

Erasmus+ Programme

Key Action 2 - Cooperation Partnerships in School Education

FIELD RESEARCH COUNTRY REPORT

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Slovenia



ASAP



Co-funded by
the European Union

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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Short Description	This document presents the results and key finding of qualitative and quantitative field research conducted in Slovenia among preadolescents, parents, teachers and school leaders, 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, semi-structured interviews) and quantitative (structured online surveys) research methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The research conducted in Slovenia included 30 preadolescents, 30 parents, 10 teachers, and 2 school leaders in the qualitative part, while the quantitative surveys gathered responses from 197 preadolescents, 205 parents, and 34 teachers. Data collection, which took place from February 2024 to January 2025, adhered to strict ethical standards, with approval from the Research Ethics Committee at DOBA Business School.

Key findings of qualitative research

Despite mature understanding of online risks, **preadolescents** vary widely in how they cope with them. While some seek adult intervention, others choose silence, fearing judgment or retaliation. Trust, or the lack of it, emerges as a central concern in the children's relationships with adults. Many perceive teachers and parents as either overreactive or dismissive and often avoid disclosing negative experiences out of fear that adults will either exaggerate the problem or fail to understand it. This signals the importance of cultivating emotionally safe spaces where children feel genuinely heard and not judged.

A key theme in **parental discussions** is the tension between shielding children and preparing them for independence. While some adopt monitoring technologies, others emphasize open communication and gradual autonomy. All agree, however, that listening, modelling appropriate behaviour, and emotional availability are critical to good digital parenting. Interestingly, parents also admit their own contradictions—such as telling children to limit screen time while constantly being online themselves.

Moreover, **teachers** point to the inconsistencies in how online misbehaviour is addressed within the school system. Much of the harmful activity happens outside of school hours or through personal devices, limiting teachers' authority and complicating the enforcement of school rules. Despite these challenges, teachers find that students do open up when trust is established—often during informal moments or when they feel that teachers care about them personally.

Protecting and empowering preadolescents online is not merely a matter of rules or awareness campaigns. It is a relational and cultural challenge that requires coordinated effort across the family, school, and community. Children need to be seen not only as users of technology but as partners in building safer digital environments. Parents, teachers, and school leaders must be supported with the training, time, and tools to create these environments—together, not in isolation. What unites all groups is the shared desire to keep children safe and supported. What divides them is often not intention, but approach. Bridging this gap will be essential to cultivating a generation of digitally resilient, emotionally intelligent, and socially connected young people.

Key findings of quantitative research

The use of devices, internet and social media

Preadolescents are highly digitally connected: 98% of preadolescents own a personal smartphone, and nearly half (49%) received it before the age of 10.

Preadolescents spend substantial time online: on school days, 30% of preadolescents spend 4+ hours daily online; on weekends, this rises to 50%.

Social media use is almost universal among preadolescents: they mostly use YouTube (93%), Snapchat (71%), TikTok (56%), and Spotify (56%). Most parents (98%) also use social media themselves, but they use different social media than their children, highlighting a generational digital divide: 89% use Facebook, 72% YouTube, 48% Instagram and 36% WhatsApp.

Early smartphone ownership and use are driven by both practical needs and social pressures. Parents cited four key reasons for giving a child a smartphone: 1) communication, 2) safety and emergency reachability, 3) fostering independence, and 4) peer conformity / digital participation.

Parental advice/guidance & dialogue

There is a significant perception gap between parents and preadolescents about the level of parental involvement: while parents report high levels of engagement in discussing online risks and supporting their child's internet use (e.g. 97% of parents reported suggesting ways to use the internet safely), preadolescents perceive considerably less involvement (e.g. 67% of preadolescents reported their parents suggesting ways to use the internet safely).

Preadolescents are more likely to help their parents with online tasks than ask them for support. 82% of preadolescents say they help their parents with internet use, but only 49% of parents recognize this. Conversely, fewer preadolescents report asking their parents for advice (30%) than parents report being asked (53%). This suggests a reversal of expected roles in some cases, with children acting as digital guides.

Schools are seen as key partners in supporting parents with online safety education: 39% of parents think it would be useful to "a fair amount" if their child's school provided an open space for discussion about parenting issues, including internet safety; additional 28% of parents feel this would be useful "a lot".

Parental control / regulation

Significant discrepancies exist between preadolescents' and parents' perceptions of online freedom: preadolescents report having much more unrestricted access to online activities than what parents claim they allow. For instance, 63% of children say they can use social media anytime, compared to only 26% of parents. This points to either limited parental awareness, miscommunication, or lack of consistent rule enforcement.

Also, the data shows a consistent gap between what preadolescents perceive and what parents report when it comes to the use of parental control mechanisms. Parents report significantly higher use of monitoring and regulation tools than preadolescents acknowledge. For example, 67% of parents say they use blocking, filtering, or activity-tracking tools, while only 37% of preadolescents are aware of this.

Children mostly accept and follow their parents' rules about the use of smartphones and do not feel that monitoring is intrusive—many even describe it positively as "care" or "protection." However, one third (33%) would prefer less parental involvement, often citing a desire for more independence and privacy in their online interactions.

Experience with difficult / unpleasant situations online

Around 15% of preadolescents encountered unpleasant or upsetting experiences online in the past year, most commonly involving cyberbullying, scary or inappropriate content, or online threats—indicating that online risks are a reality for a significant minority of children. As a response to an incident, more than half of the preadolescents blocked the person from contacting them (52%). Although many children confided in parents or peers, 28% did not tell anyone about the incident, showing that a notable portion of preadolescents may be dealing with online harm alone, underscoring the importance of open communication and support.

Similar questions about their child's unpleasant online experiences have also been asked to the parents. 15% of parents reported their child had unpleasant online experience(s) in the past year. After a child told their parents about things that bothered or upset them on the Internet, most parents responded by engaging in open and non-judgmental communication to understand the child's experience (81%).

