

Erasmus+ Programme

Key Action 2 - Cooperation Partnerships in School Education

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# FIELD RESEARCH COUNTRY REPORT

R2.2.1\_pt

# Portugal



ASAP



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A Systemic Approach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education  
Grant Agreement No. 2022-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000090043

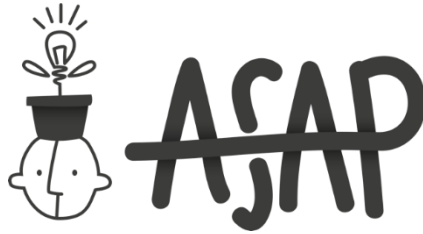


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## Project Information

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## Document Information

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<b>Short Description</b>	This document presents the results and key findings of qualitative and quantitative field research conducted in Portugal among schoolteachers within the context of the Erasmus+ ASAP project. The aim of the field research was to provide further insights on the relationship among preadolescents, digital/social media, cyberbullying, and digital/media literacy.

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## Executive Summary

This research was conducted as part of the ERASMUS+ project ASAP (A Systemic Approach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education), aimed at exploring the relationship between preadolescents (11–13 years of age) and social media, with a particular focus on the school environment. The main research objective was to investigate the challenges preadolescents face when using social media and the internet in general, as well as the needs of key stakeholders—preadolescents, parents, teachers, and school leaders—for addressing these challenges more effectively. The study employed both qualitative (focus group discussions) and quantitative (structured online surveys) research methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The research conducted in Portugal included 21 participants (teachers and school leaders) in the qualitative part, while the quantitative surveys gathered responses from 65 teachers, practitioners and school leaders. Data collection, which took place from March 2024 to January 2025, adhered to strict ethical standards, with approval from the Research Ethics Committee at DOBA Business School.

### Key findings from the qualitative research

#### *The building of trust in the online age*

Data collected during the focus groups suggests that students naturally gravitate toward teachers they find empathetic and approachable when they encounter personal and/or online challenges. Such trusted human relationships often prove to be crucial touch points as they provide emotional safety to allow students to ask for guidance on digital dilemmas. The foundation of effective education in digital citizenship is not only technical knowledge-but is also the human factor that makes students feel safe enough to share their concerns.

#### *Different challenges of digital behavior*

Teachers that participated in the focus groups share that schools are witnessing frequent misuse of mobile devices, from unauthorized photography to offensive messaging between peers. This inappropriate conduct is often the result of a worrying lack of digital literacy and legal awareness on the students' side. Teachers also warn that the other troubling thing about this is that peer pressure gets added to the equation, thus aggravating risky online behaviors which the students might otherwise have chosen to avoid.

#### *The hard task and the lack of competence of families*

Teachers believe that besides the challenges that global digital and social media among pre-adolescents bring, and the urgency of improving educational approaches, curricula and educational materials, there is another critical issue: families do not have the capacities or tools to help their kids in digital situations. According to them, this lack of competencies creates a gap between the home and school environment, making it more difficult for teachers to finish their work with students in schools.

### Key findings from the quantitative research

#### *Internet and device usage*

- Nearly 71% of teachers reported having constant internet access.
- Smartphones are the most used device for internet access (almost 88% daily use).
- 78% use the internet more than 2 hours daily on weekdays.

#### *Social media use*

- WhatsApp (89%), Facebook (77%), Instagram (74%), and YouTube (71%) are the most frequently used platforms by teachers.

#### *Digital Education Activities with Students*

- 80% of teachers reported setting rules for internet use at school.
- Almost 77% reported helping students evaluate online content, recognize misinformation, and navigate online safely.

#### *Teacher-student interactions about online issues*

- 52% believe students feel “quite comfortable” talking to them about online experiences.
- Almost 65% believe they can help students "quite a lot" or "a lot" with online problems.

#### *Gaps in the curriculum*

- Only 35% report that digital literacy is covered in the curriculum.
- Over 50% say that key digital topics like online safety and online risks are not included in the subjects they teach.

#### *Sources of Support and training*

- Teachers mainly rely on school-organized training (44,6%), peer collaboration (44,6%), and online resources (43,1%) for information and professional development on digital safety.

#### *School Efforts and Improvement Areas*

- While most teachers rated their school's efforts as “Satisfactory” or “Sufficient” (30,8% each) many suggested improvements such as embedding digital literacy into the curriculum, increasing training, and adopting a school-wide, systematic approaches to digital literacy topics.

### **Implications for the ASAP Educational Programme**

The research conducted identifies a set of fundamental principles for the educational programme developed within the scope of the project. Among these, the following stand out:

- Open and trust-based communication - the qualitative research demonstrated that students naturally seek out empathetic and approachable teachers when facing personal or online challenges. This aspect emphasises the need to create educational environments where trust assumes the role of foundation for all intervention and approach. It is thus understood that the programme must include specific training for educators on empathetic communication techniques and active listening. For parents, organising practical sessions that help them overcome the skills gap identified by teachers, providing them with concrete tools to address complex digital situations, will be a fundamental step;

