The Challenges Schools Face and Strategies They Adopt Regarding Internet Safety: A Case Study.

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Declaration

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Date: _______________________

ii
Summary

Background

Technological advances have occurred rapidly in recent decades, with Information and Communication Technologies and the Internet playing an increasingly important role in society. This increased engagement with technology is also reflected in children and young peoples’ practices. While there are many advantages to having such readily available access to the Internet, there are also many new risks to users’ psychological and physical safety, as well as their emotional wellbeing. This is particularly true for children, who are often unaware of the dangers that they are exposed to through their personal internet use or other external cyber threats.

In response to the need for transformative technology skills that prepare children for 21st century life, technology has also become prominent in schools. In order to ensure student safety when online, it is recommended that schools put a number of measures in place. This includes the implementation of an Acceptable Use Policy, which outlines what students are and are not permitted to do in school.

Methodology

This Case Study investigates the concerns of staff within two primary-schools with regards to Internet safety, and the various steps they take to try and tackle these challenges. In order to develop a rich understanding of each school’s context, perspectives from principals and teachers are sought through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. These insights are gathered through the use of questionnaires, interviews and document analysis.

Findings

The research findings indicate that both schools have a number of concerns regarding their students’ internet use, both in terms of the quality and quantity of their online experiences. In an effort to combat these worries, both schools
introduce a number of measures, such as monitoring systems, informative talks from external speakers and the implementation of the aforementioned Acceptable Use Policy.

Furthermore, both schools agree that Internet safety education is vital in order to keep students safe, however, they are unsure as to who is best suited to provide it. When trying to facilitate it themselves, teachers face a number of difficulties, including a personal lack of knowledge and time constraints. Students’ out-of-school internet use and unclear boundaries of responsibility between home and school also prove to be very challenging for these schools.

Discussion

Students’ internet use at home presents as being significantly less supervised and regulated, in comparison to its use in school. Consequently, more issues arise from these online activities, many of which spill over into school-life and require the involvement of staff within the school to resolve them. This can be frustrating for staff, who regularly advise students and parents that internet allowance should be limited and monitored. There is a feeling, particularly among principals in both schools, that parents need to take greater responsibility for their children’s online escapades.

Conclusions

The findings from this study indicate that education is vital if children are to be enabled to be safe in their online activities, however education is not enough on its own. There is also a need for adult support and guidance to help children navigate the Internet safely. To this end, the research underlines a need for nationwide actions to be taken, namely, the introduction of continual professional development for teachers and an Internet safety curriculum that is continuously evolving. Furthermore, parents also need to be provided with information and recommendations on how they can keep their children safe. Crucially, the findings recognise that home and school internet use is currently at odds with each other, in terms of time spent and permitted activities, but that there is a vital need for collaboration and consistency between the two regarding the Internet boundaries being set and the messages being sent to children.
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# Table of Contents

**DECLARATION** ........................................................................................................ II

**SUMMARY** ........................................................................................................... III

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ........................................................................................... V

**TABLE OF CONTENTS** .............................................................................................. VI

**LIST OF FIGURES & TABLES** .................................................................................. XI

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS** ...................................................................................... XII

## CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION...................................................................................... 1

1.0 **RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY** ................................................................. 1

1.1 **THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS** ........................................................................ 2

1.2 **METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW** ..................................................................... 3

1.3 **DISSERTATION OUTLINE** ............................................................................. 4

1.4 **SUMMARY** ..................................................................................................... 4

## CHAPTER 2- LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................... 5

2.0 **INTRODUCTION** ............................................................................................... 5

2.1 **APPROACH TO GATHERING LITERATURE** .............................................. 5

2.2 **THE ROLE OF ICT IN TODAY’S SOCIETY** ............................................. 6

   2.2.1 **An Increasingly Technological Society** ............................................. 6

   2.2.2 **Children and their Use of Technology** ............................................. 7

2.3 **CYBER RISKS** ............................................................................................... 8

   2.3.1 **Personal Internet Use** ......................................................................... 9

   2.3.2 **External Cyber Dangers** ................................................................... 10

   2.3.3 **Cyberbullying** .................................................................................. 11

2.4 **ICT IN AN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT** ..................................................... 12

   2.4.1 **Acceptable Usage Policies** ............................................................... 14
CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ................................................. 20

3.0 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 20

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .................................................................... 20

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH .................................................................... 21

3.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS ................................................................ 21

3.3.1 Questionnaires ........................................................................... 21

3.3.2 Interviews .................................................................................... 23

3.3.3 Document Analysis ..................................................................... 24

3.4 RESEARCH CONTEXTS & SAMPLING ................................................. 24

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ............................................................... 25

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS ................................................................................ 26

3.6.1 Triangulation .............................................................................. 27

3.6.2 Questionnaires ............................................................................ 27

3.6.3 Interviews .................................................................................... 28

3.6.4 Documentary Analysis ............................................................... 28

3.7 RELIABILITY, VALIDITY & GENERALISABILITY ............................... 29

3.7.1 Reliability .................................................................................... 29

3.7.2 Validity ....................................................................................... 30

3.7.3 Generalisability .......................................................................... 31

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY ........................................ 31

3.9 SUMMARY ......................................................................................... 32
4.2.4 INTERNET SAFETY RULES AND POLICY ................................................................. 52

4.2.4.1 Awareness of Rules and Policies ................................................................. 52

4.2.4.2 AUP- Purpose .......................................................................................... 53

4.2.4.3 AUP- Creation ......................................................................................... 53

4.2.4.4 AUP- Contents ......................................................................................... 54

4.2.4.5 AUP- Role of the Principal ....................................................................... 54

4.2.5 ADDITIONAL INTERNET SAFETY STRATEGIES ............................................. 55

4.2.5.1 Internet Safety Education ....................................................................... 55

4.2.6 RESPONSIBILITY FOR INTERNET SAFETY EDUCATION ............................... 56

4.2.7 SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING THIS EDUCATION ............. 57

4.2.8 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR SCHOOL B ..................................................... 59

4.3 SUMMARY ................................................................................................. 60

CHAPTER 5- DISCUSSION ................................................................................... 61

5.0 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 61

5.1 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS ...................................................... 61

5.2 QUESTION 1- WHAT ARE SCHOOLS’ MOST SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR STUDENTS’ INTERNET USE? ................................................................. 62

5.2.1 External Risks ............................................................................................. 62

5.2.2 Cyberbullying ............................................................................................. 62

5.2.3 Internet Addiction ....................................................................................... 63

5.2.4 Two Key Features ..................................................................................... 64

5.3 QUESTION 2- WHAT APPROACHES ARE SCHOOLS TAKING WHEN DEVISING THEIR AUPs? WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE CONTENTS OF SAID AUPs? ......................................................... 66

5.3.1 Approaches to Devising AUPs ................................................................... 66

5.3.2 AUP- Contents ......................................................................................... 66

5.4 QUESTION 3- WHAT STRATEGIES ARE SCHOOLS ADOPTING BEYOND THEIR AUP? .... 68

5.4.1 Safety Systems .......................................................................................... 68

5.4.2 Education ................................................................................................. 68
5.4.3 External Speakers ................................................................. 69
5.4.4 Educating Parents and Staff ..................................................... 70

5.5 Question 4- How do School Leaders perceive their Role and Responsibility in Devising and Implementing AUPs? ................................................................. 71

5.6 Internet Safety Education- Responsibility and Challenges ................. 72

5.7 Conclusion ................................................................................. 74

5.8 Summary .................................................................................. 75

CHAPTER 6- CONCLUSION ................................................................ 76

6.0 Introduction .............................................................................. 76

6.1 Addressing the Research Questions ............................................. 76

6.2 Implications on Professional Practice ......................................... 77

6.3 Limitations of the Research ......................................................... 79

6.4 Potential for Further Research .................................................... 80

6.5 Personal Reflection ..................................................................... 80

6.6 Summary .................................................................................. 81

LIST OF REFERENCES ....................................................................... 82

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Teacher Questionnaire ..................................................... 93

APPENDIX B: Principal Interview Schedule ........................................... 96

APPENDIX C: Teacher Group Interview Schedule .............................. 98

APPENDIX E: Information Letter and Consent Form .............................. 100
List of Figures

**Figure 4.1:** Frequency with which students access the Internet..........................35

**Figure 4.2:** Devices students use most to access the Internet.............................36

**Figure 4.3:** Reported knowledge of AUP..............................................................40

**Figure 4.4:** Responsibility for implementing school rules and policy.....................40

**Figure 4.5:** Parties identified as being most suitable to provide ISE.......................43

**Figure 4.6:** Frequency with which students access the Internet.............................48

**Figure 4.7:** Devices students use most to access the Internet.............................49

**Figure 4.8:** Reported knowledge of AUP..............................................................52

**Figure 4.9:** Responsibility for implementing school rules and policy.....................53

**Figure 4.10:** Parties identified as being most suitable to provide ISE.....................56

List of Tables

**Table 4.1:** Teachers concerns about their students’ Internet use..........................37

**Table 4.2:** Challenges to providing ISE.................................................................44

**Table 4.3:** Teachers concerns about their students’ Internet use..........................50

**Table 4.4:** Challenges to providing ISE.................................................................58
# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUP</td>
<td>Acceptable Use Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BYOD</td>
<td>Bring Your Own Device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDPR</td>
<td>General Data Protection Regulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communication Technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPPN</td>
<td>Irish Primary Principals’ Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISE</td>
<td>Internet Safety Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISPCC</td>
<td>Irish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCTE</td>
<td>National Centre for Technology in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>SET</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Rationale for the Study

Technology and the Internet has been widely acknowledged as expanding at an unprecedented rate (Giant, 2013; OECD, 2015; Huda et al., 2017). Over the last number of years, a significant level of public discussion has arisen about the impacts of internet and online gaming use on children of all ages. Following personal and professional experiences, the researcher considers adults and children’s opinions on this matter to be varying and complex. It has been observed that some adults are at one end of a spectrum and seem predominantly unconcerned by its use, allowing their children to access games and create platforms on social media sites that have been given age restrictions above that of the children using them. Others are highly wary of internet use and its risks and do not want their children accessing it at all. However, as a Fifth and Sixth Class teacher for the last number of years, the researcher has found that children were apathetic to this latter view, have little-to-no concerns about their own online activities and seem very unaware of potential risks they might have been exposed to.

Additionally, within professional circles, the researcher regularly observes other teachers expressing concerns about their students’ internet activities and issues that consequently arise in school. Indeed, the researcher has experienced these same worries and problems in her own classroom.

Following these experiences, the researcher queries whether international literature supported a need for such concerns, and additionally, what approaches are identified as effective when trying to tackle them. The researcher questions whether heavy monitoring, strict boundaries or even
banning children from the Internet is the best approach to keeping children safe, or whether something else would be more effective in enabling children to access the Internet, but safely.

Finally, the researcher’s own school is perceived as maintaining a strict ‘no phones or internet access’ stance for both inside and outside school and, as a result, Internet safety is a topic that is largely avoided. In this study, the researcher intends to examine schools with a different perspective, and therefore selects schools that promote internet use. In doing so, the researcher hopes to explore what such schools are doing to ensure it is accessed safely, and to assess whether its use in school has any impact on the concerns staff have or the problems they face.

1.1 The Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine Internet safety from a school’s perspective in order to establish what concerns the schools have about their students’ online activities, and what steps they are taking to try and ensure their pupils are engaging online in a safe manner. This study is conducted in two primary schools. The first is a Catholic school in South County Dublin that caters for approximately 495 boys and girls. The second is an Educate Together school in County Wicklow with approximately 240 mixed-gender students.

The research questions are:

1) What are schools’ most significant concerns about their students’ internet use?
2) What approaches are schools taking when devising their AUPs? What is included in the contents of said AUPs?
3) What strategies are schools adopting to address Internet safety beyond their AUP? and
4) How do school leaders perceive their role and responsibility in devising and implementing AUPs?
1.2 Methodology Overview

A Case Study approach has been selected for the study, as the research aims to glean a rich and thorough understanding of the experiences of two schools with regards to Internet safety and its safe use. In order to ensure the findings are fully reflective of staff perspectives and experiences, four research instruments are employed.

To begin, questionnaires are disseminated to all teachers to explore their concerns with respect to pupils’ online activities, participants’ awareness of school Internet safety rules and policies, additional measures the school is taking to ensure its pupils’ safe internet use, and the participants’ perspectives on Internet safety education. The questionnaires consist of predominantly closed-questions, which generate quantitative data demonstrating the teachers’ ideas and perspectives.

A one-on-one interview with the principal is conducted in order to develop an in-depth understanding of their perspectives on Internet safety, its associated risks and the school’s Acceptable Usage Policy. Other approaches the school is taking to keep their student’s safe online and principal’s perception of their role in leading and managing these approaches are also addressed.

Informed by the data generated from these two methods, a follow-up group interview with a number of teachers ensues, in order to seek clarification and further information about some of the emerging responses.

Finally, each school’s Acceptable Use Policy is thematically analysed in order to establish the boundaries the school places around internet use in class or during school hours.
A mixture of qualitative and quantitative data is gathered throughout the data collection process, enriching the findings of the research and allowing for triangulation.

1.3 Dissertation Outline

This chapter states the research questions, gives a rationale for their selection and briefly outlines the research approach taken when conducting the research. In chapter two, a comprehensive examination of pertinent national and international research will be presented. Following this, chapter three will describe the research approach and the various data collection methods employed during the study. The data generated from the questionnaires, interviews and document analysis will be reported in chapter four. Chapter five will discuss and analyse the key findings in light of literature. Finally, chapter six will draw some conclusions and recommendations for future practice, as well as acknowledge the limitations of the research and highlight the potential for future research in the area.

1.4 Summary

This chapter has clearly outlined the rationale for the study, identified the research questions and given a brief overview of the research approach selected for the purpose of this study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, relevant national and international research and findings are presented, the purpose of which (Blaxter et al., 2006) is to establish the context in which the research is being conducted, and to identify what is already known and any gaps in the area.

To begin, a broad context is established by exploring the role that technology plays in society in general, and in children’s lives. Following this, dangers posed by children’s personal online behaviours, as well as other external risks that children are exposed to through their online cyber activities is discussed, with a particular focus on cyberbullying. Thereafter, the role that technology and the Internet play in today’s educational context is examined. This includes an exploration into schools’ Acceptable Use Policies- how they are being devised and what they should include. Finally, the role that education plays in ensuring children’s digital safety is investigated, with a particular focus on how children can keep themselves safe online, potential responses to cyberbullying and the importance of parental education.

