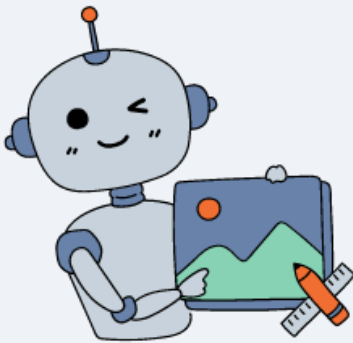


SmartStart Newsletter

Latest news from the SmartStart Teacher Academy



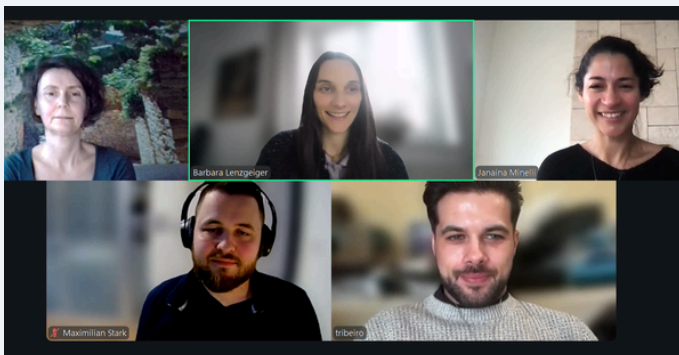
smart start

ERASMUS+
Teacher Academy

Project Updates

Meeting Time for the “Dissemination” work package-Team

On February 13, the dissemination team of the SmartStart Project met online to discuss the way forward regarding dissemination and outreach efforts. Among other strategies, an explainer video for schools and decision-makers is now in the works.



We are social!

Check out our Social Media Presence on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to stay updated on project insights, teacher training activities, and the latest developments in AI in education. Join the conversation and discover how SmartStart is shaping innovative and responsible teaching practices.



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We are social!



Classroom Insights



Dr. Barbara Lenzgeiger
junior Professorship of
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&



Dr. Elisabeth Fuchs
Academic counsellor

Debating with AI – Developing Argumentative Competencies through Interaction with Artificial Intelligence

Subject-specific argumentation is a key factor in students' academic success. In civic education in particular, the ability to justify positions, consider alternative perspectives, weigh arguments, respond to counterarguments, and work toward solutions is central. Students who can argue convincingly demonstrate not only rhetorical skill, but also a solid understanding of content and the ability to transfer knowledge to new contexts. Research shows, however, that students' argumentative competencies vary widely. They therefore require structured opportunities to practice and receive feedback.

AI-supported language models can be used to create targeted practice settings for political argumentation. Instead of re-

lying solely on predefined role plays that may not fully align with a specific unit, teachers can use AI to generate tailored debate scenarios. These can be adapted to the topic at hand, the intended learning objectives, and the students' level of prior knowledge.

In this approach, the AI assumes the role of a discussion partner or mentor. Students respond to arguments, defend their positions, and engage with counterarguments. The AI can be instructed through a carefully designed prompt to ask follow-up questions, demand clearer justification, and assess whether arguments meet defined quality criteria (e.g., reference to subject knowledge, logical coherence, consideration of opposing views). In addition, the AI can provide structured feedback on argumentative strategies.

For classroom use, prompts should clearly define:

- the role of the AI (e.g., critical discussion partner, moderator, mentor),
- the learning objective,
- quality standards for strong arguments,
- and the type of feedback to be given.

It is advisable to test prompts in advance and, where possible, provide the model with relevant subject texts. This increases the likelihood that arguments and feedback remain closely connected to the curriculum.





At the same time, several challenges must be considered. AI-generated scenarios may drift away from the lesson focus or vary in difficulty. Different models may interpret the same prompt differently. Moreover, language models can produce factual inaccuracies. Teachers therefore need to review outputs critically and embed them in guided reflection phases. AI should support, not replace, professional judgement.

Data protection is another important consideration. Schools should use platforms that comply with applicable regulations and avoid entering personal data.

Because most AI interactions are text-based, they primarily support written argumentation. To foster oral skills, teachers can integrate speech-to-text functions or follow up AI-based preparation with in-class debates, role plays, or partner discussions. Combining digital simulations with real interaction helps ensure balanced development of argumentative competence.

Used thoughtfully, AI-supported language models can expand the range of practice opportunities in civic education.

They offer flexible debate partners, individualized feedback, and additional time for structured argument training. Their educational value depends on careful planning, critical oversight, and clear integration into subject-specific learning goals.

Training & Events

The European Commission is conducting a short survey to determine how teachers, teacher educators, and educational decision-makers view and use AI in education. The survey is open **until 25 March, 2026** and may shape future European policy on the issue.

Website:

<https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/surveys/survey-artificial-intelligence-teaching-and-learning>



Research Insights



**Maximilian Stark,
Research Assistant**



Research Overview: The Matter of Factual Accuracy

A number of tasks within the modern, digitally enriched primary school classroom would be very difficult to accomplish without modern AI tools—such as live translation of a refugee child’s language or adaptive feedback for an entire class almost in real time. Other tasks can be enriched by AI use, e.g., when it is used as an “adversary” during debate tasks; see this newsletter’s Classroom Insight! There are, however, also tasks that AI tools are profoundly unsuited for; if students use it to avoid cognitive effort, for instance, this can undermine their learning progress (“cognitive debt”). Another task where using AI has major pitfalls is for finding or confirming facts.

Large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Gemini, or Claude can “hallucinate,” i.e., fabricate factual claims out of thin air. Research by the European Broadcasting Union and the BBC (2025) shows that when asking popular LLMs about current events and having their responses vetted by trained journalists, 45% of answers had substantial issues. In 20% of all answers, factual accuracy was

significantly affected as a result (e.g., fabricated quotes, untrue claims, or outdated information). New versions of many of the tools the EBU/BBC working group evaluated have since launched, which appear to include improvements regarding overall factual inaccuracy. Still, hallucinations seem to be an inherent limitation of LLMs which future developments may alleviate, but likely never eliminate (Xu et al., 2025).

There are additional challenges for LLMs’ factual accuracy. On the one hand, their outputs are a political matter: Last summer, the US administration put pressure on large technology companies to make their AI, in a loosely defined way, less “woke” (O’Brien, 2025), and since most of the most popular AI assistants in Europe are US-based (and many AI tools for learning are based in China), political developments abroad can easily influence outputs which European teachers and students receive. The interests and opinions of the tools’ owners also play a role: This may be as visible as when xAI, in reportedly in trying to make its AI assistant Grok less “politically correct,” caused it to engage in Holocaust denial (Adamson, 2025) and make various antisemitic statements (Ringer, 2025) ... or it may well result in responses that contain more subtle biases.

On the other hand, current LLMs have a tendency to agree with users even if users’ claims are factually inaccurate, a trait known as sycophancy (Sharma et al., 2025). Especially when the same chat in-



stance has reached a considerable length, sycophancy can make AI assistants reinforce users' biases and false beliefs instead of challenging them. In an educational context, this may, for example, undermine teachers' attempts to help students see all sides of an issue or make them question their preconceptions by instead confirming children's existing beliefs and assumptions.

In light of a broad societal tendency to use AI assistants as replacements for search engines (see Adobe, 2025), various inaccuracies can thus easily find their ways into the classroom—either when children themselves use the tools for research, or when teachers rely on factual claims made by AI assistants during lesson preparation. Enabling teachers to use AI responsibly in their teaching thus includes showing them the risks of assuming that the convenient, confidently phrased summaries which LLMs provide are also factually accurate.

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