

painting made by "a former school black youth in a cap and gown jumping with a big smile in the celebratory moment of graduation, his right arm outstretched at an angle reminiscent of black power, his fist around a diploma" (Borck, 2018, p. 8).

Apart from using the school material culture to demonstrate the school's positive attitudes towards the success of students, researchers have documented the importance of having tutors who help students plan for their future in concrete ways (Fenzel & Richardson, 2019). However, such an approach is not just about having career workshops and tutors; it is also about offering opportunities for academic and career development within and outside the school. In assessing three schools in the US through the experiences of their students and graduates, Fenzel and Richardson (2019) found that what kept students in school was the fact that they felt academically challenged. This was reflected in the amount of homework they had to do and the projects where they had to show their critical thinking, rather than simply repeating what the teacher taught them. Fenzel and Richardson (2019) reported that students, who conducted research, were given opportunities to learn new skills and take on leadership roles, and opportunities for volunteering in schools and in organisations affiliated with the schools. For example, volunteering in organisations connected to the school provided the youth with the opportunity to develop social capital and to find mentors outside the school. These students reported they felt responsible, had pride in contributing to the schools, but also felt responsibility towards the society at large.

Providing resources for students to be successful in a globalised, digital world, also means closing the digital divide (Riel & Schwarz, 2002), defined as individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas lacking the opportunities to access Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and to use the Internet for a wide variety of activities (OECD, 2002). Jenkins et al. (2006) confirms this by stating that participating and being successful in today's society means having access to the Internet and accessing digital information. The lack of this becomes a major obstacle to

students' educational success (Jenkins et al., 2006). Furthermore, ICT can be a tool for intergenerational learning with many spinoffs for students and parents (Leek & Rojek, 2017).

While the school cannot obviate issues like poverty, the school can partner with other organisations to provide students with laptops they can borrow or keep at home during their studies reducing the digital divide. However, closing the digital divide is not just about owning digital technologies such as laptops or smartphones but also about having the skillset needed to make the most of the opportunities the Internet provides to participate in society and enhance one's learning (Jenkins et al., 2006). Lacking the skills necessary to make an effective use of the internet and digital technologies becomes as debilitating as not having access at all to them (Jenkins et al., 2006).

Students need to have the skills to access different information on the Internet and participate in different digital communities by understanding the norms and values of these communities (Jenkins et al., 2006). They also need to learn how to pull knowledge together from different sources on the internet and evaluate these, especially in times of fake news. Schools then should teach students the skills needed to navigate the digital world (Jenkins et al., 2006). In these times of global pandemics that prevent students to be physically in class, learning needs to happen digitally.

As Kelley-Salinas (2000) observed, the use of ICTs in education:

1. Enhances students' motivation and creativity when confronted by new learning environments;

2. Brings about greater research and problem-solving dispositions focused on real social situations

3. Provides opportunity for collaborative learning and work between students, and

4. Equips students with the ability to generate new knowledge from the resources accessed online.

Challenge deficit discourses & foster teachers' intercultural competence

To counteract ESL, research shows that a major step that the school needs to take at the institutional level is to go beyond deficit explanations of ESL. Deficit explanations include the idea that ESL is caused by students' cognitive abilities, their families, their background, health etc. While these exogamous factors cannot be ignored, ascribing the causes of ESL to these factors is problematic because it prevents schools from recognizing how they contribute to ESL (Tarabini, et al., 2019).

The study by Tarabini et al. (2019) on different schools in Barcelona show how, in some schools, the principals/headmasters, teachers and staff would sometimes develop interpretations of students' failure based on their participation in school activities and their backgrounds. In these schools, students "lament[ed] the lack of specific mechanisms to manage their needs, and where these mechanisms do exist (such as flexible groups or adapted individual curricula) they consider them as stigmatising and/or limiting their opportunities" (Tarabini et al., 2019, p. 235).

In the same study, Tarabini et al. (2019) showed that the schools who did not endorse these deficit discourses and didn't explain students' low academic performance based on their background, culture, or skin colour had lower ESL rates. In these schools, staff "demonstrated a broad, multidimensional conception of the factors involved in school success and failure and clearly acknowledge the role of schools in general and teachers in particular in these processes" (Tarabini et. al, 2019, p. 223). Teachers explained the academic performance of students not merely in terms of their individual or family interest, merit and effort. Instead, they expressed critical views of the structure of the educational system, and its excessive rigidity.

In retaining students in school, Ainscow et al. (2004) and Cardinali et al. (2016) highlight the importance of working with researchers who can become "critical friends" and who can help schools identify how deficit discourses are built into their policies. Moreover, Cardinali et. al (2016) argues that academic attitudes among ethnic minority youth at risk of ESL can be improved by cross group

friendships and ethnic identity. The European Commission (2016) and Ciuffetelli (2016) suggest training of teachers and school staff about the nature of ESL, discrimination, teacher labelling and stereotyping of their students.