2.1 Approach to Gathering Literature

In the initial research stages, a broad exploration of all available literature within the areas of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and cyber safety in general, and their roles within an educational context, was conducted. Based on these areas, key terms were identified and used to conduct a review through the Trinity College Stella Search facility. Search terms included ‘ICT’, ‘ICT in schools’, ‘technology in schools’, ‘cyber safety’, ‘Internet safety’, ‘cyber
awareness’, ‘policy development’ and ‘policy implementation’. A limit of fifteen years was placed on the search to help identify the most up-to-date research.

These searches produced a wide range of books and articles within the general area. Potential relevance was initially determined based on the titles of the works, before examining their abstracts and introduction paragraphs to refine the selection further. When reviewing the selected materials, they were ranked on a scale from 1-4 based on their relevance, with 1 deemed to be key pieces of literature. The relevant literature was read, and notes were taken on information considered interesting or important. From here, clear themes emerged naturally, which have been used in the subsequent sections of this chapter to present the findings of the literature review.

2.2 The Role of ICT in Today’s Society

2.2.1 An Increasingly Technological Society

It is a well-acknowledged fact that change in today’s society is happening incessantly and at an unprecedented pace (Wallace & Pocklington, 2002; Hoag et al., 2002; By, 2005; Sugrue, 2006; Bynes, 2009). Regular developments in digital technology are one of the key areas in which these transformations are occurring (Giant, 2013; OECD, 2015; Huda et al., 2017). There is a consensus among researchers that, in recent decades, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the Internet have played an increasingly important role in our lives, so much so that they are considered fundamental elements of modern society and daily living (Goggin, 2006; Giant, 2013; Moreno et al., 2013; von Solms & von Solms, 2014; Kritzinger, 2017). This is supported by figures showing that, in 2018, 89% of Irish households had internet access. (CSO, 2018).
The Internet, defined as a “complex network of devices that communicate with one another to send your requests or data from point A to point B” (Sammons & Cross, 2015, p.12), has made the world an infinitely smaller place. Simple, everyday tasks such as seeking and sharing information or keeping up to date with current affairs can now be completed almost instantly with the use of mobile, hand-held devices (Goggin, 2006). Social media, a term that refers to “sites, apps and tools that are used to create user-generated content” (Sammons & Cross, 2015, p.79), further enables its users to communicate with others through the generating, collaborating and trading of information such as photos, videos and other content with people all over the world. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and Twitter all have hundreds of millions of users who pursue, gather and disseminate information with the click of a button (Clement, 2019).

2.2.2 Children and their Use of Technology

Society’s increasing engagement with ICT is also reflective of children and young peoples’ practices. We are living in a time when today’s youth have been exposed to technology since their birth, hence they are christened “digitods” (Edwards et al., 2018, p.45). In a survey of 5,312 Irish children aged between eight and thirteen years old, it is found that 68% own their smart phone (CSI, 2018). The results, published in the Cyber Safe Ireland Annual Report 2017 (CSI, 2018), also show that 49.9% of these children are accessing the Internet for between 1 and 4 hours daily. Another Irish study identifies tablets as being the most popular means of children accessing the Internet, followed by smartphones, laptops and consoles (Everri & Park, 2018). These mobile devices are regularly used in the absence of parents, with 23% of Irish primary school children accessing the Internet in their bedrooms (ISPCC, 2011).

In contrast to adults who perceive technology as an instrument, children often view it “as a lifeline that connects them to their friends and allows them to create a virtual social world” (Tettegah et al., 2006, p.22). To them, technology
(and in particular social media platforms) play a vital role in enabling them to connect and converse with their peers, share their opinions and experiences, and record significant life moments (Tettegah et al., 2006; O'Keeffe, 2016). These functions are additional to other technological benefits, such as “increased social supports, academic enrichment and worldwide cross-cultural interactions” (Moreno et al., 2013, p.1). Such advantages can be reaped, provided that technology is used correctly; however, its incorrect use can lead to various cyber-related dangers and threats (Kim et al., 2006; O'Keeffe, 2016; Huda et al., 2017). Some of these risks related to children’s internet use will now be explored.

2.3 Cyber Risks

There is a consensus among researchers that when children are engaging in online activities, they are exposed to various potential threats to their psychological and physical safety, and emotional wellbeing (Tettegah et al., 2006; Moreno et al., 2013; Chandrashekhar et al., 2016; Martin & Rice, 2012; Huda et al., 2017). There are concerns surrounding children’s awareness of and ability to identify and avoid risks that stem from communication with strangers, their peers or even behaviours they themselves demonstrate online (Williard, 2012; von Solms & von Solms, 2014; Park et al., 2014; Sammons & Cross, 2015). Until recently, adults were typically in a position of power where they could pre-empt dangerous behaviours and situations and intercede to minimise damages. However, as “digital immigrants” (Willard, 2012, p.4), many parents are struggling to keep up and are likely to no longer have sufficient skills or knowledge to be able to influence situations that they previously might have (Williard, 2012; ISPCC, 2015; O’Keeffe, 2016). This change in paradigm has further complicated the situation.

Some of these dangers will now be explored in further detail.
2.3.1 Personal Internet Use

Children’s own online behaviours can place their safety at risk. Due to a lack of awareness about online scams, children can accidentally expose themselves to computer threats such as viruses and hackers, and information security issues, for example, identity theft and card skimming (Sammons & Cross, 2015).

Additionally, children can behave online in ways that they would not in ‘real life’. For example, while many children have a heightened sense of ‘stranger danger’ in real-life, they typically feel more secure behind their computers, and can let their guards down by sharing personal information (Park et al., 2014). This is evidenced by 32% of Irish children reporting that they talk to strangers online every week (CSI, 2018) and one in two 11- and 12-year olds reporting that they play with strangers online (Everri & Park, 2018). Furthermore, 13% of primary-school boys and girls are found to have given out their full names online, while 5% have shared a personal photo (ISPCC, 2011).

In 2018, Ireland introduced a Digital Age of Consent of 16-years-old. As most social media companies have a minimum age of thirteen (O’Neill & Dinh, 2014), this means that companies such as Facebook and Snapchat will need the user’s parent’s permission if they are between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. Despite these restrictions, in 2014, 40% of 11 and 12-year olds had a social networking profile (O’Neill & Dinh, 2014) and in 2017 this is reported to have risen to 70% (CSI, 2018). This means that many children are lying about their age when setting up social media and gaming profiles, sometimes with their parents’ consent, with little regard for why these age restrictions are in place (Williard, 2012; O’Keeffe, 2016).

The ‘disinhibition phenomenon’ finds that “when people are using digital technologies, they do things they would not normally do in the real world” (Suler, 2004 as cited in Willard, 2012, p.20). Often young people do not fully understand the vastness of the Internet or that there are significant real-life consequences
for their online actions. This in turn can inhibit their empathy and lead to a lack of remorse (Tettegah et al., 2006; Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012; Williard, 2012; Giant, 2013; Edwards et al., 2018; Kozubal et al., 2019).

Furthermore, negative online behaviours and a belief that the Internet is an invisible universe is compounded by a perceived sense of online unidentifiability (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012) as users can easily adopt a new persona and change anything from their name, to their location or even their appearance when setting up online profiles. Through education, it is crucial that children see the technological universe they inhabit as “an extension of real life and not as a separate entity” (Kritzinger, 2017, p.18) and therefore comprehend that the ethical principles they apply in real-life, must also be present in their online actions (Piercey, 2018).

Finally, research presents conflicting findings regarding the impact of digital technologies on young people’s emotional, physical and social wellbeing. Some studies indicate that youths benefit socially from the assimilation of technology into their social activities (Campbell et al., 2006; Lenhart et al., 2007). However, conflicting findings demonstrate that an excessive use of digital technology leads to an increase in family and interpersonal problems, physical weakness, and reports of feeling lonely, depressed, socially anxious or suicidal (Kim et al., 2006; Jenaro et al., 2007; OECD, 2015). This leads to debates about whether, or to what extent, children should be using technology.

2.3.2 External Cyber Dangers

The literature indicates that the more children are online, the more they are exposed to threats (Tettegah et al., 2006; Martin & Rice, 2012; Chandrashekhar et al., 2016; Huda et al., 2017), but that youths who are generally at greatest risk, are also at greater risk online (Willard, 2012; Everri & Park, 2018). While some of these risks stem from their personal online behaviours, as outlined in the previous section, many others are presented by external sources, particularly to
those who are unaware of the potential dangers in the first place (von Solms & von Solms, 2014). These can include but are not limited to exclusion, impersonation, denigration (sending or posting cruel gossip or rumours), cyberstalking and harassment (Park et al., 2014; ISPCC, 2015; Chandrashekhar et al., 2016). These can have detrimental effects on users’ physical and/or psychological welfare (Williard, 2012; Watts et al., 2017).

It is also important to acknowledge the influence of social media engagement on children’s, and in particular, on girls’ body image (O’Keeffe, 2016). The highly sexualised images of slim and attractive young men and women that children encounter online “act as a mirror for comparison” (2016, p.846) and subliminally reinforce the message that popularity and happiness is fundamentally influenced by being lean and having the trendy products being advertised (Willard, 2012; Common Sense Media, 2015).

2.3.3 Cyberbullying

While there is no single, accepted definition of cyberbullying, Chandrashekhar et al. outline it as the “repeated, intentional and often anonymous act done to hurt another person through text messages from a cell phone, e-mail, social networking websites, chat rooms and instantaneous messaging” (2016, p.95). The substance of these communications can vary from “poking fun at someone’s physical attributes, to disclosing a victim’s personal information, often sexual behaviours” (Shek, 2004 as cited in Tettegah et al., 2006, p.18).

Although bullying itself is not a new phenomenon, the intersection between ICT and bullying is still relatively new. The literature, however, shows that cyberbullying is increasing in prevalence among children both in and out of school. In a 2011 EU study involving Ireland, it was found that an average of 6% of 9-16-year olds reported being victims of cyberbullying in the previous year (Livingstone et al., 2011). When repeated three years later, the proportion was found to have doubled (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2014), before a recent Zeeko
study increased this once again to 18% of Irish Sixth class children reporting that they had been cyberbullying (Everri & Park, 2018).

In many ways, the use of the Internet to bully further complicates the challenges experienced by victims, as the boundaries of the home setting are no longer a place of refuge (Park et al., 2014; ISPCC, 2015; Watts et al., 2017). With traditional bullying methods, the bullying ceased when victims arrived home. However, additional means of electronic communication are broadening the scope of cyberbullying.

The situation has also become increasingly challenging for schools wishing to tackle cyberbullying (von Solms & von Solms, 2014). As previously mentioned, the traditional model in which adults held the information and know-how to keep children safe has been inverted with regards to technology. Ensuing from this is a scenario in which numerous parents and teachers do not have the knowledge or self-assurance to tackle cyber risks, resulting in problems such as cyberbullying (Cross et al., 2016). Schools who attempt to stand up to and challenge cyberbullying often encounter difficulties when trying to “determine their responsibilities and their legal rights regarding discipline” (Tettegah et al., 2006, p.23) as online issues often occur outside school hours and off school grounds (Eden et al., 2013).

2.4 ICT in an Educational Context

As has already been established, children have a lot of experience with and exposure to ICT in their everyday lives. This, coupled with increased movements towards transformative technology for “better and more effective services” (DES, 2015, p.9), has changed the value of digital literacy skills from “nice-to-have skills…. [to] need-to-have skills” (Bissonnette, 2009, p.56). For these reasons, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) consider that schools should incorporate technology into their pedagogy as a resource “to enhance teaching, learning and assessment, so that Ireland’s young people become engaged
thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens to participate fully in society and the economy” (DES, 2015, p.5).

This objective has been driven by a series of government publications including *Schools IT 2000* (Department of Education, 1997), *ICT in Schools* (DES, 2008a), *Investing Effectively in ICT in Schools* (DES, 2008b), *Smart Schools = Smart Economy* (DES, 2009) and most recently the *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020: Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment* (DES, 2015).

Provided that it is used effectively and appropriately, ICT has the potential to provide significant benefits in both every day and educational contexts (Byron, 2010; Cross et al., 2016; Kritzinger, 2017). When used correctly, it enables children to access information, engage with learning through a more active, hands-on way and assess their knowledge and understanding through various interactive quizzes and games (Park et al., 2014; O'Keeffe, 2016; Huda et al., 2017).

However, there are also a number of challenges surrounding the use of technology in schools. These include a lack of access to technological resources and the Internet, and/or a lack of personal knowledge and skills among teachers, resulting in apprehension to utilise technology in the classroom (von Solms & von Solms, 2014; OECD, 2015).

Additionally, reports about the impact of ICT on pupils’ academic achievement are somewhat unclear. An assessment in OECD countries indicates that the results are “mixed at best” (OECD, 2015, p.3). It discovered that students using technology moderately in school have somewhat better learning outcomes than students who use it rarely. However, students who report using it frequently in school perform “a lot worse in most learning outcomes, even after accounting for social background and student demographics” (OECD, 2015, p.3). These findings are concurrent with other research, which also
indicates that the impact of ICT integration on student achievement was quite varied (Archer et al., 2014) or only held small gains (Cener et al., 2015). This could suggest that variances in pedagogy have an impact on student achievement, regardless of the impact of technology, or, as put by Schleicher, “technology can amplify great teaching, but technology cannot replace poor teaching” (OECD, 2015, p.4).

2.4.1 Acceptable Usage Policies

Due to the concerns surrounding technology and its safe and effective use in educational contexts, Irish schools have been advised to develop and maintain an Internet Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) (DES, 2018) that addresses “all rights, privileges, responsibilities and sanctions” (NCTE, 2012, p.2) associated with ICT use in the classroom and throughout the school day.

A range of stakeholders should be consulted when devising the policy, including teachers, school leaders, the Board of Management/trustees, students and parents/guardians, in order to ensure a communal understanding of its content (DES, 2018). This recommendation is in-line with international research (Tobin, 2017; Vanderline et al., 2009; Moreno et al. 2013; Martin & Rice, 2012; Melgosa & Scott, 2013).

