Estonia AI Leap schools programme with OpenAI

IMPLEMENTED 2025–2026 · EDUCATION · ESTONIA · BAND D · CLAIMED ONLY
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Estonia's AI Leap programme gave about 5,000 upper secondary teachers paid ChatGPT or Gemini accounts from August 2025. From January 2026 about 20,000 students could use a tutoring app built with OpenAI and Estonian researchers. By the programme's own reports, teacher use was high and the student app fell short of its use target. The effect on student learning is not yet measured.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

AI used: Generative AI: ChatGPT for teachers and a ChatGPT-based tutoring app for students, built with OpenAI.

Implemented: 2025–2026. Grade: band D, Task support, Claimed only.

Headline result, as reported: Teachers estimate AI saves them 1.8 hours a week; the student app reached 45.9% monthly use against a 60% target

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 5 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

AI Leap Foundation (TI-Hüpe), for the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. National education programme for Estonia's 156 upper secondary schools, run by the AI Leap Foundation with the Ministry of Education and Research and private partners. Launched at the initiative of President Alar Karis in February 2025. Canvas block: People and skills. Also Customers and proposition.

Business challenge

The challenge. The Foundation says 64% to 90% of Estonian students were already using commercial AI tools, often to finish work faster, and that those tools are built to give ready-made answers. It wanted a tool that guides thinking, and support for teachers.

How it was addressed. From August 2025 about 5,000 upper secondary teachers received paid ChatGPT or Gemini access, with school learning communities and training. In January 2026 students in grades 10 and 11 gained access to ITI, an app built on ChatGPT with OpenAI and Estonian researchers. It asks guiding questions before giving answers. OpenAI also worked on classifiers that check whether the app behaves as intended. The University of Tartu, with Stanford and OpenAI, is studying the effect on learning. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Who implemented it

OpenAI (Model or cloud provider): Worked with the Foundation and Estonian researchers to build the ChatGPT-based student app and supplied teacher accounts.
Google (Model or cloud provider): Supplied Gemini accounts to schools already using Google services, and identity management.
AppsEdu (Software vendor): Handled Google licence and identity management for schools.
In-house (In-house): AI Leap Foundation: Led the programme for the ministry, with University of Tartu researchers.
Two vendors were selected after a procurement in summer 2025. The Foundation says the larger product development partnership grew with OpenAI.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T1 Chat assistants, T3 API integrations. Deployment: Vendor SaaS. Vendors and products: OpenAI, Google, ChatGPT (teacher accounts), ITI student learning app built on ChatGPT, Gemini.

Where it was built in: Teacher workspaces and a student tutoring app used in classrooms, with school accounts created through the Foundation.

What changed

Before: teachers and students used consumer AI tools on their own. After: teachers have funded accounts and school learning communities, and students have a national tutoring app, with use left to teachers and students. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

What it cost

The pilot year is supported by EUR 4 million, co-funded equally by the ministry and private partners, per the Foundation. The programme spans three years.

What it saved

Teachers estimate AI saves them 1.8 hours a week on average, in the Foundation's survey. No cost saving or learning gain is reported. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Governance and control

The Foundation commissioned a University of Tartu risk assessment that identified 12 risks, including a mismatch between schools' responsibility and their control of an external provider's system. The impact study has ethics approval, per the Foundation. Teachers decide how and how often the app is used.

S2 · Accountable owner · Evidenced
The independent assessment describes the chain of responsibility: schools remain responsible for the quality and safety of the learning environment, and the Foundation is governed by a supervisory board. [3] [4]

A1 · Safe use · Evidenced
The University of Tartu Centre for Ethics assessed the programme and app across 12 risks, between January and June 2026; the Foundation commissioned it. [4]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
The minister said AI must not replace the teacher, and the Foundation says decisions about how and how often to use the app remain with teachers and students. [1] [2]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
The Foundation reports usage against targets and says classifiers check that the app encourages independent thinking; the impact study has ethics approval. [3]

A4 · Vendor AI · Claimed
Two vendors were chosen through a procurement in summer 2025; the risk assessment says it could not assess the vendors' third-party partners and recommends contract terms on security, data use and switching provider. [3] [4]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Outside scrutiny (a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acted)
The independent assessment reviews the programme against the EU AI Act and the General Data Protection Regulation; a legislative amendment in December 2025 gave schools a legal basis to use AI in teaching. [1] [4]

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Teacher uptake: 154 of 156 schools joined and 95.9% of surveyed teachers had used AI professionally by spring 2026, per the Foundation.

