THE RELEVANCE OF WORKING ON CRITICAL AND SAFE INTERNET USE IN THE SCHOOL AS A KEY TO STRENGTHEN DIGITAL COMPETENCE

La relevancia de trabajar el uso crítico y seguro de internet en el ámbito escolar como clave para fortalecer la competencia digital

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the Internet have become indispensable means for the daily life of almost all sectors of the population. Likewise, digital development has had a great impact on the younger population and, due to the frequent and continuous use of ICT, children are exposed daily to the multiple risks that exist in the network. This work has collected data, answers, attitudes and perceptions about the habits of use of ICT, the risks of the internet and the relevance of working on this topic in the school. For this purpose, a training action

has been designed and implemented with fifth year grade Primary Education students. The results have corroborated that the use of ICT and Internet connectivity are part of the day-to-day life of the adolescent population but that they lack the necessary maturity to deal with the conflicting situations that they will have to face in the network. At the same time, the students have valued positively the formative action and that confirms the relevance of working on security aspects related to digital competence in the school.

Key words: ICT, internet, digital competence, security, Primary Education, minor population

RESUMEN
Las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC) e internet se han convertido en medios imprescindibles para la vida cotidiana de casi todos los sectores de la población. Asimismo, el desarrollo digital ha causado un gran impacto en la población más joven y, debido al uso frecuente y continuado de las TIC, las y los menores de edad están expuestos diariamente a los múltiples riesgos existentes en la red. El trabajo ha recogido datos, respuestas, actitudes y percepciones sobre los hábitos de uso de las TIC, los riesgos de internet y la relevancia de trabajar la temática en el ámbito escolar. Para ello, se ha diseñado y llevado a la práctica una acción formativa con alumnado de quinto curso de Educación Primaria. Los resultados han corroborado que el uso de las TIC y la conectividad a internet forman parte del día a día de la población adolescente pero que carecen de la madurez necesaria para responder ante las situaciones conflictivas a las que se enfrentarán en la red. A su vez, el alumnado ha valorado positivamente la acción formativa y se confirma la relevancia de trabajar aspectos de la seguridad referentes a la competencia digital en el ámbito escolar.

Palabras clave: TIC, internet, competencia digital, seguridad, Educación Primaria, población menor de edad

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in a liquid reality of constant change and evolution, largely due to the impact of digital technologies (Gabarda, Orellana & Carbonell, 2017). Advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have changed the way in which we access information, work, communicate, entertain ourselves and even relate with each other (Muñoz-Miralles et al., 2014).

As a result, internet cannot be considered a parallel reality nowadays, and the use of ICT has become the main part of almost all aspects of our daily lives (Calvo & Ospina, 2014; García, 2016).

1.1. CURRENT SCENARIO OF THE USE OF ICT AND INTERNET

According to the latest Digital Society and Economy Market which is created annually by the European Commission (2017), 74% of the European households have broadband internet connection, and one third of these are high-speed connections (over 30 Mbps).

On the other hand, the number of people who use the internet on a regular basis increases year after year. During the year 2016, 79% of the European population has connected to the internet at least once a week, and the purposes of said connection have been very varied: reading the news (70%), buying products online (66%), using social networks (63%), online banking (59%) or making video-calls (39%) (European Commission, 2017).

In Spain, according to the last annual report of the survey on equipment and use of information and communication technologies in the household made by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) (2016), the figures are very similar. In the last five years there has been a significant increase in the number of households with broadband internet connection, which reached 81.2% in 2016 (a 3.4% variation with regard to 2015), and 76.5% of the population uses online services frequently (1.8% more than in 2015).

1.2. THE YOUNGEST POPULATION SECTOR ON THE INTERNET

Technological advances and the expansion of the internet have had a major impact among the youngest population. The most recent studies show that ICT is an important part of their lives (EU Kids Online, 2014; Holloway, Green & Livingstone, 2016; Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014; Protégeles, 2014).

These data reveal that minors use ICT on a regular basis: 95.2% of the population between 10 and 15 years old frequently uses the internet, and 69.8% have their own mobile phone (INE, 2016). Most of them connect to the internet every day, and the average daily use of mobile and computer is 1-2 hours (Arnaiz, Cerezo, Giménez, & Maquilón, 2016; Fernández-Montalvo, Peñalva, & Idiazabal, 2015; Rial, Gómez, Braña, & Varela, 2014).