Due to differences in school internet access, and device availability and use, a “one-size-fits-all approach will not achieve success” (DES, 2015, p.8); therefore, it is recommended that schools refer to the National Council for Technology in Education (NCTE) guidelines available from webwise.ie (NCTE, 2012). Areas to contain within the policy include “searching, downloading, publishing a school website, browsing websites [and] electronic communications such as email, social networking, messaging etc.” (NCTE, 2012, p.2). Other suggested topics to encompass are: “online research skills, where to locate internet safety advice and guidelines, a definition of inappropriate material...sanctions...online games and reporting mechanisms" (NCTE, 2012, p.2/3). The
roles and responsibilities of all parties listed should be specified, and frequent monitoring, review and evaluation of the policy is crucial in order to ensure its continued relevance to the school (NCTE, 2012; DES, 2018).

International literature for Internet Safety policies supports these recommendations, but also suggests additional areas for inclusion so as to ensure the policy is robust and all-encompassing.

Firstly, the literature places a stronger emphasis on the importance of providing clear definitions so as to ensure that all parties have the same understanding of concepts (Kritzinger, 2017; Bissonette, 2009; Williard, 2012). Additionally, the research stresses the need to outline the boundaries of the policy. This includes the intended purpose of the systems, what are accepted activities and what is categorised as misuse of devices, and the breadth of the policy, i.e. does it cover what occurs just on school devices, in the school grounds or all of students' online activities (Bissonette, 2009; Williard, 2012; Kritzinger, 2017).

Finally, the Webwise guidelines (NCTE, 2012) do not explicitly outline the importance of disseminating the policy on its completion. Broader research suggests it should be included in the “student handbooks, parents should be given copies, and they should be posted onto the school’s website” (Tettegah et al., 2006, p.25). Kritzinger (2017) concurs and suggests that it should be signed by both parents and students to ensure they were informed.

While the importance of monitoring children’s online activities is acknowledged in the literature (ISPCC, 2015; Huda et al., 2017), it also recognises that it is unrealistic to expect a supervising body to always be present. For this reason, international research identifies Internet Safety Education (ISE) as the cornerstone to ensuring that children’s inevitable digital encounters are done so in a safe and self-assured manner (Bissonette, 2009; Martin & Rice, 2012; Williard, 2012; Giant, 2013; Melgosa & Scott, 2013; Park et al., 2014; von
Solms & von Solms, 2014 OECD, 2015). Some of these recommended areas will now be outlined.

2.5 Internet Safety through Education

Sammons and Cross defined the primary goal of internet safety as being able “to safeguard your computer, personal information and loved ones from attacks and other potential threats” (2015, p.11). As already outlined, children who access ICT are exposed to various risks, particularly if they are unaware of them (von Solms & von Solms, 2014; Park et al., 2014). Furthermore, it is unrealistic to think that these online dangers will subside in today’s increasingly technological culture. For these reasons, it is vital that children are equipped with the knowledge and skills to be able to navigate the online world and know how to deal with the potentially risky situations they encounter. As most children state that they begin accessing the Internet between the ages of six and seven (Everri & Park, 2018), this education should begin as early as possible (Martin & Rice, 2012). Despite many teachers feeling they are not adequately knowledgeable about children’s internet activities (OECD, 2015), schools have been identified as being in an excellent position to facilitate this education (Bissonnette, 2009; ISPCC, 2015).

Research suggests ISE should be integrated with the teaching of other curricular areas or through the use of informal ‘teachable moments’ that occur at any given stage throughout the day (Bissonnette, 2009; Melgosa & Scott, 2013). These could arise through conversations about physical safety, school-based incidents or even a news story. Discussions around ‘real-life’ implications for the perpetrator, the victim and possible onlookers could transition into a discussion about the parallels with online incidents. Furthermore, practising how to analyse different online situations, potential responses to them and weighing up the suitability of these various responses enables children to effectively problem-solve and come up with sensible solutions for issues that arise in their own lives (Webwise, n.d.; Williard, 2012). Exploring potential long-term consequences of
reactions and reinforcing that any digital materials published can never be fully removed from the Internet would also be relevant at this time (Williard, 2012).

Topics to examine include: potential risks that different online activities pose, how to conduct safe internet searches that minimise the possibility of accessing inappropriate content, strategies to assess the credibility and safety of sites and how to protect your personal data (Webwise, n.d.; Williard, 2012; Bissonnette, 2009). Crucially, knowing how to detect when they are exposed to a danger, identifying strategies to use when they are, and knowing when it is time to seek adult support are vital skills (Webwise, n.d.; Williard, 2012).

2.5.1 Tackling Cyberbullying

The literature greatly supports the establishment of ‘social norms’ in order to tackle bullying (Perkins et al., 2009; Perkins et al., 2011; Williard, 2012; Park et al. 2014; Kozubal et al., 2019). This involves identifying what children perceive the normal behaviour of their peers to be, and then ascertaining whether or not this is a true reflection of what ‘everybody’ is actually doing. For example, portraying the message that many young people are cyberbullying their peers (an inaccurate social norm) normalises the behaviour and sends the message that sending cruel and hurtful messages are acceptable within society. Therefore, exploring and establishing what kind of behaviour a class considers to be acceptable and appropriate, highlights what actions are supported by their peers (Perkins et al., 2011; Kozubal et al., 2019). These can be reinforced through the creation of personal statements of appropriate online expectations, alongside school-wide posters and campaigns communicating these norms (Perkins et al., 2011; Williard, 2012). If left unchallenged, the social norm may have the opposite to desired effect (Perkins et al., 2011; Williard, 2012).

Additionally, as 39% of Fifth and 45% of Sixth Class children report witnessing cyberbullying (Everri & Park, 2018), it is crucial that children are influenced to respond positively to unjust situations they encounter (Perkins et
al., 2011; Kozubal et al., 2019). In exploring this, the children’s three options should be made clear to them, namely, “hurtful participant, passive observer [or] helpful ally” (Williard, 2012, p.12). These should be discussed in a fair manner, with the pros, cons, challenges and potential consequences of each role discussed.

2.6 Parental Education

Similar to educators, many parents report feeling under-skilled or knowledgeable about technological advances in comparison to their children (Williard, 2012; ISPCC, 2015; O’Keeffe, 2016). However, as “the child’s primary educator” (Government of Ireland, 1999, p.21) and considering 98.7% of Irish children in 2012 had access to at least one computer at home (OECD, 2015), it is vitally important that parents engage in their children’s education, and are kept informed and involved in the school’s internet education programme (Tobin, 2017; Tettegah et al., 2006; Melgosa & Scott, 2013). Schools can raise parents’ awareness by facilitating workshops and information evenings, providing information about resources available in school and online, or even asking parents to read, discuss with their child and sign internet safety-related homework (Giant, 2013).

2.7 Summary

This chapter examined the increasing prevalence of ICT and ascertained that it is now an integral part of everyday life for both children and adults. It has benefits such as helping us to search for, retrieve and share information, communicate and keep up to date with the world around us. However, there are also many risks associated with internet use, particularly for children who often do not fully comprehend them. These risks can be posed by children’s own online actions, or externally by other online users.
Following this, the research noted that schools are being encouraged to adopt technology into their teaching, learning and assessment methodologies in an effort to prepare students for 21st century living, and examined the skills needed to do so. In order to set boundaries for what they consider to be acceptable and unacceptable use of these devices in school and to ensure students’ safety online, schools are also creating AUPs. However, while the DES recommends that schools use the Webwise guidelines when devising their policies, it is evident from other international guidelines and literature that there is a discrepancy regarding what should be included in these policies.

Therefore, synthesising the findings and recommendations made throughout this literature review, it is clear that there is a need to further examine what Irish primary schools are incorporating into their AUPs and whether education surrounding digital literacy and skills features in them. Furthermore, it is questioned whether these policies transfer into real-life practices within schools, and what steps school leaders are taking in order to ensure they are.

Throughout the research supporting ISE, the key message is clear: the focus must be on increasing children and young people’s ability to keep themselves safe, to respond to inappropriate material or communications in an effective manner (including knowing when to involve an adult) and to engage online themselves in an ethical and appropriate way.
Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research questions and methodology adopted in this study. This includes defining the various aspects of the Case Study process, including the participants, the data collection and analysis, as well as discussing the reliability, validity, ethical considerations and limitations of the research.

3.1 Research Questions

Following a number of personal and professional experiences and an examination of national and international literature, the researcher wondered what challenges primary schools faced with regards to internet safety, what approaches they were taking to tackle these problems, and what role principals’ felt they had in leading such actions. From this, a number of research questions arose:

1) What are schools’ most significant concerns about their students’ internet use?

2) What approaches are schools taking when devising their AUPs? What is included in the contents of said AUPs?

3) What strategies are schools adopting to address internet safety beyond their AUP? and

4) How do school leaders perceive their role and responsibility in devising and implementing AUPs?
3.2 Research Approach

To explore these research questions, a Case Study approach was taken. The primary purpose of this methodology is to examine a single, or small number of, situations in great depth in order to “develop as full an understanding of that case as possible” (Punch, 1998, as cited in Silverman, 2013, p.142). In this instance, a Case Study approach was selected as it enabled the researcher to select the methods deemed most suitable for conducting a thorough examination of internet safety within two primary schools. So as to better understand the multiple perspectives within any social context and contribute to broader understandings of the social phenomenon (Yin, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018), in this instance internet safety, a number of data collection tools were used, which gathered and analysed a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. These methods will now be examined further.

3.3 Research Instruments

The data collection process began with the dissemination of questionnaires to teachers within the school and an interview with the school principal. Subsequently, a follow-up group interview was held with a small number of volunteer teachers, before finally analysing the school’s Acceptable Use Policy. These methods will now be looked at in further detail.

3.3.1 Questionnaires

As the aim of the research was to develop as rich an understanding as possible of the school’s context, the objective was to gather experiences and opinions from all teachers within the school. For this reason, a questionnaire approach was taken (rather than individual interviews) to gather these initial insights, as they are considered quicker to administer and analyse (Bryman, 2016).
Devising the questionnaire was prefaced by an in-depth search for other related questionnaires. Relevant materials were evaluated and drawn upon as necessary. The questionnaire featured an assortment of closed-questions, including dichotomous, multiple-choice, rank ordering and Likert scale questions, as well as a small number of open-ended questions. The question schedule (Appendix A) explored topics including: participants’ concerns about pupils’ online activities, their awareness of school internet safety rules and policies (in particular the AUP, its purpose and implementation), additional measures adopted by the school to ensure safe internet use, and participants’ perspectives on ISE and who is responsible for it.

The questionnaires were completed in the researcher's absence in the hopes that it would allow respondents to complete questionnaire in private and devote as much time as necessary to do so (Cohen et al., 2018). However, the disadvantage of this was that the researcher was not available to answer queries or clarify obscurities, potentially resulting in questions being misinterpreted or left un-answered (Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018).

In order to minimise misconceptions and maximise respondents, a number of steps were taken when designing the questionnaire, as described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018). The responses required were predominantly short and quantitative, in order to minimise the time required to complete the questionnaires (approximately 15 minutes). Additionally, the wording of questions and instructions were kept simple, and ambiguous questions were avoided. Finally, the respondents were not asked for any identifying information, therefore anonymising the data at the point of data collection. This was to ensure that respondents felt their identity was protected and that they could therefore respond honestly.
3.3.2 Interviews

Semi-structured, qualitative interviews were employed twice. The first instance was a one-on-one interview with the school principal. At a later stage, group interviews were conducted with a small number of teachers. In both instances, the purpose of the interview was to “attempt to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.1). The advantage of semi-structured interviews was that it enabled a list of relevant questions and topics for discussion to be developed, while also providing scope for changes in response to the interviewee(s) answers (Silverman, 2013; Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018).

The interviews were piloted prior to their implementation to ensure that questions were easily understood and effectively retrieved the information sought (Silverman, 2013). Both interview schedules featured a range of questions including but: introduction, follow-up, probing and direct questions (Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018).

The purpose of the principal interview (Appendix B) was to explore perspectives on internet safety, the school’s AUP, other approaches taken by the school to keep their students safe and their perception of the principal’s role in leading and managing the implementation of internet safety approaches.

The group interview was conducted with teachers who volunteered at the time of completing the questionnaire. The question schedule (Appendix C) was based on findings from the preceding teacher questionnaires and principal interview. It enabled the seeking of clarification and further information about responses that emerged regarding the school’s AUP, internet safety, and responsibility for ISE.
3.3.3 Document Analysis

The final method of data collection was a document analysis of the school’s Acceptable Use Policy. This instrument was employed as the AUP was considered a key piece of primary evidence that demonstrated the school’s ‘official’ position on internet use. Permission to retrieve and analyse this document was received from the principal. To ensure its authenticity and credibility, the policy was received by email directly from the school.

3.4 Research Contexts & Sampling

This study took place in two primary schools. The first was a mixed, Catholic school in South County Dublin. The school had an administrative principal who has been in his role for the last 22 years, as well as 23 teachers and approximately 495 students. The second school was a mixed-school in County Wicklow with an Educate Together ethos. There were approximately 240 students in the school, along with 15 teachers and an administrative principal who had been in situ for the past nine years.

It can be said that a purposive sampling approach was taken in this research, as the schools were handpicked to suit the research’s focus (Silverman, 2013). In this case, both schools were selected following an online search as they considered themselves to strongly promote internet safety. The researcher had no formal relationships, either personal or professional, with any of the schools that were approached, or any personnel within them.

Due to the Case Study approach taken, it was hoped that the sample would include all teachers on both staffs in order to ensure that the findings from the research were fully reflective of the school situation.
3.5 Ethical Considerations

To ensure the integrity of the research, a number of ethical considerations were observed. Prior to any data collection, ethical approval was sought and received from the Research Ethics Committee in Trinity College. Following this, potential schools were identified, and principals were approached with letters of introduction, outlining the nature of the study and asking whether they would be willing for their school to participate. Formal information sheets and consent forms were furnished where schools agreed to participate. At all times, the research was based on respect for the participants, beneficence and the absence of maleficence, and justice.

Furthermore, information letters and consent forms (Appendix D) accompanied the questionnaires and preceded the interviews being conducted to ensure that the participants were enabled to provide informed consent. Full information regarding what the participants’ involvement required, the purpose of the questionnaire/interview, and how the results would be used was provided. Additionally, the letters indicated that participants were engaging voluntarily and that they maintained the right to not partake or withdraw at any stage. Finally, participants were provided with further information on how the data would be stored, informed that their data would be held confidentially and guaranteed that their anonymity would be protected. All of the information sheets contained similar information, with slight tweaks as relevant to individual groups. The letters were written in such a manner so as to ensure their contents and language were comprehensive and accessible.