- Emotional and mental health support - Recognising that negative online experiences have a profound emotional impact on preadolescents, it is considered that the programme must integrate a strong psychological and emotional support component. The programme must address the fear, shame and helplessness that young people frequently experience but rarely share. Through group activities and individual reflections, preadolescents will be able to learn to identify, understand and manage their emotions in the digital context;
- Interactive and context-based learning - contrary to models that adopt more passive strategies, the research conducted indicates that the programme should favour active methodologies that place young people at the centre of the learning process. This approach recognises that preadolescents learn better when they assume the role of active participants in constructing their knowledge, especially on topics that form part of their daily reality;
- Critical thinking and digital literacy - the research revealed a concerning lack of digital literacy and legal awareness amongst students, aspects that manifest in inappropriate use of mobile devices and risky online behaviours. In light of this, it is considered that the educational programme should promote the development of critical thinking through practical content analysis exercises, structured debates and fact-checking activities, always contextualised within young people's digital reality;
- Parental involvement and education - according to the data collected, approximately 65% of teachers believe they can significantly help students with online problems, but recognise that families do not possess the necessary capabilities to support young people in similar situations. Thus, the promotion and creation of coherent support networks that reduce discontinuity and the gap between formal and informal educational environments is evidenced as crucial, enabling a holistic approach to developing digital citizenship;
- Adaptability and continuous improvement - recognising the dynamic nature of the digital world, the programme must incorporate constant adaptation and updating mechanisms. The programme should thus be structured in interconnected modules that simultaneously address the needs of the three main target groups: preadolescents, teachers and parents.

Given the points highlighted by the research conducted, it is considered that the educational programme should represent a systemic and evidence-based response to the challenges identified. Through an approach that prioritises interaction, emotional resilience and the development of trust relationships, the ASAP educational programme should promote the growth of a new generation of informed, resilient and responsible digital citizens.

The effectiveness of this programme will depend on its coordinated implementation and the commitment of all stakeholders involved. The programme should not, therefore, limit itself to transmitting rules about digital behaviour, but seeks to develop essential competencies for navigating autonomously and responsibly in the digital world, always with the support of a solid trust network that connects the entire educational community - from young people to parents and educators.

## Introduction

The field research, described in this report, is part of the Work Package 2 (WP2) of the ERASMUS+ project ASAP, which combines the activities of both desk and field research. In WP2, we investigated the relationship between preadolescents (kids from 11-13 years of age) and social media in our society with a focus on the educational school context from a transdisciplinary perspective, as well as from a transnational perspective – through the study of the existing situation in five partner countries (Italy, Portugal, Check Republic, Croatia and Slovenia) highlighting common, transversal features as well as specific local issues in the different contexts.

WP2 consisted of desk and field research. One of the main objectives of WP2 was to collect, analyse, and share data on the relationship among pre-adolescents, digital/social media, and the school context in the five partner countries by listening to the voice of the target groups (school kids, teachers, families, school leaders) and to enable comparative transnational analysis.

Desk research showed that studies focusing particularly on the period of preadolescence are scarce (or even fully lacking in some countries), which highlights the importance of conducting thorough field research to learn more about this target group. Hence, field research aims to promote and further contribute to studies on pre-adolescence as an age of growth and development with specific, inherent features and not just as a transition phase between childhood and teenage-hood, in which it is usually included.

The main research objective of the field research was to investigate the challenges of preadolescents related to the use of social media and Internet in general – from the perspective of preadolescents themselves and from the perspective of their parents, teachers and school leaders. We wanted to understand how pre-adolescents behave/would behave when they are faced with a problem/challenge in the online world (e.g., what they do/would do, who they talk to/would talk to, etc.). Also, we tried to find out more about the needs of all target groups (pre-adolescents, parents, teachers, school leaders) – what they would require to be able to address the issues and challenges related to the use of social media among preadolescents better and more efficiently?

The findings of the field research provided relevant input for the development of educational materials and design of the ASAP Educational Program. In that way, we ensured the educational program to be aligned with the actual needs of the target groups.

This report describes the findings of the field research, conducted in Portugal.

# 1. Research method

The field research follows a cross-sectional study design, as data was collected at a single point in time, providing a "snapshot" of the current situation. To achieve the predefined research objectives and the aims of WP2, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. For the qualitative component, focus group discussions and semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights from members of the target groups regarding online risks and safety among pre-adolescents. The quantitative component involved structured online surveys, which were used to objectively measure and quantify phenomena related to online risks and safety among pre-adolescents while also facilitating cross-country comparisons.

## 1.1. Target population and sample

In the field research, conducted in Portugal, teachers of pre-adolescents and school leaders were the primary target groups.

Table 1: Sample sizes for qualitative and quantitative research in Portugal.

Target group	Qualitative research*	Quantitative research*
Teachers	19	65
School leaders	1	/

*\* Due to dysfunctions not foreseen at the time the application was drawn up - namely national teacher strikes, dilemmas arising from the annual teacher placement processes and changes in the Portuguese socio-political context, the numbers of participants in the fieldwork conducted in Portugal had to be adapted. Despite successive efforts, the numbers for both the qualitative and quantitative research had to be adjusted, and the final sample was smaller than initially planned. However, the validity of the data was guaranteed.*

For the focus groups, participants were recruited from multiple sources. Teachers previously involved in the Co-Creation Workshop event in Porto were contacted. The team also used its contact network and reached out to associated partners. Besides these, schools that participated in Pilot 1 and Pilot 2 were also invited to engage in this part of the research. Due to the tumultuous context experienced in Portugal in recent school years, this strategy made it possible to recruit the minimum number of participants expected, and even then, allowed for in-depth discussions with individuals directly engaged in the field.

The four focus groups included 20 participants, consisting of teachers from various disciplines, ranging from language (Portuguese or English) to mathematics and sciences. The participants had diverse levels of teaching experience, with the youngest having one year in the profession and the most experienced having 34 years. The group predominantly consisted of female teachers, with 18 women and 3 men taking part in the discussions.