Ciuffetelli (2016) in a study of teachers in Ontario evaluated the impact of teacher training on global citizenship and social justice literacy in a school predominantly attended by poor children. Ciuffetelli (2016) analysed the perceptions of teachers about their students before and after the training. After the training, teachers became more aware of the circumstances of their students, began re-evaluating the stereotypes they had of children, and developed more compassion and understanding of the struggle that the parents of their students faced (Ciuffatelli, 2016). This was a first step in developing intercultural competences for teachers, which is necessary in challenging deficit discourses and supporting students.

Intercultural competence refers to 'an individual's effectiveness in drawing upon a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes in order to work successfully with people from different national, cultural backgrounds' (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 530). Intercultural competence has been found to play a crucial role in delivering education to culturally diverse populations (Noorani et al., 2019). Manzoni and Rolfe (2019) in England found that migrant students were successfully integrated in the classroom when teachers displayed positive attitudes towards intercultural interactions, were knowledgeable about students' cultures and needs, and were able to adapt their communication style to the students' culture.

On the contrary, teachers who lack intercultural competence harm migrant students' educational success (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009) and do not recognise how they marginalize minority students (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). When teachers lack intercultural competence, students end up not trusting the educational system and the dominant culture, facing greater difficulties in the classroom. Thus, teacher training in intercultural competence becomes essential in changing the deficit explanation of school failure in favour of student successes.

Move away from punishment

From the research identified, it is clear that punishment in the form of suspension or grade retention does not work. Balfanz et al. (2012) in a US study indicated that there is a close relationship between student suspensions and dropout rates. In fact, Davis (2017, p. 160) in summarizing Balfanz's study, argues that is common-sense to understand that a student with more suspensions will less likely graduate compared to their non- suspended peers. Furthermore, suspension and harsh discipline measures not only lead to ESL but also erase any of the educational achievement the suspended student has achieved throughout the year. Other studies indicate that suspension leads children to change their school, which results in further disruption of students' educational trajectory (Rich & Jennings, 2015). Similarly, grade retention put students more at risk of ESL. For instance, Van Praag et al. (2018) showed migrant children who are placed in classes with younger people are more likely to drop out.

As Mallet (2015) claims, moving away from punishment does not mean that school should not have rules. On the contrary, it shows the importance of a school's code of conduct. A code of conduct should "convey […] the important priorities in schools that are necessary for conducive learning: the imposition of firm, clear, and consistent rules; punishments for misbehaving and rule breaking; the punishment to be equitable; punishments to be of consequence to the importance of the rule; and effectively communicating these rules to students and school staff with consistent application when necessary" (Mallet, 2015, p.341) In reviewing studies on effective codes of conduct, Mallet (2015) concludes that they should be focused on the rehabilitation of the student, rather than on punishment.

Introduce restorative justice practices

Research has identified that the use of restorative justice practices is effective in dealing with students' misbehaviour and counteracting ESL. Instead of punishing disruptive behaviour, increasing empirical evidence supports the use of restorative justice (Latimer et al., 2005; Schiff, 2013; Minkos

et al., 2014). Mallet (2015) defines restorative justice practices as "student-focused interventions that try to change the perspective of students with behavioural difficulties and other related problems" (p, 342). She specifies that "these practices are appropriate for those situations when the student is primarily responsible for the disruptions or unsafe school behaviours, with a focus on accountability" (Mallet, 2015, p. 342).

However, such restorative justice practices only work when peers in schools have developed trust and confidence in each other and where the school ethos is supportive. The usefulness of restorative practices according to Mallet (2015) is that they "typically include all willing stakeholders in the incident or problem, uses a constructive collaborative approach with a focus on repairing the harm to victims and making the school community whole, while also helping the young person decrease future problems and recidivism" (p. 342).

These practices "build and improve school climate by increasing student understanding of the rules and trust in the rule enforcement" (Mallet, 2015, p. 342) and can take diverse forms, for example, "peer juries that bring together a student who has broken a code violation with trained student jurors, peer mediation that brings two or more students together for conflict resolution with trained student mediators, and peace circles that allow student dialogue, process, and collective decision-making" (Mallet, 2015, p. 342).

3.3 Instructional practices for the prevention of ESL

The instructional practices that have been found to counteract ESL and enhance students' levels of school engagement require teachers to:

1. Establish the kind of classroom environment that fosters learning by teaching expectations and rewarding positive behaviour

2. Teach students how to learn

3. Include socio-emotional learning as an important and necessary component of instruction in fostering students' resilience

4. Set and keep having high expectations of what students can achieve

5. Support students in seeing themselves as learners

6. Propose extracurricular activities rather than more homework for pupils who are disengaged

7. Negotiate the curriculum and shape it around students' identities and interests

8. Promote inclusion in the classroom through individualised and cooperative learning

9. Foster inclusion and success through the teaching of intercultural competence

Manage the classroom: Teaching expectations & rewarding positive behaviour

Managing classroom behaviour is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching. Yet, effectively managing the classroom environment is fundamental to make sure that all students continue to academically perform well (Black, 2016). Classroom management is also about developing the leadership of teachers and their management skills with a focus on learning while maintaining disruptive behaviour at bay (Montero-Sieburth, et. al, 1989).