While conducting the research, any potentially negative consequences for the participants had to be considered. While any such implications could not be foreseen, a number of precautionary measures were put in place. Firstly, all data was anonymised, and any identifying information was precluded from the findings. This was to ensure that no participants experienced negative consequences as a result of the insights they expressed. Furthermore, teacher
group interviews were conducted in the absence of the principal. This was done in an effort to combat the teacher-principal power battle, which may preclude some teachers from feeling they could speak freely for fear of being penalised for any potentially negative views they shared. Finally, where findings highlighted a divergence between school practice and research recommendations, these were presented in an appropriately sensitive and constructive manner.

Data was stored in line with Trinity College’s Policy on Good Research Practice and Policy for Retention, current data protection legislation and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Electronic raw data and transcripts of this raw data was stored on a password protected laptop that only the researcher, research supervisor and, potentially, examiners have access to. No materials were stored on any cloud devices to ensure their maximum protection.

Hard copies of questionnaires were stored securely in a locked safe in the researcher’s home at all times. Once again, access to this data was limited to the research student, research supervisor and, potentially, examiners.

As per Trinity College’s Policy on Good Research Practice, the data will be retained for thirteen months, after which time electronic data will be deleted from all sites, and paper copies will be shredded.

3.6 Data Analysis

When analysing the data collected, the researcher was conscious of not overly inferring knowledge from the findings or interpreting the data in a way which might misconstrue them, instead allowing the school’s context to represent itself (Cohen et al., 2018). Revising the data gathered repeatedly and searching for natural connections between the various methods allowed for a true reflection of the school’s situation (Yin, 2014). Each method was examined individually, before being synthesised.
3.6.1 Triangulation

In order to triangulate the findings and gain a richer understanding of each school’s situation, multiple instruments were employed gathering a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Having multiple perspectives represented in the research further validated the findings, as it ensured that they have not been influenced or misled by an individual data source (Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018).

The following sections will briefly outline how the data gathered from the questionnaires, interviews and document analysis were analysed.

3.6.2 Questionnaires

The questionnaires were analysed quantitatively. The results were tallied and inputted into Microsoft Excel (an individual Excel sheet was kept for each school so as to ensure there was no cross-over of data). Any responses from open-ended questions were categorised thematically and inputted.

As Question 11 and 17 required answers to be ranked, they were analysed in two different ways. Firstly, the responses were tallied based on how many respondents selected them. Additionally, a weighted marking system reflected the rankings given by respondents. The answers identified as being most concerning (indicated by the number 1 in the questionnaire), were given 10 points. Anything ranked as number 2 was allocated 9 points, etc.

Having completed the inputting process, the data was then analysed and presented in the form of tables and pie charts as appropriate.
3.6.3 Interviews

Both the principal interview and teacher group interview were analysed qualitatively. The purpose of such qualitative analysis (Cohen et al., 2018) was to allow for an interpretation of the data that created a thorough and rich understanding of the circumstances within the schools, with regards to internet safety.

To begin, the audio recordings were selectively transcribed (with any sensitive or identifying information precluded). To ensure anonymity in the transcriptions and the Findings and Discussion chapters of this research, all participants’ names were coded. They were referred to as either ‘Teacher’ or ‘Principal’ respectively, with either the letter A or B afterwards (dictating whether they are in School A or B). Additionally, the teachers in the interview were numbered 1, 2 or 3 depending on the order in which they first spoke e.g. ‘Teacher A1’ was the first teacher in School A to speak in the group interview.

On completing the transcribing process, the transcripts were read and information that was deemed important was highlighted and coded. On further review, these codes were grouped into reoccurring themes such as ‘concerns’, ‘perceived responsibility’ and ‘internet safety education’. The findings in chapter four were presented under these themes. When reviewing and reducing the abundant amount of data retrieved, the researcher was mindful to ensure that key information was not lost through the filtering process, and that the information was condensed to include the most coherent and relevant material (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018).

3.6.4 Documentary Analysis

On receipt of the Acceptable Use Policy from the school, a qualitative content analysis was carried out on the document. To begin, the policy was read through, with important information being highlighted and coded; from this the main
themes within the policy were identified (Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018). These categories were classified using a mixture of ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ approaches. While certain information was sought out based on the Webwise guidelines (a ‘top down’ approach), the researcher was conscious of not being too prescriptive, but rather allowing other themes to emerge solely from the AUPs’ contents (‘bottom up’).

3.7 Reliability, Validity & Generalisability

Due to the unique contexts and perspectives in every situation, reliability, validity and generalisability as might be demonstrated in other research approaches can be more challenging to authenticate in the Case Study approach (Yin, 2014; Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018). Instead, Case Studies concern themselves with consistency within the case, and replicability (Yin, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). Reliability, validity and generalisability will now be examined in terms of literature and within the particular contexts of this research.

3.7.1 Reliability

Reliability focuses on the consistency with which a method produces the same results (Abbott, 2013; Bryman, 2016). In order to ensure this within the context of the research, the same questionnaires and interview schedules were used in both schools, and the AUPs were analysed under the same headings.

As previously mentioned, reliability within the Case Study approach is predominantly concerned with consistency within the case itself (Yin, 2014; Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018). To ensure this, during the data analysis stages, the researcher analysed whether participants’ responses in one data collection method lined up with responses from other instruments. In this way, multiple methods gathering a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data confirmed that beliefs and experiences were reportedly consistently, and without any major outliers or contradictions.
3.7.2 Validity

Validity assesses the accuracy of the research findings and asks if the instruments measured what they were supposed to measure (Abbott, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018). While concerns regarding validity of the research findings are impossible to eliminate entirely (Cohen et al., 2018), steps were taken during the data collection process to minimise inconsistencies and questions regarding the legitimacy of the findings.

The biggest challenges when designing a questionnaire have been identified as the response rate and the validity of the responses (Denscombe, 2010; Bouma, 1993). As a Case Study approach strives to construct a comprehensive understanding of the context within the school, maximising the number of respondents is crucial in order to ensure the findings’ validity. To this end, a number of steps were taken.

The data gathered throughout the study was anonymised and participants were asked not to identify themselves or their school. Validity concerns itself with respondents’ potentially biased perspectives and, in preserving anonymity, it was hoped to minimise those who would not provide full and honest disclosure for fear of judgement or that the information might be shared (Israel & Hay, 2006).

The questionnaires were kept concise and brief, with primarily closed-questions, in order to minimise those who did not complete them due to time constrictions. Furthermore, piloting the questionnaires allowed for any ambiguities or difficulties to be identified and eliminated before dissemination (Silverman, 2013).

As previously mentioned, Case Studies are concerned with internal authentication and convergent validity (Yin, 2014; Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018). Triangulating data by employing a number of methods and allowing
themes to emerge from several “converging sources of data or perspectives from participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.200) ensured findings were reliable.

3.7.3 Generalisability

Generalisability establishes whether findings from the research can be considered characteristic of new samples or people (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Similar to reliability and validity, Case Studies are acknowledged as having limited generalisability due to the unique nature of each case, and therefore are not necessarily representative of a greater sample (Yin, 2014; Wellington, 2015; Cohen et al., 2018). However, Case Study findings can be seen to add to current theories, which can in turn help future researchers comprehend other comparable cases and phenomena (Yin, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). Such was the intention of this research.

3.8 Limitations of the Methodology

Despite the researcher’s best efforts to minimise them, this research piece is not without limitations.

One limitation was an inability to control external factors, such as the participants’ honesty when answering questions. Endeavours to minimise the effect of this included anonymising the data and not having the principal present during the teachers’ group interview.

The chosen sample size was small and selected based on the researcher’s desire to evaluate the practices of schools who consider themselves to promote internet safety within their school. As they were examined in isolation, the findings of the research cannot be considered generalisable or representative of all schools’ practices.
Finally, the time allocated to conduct the research was limited. In order to combat this, a sample size that enabled an effective and thorough examination of the schools in question was selected, rather than trying to observe the context within more schools, but in less detail.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has given a detailed description of the data collection and analysis process. Reliability and validity issues, ethical considerations and limitations specific to this piece of research were also highlighted.
Chapter 4

Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings from the primary research in two sections. The first sector (4.1) will look at the results from School A, while the latter half (4.2) will look at School B. With regards to both schools, the context of the study will be outlined and the frequency of students’ internet use according to their teachers will be examined. Following this, teachers’ concerns regarding their students’ internet use will be explored. The school’s Acceptable Use Policy and other approaches undertaken to keep their students safe online will be analysed; before finally discussing who teachers feel should be responsible for students’ internet safety education (ISE), and some of the challenges they encounter when trying to do so in school.

4.1 School A

4.1.1 School Profile

School A is a mixed, Catholic school in South County Dublin. There are approximately 495 pupils and 23 teachers, in addition to the administrative principal who has been in situ for the 22 years. There are two streams of each class from Junior Infants to Sixth Class.

Students in School A have internet access to the school’s Wi-Fi via school-owned laptops, tablets & computers. Volunteers from Microsoft visit the school for a number of weeks each year and provide the Fifth and Sixth Class students with lessons in coding. Apart from that, technology use is at the
discretion of the class teacher. There is no Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy in place and pupils are not permitted to use their own phones in school. When brought into school, phones must remain switched off or risk being confiscated by the principal. If they are, then the phone must be collected from his office by the student’s parent/guardian.

Fourteen teachers out of twenty-three completed and returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 61%. At least one teacher from every year group except for Senior Infants are represented in the returned questionnaires. 29% (n=4) of respondents teach the junior classes (i.e. Junior Infants to Second Class), 50% (n=7) teach the senior end of the school (i.e. Third through Sixth Classes) and 21% (n=3) are members of the SET (Special Education Teacher) team.

Of the respondents, 64% (n=9) are women and 36% (n=5) are men. The majority of respondents are aged between 20-29, with no respondents reporting being 50 years or over. 0-5 years of teaching experience is reflective of the majority of questionnaire participants (43%).

4.1.2 Students’ Internet Use

When asked about the frequency with which his students accessed the Internet (regardless of when or where), the principal states that he believes the vast majority of students access it at least once a day. When asked the same question in the questionnaire, teachers reported a greater spread of responses, however the majority (50%, n=7) also believe that students go online ‘a few times each day’ [Figure 1]. Further analysis shows that the class the teacher taught holds no bearing on the results.
According to the questionnaires, 100% of teachers believe that students predominantly access the Internet at home. When asked what devices students use to go online, respondents identified a number of answers, bringing the total amount of selections for this question up to 27. A significant majority however, (41%, n=11) reference the use of tablets or laptops [Figure 2]. Additional analysis shows that only senior class teachers think their students go online via gaming consoles or personal phones. Conversely, only students in junior classes are considered to use their parents’ smart phones.
4.1.3 Teachers’ Concerns

Through all three data collection methods, it is apparent that teachers have many concerns surrounding their students’ internet use. While two questionnaire respondents indicate having ‘no’ concerns, subsequent analysis shows that they are both Junior Infants teachers, one of whom states that their response is “based on the age-group I am teaching now” (Teacher A1 Questionnaire) but that their response would vary depending on the class they were teaching.

Regardless of whether questionnaire respondents report that they do or do not have concerns, all identify at least three ‘main concerns’ about their students’ online activities in the subsequent question (total number of selections=91). This suggests that all teachers have some worries, whether or not they consider them strong enough to be classified as ‘concerns’. These selections [Figure 3] have been analysed in two ways, through tallying and weighted ranking, as outlined in 3.6.2. In this case however, results are the same regardless of the analysis method. Teachers are most concerned about ‘the length of time their students spent exposed to screens’ and the ‘potential for
access to inappropriate material’. Teachers report being least concerned about risks to the security of students’ personal information.

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<thead>
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<th>Q11) Which of the following cause you concern about your students’ use of the internet (if any)?</th>
<th>Tallied Responses</th>
<th>As Percentage</th>
<th>Weighted Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The length of time spent exposed to screens</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for access to inappropriate material</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for inappropriate contact with strangers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General lack of awareness about the dangers of the Internet</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential negative impact on their health and wellbeing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to risks (e.g. viruses, hackers)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks to the security of their personal information</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a victim of cyberbullying</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a perpetrator of cyberbullying</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potentially negative impacts on students’ self-perception and body-image</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.1: Teachers concerns about their students’ Internet use*

Additionally, when the weighted rankings are evaluated according to whether the respondent is teaching junior classes, senior classes or is part of the SET team, it is discovered that junior teachers are most concerned about the possibility of their students accessing inappropriate material, while senior teachers are most troubled by their students’ general lack of awareness about the dangers of the Internet. SET teachers are most worried about the length of time children are spending exposed to screens.

The principal interview and teacher group interview reveal some of the same concerns. Participants worry about the duration of their students’ online activities, with some students being allowed it “as [a] kind of babysitting…to keep them occupied” (Teacher A2). The principal also expresses concerns about “kids [being] exposed to inappropriate content and contact” (Principal A) and the
precarious position this can put students in. It is for this reason that the school does not have a BYOD policy, in which children could bring in and use their own phone or other internet accessible device, because the principal is concerned that students could “use their own data and that has no filter and we don’t know what they’d do then” (Principal A).

The principal and the teachers in the group interview also raised a number of additional concerns, which will now be outlined.

4.1.3.1 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is raised by the principal several times throughout the interview. It is described as being this and last year’s “biggest issue that I deal with” (Principal A). He attributes all of the problems to out-of-school internet activity, which he says is often unfiltered and unmonitored. He expresses concerns that the issue will continue to deteriorate and will become “the single most time-consuming issue for principals and for schools as [time] goes on, because the kids will be exposed to inappropriate content and contact outside of school. And that will filter its way back in” (Principal A)

4.1.3.2 Home versus School Internet Use

Different expectations and the disparity between home and school internet use is the single biggest issue raised in both the principal interview and teacher group interview. They repeatedly state that issues arising from internet use and misuse “happen outside [and then] they always build up in school, and then have to be dealt with in school.” (Teacher A1). An atmosphere of frustration towards having to deal with out-of-school issues is palpable.

Both the principal and teachers agree that school internet use is safe as “it’s filtered and blocked” (Principal A) and it is only ever conducted under teacher guidance. In contrast, home internet use is considered to be “unsupervised”
(Teacher A3) and a place where “anything can happen” (Principal A). It appears that ICT use in school occurs within limited circumstances (in terms of both time and activity), while internet use at home is a reward for children when they “do chores or they achieve well or whatever” (Teacher A2) and occasionally as a means of babysitting, as previously mentioned.