Teachers' perspectives

Most teachers frequently talk to students about online safety, misinformation, and responsible internet use. However, a majority feel that online safety, risks, and digital literacy are underrepresented in the current curriculum, highlighting a clear disconnect between teaching efforts and institutional support.

Teachers already receive guidance via school workshops, peer exchanges, and online resources, and wish to expand this with more involvement from school counsellors and external experts. They also see a strong need to include parents in digital education efforts and suggest increasing class time and preventive programs on digital well-being.

Implications for the ASAP Educational Program

The key research findings have imposed clear implications for the design and development of the ASAP Educational Program. The research clearly supports a program that is:

- Interactive and participatory – preadolescents (but also parents) want to be included, not just instructed.
- Emotionally grounded – preadolescents need tools for resilience and coping, not just rules how to behave and how not to behave.
- Relationally focused – real change requires bridging the divide between preadolescents, parents, and teachers.
- Curriculum-enhancing – teachers need support and structure, and this program can offer that in practical terms.

The research has also identified a few common themes to be addressed by the ASAP Educational Program: emotions, communication and authenticity. Teaching emotional recognition and regulation builds resilience and normalizes emotional responses to online harm. Addressing communication skills

improves family communication strategies—parents need support in how to talk with their children. Developing critical thinking helps preadolescents evaluate what is real, safe, and reliable online, which is key for coping with contemporary online risks and challenges.

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, Czech 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, analyze, 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 Slovenia.

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 Slovenia, the following target groups have been addressed:

1. Pre-adolescents: kids from 11-13 years of age,
2. Parents of pre-adolescents,
3. Teachers of pre-adolescents,
4. School leaders.

Sampling of participants for qualitative and quantitative research was non-random: purposeful, convenient and/or self-selective (depending on the target group). Participants were mostly recruited via schools that were involved in the project as Associated Partners. These schools have expressed their support and interest to participate in the project activities in advance, including research and data collection, and they provided access to the participants.

Table 1: Sample sizes for qualitative and quantitative research in Slovenia

Target group	Qualitative research*	Quantitative research**
Pre-adolescents	30	197
Parents	30	205
Teachers	10	34
School leaders	2	/

*Focus group discussions were conducted with pre-adolescents, parents and teachers, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with school leaders.

**In the sample of 197 preadolescents, there is 1 partially completed survey. In the sample of 205 parents, there are 17 partially completed surveys. In the sample of 34 teachers, there are 4 partially completed surveys.

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. Some scales were

taken and adapted from the EU Kids Online survey¹. Data collection instruments were first piloted/tested and validated with a small group of respondents and then the final versions were translated (using back and forth translation to ensure consistency and comparability) into Slovene language. They are available on the ASAP project website: <https://www.socialmediakids.eu/>.

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

- The focus group protocol for pre-adolescents,
- The focus group protocol for parents of pre-adolescents,
- The focus group protocol for teachers of pre-adolescents,
- The scenario for semi-structured interview with school leaders,
- The online survey for pre-adolescents,
- The online survey for parents of pre-adolescents,
- The online survey for teachers of pre-adolescents.

1.3. Data collection procedure

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.

Three focus group discussions with preadolescents and one focus group discussion with teachers took place face-to-face in schools, while two focus group discussions with parents took place face-to-face in schools and one focus group discussion with parents was conducted online, via MS Teams platform. 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. Two semi-structured interviews with school leaders took place face-to-face in schools. Each interview lasted around 1 hour and was moderated by one researcher. Both focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were audio recorded. In focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, 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.

All three online surveys (for preadolescents, parents and teachers) were hosted on 1ka platform (www.1ka.si), that was moderated by DOBA Business School, the WP2 leader. Parents and teachers received the online survey via email, and it was on them to decide where and when to fill it in. In case of pre-adolescents on the other hand, filling in the online survey took place in schools, during computer classes, for instance. Preadolescents used school computers, tablets or their own portable devices to access the online survey – either through the access http link or QR code. In 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.

¹ <http://globalkidsonline.net/tools/survey/>

In case of focus groups, interviews 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 analyzed and presented on a sample-level only (not individually), with absolutely no reference to sensitive personal data of participants.

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

2. Qualitative research

The contemporary digital landscape poses both opportunities and risks for preadolescents, requiring collaborative, informed responses from those who shape their environments—preadolescents themselves, parents, teachers, and headmasters. The thematic analyses of focus group and interview data across these four groups offer valuable insight into how each perceives internet use, the associated challenges, and strategies for digital well-being. What emerges is a complex yet converging picture: while all stakeholders express concern, care, and commitment, their perspectives reveal both alignments and critical gaps that call for systemic reflection and coordinated action.

2.1. Preadolescents

Preadolescents' voices bring forward the most immediate and emotionally charged experiences. They describe how online harassment can deeply affect their sense of safety, belonging, and self-worth (*"It makes you worry, nervous, your school performance suffers because you're only thinking about what others say about you."*). Feelings of shame, anxiety, and isolation are common, particularly when exclusion takes place in group chats or social media platforms. Their emotional narratives underscore how online environments significantly shape school dynamics and social relationships (*"If he tells the teacher, classmates might treat him worse because he 'told' on them."*).

At the same time, preadolescents express a nuanced understanding of online risks—such as scams, identity theft (*"If you send someone your photo, they might misuse it later."*), and unsolicited contacts. Preadolescents displayed a cautious attitude towards online friendships, recognizing risks associated with sharing personal information (*"Never reveal your personal data, maybe just your name, but nothing more."*) or meeting online contacts face-to-face (*"Meet only in public places and bring friends along who are older and stronger."*).

Despite mature understanding of online risks preadolescents vary widely in how they cope with them. While some seek adult intervention, others choose silence, fearing judgment or retaliation (*"I prefer telling friends because teachers don't keep things confidential."*). This divergence suggests that despite growing awareness, children still lack a stable framework of trust and guidance in navigating online dangers.