Some practices teachers use to manage the classroom are not effective and may actually lead to further students' behavioural and emotional disengagement (Mallet, 2015; Black, 2016). For example, authoritarian measures such as shouting, sending students to the principal's office in restoring order in the classroom do not work (Lauresen & Nielsen, 2016). Instead, they contribute to ESL (Lauresen & Nielsen, 2016). Expelling a disruptive student from the class affects not only the expelled students' emotional and behavioural school engagement, but also the levels of engagement of those students who remain in the classroom (Black, 2016). In his reviews of studies on ESL in the US, Black (2016) concludes: "as discipline becomes overly strict or harsh, the general student body—including well-behaved students—begins to perceive school authorities as arbitrary and

unfair. At that point, students may have any number of negative reactions, including resentment, opposition, fear, or disillusionment" (p. 49).

Of the practices that work, Mallet (2015) reports, that in the US context "one of the stronger empirically supported interventions used in over 18,000 schools is Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) where the focus is on teaching skills and behaviour management early in the academic year with the goal of changing problem behaviours for all students" (p. 341). PBIS is a three-tiered approach based on the assumption that teaching about expectations will change students' behaviour. PBIS consists of a primary tier which addresses prevention by teaching behavioural expectations, rewarding positive behaviour, providing a continuum of consequences, and data collection for decision-making. The secondary tier is for at-risk students and targets these young people for interventions to help with behavioural problems. Finally, the tertiary tier is for students with more serious behaviour problems and includes more intense individualized interventions often with family and community partners. However, teaching about expectations requires schools have a code of conduct that is clear about these expectations, reward students' positive behaviour and emphasises the importance of "implement[ing] a fair and consistent continuum of corrective consequences" (Mallet, 2015, p. 341-342).

Apart from teaching expectations, some scholars have highlighted other effective strategies to restore order in the classroom. Laursen and Nielsen (2016) compared the experiences of student teachers who had undergone a training program on reflexivity in which they understood their role not as authoritarian figures and compared these with that of student teachers who had not undergone this program. Among the non-authoritarian practices that student teachers learned to use to deal with 'difficult classrooms' were: (1) concentration techniques; (2) movement exercises; and (3) having teachers step out of their teachers' role. Student teachers used concentration techniques at the beginning of the classroom to restore the calm, while movement exercises provided energy to classes with low moods (Larsen and Nielsen, 2016).

Teach Students how to Learn

Research also shows that students need to be supported through the learning process. Walberg & Paik, 2000 emphasised the importance of teacher tested practices on learners' self-awareness and self-monitoring which include

1. Modelling (teachers exhibit the desired behaviour and outcomes);

2. Guided practice (moment in which students perform with the support of the teacher to achieve the desired outcomes); and

3. Application (the phase during which students act independently of the teachers to achieve the desired outcomes and check for progress).

These become important as not knowing how to learn may negatively affect the levels of students' school engagement. Much of this has to do with risk taking in learning and arriving at what Vygotsky refers to the 'zone of proximal development', where the learner with help from others, can function and learn. Teachers in this regard need to teach students that taking risks is the road to competence and only when there is genuine interest in such learning, is there full engagement (Erickson, 1987).

Introduce social-emotional learning to foster students' resilience

The ability to self-regulate emotions and behaviour may greatly help students to endure particularly stressful moment and become academically successful, instead of leaving school early. Bradshaw et al. (2008) point out how "stressful events such as parental divorce, family conflict, and loss of a loved one can influence how a student behaves in and outside the classroom" (p. 21). Having the skills to regulate and understand one's own emotions and behaviours is identified as an important protective factor against ESL especially in times of acute stressful circumstances such as the current Covid-19 pandemic.

All students, not merely students labelled at risk of ESL, must learn and master their social and emotional skills. The core socio-emotional competencies according to Bradshaw et al. (2008) that need to be taught in schools include having a positive sense of self, self-control, decision-making skills, a moral system of belief, and prosocial connectedness. All students "need to develop these competencies to be able to manage their current role as a student and their longer term roles of an active and informed citizen and employee as well as having a positive sense of well-being as they enter their adult years" (Main & Whatman, 2016, p. 1057).

Teaching about social-emotional learning is about school/teacher interventions that support students in building their social and emotional skills. Social-emotional learning and teaching can take multiple forms. It can be part of the classroom paradigm or a stand-alone program (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Main & Whatman, 2016; Mallet. 2015). Regardless of the form of delivery, socio-emotional learning aids children and adolescents' acquisition of knowledge and improves their skills to recognise and manage their emotions so that they can make responsible decisions and become more resilient in dealing with stressful life moments (Mallet, 2015).