4.1.3.3 Students’ Self-image

The principal notes that even his own children perceive their phones to be “like an extension of their arm” (Principal A) and that they are addicted to the adrenaline rush you get from receiving a text or a ‘like’ on a picture on social media. He feels that students in school are similar and that this has negative impacts on their confidence and feelings of self-worth as, “if it doesn't beep, they're excluded.” (Principal A).

4.1.4 Internet Safety Rules and Policy

4.1.4.1 Awareness of Rules and Policies

When asked in the questionnaire whether they are aware of any policies or rules in their school around internet safety, 93% (n=13) of teachers say they are. When queried further about their knowledge of such rules and policies, 71% (n=9) describe their knowledge as ‘good’, with others being less sure [Figure 4]. 36% (n=5) of teachers feel that responsibility for implementing these school rules and policies lay with both the principal and class teacher [Figure 5]. In the teacher group interview, rules such as “no more than one hour [on electronic devices] per night” (Teacher A1), no phones allowed on in school, and no social media access via the school internet are all referenced.
4.1.4.2 AUP- Purpose

Despite being unsure of the specifics of the policy, group interview teachers all agree that the AUP is valuable. They consider its purpose to be “keep[ing] the kids safe online, mak[ing] sure they're not over using devices, keeping screen
time to a minimum, that sort of thing” (Teacher A2) and that it also details “how they can use [the Internet] in school too” (Teacher A3).

4.1.4.3 AUP- Creation

The principal outlines that the first step of devising the AUP involved examining the template from the IPPN website and other schools’ AUPs. Relevant information was identified and then personalised to meet the school’s needs. The policy was subsequently agreed upon in a staff meeting, approved by the parents association and then sent to the board of management for ratification. Afterwards, student input was facilitated by discussing it with children on the Green School Committee (Fourth to Sixth Classes).

The policy is reviewed annually. One of the concerns of this thorough process, however, is the length of time it takes, with one teacher stating that “the rate of technology is moving quicker than policy can be written” (Teacher A1).

4.1.4.4 AUP- Contents

The school’s AUP outlines the various ways in which the Internet is used and monitored in schools, and consequences for its misuse. It outlines general strategies the school takes, such as a filter and firewall systems, how and when the Internet may be used and the conditions under which students’ work may be published on the school website. Relevant legislation and supportive websites are also outlined. Strongly emphasised by the emboldened and underlined font is the statement that social media sites have a minimum user age of 13, that students should not have them and that it is parents’ responsibility to ensure their child complies with this.
4.1.4.5 AUP - Role of the Principal

When asked about his role in creating the policy, the principal seems very conscious of his legal obligations and that schools are “obliged to have it” (Principal A). He indicates that it was his responsibility to ensure the policy is “within the guidelines..., tick[s] all the boxes in regards to child protection” (Principal A) and that it “protect[s] the staff as well” (Principal A).

4.1.5 Additional Internet Safety Strategies

In addition to the AUP, the school adopts other measures to ensure student safety online. External groups such as the community guard, Microsoft volunteers and Zeeko (a company who provide online and in-school support and talks on encouraging children’s online wellbeing) speak to senior classes annually. Additionally, the programme Cyber Smarties is used in Third and Fourth Classes to introduce students to social media in a safe, supervised manner. Moreover, biennial parents’ evening and staff sessions are organised to try and share knowledge.

4.1.5.1 Internet Safety Education

Explicit education around internet safety occurs within the school also. The questionnaire responses reinforce that all teachers feel this is important. Some of the messages they communicate include time spent online, how to manage yourself, identifying and using safe websites and, in particular, the principal emphasises that you think “that you rub it out and it’s gone. And it’s not!” (Principal A).

4.1.6 Responsibility for Internet Safety Education

When asked in the teacher questionnaire to identify who would be most suitable to provide this education to students, many respondents nominate a number of
suitable candidates, with a total number of 27 selections. The majority of participants (44%; n=12) identify the class teacher, followed by the children’s parents (33%; n=9) [Figure 6]. From discussions in the group interview, it was clear that teachers agree that schools have an important role to play, but they also strongly emphasise that they cannot assume sole responsibility and that a “link between home and school” (Teacher A1) is crucial.

![Figure 4.5: Parties identified as being most suitable to provide ISE](image)

**4.1.7 Significant Challenges to Providing this Education**

When asked in the questionnaires to identify challenges that schools face when trying to provide ISE, a total of 60 selections are made. ‘Time constraints’ is the most significant challenge (22%; n=13), followed by a ‘lack of support from parents/guardians’ (17%; n=10) and a ‘lack of professional knowledge about what should be taught’ (17%; n=10) [Figure 7]. Regardless of whether the data is analysed by tallying, weighted rankings (as described in 3.6.2) or what classes the respondents teach, these three primary concerns are repeatedly identified.
A lack of knowledge and difficulty keeping up with the fast-changing nature of social media is also raised in the group interview, with teachers highlighting that there is either a need for upskilling or the involvement of an outside organisation.

Table 4.2: Challenges to providing ISE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q17) Which of the following options do you think create the most significant challenge(s) for schools with respect to providing this education?</th>
<th>Tallied Responses</th>
<th>As Percentage</th>
<th>Weighted Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of inhouse knowledge about Internet Safety</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of professional knowledge about what should be taught regarding Internet Safety</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of formal training</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access to related resources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from parents/guardians</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of guidance from the Department of Education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please elaborate)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is resoundingly clear from the principal interview and teacher group interview that children’s out-of-school behaviour online and blurred lines of responsibility between home and school are the biggest challenges they encounter. Section 4.1.3.2 already highlighted that home internet use causes teachers concern, but it simultaneously presents the biggest difficulties when trying to educate students.

Teachers seem frustrated that the school is promoting limited internet use and, in particular, no access to social media and yet “it’s clear as day that a lot of [students] are… allowed by parents to [access social media] anyway” (Teacher A2). Words such as “unlimited”, “unsupervised” and “inappropriate” are repeatedly used to describe students’ home internet use. “There’s a lot of demands on parents and, you know, the policing and monitoring their children’s activities on the Internet, I don’t know how much of a priority that has!” (Principal A) states the principal. Comments in the questionnaires reinforce these
sentiments, with respondents suggesting that parents allow children access to online materials “that [are] not always age-appropriate” (Teacher A2 Questionnaire) and if they are not monitoring their children’s use then schools are “wasting [their] time” (Teacher A3 Questionnaire).

Parents apparent expectations that schools will rectify any fall out from their children’s misadventures online further frustrates these challenges. Staff report often having to deal with difficulties that arise online outside of school, and their sentiments towards this are noticeable. The principal comments that, “when the trouble happens, which inevitably happens outside the school, I’ve to deal with the consequences. And they come back in [to school] and I have to deal with it.” (Principal A). He stresses that while he endeavours to sort out the issues as they present in school, he tells parents that “we can't deal with the source problem. That's your problem. That's your issue and your responsibility as a parent.” (Principal A).

4.1.8 Summary of Findings for School A

School A consists of an administrative principal, 23 teachers and approximately 495 students. The school has Wi-Fi, which the students access with teacher supervision via school-owned laptops, tablets and computers. The vast majority (71%) of teachers, in addition to the principal, report having concerns about their students’ internet use. These concerns appear to stem exclusively from out-of-school use, which is perceived to be less regulated and monitored. Concerns include: the length of time spent online, potential access to inappropriate material, cyberbullying, a difference between home and school expectations and online activities, and the impact of social media on students’ self-image.

93% of teachers report a general awareness of internet safety rules and policies within school. When asked specifically about the school’s AUP, 71% of teachers report having a good knowledge of its contents. It is devised with inputs from many educational stakeholders, including teachers, parents, children and
the Board of Management. It details the ways in which the Internet is used and monitored in school, and consequences for its misuse. A strongly worded statement within the policy alerts parents to the minimum age of many social media platforms and states that children should not be allowed access to them. In creating and implementing the policy, the principal outlines being aware of his responsibility to ensure that the policy meets its legal obligations and ensures that students and staff are safeguarded.

School A takes a number of additional approaches to ensure their pupils access the Internet safely. They facilitate annual student talks, implement safety programmes such as Cyber Smarties and provide ISE. All teachers agree that this form of education is important for students to receive, but only 44% feel that teachers are the most suitable to provide it. Perceived challenges to providing this education include a lack of professional knowledge about what should be taught, a lack of parental support, blurred lines of responsibility between home and school and the access children have to the Internet at home.
4.2 School B

4.2.1 School Profile

School B is a mixed-school in County Wicklow with an Educate Together ethos. There are approximately 240 students, with one stream of each class from Junior Infants to Sixth Class. In addition to fifteen teachers, the administrative principal has been present for the past 9 years.

The Internet is accessed through the school Wi-Fi via school-owned iPads. There is a strong message in the school that “the Internet is for production of things, not for consumption” (Principal B) and as such, the iPads are used for very specific, meaningful tasks. While ICT is used regularly in the school, the staff are clear that it is simply “a tool. It’s a very important tool” but that it should not and does not “replace other tools that have been part of our repertoire for a long time.” (Principal B). There is no BYOD policy in the school and children are not permitted to use their phones in school at any time. Since the last school year (2017/2018), every student in the school has a G-suite account, allowing them to store their electronic work on the cloud.

Seven teachers out of fifteen responded to the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 47%. One teacher from most class groupings are represented, except for Junior Infants, Second and Fifth classes. 28.5% (n=2) of respondents teach junior classes (Junior Infants to Second Class), 43% (n=3) are senior class teachers (Third to Sixth Classes) and two are SET teachers (28.5%).

The respondents are made up of 14% men (n=1) and 86% women (n=6), with the majority aged between 30-39 (43%; n=3) but all being 49 years old or younger. 71% (n=5) of teachers state having 11-15 years of experience.
4.2.2 Students’ Internet Use

When asked about the frequency with which their students access the Internet, the majority of respondents (57%; n=4) believe it to be ‘a few times each day’ [Figure 8]. This is in line with the principal’s opinion that “the vast majority would access it at least on a daily basis” (Principal B).

![Figure 4.6: Frequency with which students access the Internet](image)

Questionnaire findings show that teachers consider home to be the location where students primarily go online (86%; n=6). When asked what devices they believe students predominantly use to do so, response rates increased, with 13 selections made in total. Tablets and laptops are considered to be the most popular means of accessing the Internet (38%; n=5), followed by gaming consoles such as the Xbox and parents’ smart phones [Figure 9].
4.2.3 Teachers’ Concerns

The data clearly shows that staff have various concerns around their students’ internet use. When questionnaire responses are tallied, the ‘length of time spent exposed to screens’, the ‘potential for access to inappropriate material’, the risk of ‘being a victim of cyber-bullying’ and the ‘potentially negative impacts on students’ self-perception and body-image’ all receive the most votes. However, when rankings are taken into consideration (as described in 3.6.2), the ‘length of time spent exposed to screens’ and the ‘potential for access to inappropriate material’ are seen to be of greatest concern [Figure 10]. The latter of these is of great concern to both junior and senior class teachers, while junior teachers also worry about the potential for ‘inappropriate contact with strangers’.

Based on the tally of votes, the items of least concern are ‘exposure to risks’ such as viruses and hackers and ‘risks to the security of [students’] personal information’. Weighted rankings also show that ‘being a perpetrator of cyber-bullying’ is not of great concern. Whether teachers are teaching junior or senior classes holds no bearing on these results.
4.2.3 Socialising

One of the main issues raised by both the teachers and principal is the impact of the overuse of technology on students’ ability to socialise. Staff feel that a lot of students’ conversations now revolve around particular games and take place online through ‘private messaging’. One teacher even reports that, at birthday parties, the Wi-Fi code is provided, and students spend the party “on [their] own singular devices” (Teacher B1). Teachers feel that the consequences of such
situations are apparent in the schoolyard, where students “can't play together, and the old school games are gone” (Teacher B3).

4.2.3.2 Additional Effects on School Life

Other impacts of the over-digitalisation of life are also being witnessed by teachers. These include the very addictive nature of gaming and social media, which results in students being “on it, or thinking about it…a lot of the time” (Teacher B2). The principal also reports that many students appear tired and lethargic in school due to late night use. However, while such night-time use may have an impact on students’ presentation in school, it is considered that there are too many variables at play to position the blame solely on students’ online activities with absolute certainty.

Furthermore, the fast pace at which gaming moves means children “expect everything to be instant” (Teacher B2). It therefore becomes difficult for them to deal with the slower pace of school life. One teacher also comments on how students are “becoming more lazy… [as,] if [they] don't know how to do something, [they] Google it” (Teacher B1).

4.2.3.3 Pornography

Access to pornography is more “ubiquitous and really easy now” (Principal B) than ever before according to the principal. She mentions several times what a ‘huge’ concern this is for her, due to the impact it has on the perception of healthy relationships.

More than anything else, the principal tries to impart on her students that:

“when I was a kid, the mistakes I made weren't left embedded in cyberspace forever for somebody to find out. A few of my friends may know the stupid things I did when I was eighteen but there is no photographic evidence… You don't want to leave that; you don't want to leave a trail for yourselves” (Principal B).
4.2.4 Internet Safety Rules and Policy

4.2.4.1 Awareness of Rules and Policies

All questionnaire respondents are aware of some school rules and policies around internet safety. When asked about their knowledge of the specifics of the AUP however, 71% of teachers (n=5) report themselves as being ‘unsure’ [Figure 11]. Teachers in the group interview concur with this, explaining that, while there is an awareness of the policy, “it probably hasn't been revisited as often as it could be” (Teacher B3).

![Figure 4.8: Reported knowledge of AUP](image)

During the interview, the principal stresses the importance of a collective responsibility towards policy implementation. This seems to have been clearly communicated to the staff as, when asked who is responsible for overseeing AUP implementation, 71% (n=5) of questionnaire respondents state that all members of the school community have a role to play [Figure 12].
4.2.4.2 AUP - Purpose

Group interview participants refer to the AUP as a set of guidelines and rules for “internet usage and use of any devices” (Teacher B1) within the school and what teachers and students “can and cannot do in the classroom” (Teacher B2). There is also a consensus on the value of the policy, with one teacher emphasising that it gives teachers “something to stand by” (Teacher B1) and that it can be used to support you if an issue arises.