Trust, or the lack of it, emerges as a central concern in the children's relationships with adults. Many perceive teachers and parents as either overreactive or dismissive and often avoid disclosing negative experiences out of fear that adults will either exaggerate the problem or fail to understand it (*"My parents panic quickly and exaggerate things."*). Although some children do trust specific adults (*"I trust my mother most, but still, I don't tell her everything."*), most prefer to speak to peers who they believe will keep their confidence (*"I prefer telling friends because teachers don't keep things confidential."*). This signals the importance of cultivating emotionally safe spaces where children feel genuinely heard and not judged.

Their critique of current internet safety education is also revealing; they find lectures too abstract and disconnected from their reality (*"We need more interactive conversations like this one, not just four-hour lectures on what we shouldn't do."*). Instead, they advocate for practical, interactive learning and

more empathy-driven dialogue with adults (*“If adults could step into our shoes, they might understand us better.”*)—recommendations that are remarkably mature and reflective.

2.2. Parents

Parents, on the other hand, express deep care and a willingness to support their children but often find themselves struggling with how. Many describe feelings of betrayal when children break digital rules, such as secretly using banned apps (*“It’s not just the app—it’s the broken trust that hurts most.”*). Their response to such breaches often combines emotional hurt and disciplinary action, yet they also acknowledge that building lasting trust is more effective than control (*“Too much restriction never works—they’ll find ways around it.”*).

A key theme in parental discussions is the tension between shielding children and preparing them for independence (*“Our job is not to protect them forever, but to prepare them.”*). While some adopt monitoring technologies, others emphasize open communication and gradual autonomy. All agree, however, that listening (*“Listening isn’t just being there—it’s asking follow-up questions and remembering what they said last week.”*), modeling appropriate behavior, and emotional availability are critical to good digital parenting (*“Kids talk when they know they won’t be judged.”*).

Interestingly, parents also admit their own contradictions—such as telling children to limit screen time while constantly being online themselves (*“We limit their screen time—but we’re always on our phones too.”*). They express the desire for more education—not only for children but also for themselves—and call for schools to involve them more directly (*“We, parents, need workshops too—most of us are lost in this.”*). At the same time, they are aware that some parents in their communities are not engaged at all, a fact that limits the reach of preventive efforts (*“The ones who need this education the most probably won’t come. That’s the sad part.”*).

Parents also bring attention to the gendered dynamics of online harm, particularly how girls face social comparison and verbal exclusion on platforms like Instagram, while boys may externalize distress differently (*“Girls are more verbal and cruel in subtle ways—boys just fight and move on.”*).

2.3. Teachers

Teachers contribute a distinct viewpoint, informed by daily interactions with students and a deep concern for their emotional and social development. They emphasize the pedagogical potential of scenario-based learning, role-playing (*“We use role-play to help them experience both sides—victim and perpetrator.”*), and indirect discussion methods in addressing online misconduct (*“I’d start with a story, a scenario—not naming names—so they can imagine how it feels.”*).

Teachers are not only educators but also emotional barometers, often noticing students’ disengagement, lack of motivation, and difficulty resolving conflicts—all of which they link to excessive digital stimulation and reduced real-life interaction. Many speak of a noticeable decline in empathy and solidarity among students (*“There’s no empathy anymore. They don’t care if someone is hurt.”*), with social media exacerbating self-focus and desensitization (*“They are egocentric. Everything is about them now.”*).

Moreover, teachers point to the inconsistencies in how online misbehavior is addressed within the school system (*“The real problem is that nothing happens—there are no consequences.”*). Much of the

harmful activity happens outside of school hours or through personal devices, limiting teachers' authority and complicating the enforcement of school rules.

Despite these challenges, teachers find that students do open up when trust is established—often during informal moments or when they feel that teachers care about them personally (*"They want to talk—it gives them relief. But you have to show you care."*). This reinforces the importance of relationship-based teaching and the need for schools to formally create space for such engagement. Teachers are also calling for more professional development tailored to current digital trends, practical case studies (*"Give us more workshops based on real cases, not just theory."*), and emotional tools to manage the complexity of their role in students' digital lives (*"Students need to be shocked a bit. That's what gets through."*).

2.4. School leaders

School leaders approach the issue from a systemic and administrative perspective. They highlight the importance of technological infrastructure and continuous teacher training as foundational for effective digital education (*"We have ensured good material conditions since 2019, such as computer classrooms and trained IT teachers."*). However, they also express concern over the uneven digital competence among staff and students (*"Younger teachers are much more adept; they actively seek new apps and methods, unlike some older colleagues."*). They note that while students feel digitally confident, their actual literacy—especially regarding safety, ethics, and critical evaluation—is often superficial (*"They think knowing how to make a presentation means they are digitally literate."*).

Like teachers, headmasters report frequent online incidents ranging from cyberbullying to privacy breaches, but their ability to intervene is limited by school jurisdiction and parental cooperation (*"If incidents happen after school, we can't officially sanction them unless parents explicitly request our involvement."*). They see a crucial role for parents in guiding children's digital behavior, but often encounter resistance, blame-shifting, or apathy from families (*"Only about 5% of parents respond positively and attend our meetings on digital safety."*).

Despite these limitations, headmasters recognize the value of involving students in shaping school policy on digital behavior. Some institutions have attempted to engage student councils in these discussions, with varying degrees of success (*"When we actively involve students, their suggestions can be highly valuable."*). They also emphasize the role of school climate—suggesting that a supportive, relational culture can reduce harmful behavior and encourage responsibility (*"If school culture and relationships are healthy, incidents of bullying and online harassment decline."*).

However, they lament the lack of consistent parent engagement, and the growing disconnect between school norms and home environments (*"Some parents become annoyed when they have to collect confiscated phones, not understanding the severity of their child's actions."*).