The main goal of these connections is entertainment (visiting and using social networks, listening to music, watching and sharing videos and communicating with their peers). Therefore, in most cases the population of children and adolescents thinks of technologies as a source of fun and entertainment (EU Kids Online, 2014; INTEF, 2016; Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014).

Also, as they are constantly in contact with a large amount of digital tools, the access to and use of ICT by minors takes place at an increasingly early age and with growing regularity (INTEF, 2016; Ólafsson, Livingstone & Haddon, 2013). Being an internet user before age 9 is nowadays a common reality (Rial et al., 2014).

1.3. INTERNET: BENEFITS AND RISKS

Undoubtedly, the virtual world offers internet users endless possibilities and opportunities for their academic and/or working development, and even for the growth and improvement of their personal relationships (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Muñoz-Miralles et al., 2014).

Even so, the available data warn us of the numerous risks associated with the use of ICT, and more specifically of the internet. The network is characterized by its accessibility, its high stimulation and the feeling of anonymity it provides, and these features may promote an unsafe and/or irresponsible use of technology (Caro & Plaza, 2016).

In sum, although the benefits that it offers often make us forget the responsibility behind each click, the internet has some risks. Using it without the necessary awareness may lead to situations of conflict and danger, and it can have severe consequences (Rial et al., 2014).

1.4. THE UNDERAGE POPULATION, THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUP

As we have said before, access to ICT and the internet takes place at increasingly early ages. This phenomenon has a clear side effect: the younger population cannot be left out of the disadvantages, risks and conflicts that the digital world involves.

Minors often find themselves in troubling and dangerous situations when using technology. The following are some of the most common risks (Arnaiz et al., 2016; EU Kids Online, 2014; Protégeles, 2014; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013; Sevcíkova, 2016):

- Cyberbullying: harassment among schoolchildren using digital communication.
- Sexting: exchanging and forwarding sexually explicit messages and/or contents over the internet.
- Grooming: sexual molestation by an adult who uses the internet and pretends to be a younger person.

- Sextortion: extorting and/or threatening the privacy of a person based on the possession of an intimate picture of the victim. It is intimately associated with sexting and grooming, and partly with cyberbullying.
- Access to inadequate content: drugs, weapons, eating disorders, suicide, racism, etc.
- Dependence or addiction: excessive and damaging use of the internet that affects negatively the development of the individual and reduces their quality of life.

In this regard, the available data are a warning sign that cannot be overlooked: 44% of the underage population have been the victim of online sexual harassment at some point; 33.3% have had contact with strangers; 32% are at risk of becoming cyberaddicted; 13% have been attacked, ridiculed or humiliated by others through the internet; and 9% have set up and then gone to a physical date with someone they only knew online (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Bayraktar, Barbovschi, & Kontrikova, 2016; Fernández-Montalvo et al., 2015; Protégeles, 2014).

Also, these risks are closely connected with the notions of privacy, identity and well-being, and their consequences can be extremely harmful (Echeburúa & De Corral, 2010). Bad online experiences can be detrimental to their image, identity, development and well-being, both at a physical and a psychological level, and they can lead to different symptoms related to depression, anger, anxiety, risk behaviors or a deterioration of self-esteem (Devine & Lloyd, 2012; Garaigordobil, 2011).

Nevertheless, the main problem focuses on the fact that the underage population does not know how to manage the abovementioned situations. In general terms, although teenagers show confidence in their experiences and believe that they have the capacity to confront them (Garmendia et al., 2013), they show a lack of technical, critical and social abilities to deal with the conflict situations that take place repeatedly on the internet (INTEF, 2016).

In other words, the younger population is not aware of the online risks, lacks the necessary maturity and does not know the steps to follow in order to face the threats of connectivity.

For example, when they are asked about the conflict situations that most upset or worry them, most of them mention contact with strangers and the visualization of inadequate contents (Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014). Although they go through different negative experiences when they use these technologies, they omit all the conflict situations related to privacy or harassment when they describe their risks.

Moreover, teenagers admit that they follow different unsafe practices although they are aware of their high level of risk. Accepting an invitation from a stranger, revealing a large amount of private information publicly, etc., are part of the daily activities of teenagers (Ballesta, Lozano, Cerezo, & Soriano, 2015; McCarty, Prawitz, Derscheid, & Montgomery, 2011).