4.2.4.3 AUP - Creation

When asked about creating the AUP, the principal outlines that the first step involved examining the Webwise guidelines and other schools’ policies. These were adapted to meet the school's needs, with staff input also playing a role. Additionally, the principal acknowledged the important role that two parents in the school who work in Microsoft played in “helping to drive a lot of [the AUPs contents], [as they] really knew what needed to go in there.” (Principal B).
Originally, there was no student input. After its current review however, the principal states that members of the Student Council from Third to Sixth Classes will be involved “just so they understand it” (Principal B). The aim is to create a policy that is “user-friendly and practical… [and allows] for the spectrum of ideas that are there” (Principal B).

As discussed in section 4.2.1, last school year saw the introduction of a G-suite for every pupil in the school. The principal explains that this had a significant impact on the AUP and, in order to ensure everybody was comfortable with it, a number of additional steps were added to the AUP review process that year. Firstly, the intended use of the G-suite was communicated to all parents, and they were surveyed to assess how they felt about it and whether they would agree to it. A public meeting was held for parents who had questions remaining, which enabled the principal to assuage any fears and move forward. Some parents still refused to consent however, and alternative solutions were put in place for their children.

4.2.4.4 AUP- Contents

The school’s AUP outlines how the school internet is used and monitored, and sanctions for its misuse. It outlines the general responsibilities of the teachers, such as to ensure internet use is always supervised and websites have been previewed before being used in class. It also details the responsibilities of students and the ways in which they can and cannot use the school internet. The role of the school website, the kind of material that can feature on it, and relevant legislation are also listed.

4.2.4.5 AUP- Role of the Principal

It is apparent that the principal is very conscious of her responsibility towards her students and also in ensuring that policies are up-to-date and effectively implemented and adhered to. She states that, “in terms of the safety of children...
both on a day-to-day basis, physically and every otherwise but also in the cyber world, ultimately the responsibility rests with me” (Principal B). It is clear that through the school’s policies and rules, she endeavours to create a situation that is “amenable to everybody… [and ensures that] the best possible safeguarding is put in place” (Principal B).

4.2.5 Additional Internet Safety Strategies

In addition to their AUP, the school takes a number of steps to ensure their students access the Internet safely and are sufficiently educated on how to keep themselves safe online. Fundamental steps such as filtering systems, monitoring student devices and a policy that makes search history examinable are in place. Furthermore, an internet safety programme is completed annually, and speakers are invited in for Internet Safety Day from organisations such as Webwise, Zeeko, Sticks & Stones, the Gardaí and Microsoft. A parent’s information evening is also facilitated at these times.

The principal is also very proactive, as evidenced by the fact that she attends talks given by experts in the area, such as Mary Aiken, and brings back new findings to her staff for discussion. She also believes in introducing changes slowly “to make sure that we’ve had everybody aware of their responsibilities” (Principal B).

4.2.5.1 Internet Safety Education

Through all the data collected, it is apparent that there is a strong culture of ISE in the school. In the questionnaire, all respondents agree that students should receive it, and the principal emphasises the need to “Start early! You start as soon as they come in!” (Principal B). The focus of this education is to make them “aware of the dangers, while, enabling them to use the Internet as a tool” (Teacher B2) and also to teach them how to be responsible online users.
Some of the topics staff mention include an awareness of finding reliable information and websites, the importance of keeping your personal data safe, the risks around talking to strangers online and how searching online may accidentally lead to inappropriate material and what to do in that situation. The introduction of the G-suite has also placed an increased emphasis on ensuring that children know how to operate the various programmes, understand the procedures to keeping themselves safe and have an awareness of intellectual property and how to protect theirs.

4.2.6 Responsibility for Internet Safety Education

When asked who was most suitable to provide ISE, most questionnaire respondents identify more than one party, with a total number of 10 selections made. 50% (n=5) suggest that ‘an external company’ would be most suitable, followed by the ‘class teacher’ and then ‘parents’ [Figure 13].

![Figure 4.10: Parties identified as being most suitable to provide ISE](image)

Q16) Who do you feel would be most suitable to provide this education?

- Parents
- School Principal
- Class Teacher
- Another teacher within the school
- An external company

When this is probed further in the group interview, there is a consensus that, while all parties have a role to play, the involvement of an external company is the ideal scenario. Teachers were clear that the school provide education
about “other types of safety, so internet safety should fall into that” (Teacher B2), however, as a child’s “first educators” (Teacher B2), parents are recognised as playing a key role in this education. It is for this reason that a need to strengthen the partnership between home and school was outlined.

Ultimately though, concerns are raised about teachers’ and parents’ knowledge, and the gap between that and the information required to adequately teach children who already know so much about the Internet. It is at this point that the importance of external organisations becomes clear, as they “have the full knowledge. This is their expertise, their area” (Teacher B1). Additionally, teachers feel that children might be more receptive to hearing the same messages from different voices, and in particular from people who are considered experts in the area.

4.2.7 Significant Challenges to Providing this Education

Regardless of the age group being taught, a ‘lack of formal training’ permeates the questionnaire responses as the biggest challenge schools face when providing students with ISE [Figure 14]. Teachers in the group interview also voice concerns that students “know more than we do” (Teacher B1) and that the fast-changing nature of the Internet and social media means that staff do not have sufficient knowledge to support their students.
Interestingly, there is a consensus in School B’s questionnaires that a ‘lack of support from parents/guardians’ is not a challenge. However, during the teacher group interview and principal interview, internet use outside of school and the “gap between how we're perceiving [safe internet use] as educators, and maybe how parents see it.” (Principal B) presents as making the education process more challenging.

From comments made in these interviews, it is clear that internet use at home is very different to that in school. School-use is described as “guided” and “monitored” with specific tasks and time limitations. In contrast, home-use is seen as a “reward” or something to “go and play” on. Teachers consider it to be more private and less regulated, resulting in more internet misuse, and upset being caused. These problems often boil over into school-life, and this too is reported by staff as being challenging and frustrating, as they have to try and remedy damage to student relationships.

The principal feels strongly that despite all their educating and raising awareness with students and parents, ultimately “children are only really with us for 25 hours a week. The rest of the time they're at home. And I think parents have to take some responsibility for that” (Principal B). She expresses the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q17) Which of the following options do you think create the most significant challenge(s) for schools with respect to providing this education?</th>
<th>Tallied Responses</th>
<th>As Percentage</th>
<th>Weighted Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of inhouse knowledge about Internet Safety</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of professional knowledge about what should be taught regarding Internet safety</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of formal training</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access to related resources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from parents/guardians</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of guidance from the Department of Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Table 4.4: Challenges to providing ISE
concern that, while things like the Momo scare (popular in the media at the time of the recording) cause parents to fear the Internet, often things like “social media and some kinds of gaming” (Principal B) that are considered far more benign by parents, often cause the most issues and hurt.

4.2.8 Summary of Findings for School B

School B has as administrative principal, 15 teachers and approximately 240 pupils. Students access the school Wi-Fi using iPads in order to create content and each student received a G-suite account last year to store this content online. Both teachers and the principal agree that students access the Internet a few times each day.

Teachers and the principal all have concerns about their students use of the Internet, particularly that which occurs outside of school. These include the length of time students spend in front of screens, potential access to inappropriate contact and material (including pornography) and its impact on students’ ability to socialise.

While all teachers report being aware of school rules and policies, 71% are unsure about the specific details of the AUP. AUP content is found to include ways in which the Internet is used and monitored in school, and the consequences for its misuse. Numerous groups, including teachers, parents and the Board of Management, are involved in its creation. While most teachers feel it is the whole staff’s responsibility to implement the policy, the principal is aware that responsibility ultimately lies with her, and that she needs to ensure that policies are up-to-date and in line with child safeguarding requirements.

In addition to the AUP, School B takes a number of additional steps to ensure students’ use the Internet safely. They conduct annual internet safety programmes, facilitate speakers on internet safety for students and parents, and endeavour to educate their pupil’s about safe internet use. While all teachers feel
that this education is important, the majority believe that an external company is most suitable to provide it. Challenges teachers face when trying to provide this education include a lack of formal training, gaps between how parents and schools perceive the Internet and its risks, the access children have to the Internet at home, and a perceived lack of parental responsibility for its misuse.

4.3 Summary

In this chapter, the findings for both schools were presented individually. This began by analysing the school profile and the frequency with which teachers believe students access the Internet. Subsequently, teachers’ concerns about their students’ online activities were examined. Following this, the school’s Acceptable Use Policy and other approaches that they undertake to keep their students safe online were explored. Finally, teachers’ opinions on responsibility for ISE were evaluated, alongside some of the challenges of providing it.
Chapter 5

Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This thesis examines what challenges two schools face with regards to internet safety and what, if anything, they are doing to try and tackle them. In this chapter, the key findings from chapter four will be discussed in light of relevant literature.

To begin, teachers’ concerns about their students’ internet use will be explored. Following this, the approaches that schools take when creating their AUPs and the information they include in them will be analysed. Additional strategies that schools are undertaking will be highlighted, before exploring the role that principals perceive they have in implementing school policies. Finally, the topic of internet safety education will be addressed in more detail, with an analysis of who is best suited to provide it and the challenges schools encounter when trying to do so.

5.1 Addressing the Research Questions

This Case Study explored the experiences and opinions of teachers’ and principals’ in two primary schools with regards to internet safety, their concerns about students use of it and the steps they are taking to try and tackle them. Having conducted the study, the researcher feels that a better understanding of the approaches the schools take in order to ensure safe internet use amongst their students has been established.
5.2 Question 1- What are Schools’ Most Significant Concerns About their Students’ Internet Use?

The majority of staff in both schools believe that their students access the Internet ‘a few times a day’, predominantly via tablets and laptops. The length of time that students are exposed to screens is also one of teachers’ greatest concerns. National literature supports these concerns, as 49.9% of children spend between one and four hours online on a daily basis (CSI, 2018), with the majority using tablets, followed by laptops, smart phones and gaming consoles to do so (Everri & Park, 2018). However, in addition to the quantity of students’ internet access, the quality of their online experiences worries teachers.

5.2.1 External Risks

In line with research (Kim et al., 2006; Tettegah et al., 2006; Chandrashekhar et al., 2016; O’Keeffe, 2016; Martin & Rice, 2012; Huda et al., 2017), teachers in both schools express concerns that their students’ internet use exposes them to dangers, with potential access to inappropriate material online causing teachers very significant levels of worry. International research suggests that teachers are right to worry about this, as 70% of 11- and 12-year olds have social media accounts (CSI, 2018) despite a minimum age restriction of 13-years on most platforms. Additionally, 36% of primary school aged children have entered websites for people age 18+ (ISPCC, 2011).

5.2.2 Cyberbullying

Students becoming victims of cyberbullying is also flagged as a major concern by staff from Schools A and B, with Principal A labelling it the “biggest issue” he deals with. Broader research shows that it is becoming more prevalent, with the rate increasing from 6% of 9-16-year olds in 2011 (Livingstone et al., 2011) to 18% of Irish Sixth Class children in 2017 (Everri & Park, 2018). Interestingly, despite this, no one in either school expresses any worries about their students
being perpetrators of cyberbullying. This could suggest that they either do not feel their students are at risk of partaking in cyberbullying activities, or simply that they are more concerned about the vulnerable students who could be targeted, than those in a stronger position who might perpetrate it.

However, the literature suggests that perhaps teachers should be more concerned about their pupils’ ability to partake in cyberbullying. It illustrates that the ‘disinhibition phenomenon’ can make children act in a way they would not in face-to-face situations (Suler, 2004 as cited in Willard, 2012) and that perceived unidentifiability online can sometimes inhibit their empathy, as they do not see the real-life consequences of their actions (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). Therefore, while teachers might not witness students behaving in ways that would be considered bullying in a face-to-face context, they should be mindful that the research indicates that students may be more hurtful and less considerate in their online actions regardless.

5.2.3 Internet Addiction

Principal A and School B’s teachers all highlight the addictive nature of the Internet and online gaming. Both groups outline its visible impacts on school-life, particularly on children’s ability to socialise. They note that, in conversations, children regularly return to the topic of their online gaming experiences and also that they struggle to come up with games to play on yard. Additionally, the teachers observe students becoming increasingly lazy and bored in the classroom. They perceive this to be a consequence of the quick-paced nature of gaming and the instant gratification it provides, as opposed to the slower and more meticulous nature of classroom activities.

No particular concerns are raised about the impact of excessive technology and social media use on students’ physical ability or mental wellbeing, as some of the research suggests (Kim et al., 2006; Jenaro et al., 2007; OECD, 2015). However, Principal A and the teachers in School B do
express concerns about the correlation between the feedback children receive from their peers on the Internet and social media, and students' feelings of self-worth. With broader literature outlining the potential negative impacts on users' wellbeing (Williard, 2012; Watts et al., 2017), it is considered that perhaps technology is in fact having an impact on students' welfare, despite it not being reported by teachers in this study. Such effects may go undetected by teachers because parents have not informed them of such issues, or possibly, staff are aware of them, but may not have made a link between the pupil's wellbeing and their internet use.

5.2.4 Two Key Features

Regardless of the actual worries, findings from this research indicate that there are two common denominators underpinning all concerns. Namely, internet activity occurring outside of school and the rapid development of the Internet and technology.

Staff in both schools communicate their strong concerns that students’ home-use is where the vast majority of problems arise. They believe that it is habitually unmonitored and that children are consequently accessing inappropriate websites and material. National literature supports the validity of these claims, as 23% of primary-school children access the Internet in their bedrooms, while 36% enter websites for people aged 18+ (ISPCC, 2011). Additionally, the education that schools provide and the repeated messages they communicate with students and parents about the need for monitoring and limiting internet use appear to have little impact on the realities of students’ online activities at home. This lack of regard for their recommendations but then subsequently calling on them to remedy the problems that arise causes frustration for interviewees in this study. Findings also suggest that teachers perceive educating students to be insufficient and that, regardless, students are incapable of sufficiently regulating their own internet use and evaluating whether materials they access and behaviours they exhibit are appropriate or not. Thus,
a strong need for greater parental responsibility and monitoring, and joined-up thinking between homes and schools is highlighted.

This situation is further complicated by the rapid technological advances that are occurring. Staff in both School A and B express worries about struggling to support their students, as they themselves cannot keep up with the new apps, methods of communication etc. and that they find their pupils’ knowledge to be far more advanced than their own. International findings support these sentiments, with adults being described as ‘digital immigrants’ in comparison to technologically native children (Williard, 2012; ISPCC, 2015; O’Keeffe, 2016). As already evidenced in the previous paragraph, children cannot adequately regulate their internet use, regardless of whether they have received some education on how to do so safely. Therefore, there is a crucial need for adults who support children (particularly teachers and parents) to receive greater support and education so they in turn can safeguard their children’s/students’ wellbeing.
5.3 Question 2- What Approaches are Schools Taking when Devising their AUPs? What is Included in the Contents of said AUPs?