2.5. Conclusions

Across all four groups, then, certain patterns emerge. Trust, emotional safety, and consistent communication are recurring themes. All groups recognize the need for education—not just in terms of information, but in shaping judgment, resilience, and empathy. Yet, while preadolescents want adults to listen and include them, adults often operate in silos: parents without guidance, teachers

without time, and headmasters without effective enforcement. The result is a patchwork of good intentions constrained by systemic gaps.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis reveals that protecting and empowering preadolescents online is not merely a matter of rules or awareness campaigns. It is a relational and cultural challenge that requires coordinated effort across the family, school, and community. Children need to be seen not only as users of technology but as partners in building safer digital environments. Parents, teachers, and school leaders must be supported with the training, time, and tools to create these environments—together, not in isolation. What unites all groups is the shared desire to keep children safe and supported. What divides them is often not intention, but approach. Bridging this gap will be essential to cultivating a generation of digitally resilient, emotionally intelligent, and socially connected young people.

3. Quantitative research

The presentation of the quantitative research results is organized according to key topics. Where possible, we directly compared the responses of different target groups—particularly preadolescents and parents. The results from teachers are included in a separate subchapter at the end. Due to the small sample size of teachers, only a frequency analysis of their data is provided.

The collected data offer valuable insights into the opinions and behaviors of preadolescents regarding online safety, online risks, and social media use—from the perspectives of different target groups. However, due to sampling limitations, the data are not representative of all Slovene preadolescents, parents, or teachers.

3.1. The use of devices, internet and social media

More than half of preadolescents (56%) “always” has access to the internet, while another third “often” has access to the internet. 75% of preadolescents daily or almost daily access the internet via smartphones, 53% via television, 24% via computer and 17% via games console.

98% of surveyed preadolescents own their personal smartphone. Besides, 74% own their personal computer, 72% a games console and 60% a tablet. When parents had to report whether a child owns a particular device, the incidence rates were somewhat lower: 86% of parents reported their child owning a personal smartphone, 54% a computer, 24% a tablet and 34% a games console.

Table 2: Ownership of the digital devices

	Preadolescents	Parents
	% YES	
a) A personal smartphone	98	86
b) A computer	74	54
c) A tablet	60	24
d) A games console	72	34
e) A TV	39	30

Half of preadolescents received their personal smartphone before the age of ten. 28% received it at ten, 17% at eleven, 3% at twelve and 2% at 13 years of age. The data obtained from the parents are somewhat different. 40% of parents reported giving their child a personal smartphone before the age of ten, 43% at ten, 13% at eleven and 4% at twelve years of age. When asked when they would give a personal smartphone to their own child, only 22% of preadolescents would do it before a child turns 10 years of age. 38% would give it to a child at ten, 21% at eleven, 13% at twelve and 8% at thirteen years of age or later.

Table 3: The age when a child was given their own smartphone

	Preadolescents	Parents
	% YES	
a) Before the age of 10	49	40
b) At 10	28	43

c) At 11	17	13
d) At 12	3	4
e) At 13	2	0

Parents were asked to elaborate on their reasons for giving their child a personal smartphone. The responses can be clustered around four main categories: 1) the need for simple and constant communication with the child (e.g. "So they could let us know when they got home from school."; "So I could call them when they leave school."); 2) the need to check where the child is and to reach out in case of emergency (e.g. "Because they started staying home alone."; "For reachability and safety."); 3) to facilitate a child's independence and attendance to daily activities (e.g. "To go to and from school independently."; "Because she started going to school and activities on her own, so she could call me to let me know everything was fine."); 4) social reasons — not wanting their child to fall behind peers or simply keeping up with the modern digital world (e.g. "So they wouldn't fall behind others."; "Peer pressure."; "To stay reachable and keep up with the times.").

Less than half of preadolescents (44%) had access to social media before owning their personal smartphone. The opinions about the usefulness of this "mediated use of smartphones" are somewhat divided: 42% said it was useful and 46% said that it was not. We asked them to elaborate and justify their opinions by providing open-ended explanations. These could be clustered into four categories: 1) learning about digital literacy and safety (e.g. "I learned that sometimes phones can have viruses, and that you shouldn't trust certain apps."; "Because I could play games, I got a sense of how to behave online, so I never open sites I don't know... I always ask my parents first."); 2) role of parental supervision (e.g. "Yes, because my mom monitored what I was doing."; "My parents told me what I could and couldn't do and monitored me all the time."); 3) use for entertainment (e.g. "I played Brawl Stars."; "Yes, because I didn't watch bad things, just YouTube for music."); 4) learning and gaining knowledge (e.g. "I learned to read."; "I learned a lot of English.").

Preadolescents spend quite some time in a day using the internet. On a regular weekday (school day), 35% use it up to one hour daily, 22% two hours daily, 15% three hours daily and 30% use it for four or more hours daily. During the weekend, 18% use it up to one hour daily, 17% two hours daily, 16% three hours daily and 50% use it for four or more hours daily. The time spent on the internet increases substantially during the weekends. Parents also spent a significant amount of their daily routine using the internet. On a regular weekday, 24% of parents use it up to 1 hour daily, 28% two hours daily, 16% three hours daily and 31% for four or more hours daily. During the weekend, 37% of parents use it up to one hour daily, 28% two hours daily, 17% three hours daily and 17% for four or more hours daily. While the usage patterns for both preadolescents and parents are rather similar for regular days, parents use internet less often during the weekends.

Table 4: The use of the internet among preadolescents and their parents during weekdays and weekends (in %)

	Preadolescents		Parents	
	Weekdays	Weekends	Weekdays	Weekends
a) Up to 1 hour daily	35	18	24	37
b) Two hours daily	22	17	28	28
c) Three hours daily	15	16	16	17
d) Four or more hours daily	30	50	31	17

Although the age limit for the use of social media is generally set at thirteen, only 2% of surveyed preadolescents do not use social media. Preadolescents mostly use YouTube (93%), Snapchat (71%), TikTok (56%) and Spotify (56%). In case of those social media that are most frequently used, it was mostly preadolescent themselves who opened the social media accounts (84% in case of Spotify, 77% in case of TikTok, 73% in case of Snapchat and 56% in case of YouTube). When parents were asked about the social media their child was using, the same social media were identified but with significantly lower incidence rates (e.g. 64% for YouTube, 56% for Snapchat and 27% for TikTok). Interestingly, 13% of parents reported their child was not using social media at all. Also, parents' responses about who opened a child's social media account are not fully consistent with preadolescents' responses: there is more variability in the parents' responses with a generally higher incidence of shared actions ("me and my child together"). Most parents (98%) also use social media themselves, but they use different social media than their children: 89% use Facebook, 72% YouTube, 48% Instagram and 36% WhatsApp.