Studies by Bradshaw et. al (2008) and Mallet (2015) show that socio-emotional learning is effective in enhancing students' skills to withstand stressful moments, in fostering students' academic resilience, and in counteracting ESL. This is concurred by Main and Whatman (2016) who emphasise that "the explicit teaching of social and emotional skills can help young adolescents develop a strong sense of efficacy for learning, more resilient behaviours, and self-regulatory skills which can include self- monitoring, time management, and personal reflection" (p. 1057). On the one hand, they can reduce bullying and disruptive behaviour and improve peer relationships (Bradshaw et al., 2008) and, on the other, they can improve students' academic performance, class suspensions (Mallet, 2015).

Set and keep high expectations of what students can achieve

The research literature strongly emphasises the importance of having teachers who set and keep high expectations of what their students can achieve. Low expectations have been shown to lead to students' emotional, behavioural, and cognitive disengagement in schools (Fredricks et al., 2004; Tarabini et al., 2019). Calligham (2016) summarised this particularly for students with disadvantaged backgrounds who are at risk of ESL as they are often not recognised as having particular talents and skills. By having low expectations of students, "teachers can steer them towards relatively low-skilled vocational pathways that further disadvantage them both in education and the workforce" (Calligham, 2016 p. 13).

Teachers' low expectations lead students to behaviourally disengage because they believe that they are not able to learn, will not have a future in the educational system. Holding these beliefs makes it more likely for students to engage in absenteeism or decide to not actively participate in the classroom and in the schools' activities (Tarabini et al., 2019). Teachers who hold low expectations of their students contribute to student's emotional disengagement since they perceive that their teachers discriminate against them and do not understand their specific needs (Tarabini et al., 2019). Low expectations also mean that teachers 'dumb the curriculum down'. By doing so, students are provided with content that is not at their required level but below, setting into motion a downward spiral of learning. The lack of a challenging curriculum engaging students' high order level of thinking leads to students' cognitive disengagement. Students may assume that if their teacher is dumb and teaches dumb things, why then bother to go to school?

Thus, delivering a challenging curriculum is critical. Indeed, the European Commission (2018a) revealed that there is a "strong positive association of academic expectations and resilience status across analyses". Emphasizing the cognitive abilities of students may do more to help them achieve than emphasizing their cultural backgrounds.

Support students in seeing themselves as learners

Furthermore, not only should students be challenged, and their potential believed in, but teachers also need to build their 'educational identity'. Macdonald et al. (2019) discussed the importance of building a science identity in the context of STEM subjects. In their review, Macdonald et al. (2019) showed that when women and students of minority backgrounds develop a science identity, they are more likely to continue to tertiary education and post graduate education where they would pursue science subjects. According to Macdonald et al. (2019), teachers can deploy numerous effective practices to help students develop such science identity. For example, teachers can infuse career information into the courses they teach and make presentations where the lack of diversity in different sciences fields is shown, while highlighting the need and possibility for change (Macdonald et al. ,2019)

Propose extracurricular activities rather than more homework

In his study on the effectiveness of homework support to reduce ESL in French suburbs characterised by high socio-economic inequality, Meunier (2015) found that homework support is not the best practice to support students who academically lag behind. Meunier (2015) showed that support programs work best when students have occasional assistance and a healthy environment to do their homework. In such cases, students are motivated by their desire to do their homework correctly together with the reassurance from their peers. However, there are cases in which students may lack the material needs such as a table or proper studying room to do homework at home (Meunier, 2015). Furthermore, Meunier (2015) found that children who are forced to do extra homework and to attend school, experience the most drop-out, since being forced leads to problems of integration within the school and with other peers. Instead, Meunier (2015) found that cultural and artistic activities can facilitate and unblock student's learning in a more effective way than formal methods of education such as homework.

Art and cultural activities well carried out without judgement and penalties, where the possibility of making mistakes and mobilising non-school skills exists is quite positive. Clearly, there are benefits in engaging in extra art curriculum activities for students at risk of ESL as a major cause of student disengagement is the lack of extra curriculum activities which contributes to ESL (González-Rodríguez et al., 2019. Bowers et al., 2013; Charmaraman & Hall 2011; De Witte et al. 2013; Ekstrand 2015; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015).

Negotiate and shape the curriculum around students' identities and interests

Main and Whatman's (2016) research argues that to keep students engaged, teachers need to be able to listen to students and negotiate the curriculum they teach in ways that match students' interests and identities. Moreover, Callingham (2016) highlights that when students have an input in their own remaining, this enables a sense of connectedness with the school to be developed, enhancing their school belonging, a powerful protective factor against ESL.