Both schools have an Acceptable Use Policy, as recommended by the Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2018). Teachers in both schools believe the document to be beneficial, however, they are not overly confident in their knowledge of the policy’s content.

5.3.1 Approaches to Devising AUPs.

In line with government recommendations (NCTE, 2012), School A and B both consulted the Webwise guidelines, as well as looking at other schools’ policies when creating their own. A range of stakeholders were also involved, including staff, parents and the Board of Management. School A consulted students on their Green School Committee, and while School B did not initially, they intend to involve their Student Council once the current review is complete. Furthermore, School B utilised the expertise of two parents in the school who worked for Microsoft. The inclusion of these stakeholders is in-line with national (DES, 2018) as well as international recommendations (Tobin, 2017; Vanderline et al., 2009; Moreno et al. 2013; Martin & Rice, 2012; Melgosa & Scott, 2013).

5.3.2 AUP- Contents

The Webwise guidelines state that an AUP should “address all aspects of internet usage… [including]: searching, downloading, publishing a school website, browsing websites [and] electronic communications such as email, social networking, messaging etc.” (NCTE, 2012, p.2). These categories are all met within School A and B’s individual AUP. Other areas that are discussed in both AUPs include sanctions for misuse and relevant legislation. School A also references a number of internet safety websites. These three are suggested areas to encompass in the Webwise Guidelines (NCTE, 2012).
School A’s AUP makes a strong stand against social media use. They state that most platforms have a minimum user age of 13, therefore highlighting that it is illegal for their students to have accounts on them. The policy makes it clear that it is parents’ responsibility to ensure their child complies with this. While the Webwise guidelines (NCTE, 2012) recommend outlining the school’s position on social networking sites, broader international research also emphasises a need for clear boundaries within school policies (Bissonnette, 2009; Williard, 2012; Kritzinger, 2017). Boundaries between home and school responsibility can be complex for both parties to navigate, as the two often overlap; issues that arise at home transfer into school-life and vice versa. Hence, referring to students’ out-of-school activities may inadvertently blur the boundaries of this policy somewhat, as some parents may think that they can bring issues that arise on social media to the school to deal with if they have used the school’s guidelines to regulate their children’s internet use. As dealing with issues that arise outside of school is considered challenging and in some cases frustrating by staff in both schools, including such a statement in their policy may have the opposite effect to that desired by the school i.e. parents may be more likely to approach the school for solutions when problems arise.

Finally, it is noted that no clear definitions of any nuanced terms or unacceptable online behaviours (e.g. catfishing, cyberbullying or doxing) are outlined in either AUP, despite the importance of this being highlighted in the literature (Bissonnette, 2009; Williard, 2012; NCTE, 2012; Kritzinger, 2017). The inclusion of such descriptions would be beneficial to include, so as to ensure that the meanings and categorising features of various infractions are clear for all parties.
5.4 Question 3- What Strategies are Schools Adopting Beyond their AUP?

5.4.1 Safety Systems

Both schools take a number of other measures to ensure their students access the Internet safely. To begin, both have internet filtering and firewall systems in place to limit students’ roaming capabilities. Additionally, both have strict monitoring procedures in place.

5.4.2 Education

The data collected demonstrates a strong belief by staff in both schools that educating pupils about internet safety is very important. School B’s principal considers that this should “start as soon as they come in”, an opinion which is supported by international research (Martin & Rice, 2012) as children are accessing the Internet younger and younger (Everri & Park, 2018).

Neither school appears to have a school-wide approach to ISE, however standardised safety programmes such as Stay Safe and Cyber Smarties are implemented. Many of the topics that the schools are discussing appear to fall within the categories of ‘digital literacy’, a term that describes the functional skills required to operate and participate fully in technology and the media (Hague & Williamson, 2009; Webwise, n.d.). Webwise (n.d.) has classified these skills under 7 headings: critical thinking, online safety skills, digital culture, collaboration and creativity, finding information, communication and netiquette and finally, functional skills. School A and B explore appropriate online behaviour, including how to search for and identify reliable websites and information, how to keep personal data safe, how to manage yourself online and the dangers of talking to strangers online. These areas all fall within the scope of the digital literacy skills outlined (Webwise, n.d.) and recommendations from broader research (Bissonette, 2009; Williard, 2012).
However, the topics taught by schools are not considered exhaustive. Neither school explores social norms or the importance of responding positively as witnesses in relation to cyberbullying. Both of these are highlighted as vital approaches to take when trying to tackle cyberbullying incidences (Perkins et al., 2009; Perkins et al., 2011; Williard, 2012; Park et al., 2014), such as the ones that both principals report encountering. This suggests that there is still scope for an expansion and development of ISE in both schools.

However, with teachers’ repeated concerns about a lack of personal knowledge and professional guidance regarding what should be taught, the quality and depth of education depends exclusively on individual teachers’ breadth of knowledge, confidence and their personal commitment to keep up-skilled, education even within each school. Thus, the education students receive is likely to be inconsistent. Responsibility for ISE and its associated challenges will all be discussed further in section 5.6.

5.4.3 External Speakers

Both schools facilitate annual internet safety speakers for students. This includes presentations from external companies such as Zeeko, the Community Guard, Webwise, Sticks and Stones and volunteers from Microsoft. While the literature strongly supports ISE (Bissonette, 2009; Martin & Rice, 2012; Williard, 2012; Giant, 2013; Melgosa & Scott, 2013; Park et al., 2014; von Solms & von Solms, 2014; OECD, 2015), it suggests that, rather than teaching about internet safety in isolation or at one particular time (like Internet Safety Day as was suggested in this study), it should be taught on a continual basis through informal ‘teachable moments’ and issues that come up in school or the media throughout the year (Bissonette, 2009; Melgosa & Scott, 2013). Going forward, this could be a consideration for enhancing ISE practices in schools.
5.4.4 Educating Parents and Staff

In addition to student education, it is clear that both schools make a conscious effort to ensure that parents and teachers are also kept informed. For parents, external speakers facilitate information evenings biennially in School A, and annually in School B. As “the child’s primary educator” (Government of Ireland, 1999, p.21), research considers parental education to be vitally important so they can support their children online (Tettegah et al., 2006; Melgosa & Scott, 2013).

Teachers in both schools receive talks from external speakers biennially. Additionally, Principal B attends talks by experts in the field and brings relevant information back to the staff. Such engagement, along with the other various approaches outlined in this section, demonstrate that schools have a clear desire to support and protect their pupils and ensure they remain safe online.

However, there appears to be little in the way of government-led professional development, something that is voiced by the questionnaire respondents from School B in particular. It appears that schools organise these speakers at their discretion, which indicates the ad-hoc, school dependent nature of provision in this regard. Thus, there is scope for greater clarity and leadership at a national level with respect to the provision of related supports for schools (including teachers) and parents.
5.5 Question 4- How do School Leaders Perceive their Role and Responsibility in Devising and implementing AUPs?

It is clear from speaking to both principals that they experience their role as principal as serving two main purposes in creating and enacting the school’s AUP. Firstly, both principals are very aware of their responsibilities towards their pupils and to safeguarding their wellbeing. Secondly, both are conscious of their legal obligations and that it is ultimately their responsibility to ensure that policies are up-to-date and effectively implemented. However, despite a thorough search, no Irish documentation clarifying who specifically is responsible for policy implementation is apparent, apart from the Education Act 1998, which states more broadly that the Board of Management has ultimate responsibility for ensuring student safety and welfare (Government of Ireland, 1998). As well as these two points, Principal A also expresses the need for principals to ensure the safety of their staff.

In addition to the principal’s responsibilities, Principal B believes strongly in the value of collective responsibility among staff and appears to have created a culture within the school in which all staff members are aware of their role. This benefits the school (and therefore its students), as the communal energies and efforts of the staff can help to strengthen messages about rules and appropriate behaviours that pupils receive.
5.6 Internet Safety Education - Responsibility and Challenges

While the responsibility for and problems associated with providing ISE was not initially identified by the researcher as a key issue in this study, it was a prominent topic of conversation throughout the data collection process. For this reason, while ISE has already been discussed as an additional action that schools take to help their students remain safe online in section 5.4.2, who is most suitable to conduct it and the challenges schools face when trying to do so will now be explored.

Questionnaire respondents from School A indicate that the ‘class teacher’ is the most appropriate person to provide ISE. Research also identifies schools as being in an excellent position to do so (Bissonette, 2009; ISPCC, 2015). In contrast, School B specifies that ‘an external company’ is most suitable. However, both of these are in divergence with research which found that teachers, paediatricians and parents all identified parents as holding the primary responsibility for it (Moreno et al. 2013). This study (Moreno et al., 2013) though, concurs with Schools A and B in affirming the valuable roles that home, school and external parties all have to play.

Both schools also classify a number of challenges that teachers face in their endeavours to facilitate such education. Primarily, their lack of personal knowledge and the difficulties they face in trying to keep up with technological developments impede teachers from discussing internet safety with their students. This concern is reflective of teachers in other studies (Cross et al., 2016). This is also the main reason given by teachers in School B when outlining the need for external company’s involvement. This once again reinforces that schools may not be solely the most suitable facilitators of ISE, as they doubt their own knowledge, and that a more partnership-based approach is thus more appropriate and more likely to be effective.
Additionally, the questionnaires highlight challenges such as time constraints due to an already busy curriculum schedule, and a lack of professional training and knowledge regarding what should be taught. These difficulties underline a need for government input to clarify how much time should be spent on internet safety, where the time should come from, and crucially, what needs to be covered in order to provide children with the necessary digital literacy skills.

Interestingly, while School A outlines a lack of parental support as a significant difficulty, there is a resounding consensus from School B that it is not so. This could be due to the “high levels of parental involvement” (Educate Together, 2005, p.14) in all aspects of education that is encouraged within the Educate Together ethos.

Nevertheless, regardless of patronage, both schools define students’ out-of-school internet use and unclear boundaries of responsibility between home and school as being highly challenging. It appears that as a consequence of less supervised and regulated internet use at home, more regular problems arise, which inevitably boil over into school life and relationships. Both schools seem to find these issues difficult to rectify and prevent reoccurring, as, despite their warnings that internet use should be limited in terms of time and content, they have no control over what actually occurs once their students leave school.

Research also acknowledges the difficulties schools face when trying to balance their responsibility and legal rights regarding incidences that occur outside of school (Tettegah et al., 2006; Eden et al., 2013; Giant, 2013). It appears to be a grey area, as schools have no control over what goes on online once their students leave school (and indeed perhaps they should not have), but when issues arising from these online activities present in school-life, they seem to be expected by parents to intervene and resolve them. And so, the question remains, where is the line of responsibility drawn between issues that arise outside of school, but then proceed to impact school-life? Both principals state
that parents need to take more responsibility for what their children are doing online and how they are behaving, and its consequences.

These difficulties demonstrate a strong need both for boundaries of responsibility and, fundamentally, consistent messages and limitations around internet use both at home and in school.

5.7 Conclusion

From this chapter, it is realised that the research findings are predominantly in-line with broader literature. It is discovered that schools have a number of concerns about students’ internet use; from the length of time spent online, to external risks posed by seedy internet content, the risks of cyberbullying and even its implications on behaviours presenting in school. Regardless of the concerns however, students’ out-of-school internet use and teachers’ lack of knowledge and therefore incapacity to support students, present as overarching factors of the concerns already discussed.

In reaction to the concerns outlined above, schools are creating Acceptable Use Policies to try and ensure that students’ internet use inside school is safe. In creating them, schools are involving a range of stakeholders as recommended, but it appears that staff are not always overly au fait with its contents.

Schools are also taking a number of additional steps. Primarily, it is evident that staff within the schools truly believe that ISE is important for children. However, despite their efforts to facilitate it, there still appears to be uncertainty as to who is in the best position to do so, due to teachers’ self-professed lack of understanding about internet safety and what should be taught in this regard. To this end, a requirement for professional development and a national curriculum to underpin this instruction is highlighted. Other approaches to promote internet safety included close monitoring and filtering systems on the schools’ internet
and providing parents and teachers with opportunities to keep themselves informed via information evenings.

More than anything else, one of the key findings is the perceived discrepancy by school staff respondents between schools’ and parents’ attitudes to the Internet and its use, and the complex and challenging problems stemming from it. This multifaceted issue is compacted by a seeming lack of parental boundaries and responsibility, and the schools’ frustrations that they do not have any control over what happens online activities outside of school, but that they have to deal with its consequential issues.

It is also evident that while internet safety education is crucial, it does not prevent issues from arising, particularly at home, where internet use is more liberated and may be poorly regulated. It appears that despite receiving some education in school, students still struggle to regulate their actions and behaviours online. Thus, adult involvement in order to protect them is crucial, with a vital need for a coherent approach between home and school.

5.8 Summary

This chapter discussed the findings from this study under the four research questions and the additional topic of who is considered to be most appropriate to provide ISE and the challenges schools face when trying to do so.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

Having presented the findings in chapter four and discussed them in light of pertinent literature in chapter five, this concluding chapter will consider the potential consequences of these outcomes on school practice and policy. These conclusions will begin by summarising the main findings. Following this, implications for future professional practice and policy, limitations of the research and potential paths for further research will be discussed. This chapter will then close with the researcher’s personal reflections.

6.1 Addressing the Research Questions

The research questions, as identified in chapter one, are examined using a Case Study approach. The investigation is conducted within two primary schools; with the principal and teachers in both being asked about their opinions of and concerns regarding students’ internet use and the approaches being taken by the school to tackle these worries. A number of conclusions are drawn from this research.

Firstly, it is apparent that teachers have a range of worries about their students’ internet usage, from the length of time they spend online, to their personal actions, the risks of cyberbullying and the implications it is having on school-life.

Secondly, it is clear that both schools are keen to enable their pupils to access the Internet in a safe and sensitive manner, and that they are taking a number of steps to ensure this. In addition to restrictions on time spent and the
online activities undertaken, both schools have strong filtering systems and clear rules about monitoring students in place. Furthermore, it is evident that both school’s Acceptable Use Policy includes input from a range of stakeholders. However, it is also noticed that staff are not overly confident about the policy’s contents.