Therefore, the underage population is, in many senses, the most vulnerable group to the risks associated to the use of ICT, and more specifically, to an excessive and conflictive use of the internet (Echeburúa & De corral, 2010; Škarupová, Ólafsson, & Blinka, 2015).

1.5. DIGITAL COMPETENCE, THE KEY FOR A SAFE AND CRITICAL USE

Over the last years, the risks of the internet, their severe consequences and the lack of maturity of the younger population are some of the major concerns to families, as well as to the fields of psychology and pedagogy (Caro & Plaza, 2016). Therefore, digital competence has gained relevance as a strategy to reinforce prevention and promote a critical, responsible and safe use of technology.

Digital competence is considered one of the basic competences for lifelong learning, according to the European Parliament (2006/62/CE). Digital competence must guarantee a safe and critical use of ICT at work, and also for leisure and communication purposes.

For its part, the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) of the European Commission proposed the creation of the DIGCOMP common framework for digital competence (European Commission, 2013). This document describes the areas that are part of the general framework for digital competence, and it includes different sub-competences related to safety: «Personal protection, digital identity protection, security measures, and safe and sustainable use» (INTEF, 2017, p. 21).

Indeed, technology requires information and guidance so that it can be of service to users and to the common good. In view of this situation, schools cannot turn their back to reality and it is essential to have spaces to work on privacy management, the risks of the internet and awareness of digital identity (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Gómez-Ortiz, Del Casas, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2014; Rial et al., 2014).

In fact, schools, together with families, must emphasize a long-term education approach that can guarantee the development of the digital autonomy of students. Training, critical reflection and ethical values have to empower the underage population against the potential threats involved in the use of ICT to promote its benefits (Gabarda et al., 2017).

1.6. TRAINING INITIATIVES FOR A HEALTHY USE IN SCHOOLS

Some schools that are aware of the importance of this subject are sensitized to the problem and create teaching proposals to prevent the risks involved in the use of the internet and to discuss digital identity in the classroom. However, the implementation of initiatives related to a healthy use of ICT in the schools is still an unresolved matter (Garaigordobil, 2015).

Therefore, this work is based on the design and practice of a training initiative to promote the safe and critical use of ICT, and particularly of the internet. The training initiative took place along three sessions and was targeted at fifth-year Primary Education students in a school of the Public Education system of the Basque Country in Vitoria-Gasteiz.

2. OBJECTIVES

Our goal was to gain a better understanding of the digital reality of the underage population, and also to assess the implementation of specific programs for risk prevention. In this sense, we have tried to confirm the need and the importance of working on the existing risks on the internet at schools.

Therefore, this work has had the following objectives:

2.1. Identifying the habits in ICT use and the qualities of the experiences associated to the use of the internet in fifth-year Primary Education students.

2.2. Establishing the perception of risk while using ICT and the internet of fifth-year Primary Education students.

2.3. Assessing the implementation and transcendence of specific training initiatives about the risks of the internet at school.

2.4. Confirming the relevance of working on the prevention and safe use of ICT at school.

3. METHODS

In line with these objectives, this study has attempted to act on the social reality of the underage population by making questions with a practical repercussion in the short term.

To do so, once that the problematic situation has been diagnosed research has been done by combining different techniques and strategies for information collection. The reason for this choice is that action research is «[…] the best way to deal with the problems of society, mainly when the goal is to analyze reality in order to improve it» (Pérez, 2014, p. 10).

Research has been targeted at action in order to understand the interactive relationships between theory and practice. In turn, action has been focused on the critical resolution of a problematic situation that emerges from the relationship between the young population and ICT use, as well as from the need of schools to work on this topic in the classroom. All of this has been based on a training initiative divided into three sessions for the promotion of a critical and safe use of ICT, and mainly of the internet.

Throughout the training initiative, the researcher has been involved with and taken part of the teaching group, and she has had an active and participatory role. Therefore, apart from the results, the process itself has become a key element for the development of the study.