The participants are listed under pseudonyms in the table below to ensure anonymity.

Table 2: List of focus groups and their participants.

Focus group number	Date	Participant*	Gender	Years of experience	Discipline
1	20/04/2024	Peter	Male	34	Portuguese/ Librarian teacher
		Daphne	Female	18	Portuguese, History and Geography/ Librarian teacher
		Leonardo	Male	27	Informatics/ Media Literacy /Internet Safety **
		Soraia	Female	24	Informatics/ Librarian teacher
2	15/10/2024	Carla	Female	6	Mathematics
		Carmo	Female	30	Portuguese
		Diana	Female	14	Informatics
		Elsa	Female	18	Natural Sciences
		Pietra	Female	20	History
3	23/10/2024	Antonia	Female	1	Portuguese, History and Geography
		Jules	Female	15	English
		Judite	Female	12	Mathematics
		Priscila	Female	15	Portuguese and English
4	13/11/24	Mónica	Female	30	Mathematics
		Lidia	Female	19	Informatics/ ICT
		Flávio	Male	17	Physics and Chemistry
		Rita	Female	28	History
		Sabrina	Female	31	English
		Camila	Female	29	History
		Frederica	Female	21	Spanish and Librarian teacher

\* All names are pseudonyms assigned to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

\*\*As a trainer in the field.

In terms of the quantitative research, the survey was distributed through various channels, including the research team's contact network, associated partners, a national network of schools, and

Facebook groups - which is a relevant social media channel among the teaching class in Portugal. This approach ensured a wide dissemination of the survey and the collection of answers and collecting responses from participants from all over the country.

90 responses were collected. Though, considering the selection criteria pre-defined and agreed among partners, 65 full responses were considered valid for analysis. The respondents included 52 females and 13 males. On average, the participants had 29 years of teaching experience. 28 of the respondents held the position of head teacher during the current school year.

Table 3: Question 1 - Which gender do you identify with?

Female	52
Male	13
N/A	0
Total	65

## 1.2. Data collection instruments

As no suitable standardized and validated data collection instruments were available to meet the aims of the ASAP project and research objectives of WP2, data collection instruments were designed by the project's expert team, composed of project partner representatives with prior experience and expertise in research, data collection and construction of data collection questions. Data collection instruments were first piloted/tested with a small group of respondents and then the final versions were translated (using back and forth translation to ensure consistency and comparability) into Portuguese language.

## 1.3. Data collection procedure

The following data collection instruments have been designed for the purpose of this field research:

- The focus group protocol for teachers of pre-adolescents;
- The online survey for teachers of pre-adolescents.

Prior to data collection, the decision of the Research Ethics Committee at DOBA Business School was obtained to justify that the field research was aligned with the research ethics standards and principles. The decision was issued on 7 February 2024.

Four focus group discussions with teachers took place online, via Zoom. This allowed to engage participants from different contexts and locations, in after-school hours – which was pointed out as preferred time indicated by the participants. Each focus group discussion lasted around 1,5 hours and was moderated by two researchers: one of them led and moderated the discussion, the other one acted as an observer, paying attention to non-verbal clues and taking down the notes.

The focus group discussions were audio and video recorded. In focus group discussions participants were asked to talk openly about their behaviours, experiences, insights, needs and expectations related to the use of social media (and the Internet in general) among pre-adolescents.

The online survey was hosted on 1ka platform ([www.1ka.si](http://www.1ka.si)), that was moderated by DOBA Business School, the WP2 leader. Teachers received the online survey via email, and it was on them to decide

where and when to fill it in. In the online surveys, participants were asked to report on their behaviors, attitudes and opinions regarding the topic of this research in a more structured way. There were mostly closed-ended questions in the online survey with only few open-ended questions that required elaboration with one's own words.

In case of focus groups, and online surveys, personal data, which could reveal the identity of participants (e.g., information on consent forms) were kept away from the databases with collected content-specific data and files/reports with summarized research findings. Data were analysed and presented on a sample-level only (not individually), with absolutely no reference to sensitive personal data of participants.

Qualitative research took place from April to November 2024 and quantitative research took place from March 2024 to January 2025.

#### **1.4. Data analysis procedures**

To analyze the collected data during qualitative research, we relied on thematic analysis. This method allows us to go beyond merely counting words or extracting excerpts from the focus groups, enabling the identification of meanings and themes that can indicate possible patterns. In the scope of this research, the team considered relevant to focus the analysis on identifying, analyzing, and reporting the key themes and dimensions that emerged from the focus group data (Braun & Clarke, 2016, 2012). The thematic analysis was conducted according to Braun & Clarke's proposed six-step approach (2016): familiarization, code formulation, theme generation, theme review, defining and naming themes, and report creation.

Following the analysis and identification of the prominent themes that emerged from the discussions, field notes were also used as a complementary method to enrich the analysis. The field notes were particularly valuable for clarifying aspects related to participants' expressions or engagement with the questions during the discussions.

## **2. Qualitative research**

The qualitative component of the field research involved focus group discussions with teachers and school leaders. In total, 19 teachers and one school leader (who also teaches) participated. The data were collected across several schools participating as associated partners in the project. The discussions focused on children's online behavior, challenges, emotional responses, and the role of adult support. Each of the following sections presents insights from a specific target group.