3.2. Parental advice/guidance & dialogue

Table 5 below describes parental guidance in navigating the online risks. Preadolescents were asked how often their parents demonstrate those behaviors. Similarly, the parents themselves were asked how often they do those things with their children. The data reveals a significant gap between how parents perceive their involvement in guiding their children's internet use and how children experience it. While parents report high levels of engagement in areas like encouraging online exploration (92%), suggesting safety internet usage (97%), and explaining dangers (98%), preadolescents report much less engagement from the side of their parents. For instance, only 66% of preadolescents feel their parents encourage online exploration, and just 34% perceive their parents sitting with them while using the internet. Furthermore, while 97% of parents say they discuss what to do if something online bothers their child, only 51% of children agree. This suggests that parents may overestimate their involvement, particularly when it comes to joint activities like sitting together or discussing online issues. Overall, the data highlights the need for better communication between parents and children to bridge these perception gaps and ensure children feel more supported in their online experiences.

Table 5: When you use the internet, how often does your parent/carer do any of these things?

	Preadolescents	Parents
	% sometimes and often/very often	
a) Encourages me to explore and learn things on the internet	66	92
b) Suggests ways to use the internet safely	67	97
c) Sits with me while I'm using the internet	34	80
d) Talks with me about what to do if something online bothers or upsets me	51	97
e) Explains why some online content can be dangerous for me	73	98
f) Talks to me about the commercial activities I am exposed to online (for instance when someone tries to sell me something)	53	96

Next, table 6 below describes a few behaviors related to online safety and the use of internet, that might be exerted by preadolescents. Preadolescents were asked if they had ever done those things. Similarly, the parents were asked if their children had ever done those things. The data shows clear differences in how preadolescents and parents perceive their interactions regarding internet use. Preadolescents report telling parents about online issues (45%) and asking for advice (30%) less frequently than what parents reported; parents feel they are more often involved in these conversations (70% and 53%, respectively). Interestingly, preadolescents help parents more with internet tasks (82%) compared to what parents reported about their children’s assistance (49%). While arguments about internet usage seem less commonly perceived, 28% of preadolescents report occasional disagreements, compared to 43% of parents. These results highlight that preadolescents are more active in helping parents online, while parents perceive themselves as more involved in supporting and advising their children regarding online behavior and concerns.

Table 6: Have you EVER done any of these things?

	Preadolescents	Parents
	% sometimes and often/very often	
a) Told my parent/carer about things that bother or upset me on the internet	45	70
b) Helped my parent/carer to do something they found difficult on the internet	82	49
c) Argued with my parent/carer about what I do on the internet	28	43
d) Asked for my parent’s/carer’s advice on how I should act online	30	53

In addition, obedience to the rules and guidelines imposed by the parents were evaluated, as well as the perceptions regarding the parents’ concern and interest into a child’s behavior on social media. Preadolescents were asked how often they or their parents do any of those things described in the table 7 below. Similarly, the parents were asked how often they or their children do any of those things. The data reveals notable differences in how preadolescents and parents perceive their behavior and interest in social media usage. 45% of preadolescents report ignoring their parents' rules about internet usage, while 51% of parents believe this is the case. Regarding concern about time spent online, 68% of preadolescents feel their parents are concerned about their social media time, with 72% of parents reporting the concern, showing a slight alignment. However, there is a significant difference in interest, with 63% of preadolescents stating their parents are interested in their online activity, while 93% of parents report being interested.

Table 7: How often...?

	Preadolescents	Parents
	% sometimes and often/very often	
...do you ignore what your parent/carer tells you about how and when you can use the internet?	45	51
...are your parents concerned in how much time you spend on social media/online?	68	72
...are your parents interested in what you do on social media /online?	63	93

Parents generally feel competent in helping their children cope with disturbing or troubling online content and behavior. 54% of parents is convinced they can help their child in “a fair amount” and additional 34% believe they can help them “a lot”.

Parents are currently receiving information and advice on how to help and support their child through various sources, mostly in online articles and blogs dedicated to parenting and online safety (58%), at parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings or resources (50%), on educational websites and resources specifically focused on internet safety for children (48%), at the child's school or educational institution (38%), at parenting workshops or seminars organized by schools or community organizations (35%) etc. Current ways of receiving information are mostly aligned with their future requests. In the future, parents would want to receive information about online safety mostly at their child's school (70%), on websites (61%), from their child (32%) and on television (30%). Apparently, parents perceive their child’s school as an important agent in providing relevant information. 39% of parents think it would be useful to “a fair amount” if their child’s school provided an open space for discussion about parenting issues, including internet safety; additional 28% of parents feel this would be useful “a lot”.

3.3. Parental control / regulation

Regarding parental control and regulation, we were first interested to investigate what preadolescents are allowed to do online (on the internet). Preadolescents were asked whether their parents allow them to do the following things such as use a web camera, use a social media site, etc. Then, the parents were asked the same thing – if they allow their child to do those things. Table 8 below summarizes the percentages of preadolescents who are allowed to behave this way anytime. The data reveals significant discrepancies between preadolescents' and parents' reports regarding what children are allowed to do online. Across all listed activities, preadolescents report much greater freedom than parents acknowledge giving. For instance, 59% of preadolescents say they can use a phone camera anytime, compared to only 17% of parents who say they allow this. Similarly, 63% of preadolescents say they’re allowed to use social media anytime, while just 26% of parents agree. This pattern continues for watching videos (81% vs. 44%), playing online games (63% vs. 25%), and especially for sharing content online, where 37% of children say they’re free to do so, but only 6% of parents confirm this. These results suggest a large gap in parental awareness or control and may point to either rule-breaking by preadolescents or miscommunication/misunderstanding about boundaries set by parents.