Additionally, the findings of the research strongly demonstrate that staff within the schools truly believed that ISE is important, but also that they appear unsure as to who is best to provide it. They recognise the valuable role that they play in this, but a lack of personal and professional knowledge is hindering them from feeling they can adequately do so on their own.

More than anything else, the biggest issue that schools face presents as the discrepancy between school and home internet activities and behaviours. This challenge is two-fold. Firstly, home-use is considered poorly regulated and limited, consequently children appear to be at greater risks and encounter more problems as result of their own, or someone else’s behaviours. Additionally, parents involving the school in incidences that result from these online engagements is noted as highly challenging for schools.

6.2 Implications on Professional Practice

Many of the schools’ actions are to be commended, such as educating their pupils to act safely and wisely online. This education is strongly supported by national and international research; therefore, it is recommended that other schools adopt similar approaches. However, the quality of this education is questioned, as teachers indicate that they have a lack of personal knowledge and national instruction on what exactly needs to be taught. Thus, education varies from classroom-to-classroom, exclusively dependent on individual teachers’ level of understanding, confidence to teach it and whether they believe it is their responsibility to provide such education at all. In order to ensure this education is more robust and consistent, a number of measures need to occur
on a national level. Firstly, there is a clear need for regular professional development on internet safety in order to ensure that staff have sufficient knowledge to provide such education. Additionally, a detailed and continuously evolving programme or curriculum specifying the various topics to cover is considered necessary.

Crucially, the cumulative findings of the data clearly show that, regardless of efforts to protect students’ online activities in school and provide some education around how they can be safe online in general, students are incapable of adequately regulating their own actions online. As a number of problems are still arising, with the majority stemming from out-of-school use, a number of recommendations are proposed:

Firstly, parents require significantly more education and help in order for them to be sufficiently able to support and protect their children online. To ensure that every parent receives equal input, regardless of the school’s knowledge or opinion of internet use, this needs to be instigated nationwide by an independent body, such as the DES, and facilitated by organisations with expertise in the area.

Secondly, there is a critical need for more joined-up thinking between home and school in order to ensure safe online use. It is evident that even with education, children cannot effectively evaluate and ensure their own safety online. Furthermore, while the schools seem confident that the steps they are taking to ensure internet safety within school are effective, problems are still arising from home-use. Therefore, getting all parties on the same page with regards to internet safety messages and limits seems like a vital next step to minimising problems and maximising child welfare online.

Finally, following on from the clear evidence throughout this chapter which has demonstrated the need for aligned thinking and boundaries, it is
recommended that an internet safety programme is developed that would include elements of both school and home involvement.

6.3 Limitations of the Research

Despite every effort being made to create a thorough and in-depth illustration of each school’s context, some difficulties were encountered when trying to gather feedback on the questionnaires and participants for the subsequent group interview. While questionnaire response rates were reasonable (School A=61%; School B=47%), it cannot be said the Case Study findings are fully reflective of the school’s situation, as it cannot be presumed that non-respondents would have agreed with their colleague’s spread of responses. Moreover, although a number of questionnaire respondents initially offered to participate, trying to get them to commit to the interview was more difficult. Once again, had more teachers partaken, different perspectives may have been gained, which could have added to the findings.

Due to the Case Study nature of this research, it cannot be said that the findings are generalisable. Instead, the approach intended to examine two schools who both consider themselves to be proactive about internet safety in order to glean a more in-depth understanding of their individual contexts. To create a more generalisable study, a larger sample size with schools representing a wider range of approaches would have been required. However, this could have compromised the depth of the study.

Finally, time restrictions limited the extent to which the two schools’ contexts could be investigated. With more time, the research could have looked at internet safety perspectives from other groups within the school, such as the Board of Management, parents and students.
6.4 Potential for Further Research

If continuing this study at a later stage, the research questions could be answered more thoroughly. This could be done by allocating more time to the study to allow for clarification on any outstanding questions. Additionally, with more time, greater depth could be added to the research by examining perspectives of the schools’ Board of Management, parents and children’s.

Alternatively, follow-up research could broaden the study and explore what difficulties a wider range of schools’ experience or the approaches they take to internet safety. The findings of such research could then be compared with this study and it could be examined whether there is any alignment between schools’ approaches to internet safety and the challenges they face.

6.5 Personal Reflection

The researcher gained great personal insight and felt that a range of research skills were enhanced throughout this investigative process. It was learned that organisation and an overall sense of time management were strengths of the researcher, while other skills such as synthesising sources and setting manageable goals were developed during this process.

On reflection, the researcher felt confident that a Case Study was the correct approach to take for this research as it allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the situation within the schools to be developed. The different methods employed were also considered to have been effective, as they enabled a range of perspectives to be represented. The follow-up group interviews were also particularly beneficial, as they provided scope to re-visit and clarify understanding.

Despite worrying that it would be challenging to secure schools for participation, the researcher secured two schools quite efficiently. However,
difficulties were experienced when trying to maximise respondents for the teacher questionnaire and follow-up interview group. Despite ensuring that the methods did not clash with any significant school events such as Parent Teacher meetings or the run up to school holidays, it was difficult to secure volunteers, particularly for the group interviews. On reflection, the researcher is unsure if anything more could have been done to facilitate greater group interview participation, as conducting them during school time was not an option due to the researcher also teaching full-time.

6.6 Summary

This chapter focused on identifying the implications of the findings on professional practice and policy, the limitations of the research and potential opportunities for future research.

The research outcomes indicated a requirement for continuous professional development for teachers and a detailed internet safety programme that is regularly reviewed and developed. Additionally, a crucial need for more joined up thinking about appropriate internet use between home and school was identified, with considerably more education and support for parents also being needed. Finally, it was suggested that an internet safety programme involving both parental and school involvement would be of benefit, as both parties could then establish and reinforce the same internet safety boundaries and messages.

Following this, limitations of the research as a result of the response rate, time restrictions and the study’s generalisability were outlined. Finally, potential opportunities for future research, by either deepening or broadening the study, were discussed.
List of References


Appendices
Appendix A:  Teacher Questionnaire

The following questionnaire will be anonymous. Please answer the questions by circling the answer you consider most accurate, unless instructed otherwise. I would ask that you answer all questions honestly so that reliable data can be obtained.

Thank you in advance!

1) Are you:

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<th>Female</th>
<th>Rather not say</th>
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2) What age are you?

|   | 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ |

3) How many years have you been teaching for?

|   | 0-5  | 6-10  | 11-15 | 16-20 | 20+ |

4) How would you describe your computer skills?

|   | No skills at all | Basic/Beginner | Average | Advanced | Expert |

5) Do you have a profile on a social networking site e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter?

|   | Yes | No | Rather not say |

   If Yes, which sites? ________________________________

6) Which class(es) do you currently teach?

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<td></td>
<td>Senior Infants</td>
<td>4th Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Class</td>
<td>5th Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Class</td>
<td>6th Class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7) On average, how often do you think your students access the Internet?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Once a month</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once a fortnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once a week</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
8) Where do you think your students access the Internet in the main?
   At home  In school  Don’t know  Other (please elaborate)
   Other: ________________________________

9) How do you think your students, predominantly, access the Internet? (please circle)
   Personal smart phone
   Parent’s smart phone
   Tablet or laptop
   Desktop device
   Other gaming devices (e.g. Xbox, Playstation)
   Don’t know

10) Do you have concerns around your students’ use of the Internet?
    Yes  No  Don’t know

11) Which of the following cause you concern about your students’ use of the Internet (if any)? (Please rank in order, with 1 being the reason that causes the most concern)
    ______ The length of time spent exposed to screens
    ______ Potential for access to inappropriate material
    ______ Potential for inappropriate contact with strangers
    ______ General lack of awareness about the dangers of the Internet
    ______ Potential negative impact on their health and wellbeing
    ______ Exposure to risks (e.g. viruses, hackers)
    ______ Risks to the security of their personal information
    ______ Being a victim of cyberbullying
    ______ Being a perpetrator of cyberbullying
    ______ Potentially negative impact on students’ self-perception and body-image
    ______ Other (please elaborate) ________________________________
    ______ None of these
    ______ Don’t know
12) Are you aware of any policy or rules concerning Internet Safety in your School?

Yes  No

Please outline:________________________________________

13) If Yes, how would you describe your knowledge of the content of these rules/policies?

Very poor  Poor  Unsure  Good  Very Good

14) In your opinion, who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of such a policy or rules? ________________________________

15) Do you think students should receive education about how to use the Internet safely?

Yes  No  Don’t know

16) If Yes, who do you feel would be most suitable to provide this education? (please circle)

Parents  School principal  Class teacher  Another teacher within the school  An external company

17) Which of the following options do you think create the most significant challenge(s) for schools with respect to providing this education? (Please rank in order, with 1 being the most significant challenge)

_____ Time constraints
_____ Lack of inhouse knowledge about Internet Safety
_____ Lack of professional knowledge about what should be taught regarding Internet safety
_____ Lack of formal training
_____ Lack of access to related resources
_____ Lack of support from parents/guardians
_____ Lack of guidance from the Department of Education
_____ Other (please elaborate) ________________________________

Are there any other comments you wish to make at this time? __________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

95
Appendix B: Principal Interview Schedule

Introductory Questions

- How many years as principal?
- How many teaching staff are currently employed?
- How often do you think the majority of students in your school access the Internet?
- Do students have access to the Internet through the School Internet?

Acceptable Usage Policies

- Does your school have an Acceptable Usage Policy?
- Who was/is involved in its creation?
- What do you believe is a principal’s role when the school’s AUP is being created?
- Did your school use any guidelines or examples of other AUPs when creating it?
- Was there any data gathered through questionnaires etc. when your policy was being developed?
- Is this policy reviewed? How often? Who is involved?
- What responsibilities do you think principals have to ensure policies, and AUPs specifically, are implemented?
- What, if any, challenges have you experienced personally, or among your staff, when trying to implement your AUP?
- What steps/approaches have you taken to try and minimise or deal with these challenges?
Additional strategies beyond AUPs

- Apart from the AUP, are there any other steps that you school or the staff take to promote Internet Safety?

- Have you or any of your staff availed of any resources to deal with Internet Safety?

- Have your staff received any training about Internet Safety or how to educate students to engage safely with the Internet?

- Has your school hosted a parents'/guardians’ information session? What kind of things make this difficult to do?

- What kind of problems do you as a school face when trying to tackle the issue of Internet Safety?

- Is there anything the Department of Education could do to help you as a school cope better with tackling the issue of Internet Safety?

Challenges faced by schools with respect to Internet Safety

- What are some of the things that cause you the most concern about your students’ use of the Internet (if any)?

- In the last 5 years, have you experienced any incidents or problems brought to your attention as a result of your students’ Internet access either inside or outside of school?

- Do you feel the schools’ parents support the schools’ endeavours to promote Internet Safety?
Appendix C: Teacher Group Interview Schedule

- Are you aware of any school rules or policies around Internet safety in your school?
- Can you elaborate on some of these?

**Acceptable Usage Policy**

- Have you heard the term Acceptable Use Policy before?
- What do you understand about the purpose of an Acceptable Use Policy?
- Do you know if your school has an Acceptable Usage Policy?
- How well do you feel you know the contents of your schools’ policy?
  - If not so well, why?
- Do you feel you played any role in its creation?
  - If so, what?
- Do you feel, or to what extent do you feel the children and parents in your school should have a say in what goes into it?
- Do you see it as valuable policy to have or just another tick the box exercise?
- Do you feel it is a living document within your school?
  - What impact (if any) does it have on your teaching?
Internet Safety

- In questionnaire findings, I noticed that there were differences in what teachers worried about regarding their students’ Internet usage, depending on whether they were teaching the junior or senior classes. Would you agree with this? Can you comment further?

- To what extent do you feel the responsibility of teaching about Internet safety should lie with the school?

- In the questionnaires that were completed, the majority of people felt (A: Classroom teacher; B: External company) should provide ISE. Would you agree with this? Comment further?

- Do you feel teaching children about Internet safety changes whether you are teaching junior or senior classes. If so, in what way?

- What kind of things do you think that the children should be learning about when Internet safety is being taught?

- Do you feel parents support your endeavours to promote Internet safety in school?

- What do you think are the biggest challenges you face when trying to tackle the subject of Internet safety?

- How does your students’ Internet use impact on their lives in school?

- One thing that has been repeatedly raised in the data collected so far is the difference between home and school expectations with regards to Internet usage and safety. Would you agree there is a difference? Can you elaborate?
Appendix E: Information Letter and Consent Form

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Principal Information Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the Project:</th>
<th>Acceptable Use Policies and Other Approaches Used to Address Internet Safety in Primary Schools: A Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Study:</td>
<td>I am an M.Ed. student in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As part of my course, I am carrying out research in the area of Internet safety under the supervision of Dr. Keith Johnston. The study is designed to explore what schools perceive to be the most significant challenges with respect to Internet safety and the steps they are taking to try and tackle these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Information:</td>
<td>Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason to do so. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an interview that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. A copy of the interview schedule has been attached for your information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I foresee no risks to your participation in the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life. The data gathered will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No personal information or information that could identify you in any way will be revealed in the research. Findings will be stored safely, with access only available to the researcher, the research supervisor and possibly, examiners and it will be destroyed after 13 months. The anonymised results from the study will be included in a thesis and may be discussed at conferences or published in a journal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you have any questions or anything is unclear, please feel free to contact me by emailing <a href="mailto:rcrotty@tcd.ie">rcrotty@tcd.ie</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finally, thank you most sincerely for taking the time to read this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Contact details:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rcrotty@tcd.ie">rcrotty@tcd.ie</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor Contact details:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:KJOHNSTO@tcd.ie">KJOHNSTO@tcd.ie</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal Consent Form

Title of Project: Acceptable Use Policies and Other Approaches Used to Address Internet Safety in Primary Schools: A Case Study

Research undertaken by: Rachel Crotty

You are under no obligation to participate in this study.

If you agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, you are free to do so, without providing any reason or explanation.

Please answer all of the following (tick the appropriate box):

I have read and understood the information sheet

I understand what the project is about, and what my participation will entail.

I understand that the data generated will only be used for the stated purpose and that it will be stored appropriately and deleted on completion.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

I am aware that any data provided by me will be kept confidential and that I, or no other individual, will be identified in the resulting research report.

Please sign below to confirm your consent to participate in the study:

_________________________  ______________________  
Signature of Principal      Date

_________________________  ______________________
Signature of Researcher    Date