### **2.1. Personal and digital relationships**

During the focus groups, teachers reported that they are frequently approached by students seeking support regarding relationships including the ones established through digital media, as well as other more personal issues - e.g. family or friendship matters. This phenomenon is attributed to the perception of teachers as approachable adults within these age groups and someone who they can trust. Priscila (Focus Group 3) mentions that those who are seen as the “gentle teachers” who try to listen are usually frequently approached by students. She adds that children are very needy and that they frequently lack the support they need at home – so “the teacher who pays attention is the best person in the world” (Priscila, FG 3).

Participants further mentioned that students often confide in their teachers (as well as in their peers), though the first are not consulted for every issue. One of the participants highlights that “they can rely a lot on a teacher, but if they don't have digital skills, it's not the adult they're looking for.” (Soraia, FG 1). One of the teachers mentions that “First they talk amongst themselves. Then probably a teacher they're comfortable with. And then the institutional figure - unless it's something they're really ashamed of.” (Peter, FG 1). Though parents aren't out of the picture and sometimes fulfill this role of reference adults.

When reflecting about the relationship between teachers and students, the importance of trust and accountability is emphasized. According to focus groups' participants, young individuals desire to be heard and involved in decision-making processes; therefore, it is crucial to continue fostering effective listening skills.

Furthermore, during the focus groups teachers highlighted that - according to their experiences and perceptions - online behavior tends to influence and perpetuate conduct and relationship dynamics within the school environment. Dynamics and peer pressure tend to play a fundamental role, often with negative implications. Sabrina, who joined the third focus group, also shared that influencers are a big presence in the lives of pre-teens, often coming onto their screens and addressing topics that the adults who are part of their lives (such as parental figures and teachers) either don't know about or don't have the expertise to address.

### **2.2. Mobile devices and behavior**

The second theme that emerged in discussions with teachers and that we were able to identify concerns mobile devices and the behaviour of pre-teens. Numerous problems have been reported during the focus groups, frequently centering around the improper capture of images - this seems to be one of the most frequent problems regarding the use of smartphones in school grounds. Peter and

Soraia (participants of Focus group 1) state that there is a lack of knowledge regarding privacy and image preservation. Another teacher, Diana (FG 2) refers that copyright is occasionally covered in ICT and Citizenship lessons, but that students are still unaware of what is punishable or not by law. Besides this, many teachers have also faced problems related to inappropriate behavior and offensive language, primarily via messaging applications. According to them, these issues underscore the broader challenges associated with mobile device usage among students. “Behaviours in digital networks are the continuation of relationships at school; in a group setting they feel more comfortable engaging in these behaviors”, mentions Flávio (FG 4), who is also a school leader. Elsa and Carmo (FG 2) also mention that direct, gratuitous, thoughtless insults and offensive messages are frequent.

Participants referred during the focus groups that student behavior and immaturity are major factors that educators must address and which occasionally complicate their educational task. From the teachers' perspective, the family context significantly influences these behaviors, particularly in terms of setting or lacking boundaries regarding the use of mobile devices.

The impact of these challenges is multifaceted: classroom environment, student interactions, and the overall educational experience. Proper guidance and intervention from both educators (e.g. teachers) and families are pointed out not only as crucial in mitigating these issues but also in promoting a more positive and respectful digital culture among students.

### **2.3. Intervention and the role of schools and families**

When discussing the role of schools and families in educational contexts, teachers stress the importance of continuous intervention, rather than merely crisis management. Despite efforts by schools to adapt to the evolving realities of student needs, there remains considerable progress to be made - time, specific guidelines at ministry level, training, adaptation of curricula. However, the responsibility cannot be placed solely on schools or teachers. Participants mentioned that often families struggle to keep pace with these new realities and may lack the necessary resources or knowledge to tackle problems related to digital life and devices. In specific cases, participants mention tutoring students in these topics as crucial for monitoring and addressing situations of concern. This is also pointed out as a practice that various of the participants already implement in their contexts.

During the focus groups teachers also reflected about the ways parents or guardians deal with more complex problems. Even if some of them assume leadership, intervening and resolving the situation themselves, others advocate for shared responsibility, recognizing that collaborative effort is required to effectively support students.

The data collected during the focus group discussions emphasise the importance of continuous intervention and proactive support for all educators engaged in pre-adolescents education, in order to address the multifaceted challenges faced by students, ensuring their well-being and fostering a positive educational environment. Carmo (FG 2) says that “the proximity and sharing between teachers and colleagues can help to signal this [type of abusive, dangerous or offensive situations]. Assertive measures are needed in which everyone is called upon to intervene - the school but also parents and families”.

## 2.4. Training expectations and needs

Regarding the teachings of their students and their expected reactions to situations of conflict, concern or offence, teachers outline specific expectations. They expect students to:

- Report incidents to an adult;
- Recognize that the situation is wrong or problematic;
- Refrain from engaging in inappropriate behavior.

The emergence of training and information as significant needs was highlighted during the discussion sessions, particularly emphasizing the importance of space, time, and specific guidance focused on social media and digital citizenship. Judite (FG 3) highlights that training is essential but multidisciplinary teams are also crucial - “child psychiatrists, social educators, and the teacher as part of a multidisciplinary team – even to learn how to deal with parents). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Citizenship classes are primarily identified as platforms to address these topics, but some teachers try to bring the topics into other subjects as Antonia and Priscila, History and Portuguese teachers (FG 3) share. Antónia (FG 3) points out “everyday things [such as] news, interviews, RTP [national television channel] series among others”; Priscila particularly highlights “Bom Português [Good Portuguese tv rubric], RTP play, many movies adapted from books (...) and games too - for example for verbs, like Bamboozle”.