As Schultz et al. (2008) remind us, "teachers are confronted by numerous decisions-large and small-in their daily practice [involving] curricular choices or emphases, participation structures for teaching particular content (e.g., small-group or whole-class instruction), behaviour management, the structure of assignments and assessment, and the like" (p. 166). As Schultz et al. (2008) emphasise, "some of these choices are mandated by district or local practices, while others are left to the individual teacher to decide" (p. 166). This means teachers can create the space to negotiate the curriculum in ways in which it incorporates students' interests, identities and knowledge while also advancing their learning by listening to them in order to shape the curriculum around their interests, knowledge and identities (Nortwedt, et.al, 2020).

Schultz et al. (2008) identified two listening stances that teachers can use to negotiate imposed curriculum in such a way that incorporate students' experiences and knowledge:

1. "Teachers made decisions about how to listen to individual students. They found ways to
   listen to their students by adding 'small moments' to the classroom schedules in order to

connect to student lives and to build on their knowledge and understandings". (Shultz et al., 2008, p. 169)

2. "Teachers made decisions about how and whether to draw on their knowledge of students and their community contexts in their curricular choices, assignments and pedagogical practices. Teachers chose whether to design their assignments to reflect their students' interests or introduce material that is more uniform or generic" (Shultz et al., 2008, p. 170).

Classroom inclusion through individualised, cooperative and collaborative learning

Inclusion can be fostered by teachers to prevent ESL, through individualised, cooperative and collaborative learning which energizes students' active participation (EEF, 2019; Järvelä, 2016). The core idea of individualised instruction is that each learner is given tasks that match the learner's needs and abilities. Individualised instruction is based on the assumption that learners have diverse needs, and that an approach that is tailored to these will be more effective (EEF, 2019). Individualised learning reduces the achievement gaps of students and creates environments in which students are sufficiently comfortable to take risks in their learning and make mistakes in front of other people (Macdonald et al., 2019).

Furthermore, teachers can enhance inclusion and participation using collaborative learning which can be fostered in multiple ways: collaborative online documents can be used and shared among peers, cooperative exams (students are asked to work together to complete an exam question), Gallery Walks (students respond to prompts and each other's' comments), Jigsaw (students gain expertise in one aspect, then peer-teach and work cooperatively to complete a task), Think-Pair-Share (students think about response to a question, discuss with partner, then share with the class), Worksheets (in-class assignments), and Wrappers (self-monitoring activities surrounding an assignment) (Macdonald et al., 2019).

Problem-Based Solving (PBS) has also been identified as an effective strategy to promote students' participation and inclusion (Järvelä, 2016). PBS is "a collaborative, case-centred, and

learner directed method of instruction, where problem formulation, knowledge application, self-directed learning, abstraction and reflection are seen as essential components" (Järvelä, 2016, p. 36).

Project-based learning is an additional effective strategy of including students because it "can be seen as a way to promote high-level learning by engaging students in real scientific work" (Järvelä, 2016, p. 37). Järvelä (2016, p. 38) indicates project based learning is based on:

1. A driving question, encompassing worthwhile content;

2. Investigations that allow students to ask and refine questions;

3. Artefacts that allow students to learn concepts;

4. Collaboration among students, teachers, and others in the learning community, and

5. Technology that supports student data-gathering, analysis, communicating and document preparation.

Walberg and Paik (2000) also proposed peer tutoring to foster inclusion in which slower or younger students are tutored by more advanced students. Peer tutoring offers opportunities for the improvement of tutees but also tutors, As Walberg and Paik (2000) explain, there are many benefits to peer tutoring. Students who tutor their peers have to organise their thoughts in a way that is intelligible to others. Students who tutor also need to acquire and develop their communication skills. Furthermore, peer tutoring requires student tutors to master and review the subject at hand, acquire time management skills and social skills to 'connect' and empathise with their peers.

Inclusion and success through intercultural competence

Classroom inclusion can also be fostered through the teaching of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence allows students with diverse backgrounds to communicate and learn from each other; counteracts bullying and stereotyping among peers; reduce ESL; and help students prepare to global citizens and to succeed in a global world. Indeed, in a global world that requires

communication with people from different cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, intercultural competence is a needed skill to succeed (Topas, 2014; Deardoff, 2006).

Moeller and Nugent (2014) have identified some effective strategies that teachers can deploy to help students reflect on intercultural issues and acquire intercultural competence. The first strategy is the exploration of the intercultural attitudes of the students, their preconceived ideas and attitudes towards others. This can be done by presenting students with cultural forms or artefacts (e.g. a film, a poem, a form of art, proverbs and language) and to ask students to reflect on what they have seen using the OSEE tool (Observe, Stating, Explore, Evaluate) developed by Deardoff & Deardoff (2000).

Students are asked to *Observe* the actions seen and to *State* (or otherwise list) the observable actions. Then, students are invited to *Explore* possible explanations embedded in the actions and interactions of the target culture. Finally, students are asked to *Evaluate* possible explanations. In the exploration and evaluation of possible explanations for the actions and interactions observed in the target cultures, students can and are required to learn more about the target culture explored and confront their own prejudices (Moeller & Nugent, 2014).