Table 8: Does your parent/carer allow you to do the following things on the internet

	Preadolescents	Parents
	% allowed to do this anytime	
a) Use a web or phone camera (e.g., for Skype or video chat)	59	17
b) Use a social networking site (e.g., TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram)	63	26
c) Watch video clips (e.g., on YouTube)	81	44

d) Play games with other people online (e.g. Minecraft)	63	25
e) Share photos, videos or music online with others	37	6

Next, we were interested about the use of parental control mechanisms to monitor and regulate their child's online behavior. Preadolescents were asked if their parents use any of the following control mechanisms, including the rules about how much time they are allowed to spend online. Similarly, we asked the parents if they use any of the following control mechanisms. The data shows a consistent gap between what preadolescents perceive and what parents report when it comes to the use of parental control mechanisms. Parents report significantly higher use of monitoring and regulation tools than preadolescents acknowledge. For example, 67% of parents say they use blocking, filtering, or activity-tracking tools, while only 37% of preadolescents are aware of this. Similarly, 83% of parents report setting rules about when or how long their child can be online, compared to 46% of preadolescents. Use of services or contracts to limit time is also reported more frequently by parents (56%) than by preadolescents (31%). Even location-tracking technologies (e.g., GPS) show a discrepancy: 54% of parents say they use them, while only 40% of children say so. These findings suggest that preadolescents may not always be aware of the controls in place, or that some rules and restrictions may not be consistently enforced or communicated.

Table 9: Does your parent/carer make use of any of the following...?

	Preadolescents	Parents
	% YES	
a) Parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering or keeping track of my activities on the internet	37	67
b) Rules about how long or when I am allowed to go online	46	83
c) A service or contract that limits the time I spend on the internet	31	56
d) Technology to track where I am (such as GPS)	40	54

Most preadolescents (around 70-85%) reported that they respected the stated rules and forms of control imposed by their parents.

Half of surveyed preadolescents (51%) believe their parents sometimes, often or very often check on them after using the internet. Around 40% of preadolescents believe their parents never or hardly ever check on them afterwards. The responses of parents are rather different. They reported checking (% sometimes, often or very often):

- Which friends or contacts he/she added to his/her social networking profile (70%)
- The messages in his/her email or an app for communicating with people (72%)
- His/her profile on a social networking site or online group (69%)
- Which online content he/she viewed (81%)
- The apps he/she downloaded (83%)
- The in-app purchases he/she made (64%)

30% of preadolescents and 23% of parents reported they had an agreement on checking the child after using the internet (e.g. to check once a day). Another 31% of preadolescents and 14% of parents reported the parents to ask for permission every time they want to check on the child after using the internet. Another 44% of parents reported they had no prior agreement on that, but they do it anyway and their child(ren) know(s) about it.

Preadolescents believe their parents have been checking on them after using the internet because they are concerned for their safety and care for their protection. Preadolescents do not associate parental control with invasion into their privacy. When asked how it feels being supervised and monitored by their parents, preadolescents mostly shared neutral or even positive impressions. 45% of them reported they felt cared for and another 30% of them reported they felt protected. They also reported feeling nothing special (36%), important (22%) or embarrassed (21%).

When preadolescents were asked how much their parents know what they do online, 14% of preadolescents said "nothing", 34% said "just a little", 31% responded "quite a bit" and 15% chose "a lot". Parents were asked the same question, and their responses were rather different. 42% of parents believe they know "a lot", 47% "quite a bit" and 10% of parents feel they know "just a little" about their child's online behavior.

56% of preadolescents believe the level of their parents' involvement should remain the same, 33% feel they should be less involved and only 3% of preadolescents want their parents to be more involved in their online activities and behaviors. When asked to elaborate on their viewpoint regarding their parents' involvement, they mostly provided the following reasons: 1) a desire for more privacy and autonomy in their online activities (e.g. "Because it's my privacy and I don't see the point in them reading every conversation between me and my friends."; "Because I'm old enough to know what's right and wrong."); 2) the belief in the adequacy of current level of parental control (e.g. "Because it's okay like this."); 3) the belief that their parents try to protect them (e.g. "Because I understand why they're protecting me."; "Because they care about what I'm doing."); 4) the feeling of excessive monitoring or interference (e.g. "They check my phone too often."; "When I'm doing something or watching something, they take it away and I can't continue.").

3.4. Experience with difficult / unpleasant situations online

According to preadolescents, 15% of respondents had an unpleasant experience that happened online and bothered or upset them in the past year (e.g., made them feel upset, uncomfortable, scared or that they shouldn't have seen it). These were mostly related to: 1) online threats, misinformation, and scary content; 2) cyberbullying, harassment (online predators and dangerous interactions with strangers), and inappropriate, violent, or sexual content; 3) technical issues, gaming frustrations, and internet problems. Of those who experienced the incident, 34% reported it happened only once, 31% reported it happened a few times and 10% reported it happened at least every month in the past year.

Among those who had unpleasant online experience(s), 45% talked to their parents, 41% to a peer (a friend around their age), 28% to their brothers/sisters and additional 28% did not talk to anyone. As a response to an unpleasant situation, more than half of the preadolescents blocked the person from contacting them (52%). Other frequent responses were ignoring the problem or hoping the problem would go away by itself (28%), refraining from using the internet for a while (24%), trying to get the other person to leave them alone (17%) etc.

After being exposed to an unpleasant situation online, preadolescents felt excited (48%), afraid (34%), embarrassed (34%), astonished (31%), angry (31%), helpless (31%) and/or disgusted (31%).

Similar questions about their child's unpleasant online experiences have also been asked to the parents. 15% of parents reported their child had unpleasant online experience(s) in the past year. These were the most common issues: 1) cyberbullying, verbal abuse, and harassment (e.g. insults, negative comments, and verbal abuse in group chats); 2) exposure to inappropriate and violent content (e.g. ads and videos with violent content); 3) unwanted communication with strangers (e.g. unknown individuals messaging children on Viber); 4) conflicts and pressure in online communication (e.g. impatient or pushy classmates demanding things via messages). Of those parents who reported the unpleasant incident, 24% said it happened only once and an additional 69% confirmed it happened a few times.