Furthermore, those who serve as head teachers acknowledge the utility of dedicating time and space within their lessons - to the detriment of other topics - to discuss emerging issues and problems.

## 2.5. Resources and tools

As to resources, teachers list materials available online through networks and other structures, such as eTwinning, the Directorate-General for Education, the School Libraries Network, and SeguraNet. For this professional group, Facebook remains a relevant social network, with teachers referring to it as a platform primarily used for sharing of information and accessing resources.

Some teachers admit to employing gamification tools, such as Kahoot or Bamboozle (e.g. Priscila and Jules, FG 3), to engage students. Others focus on introducing production-based activities to explore the potential, as well as the challenges and limitations, of digital media. Despite these efforts, social media as a whole is not considered a viable option for educational purposes within their practices. These aspects highlight the ongoing need for innovative approaches that take into account not only the media that are now available but also students' uses, preferences, and interests to effectively leverage technology in supporting and enhancing the learning experience.

## 2.6. Conclusions

The findings from the focus groups conducted in Portugal highlight the intricate and multifaceted nature of the challenges and opportunities associated with digital media - particularly social media - and its impact on student relationships, behavior, and educational environments. The data collected during the discussions that the teaching professional class still plays a pivotal role in supporting pre-adolescent students as they navigate the complexities of digital interactions, providing guidance and fostering trust and accountability. Furthermore, teachers also play a relevant role when it comes to creating bridges with life lived in the physical world and with other adults that have educational

responsibilities - such as parents or guardians. The importance of implementing a culture of continuous intervention, rather than merely crisis management, is underscored, highlighting the need for schools and families to not only adapt but also collaborate in addressing these changing realities.

The discussions make evident a number of challenges faced by schools, and particularly teachers. Inappropriate behavior, offensive speech, and misuse of another's image are the problems most highlighted by focus group participants, and underscore the need for clear boundaries and guidance from both educators and families. Student behavior and immaturity often intersect with the family context - this aspect in particular emphasises teacher's belief that there is a need for collaborative approaches to establish and enforce appropriate use of technology. In addition, the influence of online behavior on school interactions further emphasizes the urgent need to equip teachers to take action toward promoting positive digital citizenship.

Training and information are identified as significant needs, with a focus on social media and digital citizenship. Teachers acknowledge the usefulness of ICT and Citizenship classes, as well as the importance of dedicating time and space within the head teacher's lessons to address emerging issues. The examples presented by teachers in terms of integration of innovative tools and resources, such as gamification and production-based activities, highlights the dynamic nature of educational methods and the importance for ongoing professional development - teachers often undertake training on their own initiative.

In line with this, online resources and networks, such as eTwinning and SeguraNet, have been contributing for educators to enhance their practices and share valuable information. The data also highlights that social networks, like Facebook, are still relevant for professional collaboration and resource sharing. Even though not clearly mentioned by the participants, this aspect further underscores the interconnected nature of modern education. Still, the findings illustrate how a multifaceted approach is required to effectively leverage technology in supporting and enhancing the learning experience - not only of students, but also of teachers and other educators (e.g. parents).

As a final note, it is essential to highlight that the focus groups reveal the necessity for continuous, collaborative efforts between educators, families, and broader educational networks. The evolving digital landscape presents both challenges and opportunities that demand adaptive strategies and proactive interventions to digital literacy education. By fostering trust, accountability, and positive digital citizenship, educators can create supportive and resilient educational environments that empower students to navigate the complexities of the digital age in a responsible and conscious manner.

### 3. Quantitative research

The quantitative research was conducted through structured online surveys completed by 65 teachers. The surveys aimed to explore patterns of device use, online habits, exposure to online risks, emotional responses, and the nature of parental or school support. The following sections present an overview of the findings for each target group, followed by an aggregated analysis.

#### 3.1. Internet access and use

Out of the total number of respondents, 46 indicated that they have access to the internet whenever they want, while 17 mentioned having frequent access. The smartphone is the most commonly used device for daily internet access among the respondents. In contrast, tablets, game consoles, and televisions are generally not used by teachers for this purpose.

Table 4: Question 7 - Do you have full access to the Internet whenever you want or need it?

	N	%
Never	2	3,1
Sometimes	0	0
Frequently	17	26,2
Always	46	70,8
Total	65	100%

Table 5: Question 8 - When you use the Internet today, how often do you use the following devices to access the Internet?

	Never or almost never		At least every month		At least every week		Daily or almost daily		I'd rather not say		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
a) Smartphone	5	7,7	2	3,1	1	1,5	57	87,7	0	0	65	100
b) Desktop, laptop or notebook computer	0	0	3	4,6	4	6,2	0	0	58	89,2	65	100
c) Tablet	43	66,2	9	13,8	6	9,2	0	0	7	10,8	65	100
d) Game console	59	90,8	3	4,6	1	1,5	0	0	2	3,1	65	100
e) Television	15	23,1	5	7,7	7	10,8	0	0	38	58,5	65	100

As to internet use, 51 respondents reported using the internet for more than 2 hours a day on weekdays. On weekends, this number slightly decreases, with 45 respondents indicating they use the internet for more than 2 hours a day.

Table 6: Question 9 - How much time do you spend on the Internet during the day?