In addition, Moeller and Nugent (2014) suggest also using teaching strategies to provide evidence of growth to students so that they can see the benefits of the intercultural process. For example, teachers can present a cultural form to students and ask them to express their views. Then, these views are documented and stored somewhere. The students are then asked to conduct further research or are guided in the learning process. At the end, the students and the teachers should go back to the first reactions they had when they were presented the cultural forms and reflect on the learning process that took place and what they value about it.

3.4 Interpersonal practices for the prevention of ESL

This section presents the interpersonal practices that have been found to enhance positive relationships, which are central to counteract ESL and enhance students' school engagement. Presented are practices that foster:

1. Positive relationships between students and teachers

2. Positive relationships between peers

3. Positive relationships between students and school's staff

4. Positive relationships between the school and students' families

Foster positive relationships between students and teachers

Research shows that positive student-teacher relations act as a strong protective factor against ESL (Callingham, 2016; O'Gorman et al., 2016). In fact, "a good relationship between teacher and student requires the teacher to show respect, tolerance, empathy and interest in students. Each student is characteristically viewed as having the potential to learn and to achieve this learning individually" (Nordenbo et al., 2008, p. 84 as cited in Laursen & Nielsen, 2016). Furthermore, caring for the student's academic and emotional wellbeing becomes an important component of positive student-teacher relationships (O'Gorman et al., 2016).

In this regard, Boynton and Boynton (2005) suggested the following effective strategies teachers can use to develop positive and caring relationships with their students:

1. *Calling on all students equitably*. Teachers need to have equitability in the response opportunities of the classroom. When teachers do not call on students equitably and privilege some students over others, they are communicating lower expectations to those students who are not asked to answer the question. This in turn decreases students' self-confidence and hampers the teacher-student relationship whereby students may tune out and disengage from the lesson as they are not expected to answer questions.

2. *Giving hints and clues to help students answer questions*. Teachers can communicate positive expectations by giving students hints and clues to help them answer the question. What is communicated here is that teachers believe the student will be able to succeed with some support.

3. *Telling students that they have the ability to do well*. Teachers can also communicate positive expectations to students by directly telling them that they have the ability to do well. When teachers communicate to students that they have confidence in their abilities, students respond by working hard and behaving appropriately to justify the confidence they were given.

4. *Correcting students in a constructive way*. Teachers can correct and discipline students for inappropriate behaviours. This becomes an opportunity to build a positive student relationship. Through correction, students feel that they are cared for. However, this should be done by teachers in a manner that avoids bitterness, sarcasm, low expectations, or disgust, as this is counterproductive. Instead, correction should be done in a way that communicates that teachers care and respect their students.

5. *Showing care and interest constructively*. Researchers emphasise the role of care in improving student-teacher relationships. Boyton and Boynton (2005) identified ways in which the teacher can demonstrate caring for students, for instance, by showing interest in the students' personal lives, greeting students when they meet them, checking on them when they perceive something might have happened, and listening and empathizing with them

6. *Increasing latency periods when questioning students*. Boyton and Boyton (2005) explain that the amount of time given to students to answer questions is directly related to the level of expectation held. Students are given more time when teacher have confidence in their ability to answer a question. Conversely, less time is given to students in whom there is little confidence.

Positive relationships between peers

Peers have been found to play a fundamental role in promoting the educational success and the resilience of students and in providing positive relationships that enhance school performance, strengthen school engagement and belonging, ultimately counteracting ESL. Studies conducted in the US context show how migrant children and youth may turn to their peers to do well at school and to find the support to cope effectively with emotionally and psychologically challenging moments (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005; Suàrez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003; Gibson et al., 2004). Research also cites that migrant children and youth may turn to their peers to make sense of their own identities outside the family domain, resist hegemonic negative conceptualisations where they are pathologized or downgraded, and develop inclusive, hybrid identities that combine elements of their heritage and new cultures (Brettell & Nibbs, 2009; Haayen, 2016; Turcatti, 2018).

Positive relationships among students can be built through some of the practices that have been already been outlined in the report. The objective should be to enhance collaborative learning in the classroom, teach intercultural competence to students, promote peer tutoring as opportunities to work together, appreciate each other, and strengthen bonds. Introducing restorative practices allows for the instances of bullying and disrupting behaviour to be made up in order to avoid normalising bullying and behaviour which can perpetuate inequalities between students.

Positive relationships between school staff and students

While much of the literature tends to focus on positive relationships between peers and between students and teachers, positive relationships between school staff and students are equally important. Harper (2017) conducted a study on the relationship between school librarians and high school students in the US who had undergone stressful moments. Harper (2017) showed how school libraries can provide unique opportunities to help those students who are experiencing difficult or hurtful situations in their lives. School librarians can use their libraries to build a library program on

the interests of students and to guide students to curate a collection and help them create a library environment as a healing space for those in need.