After a child told their parents about things that bothered or upset them on the Internet, most parents responded by engaging in open and non-judgmental communication to understand the child's experience (81%). Other frequent responses were encouraging the child to take breaks from digital devices and engage in offline activities (59%), teaching the child strategies for dealing with online conflicts and challenges (41%) and fostering a supportive environment at home to help the child cope emotionally (37%).

3.5. Teachers' perspectives²

30 out of 33 teachers daily or almost daily use their smartphone to access the internet, 32 teachers use a computer, 15 use a television and only 2 out of 33 teachers daily or almost daily use a tablet to access the internet. During a regular weekday, 9 out of 33 teachers spend up to one hour on the internet, 8 spend two hours, 10 spend three hours and 6 out of 33 teachers spend four or more hours online. During a weekend, 15 out of 33 teachers spend up to one hour on the internet, 6 spend two hours, 5 spend three hours and 7 out of 33 teachers spend four or more hours online. Teachers spend somewhat less time online during the weekend compared to the regular working days.

Only 3 out of 34 surveyed teachers do not use social media at all. Most teachers use Facebook (23 teachers), YouTube (23 teachers) and Instagram (15 teachers).

Teachers were asked how often they have done any of the following actions related to online behavior of children at their school in the past year. The data show that teachers sometimes, often or very often:

- Suggested their students ways to use the internet safely (31 out of 31 teachers),
- Explained how to recognize disinformation online (29 out of 31 teachers),
- Instructed their students how to find reliable sources of information on the internet (29 out of 31 teachers).
- Explained why some online content is good or bad (28 out of 31 teachers),
- In general, talked to their students about what to do if something online ever bothered them (28 out of 31 teachers),

² As the sample of teachers was small (below 100 units), no percentages were calculated.

- Encouraged their students to explore and learn things on the internet (27 out of 31 teachers),
- Made rules about what the students can do on the internet at school (27 out of 31 teachers),
- Helped their students when they found something difficult to do or find on the internet (26 out of 31 teachers),
- Helped their students in the past when something has bothered them on the internet (23 out of 31 teachers).

Next, teachers were also asked if students have consulted them regarding their online challenges in the past year. The data show that preadolescents sometimes, often or very often:

- Started a discussion with the teacher about what they do on the internet (23 out of 31 teachers),
- Told the teacher about things that bother or upset them on the internet (21 out of 31 teachers),
- Helped the teacher do something they found difficult on the internet (21 out of 31 teachers),
- Asked about something that they have seen advertised online (19 out of 31 teachers),
- Asked for advice on how they should act online (14 out of 31 teachers),
- Asked for help with a situation on the internet that they could not handle (12 out of 31 teachers).

Teachers, whom children consulted with regarding their unpleasant online experiences, further elaborated on the specifics of those incidents. Teachers' responses can be classified into several categories: 1) offensive, hostile, or inappropriate content directed at preadolescents (e.g. "name-calling on social media"; "hate speech"; "threats or verbal violence"); 2) sharing and posting photos without permission (e.g. "inappropriate photos of other students being shared"); 3) exclusion from groups and social isolation (e.g. "exclusion from a Snapchat group... because she didn't participate in gossiping"; "students formed two groups and engaged in hostile and inappropriate chats"); 4) sensitive content and inappropriate materials (e.g. "we talked about the dark web... students said it's both entertaining and worrying").

After being approached by the preadolescents regarding their unpleasant online experiences, most teachers responded in the following ways: provided emotional support and a safe space for the child to talk about their experiences (16 out of 21 teachers), engaged in conflict resolution and mediated between students involved (11 out of 21 teachers), contacted the child's parents or guardians to discuss the situation (10 out of 21 teachers), offered guidance on responsible internet and social media use (10 out of 21 teachers), collaborated with school counsellors to provide additional support (10 out of 21 teachers). Most teachers feel confident about their ability to help their students cope with unpleasant online experiences: 17 out of 31 teachers feel they can provide "a fair amount" of help, 4 out of 31 teachers feel they can help them "a lot" and additional 7 out of 31 teachers believes they "cannot provide much help".

Teachers are divided in their opinion about how comfortable preadolescents feel discussing their online experiences with them: 14 out of 31 teachers believe preadolescents feel quite or totally comfortable, while 15 out of 31 teachers believe preadolescents feel quite uncomfortable talking to them. Teachers believe students are willing to discuss their online experiences when they feel trust toward the teacher or when they feel they will be understood and supported (e.g. "Because several students of different ages have already recognized me as a trustworthy, compassionate person who

cares and has a fair, impartial approach."). Also, according to teachers' opinions, preadolescents are willing to talk if encouraged or in moments of distress (e.g. "They are willing if they feel distress."). On the other hand, preadolescents wouldn't talk to the teacher, if they feel embarrassed, if they're afraid their parents will find out or if they simply do not feel the need to talk about the internet or believe it's their private matter, unrelated to school (e.g. "Students believe they are already well-informed and don't need reminders.").

Teachers were also asked where and how they are currently receiving information and advice on how to help and support a child on the internet. Most teachers are receiving this information at professional development workshops or training sessions provided by the school (25 out of 31 teachers), from colleague collaboration and sharing of best practices (21 out of 31 teachers), on educational websites and online resources (18 out of 31 teachers) and at educational conferences or seminars on online safety (17 out of 31 teachers). Current modes of receiving relevant information are highly aligned with what they wish for in the future; besides the currently relevant modes of information, they also highlighted the need for receiving guidance from school counsellors or support staff (13 out of 31 teachers).