3.1.   PARTICIPANTS

The training initiative has been implemented in a public school located in Vitoria-Gasteiz. In total, 67 fifth-year Primary Education students from both sexes have been included in the study. They were divided into 3 groups with a balanced sex ratio (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample divided into groups and sex

	Group 5D1	Group 5D2	Group 5D3	Total	
Girls	8	14	12	34	50.75%
Boys	14	13	6	33	49. 25%
Total	22	27	18	67	

Source: Compiled by author

3.2.   TOOLS

Given the nature of the study, and in order to obtain different perspectives on the same reality, tools from different typologies have been used:

- Online «ad hoc» questionnaire that was completed individually and anonymously at the beginning of the process by the students. It includes ten open questions regarding the age in which they started, the devices they use to access the internet and the time they spend using ICT, as well as the experiences that they lived online. The categories shown in the graphics are based on the responses collected.
- Field notes to keep a register of the relevant information or personal notes that emerged during the development of the training initiative.
- Audio recordings and transcription of each of the sessions in the initiative.
- Observation table to collect responses and attitudes associated to the training initiative according to the pre-established categories.
- Online «ad hoc» questionnaire to complete individually and anonymously at the end of the process by the students, in order to assess the practical value of the training initiative. The questionnaire includes five open questions to assess the interest and attitude of the students regarding digital competences and the usefulness of the sessions, as well as the need that students perceive for working at school on the prevention of risks that using the internet may have.

3.3. PROCEDURE

First of all, the research team met the person in charge of the ICT coordination and training of the school. In the meeting, the details of the training proposal and the schedule of the sessions were discussed. Also, the necessary authorizations were obtained to make audio recordings in the classroom.

One week before the start of the training initiative, the students completed the first online questionnaire about their ICT use habits and the experiences they lived on the internet. They did it individually and anonymously. The research team collected and analyzed the data to obtain a first qualitative image of the digital reality of the sample of participants.

The training initiative was divided into three 45-minute sessions. The sessions were organized weekly and implemented in the month of March 2016. Each session was repeated with each of the three groups.

The main goal of the training initiative was to raise awareness among fifth-year Primary Education students of a critical and safe use of ICT. The first session was used to identify the different risks involved in connectivity; the second one analyzed the construction, impact and relevance of the digital identity; and the third one reinforced the necessary preventive measures to ensure safe use and digital autonomy (Table 2).

Table 2. Sessions and contents of the training initiative

Session	Contents
1st session: risks of the internet	Use habits Main risks of the internet: cyberbullying, sexting, grooming, inadequate contents and addiction
2nd session: digital identity	Construction, impact and relevance Consequences of out-of-context information and rumors
3rd session: preventive measures for a critical and safe use	Preventive measures for a critical and safe use Response and resolution of conflict situations Interest and relevance of the subject

Source: Compiled by author

All of this has been carried out through attractive and enjoyable activities, debates in large and in small groups, games of analysis and constructive reflection processes. At all times, the students have been the main agents in the action and group participation has been an essential element.

Audio recordings have been made during the sessions, and field notes on the development of the initiative have been taken. Apart from directing and conducting the training initiative, the research team has played a role as observers.

At the end of the training initiative, the students have completed the online assessment questionnaire, individually and anonymously.

3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

The responses given by the students regarding ICT use habits and experiences lived online, as well as their assessment of the training initiative itself through the questionnaires, the observations and the field notes that have been collected have had a different nature.

In the case of qualitative information, the categories emerged as a result of the contrast and triangulation among the researchers, who generated an information analysis tool with hierarchical axial

encoding through the qualitative analysis software NVivo 11 Plus (See category system, Table 3). This analysis tool was helpful to organize and classify the information collected, and it was also useful to provide a structure to the results section.

With regard to numerical answers, they have been treated with calculation processing software, with basic statistical operations.

Triangulation among the different tools was applied to ensure the veracity of the information collected.

Table 3. Category system

Category	Subcategory
Use habits and experiences lived online	Tools Use: frequency and objectives Profiles in social networks Negative experiences and their qualities
Risks	Risk awareness and perception Grooming: Contact with strangers Sexting: Awareness and respect Inadequate contents: types and responses Cyberbullying: participants, consequences, respect and assistance Addiction: control
Digital identity	Construction, impact and relevance Consequences of out-of-context information and rumors
Preventive measures	Preventive measures for a critical and safe use Response and resolution of conflict situations Training Interest and relevance of the subject