Positive relationships between school and parents

Davis (2017) argues that it is not enough for the school to provide opportunities for family engagement, rather "it must also embody a welcoming climate where individuals feel that their opinions matter" (p. 165). In this respect, Cuban (2008), Davis (2017) and Flores et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of trust and respectful relationships between parents, teachers, and staff. Teachers and school staff need to pay attention and listen to parents, by continuously communicating with them, having them have a say in the kind of policies the school introduces. It is important that schools have interpreters and cultural experts for parents of students of migrant backgrounds (Belghazi, 2017).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the content presented in this report, it is clear that the complexity of ESL and of the targeted set of policies to combat ESL can be overwhelming, given the myriad of recommendations that have been made at the European Union level, national level and at the level of local governments. Yet, their message is clear: there is a need for change and more so now with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. From the literature reviewed, it is also clear that it is important to recognise that ESL students are not homogenous, but quite heterogeneous. This requires understanding students' ESL evolution at different points throughout their educational journey, as school disengagement starts early on and can be aggravated over time.

Furthermore, we are in the initial stages of understanding the full impact of Covid-19 in education. However, what is clear is that communication and instruction via digital means has become the modus operandi in achieving educational aims. As such, we need to be cognizant of the following:

1. There is a digital divide in terms of Internet viability and in terms of the resources that are available such as computers, platforms and training;

2. The technological knowledge of parents on the use of the Internet for home schooling requires directed training;

3. The attention span of students and the pace of instructional learning needs to be considered especially when logging in through zoom or other media, which demands high concentration;

4. The need for pro-active responses rather than band-aid solutions will be necessary;

5. Most importantly there will be a need for schools to systematize the engagement and pedagogical goals of students, teachers, and parents at all levels.

This means that there is a need to prioritize targeted policies to reduce and prevent ESL. These are briefly summarized under each of the areas of analysis.

Under institutional changes, radical change in the structure of schooling is eminent, as it is already happening with the influence of Covid 19 and the move to online learning and teaching. Yet, it is clear that in order to provide ESL students second chances, policies that bridge the radical, financial as well as institutional support towards change need to be established. Brunello and de Paolo (2014) have proposed:

1. Extending compulsory education in order to provide more time for students to stay in school;

2. Reducing grade retention and finding alternative modes; and

3. Adding a strand of vocational education at upper secondary level.

Several scholars cited in this report such as Aiscow et al. (2004), Stoll (1998), and Montero-Sieburth (2018) suggest the following as critical changes:

1. Initiating early on, preventive measures in pre and primary education;

2. Visibilizing inclusion and training teachers to an overall inclusion philosophy which is embraced by teachers' schools;

3. Hiring of full-time teacher with greater financial and professional training incentives to overcome the turnover of teachers and maintain the retention of teachers;

4. Reducing class size for more personalized learning;

5. Changing the age in which tracking into post-secondary tracks occur;

6. Changing the cultures of school from their neoliberal stances of economic productivity based on a knowledge production model to one of reflective cultural change were teachers and students are researchers within their schools

At the policy level of the schools, the need for early detection of students is also necessary with systems of monitoring and evidence-based information. Moreover, there is an urgent need to visibilise inclusion and train teachers to an overall inclusion philosophy which is embraced by all

schools. Such inclusion will need not only to strengthen the participation rights of children (Navarro, 2014) but also schools' approaches to inclusion which may incorporate single unit approaches, content infused approaches, and school placement/experience incorporated approaches (Symeonidou, 2017). Moreover schools will need to focus on issues of "colour blindness" that go beyond ethnicity by eliciting teacher, administrative, staff and parental responses.

This, in turn, will require the professionalization of teachers, providing training and greater career retention strategies in schools. In addition, the questioning of the current tracking systems may be well overdue since evidence from the Netherlands about multi-track systems may have a negative impact on ethnic inequality, by gearing ethnic minorities towards dropping out, while Dutch students undergo downward mobility (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003).

For all concerned, there will be also the need to institutionalize reflective practices and incorporating innovative methodologies (classroom management training, teacher research, student research of their schools, leadership training of teachers, cooperative learning, emotional intelligence, Howard Gardner's varied intelligences in teaching modules).

Now more than ever, partnerships with parents will need to become policies that engage them not only as teachers but as leaders in preparing their children at home with the same value system and ethos of the school. In this respect, attention needs to be paid to the types of parent and school strategies that create effective partnerships (Smit et al., 2007). Such partnerships will require greater digital connections and instructional materials to be shared between teachers and parents, in addition to the training of teachers and parents and online check-in options with parents.

As schools reopen, support from governments, stakeholders and community members will be fundamental to creating learning spaces which can be used and accessed during the summer and after school periods. These policies will inevitably affect the instructional level of schooling and the interpersonal as new schooling cultures emerge from this fusion between parents, students' homes, and schools.

