



Sylvia Söderström, S. (2012) *Disabled Pupils' Use of Assistive ICT in Norwegian Schools* in F.A. Auat Cheein, (Ed.), *Assistive Technologies*. Croatia: InTech, 25–48. ISBN: 978-953-51-0348-6

Abstract

This chapter examines the use of assistive Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by pupils with disabilities in Norwegian primary and secondary schools. It investigates how use, or non-use, of assistive ICT at school influences such pupils' opportunities to actively participate in an inclusive educational system within the regular school system. This investigation draws on a qualitative pilot study carried out in Norwegian primary and secondary schools during the autumn of 2010.

This chapter presents findings from the pilot study. The report from the main project will be published in 2014.

Main findings

This chapter's findings show that there are barriers to the use of assistive ICT on several levels in Norwegian schools. Some of the barriers are technical and related to equipment, others are human barriers related to competences and attitudes, while some barriers are at system level and related to inter-disciplinary collaboration and school administration.

Technical barriers appear when the assigned assistive technology does not work as intended, due to simple technical errors or incompatible software or hardware. Such technical barriers put an effective stop to pupils with disabilities participating or being included in any ICT-based learning or interaction between classmates.

Another barrier is the unclear distribution of responsibility among the professionals involved, between different levels of services or within the same service level. A great number of service providers are involved in the provision of assistive ICT to pupils, e.g. the local occupational therapist, the assistive technology centre, the technical supplier, various resource centres, the local municipality, the local school and the individual teachers. While these actors spend time figuring out who is responsible for what, the pupils requiring assistive ICT are left stranded.

The study shows that school organisation and administration significantly impact on the possibilities of pupils with disabilities to participate and be included. School administrators' attitudes towards active efforts to include pupils with disabilities in the ordinary school setting constitute the framework for teachers' possibility to make individual adjustments in their teaching. The administration's attitudes differ significantly from school to school in this study. In one school, the administration took a positive and active approach to including pupils with disabilities in the ordinary school setting, while this was not an issue at all in the two other schools studied.

This study highlights phenomena and practices which impact on the use and non-use of assistive ICT in Norwegian primary and secondary schools. In sum, the decisive factors appear to be knowledge, competence and attitudes towards technology and disability among teachers, school administrators and collaborating partners. These findings are in line with previous research in this area.

This study points out how practical details and situations make a great difference in the day-to-day situation of pupils with disabilities. When assistive ICT works as intended and its use is integrated into teaching in the ordinary classroom setting, the use of assistive ICT facilitates participation and inclusion. It appears, however, that such integration occurs



only to a limited extent. When assistive ICT is not used, does not work as intended or is used only in separate and excluding settings, it is perceived as an element differentiating the pupil from others, which in turn hampers participation and inclusion.