Source: Compiled by author

4. RESULTS

In the case of the Primary Education groups that were analyzed, the data from the first questionnaire reveal that the use of ICT is a common activity for all the students. Most of them (65%) started using digital technologies autonomously and on a regular basis over the last two years (Figure 1), with an average age of start of ICT use of 8.5 years. 31% use technological devices every day and 24% almost every day (Figure 2).
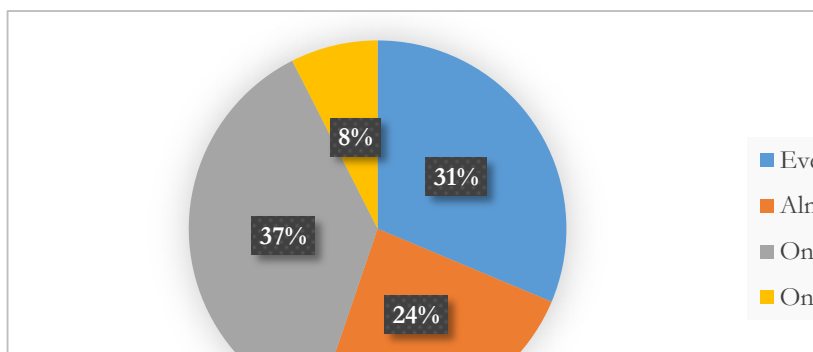
Figure 1. Start of ICT use.
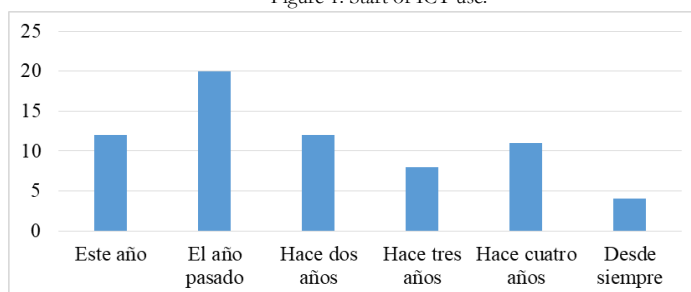
Source: Compiled by author

Figure 2. Frequency of use.

Source: Compiled by author

The use of internet is also common and frequent among the younger sectors of the population. Although in general terms the most commonly used tool to access the internet is the family computer, many of them (48.3%) go online through personal devices such as tablets or mobile phones (Figure 3). In spite of the young age of the students, there is a common use of personal devices compared with family-shared devices.

Figure 3. Devices used for internet access
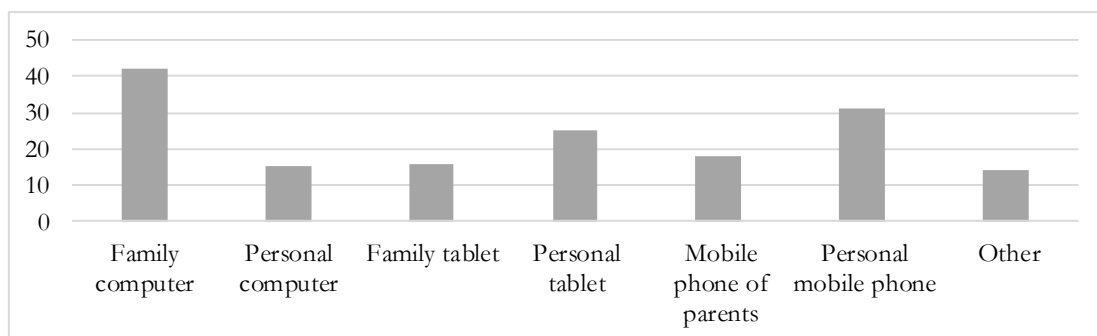
Source: Compiled by author

When asked about the frequency of internet use, the students admit that they go online a lot, every day. 35% are connected between one and two hours per day, and 42% are connected under one hour. Although they are a minority, it is important to highlight that part of the sample spend two to three hours online, or even more than three hours every day (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Time connected to the internet every day.
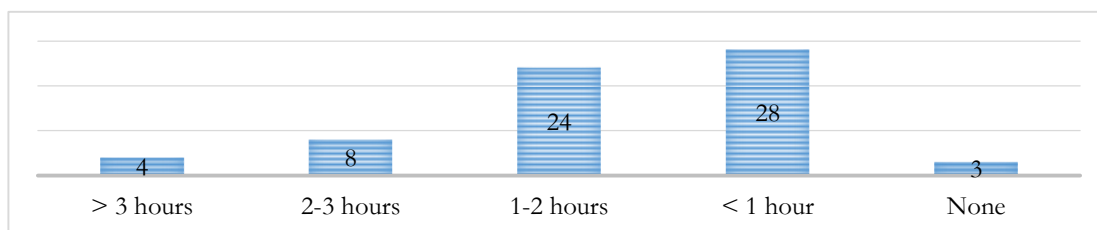
Source: Compiled by author

Most of the students report that they use the internet to do their homework, search for information, play, watch videos and/or communicate with their peers. For this last activity, there were a significant number of mentions to the use of the WhatsApp Messenger service, in which groups of users play a prominent role.