At the instructional level there will be more leverage, given that teachers are at the front of learning. It is clear from the research that for ESL to be prevented, the positive relationship between teachers and students and the provision of challenging learning opportunities to students are the single most important school factors. This also involves training teachers in critical pedagogy with intercultural learning as the cornerstone and training teachers in reflective practices and in modelling research agendas within their classrooms based on experiential learning. Such training should also be about teachers doing active research in their classrooms developing learning modules that gradually create spaces within limited curriculum for more student-centred and experiential learning to take place and for teachers to be in touch with what is going on in the lives of their students. Furthermore, enacting pass/fail criteria rather than grades may be more accommodating to students.

More importantly, enhancing student's engagement can take place through in-person and/or online mentoring, peer tutoring, buddy systems and peer-to-peer training as a means to strengthen personal relationships. Students' school engagement can also be fostered through extra-curricular activities and group projects which are student-initiated; storytelling as a means to centre socio-emotional similarities between students can be implemented; and interviewing of teachers and parents as a means to identify with their personal lives (Montero-Sieburth, personal communication, May 2020).

At the interpersonal, intergenerational and intragenerational learning will be needed between peers, teachers, and parents. Building upon a student's self-esteem, his/her ability to do and believe in him/herself is the basis on which ESL can be prevented. Working closely with parents on their everyday teaching and learning experiences will also allow for greater intergenerational learning to take place, especially for immigrant families who may not be able to fully participate in the school (Nauck, 2001).

Schools will need to face the current challenges with an understanding of changing their present school culture. In this regard, some of the ideas from Louis Stoll (1998) concerning how to

change school cultures are worth pursuing. Schematically, the process of changing school cultures can be represented by the following:

- **Stage I**: Understanding the rationale behind the strategies of policy makers and how they translate or do not into the school ethos and school culture. Schools need to unpack and understand what can be done practically and realistically in their schools to counteract ESL.

- **Stage II**: Mapping the time frame for change based on school year arrangements (short, midterm, long-term); using the space physically and digitally incorporating nature as well; detecting surface and underlying deep opportunities for change; identifying roles and responsibilities for effecting change; and developing leadership and management strategies among all stakeholders.

- **Stage III:** The third stage is about re-culturing, which entails developing new values, beliefs and norms (cultures and counter-cultures) at all levels (students, teachers, school principal and administration, community; developing the sustainability of schooling by integrating different meanings and interpretations in educational practices which are shared and together promote practices of ESL reduction and prevention; identifying the norms of the school culture and the school's acceptance to change; understanding power relationships between the school culture and subcultures of the school and managing the school's culture in terms of internal or external changes.

5. CONCLUSION

From this report, it is clear that the formulation and implementation of practices to reduce ESL can only be effective when the multiple social actors, stakeholders, and policy makers within the school and community are bound together and committed to achieve a common goal – keeping students in school.

This requires that school staff, parents, and community participants work together (Goldberg, et.al, 2019). While parents play a very significant role, and their influence can be felt at home, their relationship to the school is critical in order to maintain the continuity of school to home (Ogbu, 1982). Yet parents do not often see themselves as leaders cooperating with school authorities. Therefore, parental training on their leadership is essential to bridge the values of the home to school and vice versa (Landa, 2011).

In the process of setting up, implementing, analysing and evaluating best practices, the school must identify and define its vision, mission and values as a starting point to uncover and characterise the school culture and ethos. A key will be the incorporation of these values with essential input from teachers, administrators and staff as to how they expect students to integrate such notions and how they become part of the platform upon which practices that prevent ESL can be institutionalized.

Since the triangle of teacher, student and curriculum is the essence of interactive learning and teaching at school, teachers must be first open to learning from their students. Students are most motivated to stay in school when their relationships to their teachers are based on mutual respect which in turn generates cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement. Not only do such strong student-teacher relationships reduce ESL, they clearly enhance the students' future educational and job-related trajectories. Without doubt, well-prepared, knowledgeable teachers willing to listen and use critical thinking will energize their students to learn and stay in school.

Especially during the unprecedented impact of Covid-19 on schooling where already there has been increased ESL, students, teachers and parents must work even more closely together to recreate new culture of schooling. Remote learning techniques, interrupted school vacation schedules and cancelled school events are new challenges for administrators, teachers and students alike.

Against this backdrop, now more than ever, schools must develop and engender a culture of care by instituting practices which in turn encourage resilient student behaviour, foster strong student-teacher relationships and thereby counteract the self-defeating motives for early school leaving.

Practices for the reduction and even elimination of ESL is a process that begins in the very earliest school grades and will only have results if the culture of a school is committed to pursue the process with consistency, persistence and dedication. In today's unsettled political and economic climate education of youth is the key not only for their future wellbeing, but for the health, safety and welfare of the society at large.

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7. APPENDIX

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