Most teachers feel that contents of online safety (20 out of 31 teachers), online risks (21 out of 31 teachers) and digital literacy (17 out of 31 teachers) are not properly represented in the current school curriculum. Only 6 out of 31 teachers confirmed that topics related to online safety, online risks or digital literacy are well-represented in the curriculum of the subject(s) they teach. Teachers in general hold positive perceptions regarding their school's endeavors to contribute to online safety and to promote safe/responsible behaviors on the Internet among the preadolescents: 15 out of 30 teachers assessed those endeavors as "excellent" and 12 out of 30 teachers assessed them as "satisfactory". However, they provided a few suggestions of what to improve in the future, for instance increasing the number of classroom hours, workshops, and preventive activities dedicated to safe and responsible internet use; involving parents and external experts (e.g. "Include parents in education alongside children."); focusing on building long-term digital skills and critical evaluation of online content among both students and teachers (e.g. "Encourage critical thinking about the online content they watch/read.").

3.6. Conclusions

- Preadolescents are highly digitally connected: 98% of preadolescents own a personal smartphone, and nearly half received it before the age of 10.
- Preadolescents spend substantial time online: on school days, 30% of preadolescents are online 4+ hours daily; on weekends, this rises to 50%.
- Social media use is almost universal among preadolescents: they mostly use YouTube (93%), Snapchat (71%), TikTok (56%), and Spotify (56%) – different social media platforms than the parents are using, highlighting a generational digital divide.
- Early smartphone ownership and use are driven by both practical needs and social pressures. Parents cited four key reasons for giving a child a smartphone: communication, safety and emergency reachability, fostering independence, and peer conformity / digital participation.

- There is a significant perception gap between parents and preadolescents about the level of parental involvement: while parents report high levels of engagement in discussing online risks and supporting their child’s internet use, preadolescents perceive considerably less involvement.
- Preadolescents are more likely to help their parents with online tasks than ask them for support. 82% of preadolescents say they help their parents with internet use, but only 49% of parents recognize this. Conversely, fewer preadolescents report asking their parents for advice (30%) than parents report being asked (53%). This suggests a reversal of expected roles in some cases, with children acting as digital guides.
- Schools are seen as key partners in supporting parents with online safety education: most parents also believe that schools offering open discussions about parenting and internet safety would be useful.
- Significant discrepancies exist between preadolescents’ and parents’ perceptions of online freedom: preadolescents report having much more unrestricted access to online activities than what parents claim they allow. For instance, 63% of children say they can use social media anytime, compared to only 26% of parents. This points to either limited parental awareness, miscommunication, or lack of consistent rule enforcement.
- Children mostly accept and follow their parents’ rules about the use of smartphones and do not feel that monitoring is intrusive—many even describe it positively as "care" or "protection." However, a third (33%) would prefer less parental involvement, often citing a desire for more independence and privacy in their online interactions.
- Parents believe they are highly informed about their child’s online behavior, while preadolescents claim this is not the case. This mismatch may reflect a communication gap or differing standards for what “knowing” means and could impact trust and effectiveness of parental guidance.
- Around 15% of preadolescents encountered unpleasant or upsetting experiences online in the past year, most commonly involving cyberbullying, scary or inappropriate content, or online threats—indicating that online risks are a reality for a significant minority of children. Although many children confided in parents or peers, 28% did not tell anyone about the incident, showing that a notable portion of preadolescents may be dealing with online harm alone, underscoring the importance of open communication and support.
- Most teachers frequently talk to students about online safety, misinformation, and responsible internet use. However, a majority feel that online safety, risks, and digital literacy are underrepresented in the current curriculum, highlighting a clear disconnect between teaching efforts and institutional support.
- A substantial number of preadolescents turn to teachers with online concerns. However, teachers are divided on whether students feel comfortable doing so, with trust and emotional safety being critical for open communication. Embarrassment and fear of parental involvement often prevent students from speaking up.

- Teachers already receive guidance via school workshops, peer exchanges, and online resources, and wish to expand this with more involvement from school counsellors and external experts. They also see a strong need to include parents in digital education efforts and suggest increasing class time and preventive programs on digital well-being.

4. Conclusions

The key findings of both qualitative and quantitative research have imposed clear implications for the design and development of ASAP Educational Program. The research clearly supports a program that is:

- Interactive and participatory – preadolescents (but also parents) want to be included, not just instructed.
- Emotionally grounded – preadolescents need tools for resilience and coping, not just rules how to behave and how not to behave.
- Relationally focused – real change requires bridging the divide between preadolescents, parents, and teachers.
- Curriculum-enhancing – teachers need support and structure, and this program can offer that in practical terms.

The results have also identified a few common themes that could be addressed by the ASAP Educational Program:

1. EMOTIONS

Preadolescents experience a wide range of intense emotions after unpleasant online experiences (fear, embarrassment, anger, helplessness, etc.). Preadolescents often don't talk to anyone about these experiences and emotional safety was a recurring theme across all qualitative groups. Teachers and parents both struggle to address the emotional aspect, despite trying to offer support.

Program relevance: Teaching emotional recognition and regulation can build resilience and normalize emotional responses to online harm.

2. COMMUNICATION

Communication gaps exist between preadolescents and adults (parents often overestimate involvement; preadolescents underreport). Preadolescents do not always feel comfortable talking to teachers or parents, especially due to fear or embarrassment. Many preadolescents prefer to turn to peers or no one at all for support.

Program relevance: The program should address open dialogue skills, reduce stigma around digital problems, and equip preadolescents to seek help constructively. It should also improve family communication strategies—parents need support in how to talk with their children.

3. AUTHENTICITY

Teachers are actively teaching online misinformation, source credibility, and safe browsing—but feel the curriculum doesn't support this enough. Preadolescents encounter misinformation, inappropriate content, and online threats frequently. In addition, parents and preadolescent use different platforms, creating a generational digital literacy divide.

Program relevance: The program should address critical thinking and media literacy, filling curriculum gaps while reinforcing teacher efforts. It should help preadolescents evaluate what is real, safe, and reliable online, which is key for coping with contemporary online risks and challenges.

FIELD RESEARCH

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 Slovenia 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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