	Weekdays		Weekends	
	N	%	N	%
Little or no time	1	1,5	4	6,2

About half an hour	4	6,2	3	4,6
About 1 hour	9	13,8	13	20
About 2 hours	22	33,8	23	35,4
About 3 hours	11	16,9	9	13,8
About 4 hours	11	16,9	8	12,3
About 5 hours	2	3,1	1	1,5
About 6 hours	3	4,6	3	4,6
About 7 hours or more	2	3,1	1	1,5
I'd rather not say	0	0	0	0
Total	65	100	65	100

Regarding the use of social media, WhatsApp (n=58), Facebook (n=50), Instagram (n=48) and YouTube (n=46) are the platforms mostly used by teachers.

### 3.2. Relationship between teachers and students in school

Questioned about the time they spend with their students, teachers reported various activities they often or very often engage in with their students concerning internet use at school. A significant number of teachers (n=52) indicated that they establish rules regarding what students can do on the Internet at school. Additionally, 47 teachers reported explaining to students why some online content is good or bad.

Furthermore, 46 teachers mentioned helping students when they encounter difficulties in performing tasks or finding information on the Internet. Another critical aspect addressed by teachers is the recognition of misinformation online, with 44 teachers emphasizing this in their interactions with students. Lastly, 42 teachers reported suggesting ways to use the Internet safely to their students.

Table 7: Question 11 - Think about the time you spent with the pupils at your school, aged between 11 and 13, last year. How often did you do any of these things?

	Never or nearly ever		Sometimes		Often or very often		I'd rather not say		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
a) Encouraged your students to explore and learn things on the Internet	3	4,6	30	46,2	30	46,2	2	3,1	65	100
b) Suggested to your students ways to use the Internet safely	4	6,2	17	2,6	42	64,6	2	3,1	65	100
c) In general, talked to your students about what they would do if something bothered them online	9	13,8	22	33,8	32	49,2	2	3,1	65	100

d) Helped your students when they found something difficult to do or find on the Internet	4	6,2	13	20	46	70,8	2	3,1	65	100
e) Explained why some online content is good or bad	3	4,6	13	20	47	72,3	2	3,1	65	100
f) Helped your students in the past when something bothered them on the Internet	11	16,9	16	24,6	36	55,4	2	3,1	65	100
g) Established rules about what students can do on the Internet at school	4	6,2	7	10,8	52	80	2	3,1	65	100
h) Explained how to recognise misinformation online	5	7,7	13	20	44	67,7	3	4,6	65	100
i) Taught your students how to find reliable sources of information on the Internet	4	6,2	9	13,8	50	76,9	2	3,1	65	100

Teachers reported varying degrees of student interactions concerning internet-related issues. Some students occasionally approached teachers to share things they saw or witnessed online that bothered or upset them - 27 teachers noted this occurrence. On the contrary, 29 teachers reported that students never or hardly ever helped them with difficulties they faced on the internet (e.g. tasks).

In terms of initiating conversations, 32 teachers mentioned that students sometimes started discussions about their online activities. Additionally, 27 teachers reported that students sometimes sought advice on how to behave online and occasionally inquired about advertisements they had seen on the internet. Lastly, 30 teachers indicated that students sometimes asked for help with internet situations they could not resolve on their own. 33 teachers didn't reply to this question.

Table 8: Question 14 - Think about the last time your pupils aged between 11 and 13 told you about things that bothered or upset them on the Internet. How did you react and support your pupil(s) in that case?

	Yes		No		N/A		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

I provided emotional support and a safe space for the child to talk about their experiences	15	23,1	17	26,2	33	50,8	65	100
I reported the incident to the school management so that further action could be taken.	11	16,9	21	32,3	33	50,8	65	100
I contacted the child's parents or guardians to discuss the situation.	12	18,5	20	30,8	33	50,8	65	100
I offered guidance on the responsible use of the internet and social media.	17	26,2	15	23,1	33	50,8	65	100
I informed the whole class about online safety and responsible online behaviour.	21	32,3	11	16,9	33	50,8	65	100
I collaborated with school counsellors to provide additional support.	3	4,6	29	44,6	33	50,8	65	100
I got involved in conflict resolution and mediated between the students involved.	10	15,4	22	33,7	33	50,8	65	100
Referred the child to external support bodies or organisations.	2	3,1	30	46,2	33	50,8	65	100

Monitored and supervised the child's online activities during school hours.	5	7,7	27	41,5	33	50,8	65	100
Documented the incident and kept a record for future reference or communication.	4	6,2	28	43,1	33	50,8	65	100
Other, please specify:	1	1,5	31	47,7	33	50,8	65	100

According to the survey results, 34 respondents reported that their students feel quite comfortable discussing their online experiences with them. This level of comfort suggests a significant level of trust between students and respondents, which is essential for effective communication and support. Furthermore, 23 respondents believe that they can significantly assist their students with online issues, which indicates a strong sense of responsibility and confidence among the respondents in their ability to provide meaningful guidance and solutions to their students' online challenges.

Table 9: Question 15 - In general, do you think your pupils, aged between 11 and 13, feel comfortable talking to you about their online experiences?

	N	%
Totally uncomfortable	2	3,1
Quite uncomfortable	6	9,2
Quite comfortable	34	52,3
Totally at ease	7	10,8
I'd rather not say	7	10,8
N/A	9	13,8
Total	65	100

Table 10: Question 17 - To what extent do you think you can help your students, aged between 11 and 13, deal with anything that bothers or disturbs them in online contexts?