> «I use the internet to play, watch videos and see WhatsApp groups.» (Girl, 1st session)

With regard to negative experiences related to the use of the internet, in spite of their young age and limited experience online, half of the students (43%) report having lived some of them. Some of the conflict situations that are brought up repeatedly are the visualization of inadequate images or messages and having contact with strangers.

> «While we were using the computer in a friends' house, a naked girl showed up on the screen and said: 'I was waiting for you'.» (Boy, 2nd session)

> «My friend receives messages from a stranger. He tells her to go to a square to meet him. She is my age. She told her parents, but I don't think they did anything about it.» (Girl, 1st session).

However, the perception of risk in the underage population is very different. According to the students who participated in the initiative, the main risks of the internet are viruses and the theft of personal information by a hacker. Only a minority of them include inadequate contents or contact with strangers in the list of risks.

> «When a hacker goes into your computer, they can access personal information and images without your consent.» (Girl, 1st session)

> «Yesterday, when I turned on my computer, someone else was using my account.» (Girl, 1st session)

> «On Facebook we can find people who lie. They may say that they are a girl, but they are actually a boy.» (Girl, 3rd session)

Similarly, 22% admits that they did not finish part of their homework because they stayed online. When this happens, homework is always affected the most. On the other hand, and as we will detail below, this practice is not perceived as harmful.

When discussing the different risks, students showed that they knew about them. In the case of sexting and/or grooming there were contradictory opinions; with regard to cyberbullying and inadequate contents, they highlight the importance of having assistance from their families; and finally, addiction is not perceived as a risk.

Most of the students report that when sending personal information or photographs to a stranger «we do not know who that person is and what he or she may do with the contents». They even add that «when we send a photograph, we lose control over it and the other person can do what he or she wants with it (forward it, publish it…)».

However, the practice of sending photographs is widespread among the underage population, and they do not consider it a risk unless the contents of that information/photograph are very intimate or private, such as a naked photograph.

> «If you are not naked, sending pictures is not wrong.» (Boy, 1st session)

> «If we send a photo as we are (dressed), it's OK. But if you are naked it is dangerous because they can forward it to more people or publish it online.» (Girl, 3rd session)

This kind of statements separates the theoretical knowledge of risks from a safe use of the internet. The underage population is aware of the risks involved in the use of the internet, and more specifically of certain practices. On the contrary, they do not perceive the threats that are described at a theoretical and discursive level as part of their daily practices and/or ICT use.

On the other hand, inadequate contents are, according to the participants, «another risk of the internet». The young sector of the population is acutely aware that during their connection and use of the internet they will very likely see «content that they do not look for or want».

In view of this conflict, most of them emphasize the importance and need of parental control and/or assistance. However, there are participants that do not refer these situations to their relatives for fear of reprisals.

«Control is beneficial for us.» (Boy, 2nd session)

«If I tell my parents that I found something inadequate, they think that I looked for it on purpose, and they would ground me for doing bad things.» (Girl, 1st session)

With regard to cyberbullying, it is a concept that all students are familiar with. They find it easy to draw a connection with real situations and, therefore, they are aware of the severity of the potential consequences. Similarly, they know that out-of-context information and rumors are harmful and can be very damaging.

«Cyberbullying is bullying that is done on the internet. It is very dangerous and there are people that even commit suicide.» (Boy, 3rd session)

«Spreading rumors about other people is dangerous, offensive and harmful.» (Boy, 2nd session)

In cases of harassment, 87.5% of the students state that it is essential to ask for help. In any case, there is still part of them (12.5%) who think that «talking about it can cause more attacks and/or harassment» or that «telling it to the teachers is not going to fix anything».

It is worth adding that working on dependence or addiction to the internet has not been easy. Many of them do not perceive addiction as a risk, and connection without control is widespread among the underage population.

«I take my mobile phone to bed and connect to the internet without my parents' permission» (Girl, 1st session)

«If you are connected all night long it's OK. The only problem is that the next day you are going to be tired.» (Boy, 1st session)

Also, the students' previous knowledge of the concept of digital identity was ambiguous, probably due to their young age and short experience online. Generally, they associate their digital identity with their personal information and their online profile, and they leave aside the contents that others might publish related to them, or even the content that their online interactions might generate.