– Collaboration: about two-thirds of schools set up learning communities where teachers discuss AI use.

– Among analysed student conversations, 51.1% of users were classed as learning-oriented, per a critical commentary on the Foundation's report.

DID NOT

– Student app use fell short: 45.9% monthly active users against a 60% target, and 62.4% account activation against 80%.

– Teacher accounts also fell short of targets: 75.3% activated against 80% and 54.2% monthly active against 60%.

– Students rated ITI 3.07 out of 5 in a survey of 182, and the most common complaint was too many guiding questions, as reported by Tom Daccord.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the student app improves learning, motivation or independence. The University of

– Whether teacher time saved is used for better teaching.

– Whether the model of dependence on external providers stays affordable and controllable, which the risk assessment raises.

Timeline

Feb 2025 President Alar Karis announces the AI Leap initiative [3]

Aug 2025 About 5,000 upper secondary teachers receive ChatGPT access [3]

Jan 2026 Student learning app launched to about 20,000 students in grades 10 and 11 [1]

Jun 2026 Foundation reports 94% teacher use and expands the programme for 2026/27 [2]

Aug 2026 First annual review published, with usage against targets [3]

Oct 2026 Independent commentary says the report does not link AI use to improved learning [5]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: D, Task support. Proof: Claimed only. Level of change: Task support.

Task support (Level 1, band D). The programme describes changes to teaching practice and school collaboration, but reports no change in outcomes.

Teachers use AI for planning, materials and feedback, which supports individual tasks. The programme reports that 63% of teachers have redesigned some teaching, but no change in learning outcomes is shown, and the student app missed its use target. Band D on the evidence so far.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

Access and teacher uptake moved quickly because the programme paid for accounts and built school learning communities around them. The student app is where the design met reality: its question-first approach was the purpose and also the main complaint. The independent risk assessment points to a gap between schools' legal responsibility and their control of an external system. The transferable point is to measure learning and control, not only account numbers.

1. Set use targets and publish results against them from the start.
2. Test whether the intended pedagogy suits users before scaling the app.
3. Match each school's responsibility with the means to see and control the system.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Self-reported: results are from the programme's own surveys and usage data. The risk assessment is independent in authorship but commissioned by the Foundation.

Evaluation method. Self-reported programme figures: teacher survey of nearly 800 teachers,

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/estonia-ai-leap-openai

[1] AI Leap Foundation: Estonia launches nationwide AI Leap education program and introduces learning-supportive AI in upper secondary schools
https://tihupe.ee/en/estonia-launches-nationwide-ai-leap-education-program-and-introduces-learning-supportive-ai-in-upper-secondary-schools/

[2] AI Leap Foundation: AI Leap's first year led schools to rethink teaching and learning (9 June 2026)
https://tihupe.ee/en/3385/

[3] AI Leap Foundation: AI Leap first annual review 2025/26 (PDF)
https://tihupe.ee/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/AI-Leap-First-Annual-Review-202526.pdf

[4] University of Tartu Centre for Ethics: risk assessment and value analysis of the AI Leap learning application (PDF)
https://tihupe.ee/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/AI-Leap-Risk-and-Value-Analysis.pdf

[5] Tom Daccord, Tom's Takes: Estonia's AI Leap one year later
https://tomdaccordai.substack.com/p/estonias-ai-leap-one-year-later-widespread

AI Leap Foundation (TI-Hüpe), for the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research website: https://tihupe.ee/en/

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VERSION HISTORY

v1.1 15 November 2026 Method update: standards and regulation (A6) relabelled "outside scrutiny" because the evidence is a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acting, not the organisation's own compliance.
v1.0 15 November 2026 First published