	N	%
Not at all	1	1,5
Not much	8	12,3
Quite a lot	23	35,4
A lot	19	29,2
I don't know	5	7,7
Not at all	1	1,5
Total	65	100

### 3.3. Where teachers obtain information

Regarding the sources from which teachers obtain information and advice on supporting their students with issues related to Internet use and safety, several key points have been identified. Professional development workshops or training sessions organized by the school they work at were pointed out by 29 teachers as valuable resources. Similarly, collaboration between colleagues and the sharing of best practices were highlighted by another 29 teachers.

Educational websites and online resources were pointed out by 28 teachers as useful tools for acquiring relevant knowledge. Additionally, educational conferences or seminars on online safety were referenced by 26 teachers as important sources of information. Finally, resources provided by the school cluster or educational authorities were mentioned by 25 teachers as beneficial in addressing students' online challenges. All these diverse sources stress the importance of a multifaceted approach to equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to support their students effectively.

Table 11: Question 18 - In general, where do you get information and advice on how to help and support your pupils, aged between 11 and 13, to use the Internet and keep them safe?

	Yes		No		N/A		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional development workshops or training sessions organised by the school.	29	44,6	27	41,5	9	13,8	65	100
Educational conferences or seminars on online safety.	26	40	30	46,2	9	13,8	65	100
Resources from the school cluster or educational authorities.	25	38,5	31	47,7	9	13,8	65	100
Teacher forums and online communities.	8	12,3	48	73,8	9	13,8	65	100
Guidance from school counsellors or support staff.	5	7,7	51	78,5	9	13,8	65	100
Educational websites and online resources.	28	43,1	28	43,1	9	13,8	65	100
Books and publications on	17	26,2	39	60	9	13,8	65	100

Internet safety for pre-teens.								
Collaboration between colleagues and sharing of best practice.	29	44,6	27	41,5	9	13,8	65	100
Webinars and online courses centred on online safety.	23	35,4	33	50,8	9	13,8	65	100
Materials from government or non-profit organisations.	9	13,8	47	72,3	9	13,8	65	100
School or national policies and guidelines.	15	23,1	41	63,1	9	13,8	65	100
Other (please specify).	2	3,1	27	41,5	9	13,8	38	58,5

### 3.4. Curricula adequacy to Digital Literacy and online Safety topics

Questioned about the inclusion of topics related to Internet use in school curricula, the survey revealed several significant gaps. Specifically, 33 respondents indicated that Online Safety is not part of the current curriculum. Additionally, 30 respondents noted the absence of Online Risks and Threats from the curricula, while 31 respondents reported that Digital Literacy is also not included. Furthermore, 35 respondents pointed out that these topics are not covered in the syllabi of the subjects they teach. This data goes in line with previous research that has been addressing and pinpointing a critical need for the incorporation of these essential topics into the educational curriculum to ensure that students are well-equipped to navigate the digital world in a safe and effective manner.

Table 12: Question 21 - How well do you think the following topics are covered in the school curriculum?

	Yes		No		Id' rather not say		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
a) Online safety	20	30,8	33	50,8	12	18,5	65	100
b) Online risks/ threats	23	35,4	30	46,2	12	18,5	65	100
c) Digital literacy	23	35,4	31	47,7	11	16,9	65	100

Table 13: Question 22 - Are any of the topics related to online safety, online risks/threats and digital literacy included in the curriculum of the subject(s) you are teaching?

	N	%
Yes	17	26,2
No	35	53,8
N/A	13	20
Total	65	100

### 3.5. How the school is addressing these challenges

As to the school's efforts to enhance online safety and promote safe and responsible behavior on the Internet among students, the survey results show that the majority of responses fall between "Satisfactory" (n=20) and "Sufficient" (n=20). This indicates that while there are efforts being made, there is room for improvement to ensure that these initiatives effectively address the needs and concerns related to students' online activities. Some of the suggestions presented by respondents on how to address these topics were:

- Address the topic throughout the school year with concrete real-life examples.
- Prohibit mobile phones.
- Training in this area.
- It would be very important to have a subject in this area as part of the curriculum.
- More actions and lectures for students on the topic/ Activities with students.
- More information on the subject through workshops, for example.
- Provide and advise procedures for the entire school among teachers and students.
- Use Citizenship and Development classes to address the topic, and hold workshops to address the issue at school.
- More systematic formative work.
- School's material and human resources with clear guidelines and a coordinating team to support students and teachers.
- Projects that develop the topic.
- Put up more posters, distribute pamphlets, and promote simulations of dangerous situations to train responses.
- The school should have a systematic approach policy for all students, not depending on the initiatives of the school library or specific events like Safer Internet Day and others.
- More collaborative work.
- Add curricula related to online safety.
- Workshops and clarification sessions on related topics.

Table 14: Question 23 - How do you rate your school's efforts to contribute to online safety and to promote safe/responsible behaviour on the Internet among pupils aged between 11 and 13?

	N	%
Insufficient	9	13,8
Satisfactory	20	30,8
Excellent	20	30,8

I'd rather not say	10	15,4
N/A	65	100

### 3.6. Conclusions

The results of the survey are in line with the latest research carried out in Portugal, which points to the need to adapt schools, training materials and the curriculum itself to the demands of the digital age. Despite this alignment, the data points to aspects that need further reflection and discussion related to teachers' involvement and challenges in addressing students' internet use and online safety within the school environment.