Finally, the students have shown a high degree of interest and a participatory and critic attitude during the sessions of the training initiative. The contents have been constantly associated with their personal experiences and they have voiced their personal concerns about the topic. This is all associated to and included as part of the results of the questionnaires completed at the end of the sessions.

In total, 96.92% of the students have stated that the sessions were useful to reflect about their ICT use. 95.38% of them classified the sessions as interesting and, thanks to this proposal, 92.30% of the students had the chance to know the risks of the internet as well as the preventive guidelines to avoid them. Also, it is worth mentioning that 38.8% report that they had never been given infor-

mation and/or training about this topic before. Therefore, 98.46% highlight the importance and ne-
cessity of working on these issues in the classroom.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis of the results of this work matches what was published in previous studies (EU Kids Online, 2014; Holloway et al., 2013; Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014; Protégeles, 2014); and our data confirm that students in the fifth year of Primary Education (ages 10-11) use ICT daily and this use spreads to different fields of their daily lives: search for information, study, entertainment and communication.

Similarly to the participants in other studies (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Fernández et al., 2015; Rial et al., 2014), internet use is also common among the participating students, who spend an average of 1-2 hours connected every day.

The age at which they start using ICT on a regular basis is 8.5 years, and 65% of the students have already started using them autonomously and regularly in the last two years. These data are also similar to what was observed in other studies (EU Kids Online, 2014; INTEF, 2016; Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014; Rial et al., 2014), and show that regular users of technological media are increasingly younger.

Also, our data are in line with what was observed in the study by Caro and Plaza (2016), and they confirm the fact that ICT use and the internet involve certain risks. In spite of the young age of the participants, and in line with other studies on conflict situations experienced by the underage population (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Bayraktar et al., 2016; Fernández-Montalvo et al., 2016; Protégeles, 2014), 43% of them admit that they have lived a conflict situation, and there are repeated examples of exposure to inadequate contents and/or contact with strangers.

According to Garmedia et al. (2013) and INTEF (2016), although the students show a theoretical knowledge of the risks associated with connectivity, the data reveal that they feel confident but they lack maturity to make a critical use of these technologies.

Also, the participants admit that they carried out actions that have been considered dangerous on a regular basis, as previous studies have confirmed (Ballesta et al., 2015; McCarty et al., 2011). The younger population, despite being aware of the possible negative consequences of sending and/or publishing personal photographs, admits that they do it regularly and they believe that the consequences are limited to the looks of the person who appears in the photograph.

In turn, the results point out the relevance and the need to work on the critical and safe use of the internet in the classroom, as different authors have already stated (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Gabarda et al., 2017; Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2014; Rial et al., 2014). The students highlight the benefits of family control and assistance with regard to conflict situations on the internet. They have also expressed a positive assessment of training initiatives that reinforce critical reflection and promote a safe use of ICT.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The use of ICT and the internet is widespread among the underage population, and the age at which they start using ICT is 8.5 years. The digital world is part of their daily life and their development. Consequently, the teenage sector cannot afford to keep out of that technology.

However, as technology evolves, the risks of ICT use increase. It is impossible to completely eradicate these risks, as it would be in any other field in life. The underage population is inevitably faced with different situations of conflict on a regular basis while they use the internet.

In this regard, there is a contradiction between their level of theoretical knowledge and the common practices of the younger population. Although they are aware of the risks that exist online, they do not perceive those risks in their daily use of the technology and they show a lack of critical capacity to respond to online threats.

Therefore, it is essential to train and empower the underage population in order to promote a critical and safe use of ICT and the internet. Digital competence must guarantee all the necessary abilities and capacities to manage different situations in the online world without suffering severe consequences.

In view of this situation, schools must adopt a more active role. It is necessary to promote an educational and creative use of digital technologies and to work on privacy management, online risks and attention to digital identity in order to promote a critical and safe use of technology as well as the digital autonomy of the students.

Both the attitude and the statements of the participants in the study have emphasized the essential role played by the school in the development of their digital competence. Students in the fifth year of Primary Education underlined the relevance of discussing contents at school related to online safety and coexistence.

Also, the underage population stresses the importance and the necessity of families being involved and collaborating in their training process to prevent the risks that exist on the internet. The participant groups valued parental control positively and they refer to families as an essential agent in the resolution of conflict situations.

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