Teachers frequently engage in various activities to support their students in terms of establishing internet usage rules, explaining the quality of online content, assisting with online tasks, recognizing misinformation, and promoting safe internet practices. These efforts highlight teachers' proactive role in fostering a safe and informed online environment for their students. However, the survey also reveals significant gaps and areas for additional improvement. A substantial number of teachers reported that crucial topics like Online Safety, Online Risks and Threats, and Digital Literacy are absent from the current curricula - which makes it difficult to include these themes across the various national educational contexts. The choice of whether or not to deal with these issues is left up to schools, teachers or the school groupings - there is, therefore, no guarantee that the issue reaches all students. This indicates a pressing need to incorporate these topics into the curricula to better prepare students for the digital age.

Moreover, the school's efforts to enhance online safety and responsible internet behavior, while deemed "Satisfactory" or "Sufficient" by most teachers who responded to this survey, suggest that there is still considerable room for improvement. Taking into consideration their specific contexts, teachers have proposed several suggestions to address these gaps, including continuous engagement with online safety topics throughout the school year, prohibiting mobile phones, providing targeted training, incorporating relevant subjects into the curriculum, and organizing workshops and activities to raise awareness among students and staff. Some of these suggestions have been tested at a national or local level over the last two school years, such as banning mobile phones or developing projects aimed specifically at these topics.

The diverse sources of information and advice used by teachers, ranging from professional development workshops to collaboration with colleagues and online resources, emphasize the importance of promoting multifaceted approaches in equipping educators with the necessary skills and knowledge. By implementing systematic and comprehensive strategies, schools can better support teachers in their efforts to promote safe and responsible internet use among students. As a final goal, this can promote a safer and more informed digital environment within formal educational settings.

## 4. Conclusions

The findings from the focus groups and the survey conducted in Portugal stress the relevant role that teachers play in guiding pre-adolescent students through the complexities of digital interactions. Data shows that teachers are central in fostering trust, accountability, and positive (digital) citizenship among students, occasionally being sought out to clarify issues or ask for advice. However, it also highlights a set of challenges that need to be addressed through collaborative efforts. Teachers argue that addressing issues and problems related to digital citizenship - e.g. inappropriate behavior, offensive speech, and misuse of digital media - are quite frequent on school grounds and demand a collective effort between educators, families, and broader educational networks.

The survey results align with recent research (European Commission, 2024; Smahel et al., 2020), indicating a pressing need to adapt school curricula, training materials, and overall educational strategies to respond to the demands of the digital age and the ongoing challenges it presents. Although teachers are actively engaging in various activities to support students, the absence of key topics like Online Safety, Online Risks and Threats, and Digital Literacy in curricula is a significant gap that poses doubts in terms of what to address and how to do it. This accentuates the need for a clear and systematic incorporation of digital literacy-related topics to better support teachers and prepare students for the digital world.

As to the school's efforts to promote safe and responsible internet behavior, though generally considered "Satisfactory" or "Sufficient," they indicate room for improvement. Teachers' suggestions, such as continuous engagement with online safety topics, targeted training, and including topical subjects into the curriculum, highlight the importance of designing all-round strategies. These approaches, alongside the use of online resources and professional collaboration, can provide teachers with the necessary skills and expertise to create supportive and resilient educational environments. It's also worth mentioning that - albeit in a scattered way - teachers are aware of various platforms that provide materials and tools that they consider useful for tackling these topics with their students.

Another relevant aspect that stands out from the analysis is the fact that teachers tend to find space to address issues and problems related to digital media, digital citizenship and digital literacy, both in compulsory subjects - such as ICT and Citizenship - and in their own timetable - especially those who hold class management positions (head teachers). Thus, it is possible to identify a growing concern and attention to digital citizenship and an effort to include it in school.

In a nutshell, the data collected in Portugal point out that the evolving digital landscape requires adaptive strategies, preventive approaches and proactive interventions. There is a general consensus among teachers that by fostering continuous and collaborative efforts, schools and families can effectively address the challenges and opportunities presented by digital media. This can contribute to pre-adolescents growing up to become well-equipped, responsible and conscious digital citizens.

Further reflecting on the implications this data can have on the development of the ASAP Educational Model and Programme, we can highlight that:

- The emphasis on trust, accountability, and positive digital citizenship underscores the importance of promoting developing metacognitive skills in a transversal manner in pre-adolescents' education. Including activities and lesson plans that encourage students to critically reflect and question online behaviors, understand the consequences of their actions, and develop self-regulation strategies will be a key aspect;
- There is a major focus on continuous training and professional development for teachers. For this reason, the ASAP Educator model and program should stress individual development and consider opportunities for educators to develop crucial competences - such as digital literacy, critical thinking/ problem-solving, collaboration, communication, innovation, creativity and emotional Intelligence;
- The results highlight the importance of collaboration between educators, families, and broader educational networks. The ASAP Program should encourage active cooperation and activities between these stakeholders to create a cohesive and supportive environment for students and joint growth and learning;
- The inputs collected underline the need for multifaceted approaches. The ASAP program and model should focus on implementing systematic and comprehensive strategies to address digital citizenship-related topics, including assessments and the potential for adaptation and replication. These aspects can ensure the program remains relevant and effective in the long term.

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# FIELD RESEARCH

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This report is part of the Erasmus+ project ASAP – *A Systemic Approach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education*.

It presents key findings from field research conducted in Portugal with students, parents, teachers, and school leaders. The study explores the challenges of digital life in early adolescence and the educational needs of all involved.

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