# THE INSTANT MESSAGING USE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER WELL-BEING

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**Preface**

Having reached the end of this process, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who made this possible. First, I wish to thank my supervisor, Prof. Dr. An-Sofie Claeys, for the excellent guidance, insightful comments and helpful feedback. Second, I wish to thank Ellen Soens, who also provided valuable feedback. Third, I am particularly grateful to the participants who generously gave their time to take part in this study. Without their willingness to share their experiences, this research would not have been possible. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my friends and family for their emotional support throughout this process, as well as my entire education.

**Abstract**

Instant messaging apps have become increasingly embedded in the workplace. Previous research has shown that work-related instant messaging use carries a range of implications, both positive and negative. However, as workplace contexts differ significantly, this study is situated within the context of education. Most prior research has been confined to higher education, the perspective of students or technical, educational and academic advantages. Teacher well-being has remained a relatively underexplored area. This study therefore examines the perspective of teachers in secondary education and the implications of instant messaging for their well-being. Through in-depth interviews with 15 Flemish secondary school teachers, their use of instant messaging with colleagues and/or pupils is explored. The results indicate that instant messaging is a more established practice among colleagues than with pupils. The outcomes reported by participants are further examined and categorised into advantages (speed and strengthening of bonds), disadvantages (lack of overview, information overload, disruptive notifications and disrupted work-life balance) and ambivalent implications (informality and increased approachability). Finally, as schools can develop policies that guide staff in using instant messaging effectively while mitigating its negative impact on well-being, teachers' perceptions of their schools' existing policies are examined. This revealed that approximately half of the participants were unaware of the guidelines in place. In light of this, several recommendations for schools are proposed.

(217 words)

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**List of abbreviations**

IM = instant messaging
ESN = enterprise social networking

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## GenAI transparency statement

### Verklaring op eer over verantwoord gebruik van generatieve AI

In deze verklaring geef je aan of en hoe je generatieve-AI-tools hebt gebruikt. We vragen je om deze verklaring zo eerlijk, volledig en correct mogelijk in te vullen, als vorm van transparantie en als reflectie op je leerproces. Dit sluit aan bij de afspraken rond academische integriteit in het Facultair Reglement (Facultaire aanvullingen op het OER).

- Ik gebruik generatieve-AI-systemen steeds in overeenstemming met de richtlijnen van de universiteit, de faculteit en haar opleidingen. Ik heb de facultaire richtlijnen hierover nagelezen.
  ☒ ja – ☐ neen
- Ik heb het leerpad Generatieve AI – van leren tot creëren doorgenomen.
  ☒ ja – ☐ neen

### >> Identificatie

- Naam student: Kyra De Keyser
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- Vak en opdracht waarop deze toelichting van toepassing is: Masterproef
- Datum (dd/mm/jjjj) bv. “01/09/2025”: 25/05/2026

### >> Gebruik van generatieve AI

Duid met ‘x’ aan wat van toepassing is.
☐ Ik heb geen generatieve-AI-tool gebruikt. (*Indien je deze optie aanduidt, hoef je de rest van het formulier niet verder in te vullen.)*
☒ Ik heb een of meerdere generatieve-AI-tools gebruikt.

### >> Deontologische code

☒ Ik heb generatieve AI verantwoord gebruikt en ik heb me daarbij gehouden aan de volgende basisprincipes:

- **Verantwoordelijkheid en onafhankelijk handelen** – ik ben altijd zelf verantwoordelijk voor de inhoud en kwaliteit van mijn werk, en voor de manier waarop ik AI-tools hierbij inzet.
- **Eerlijkheid en kritische houding** – ik check de betrouwbaarheid en de bron van de output van de tools, en ik ben eerlijk over het gebruik van de tools.
- **Respectvol gebruik** – ik ben me bewust van mogelijke vooroordelen en bias in de output van de tools.
- **Veilig en vertrouwelijk omgaan met informatie** – ik upload geen privacygevoelige of vertrouwelijke data.
- **Zorgvuldig en duurzaam gebruik** – ik weeg mogelijke efficiëntie door AI-gebruik af tegenover het energieverbruik.

### >> Toelichting bij de verschillende stappen in het schrijfproces

In dit deel van het formulier geef je transparant en in detail aan hoe je generatieve-AI-systemen hebt ingezet tijdens de verschillende fasen van je schrijfproces. Indien je AI hebt ingezet, vermeld je bij de relevante stap(pen) welke tool(s) je gebruikte en licht je kort toe hoe je die verantwoord hebt toegepast. Voor verdere verduidelijking bij de verschillende fases en extra voorbeelden kan je het facultaire richtlijnen-document raadplegen.

☒ Ik heb generatieve-AI-systemen gebruikt voor **het opzoeken en verwerken van wetenschappelijke literatuur en ander bronnenmateriaal**. *Bijv. om te zoeken naar nieuwe informatie, concepten en ideeën; om bestaande informatiebronnen samen te vatten; om moeilijke passages in gevonden literatuur beter te begrijpen (inclusief vertalen) …*
Tool(s):
ChatGPT en Claude
Hoe heb je de tool(s) verantwoord gebruikt? Geef een korte toelichting:
Ik zocht zelf naar bronnen en verwerkte die zelfstandig. Bij enkele bronnen twijfelde ik echter of mijn interpretatie helemaal duidelijk en correct was. Dan vroeg ik aan AI of mijn stuk geschreven tekst inhoudelijk correct bij de bron aansloot. Soms voegde ik zelf stukjes uit de bron aan mijn prompt toe, soms voegde ik de volledige bron toe, maar dan vroeg ik telkens om de specifieke passages uit de bron te geven waarop AI zich gebaseerd had. Zo bleef ik kritisch over de aanpassingen en heb ik de output altijd dubbel gecheckt.

---

☐ Ik heb generatieve-AI-systemen gebruikt voor **het opstellen van een onderzoeksvraag en het uitwerken van een onderzoeksmethodologie.** *Bijv. om een interviewleidraad of een toestemmingsformulier op te stellen, voor het scherpstellen van een onderzoeksvraag …*
Tool(s):

Hoe heb je de tool(s) verantwoord gebruikt? Geef een korte toelichting:

---

☐ Ik heb generatieve-AI-systemen gebruikt voor **het analyseren en visualiseren van onderzoeksdata.** *Bijv. om een statistische analyse te maken, afbeeldingen te genereren, een grafische weergave van gegevens uit een dataset te maken, om advies over mogelijke visualisaties te krijgen, …*
Tool(s):

Hoe heb je de tool(s) verantwoord gebruikt? Geef een korte toelichting:

---

☒ Ik heb generatieve-AI-systemen gebruikt als **hulpmiddel bij het schrijfproces**. *Bijv. om taalfouten (spelling, grammatica) op te sporen en te verbeteren in de tekst die ik zelf heb geschreven; om inspiratie te vragen voor het herformuleren van zinnen die ik zelf heb geschreven; om tekst die ik zelf heb geschreven te helpen vertalen; om structuur aan te brengen in mijn tekst; om eigen ideeën te helpen formuleren in een academische schrijfstijl …*
Tool(s):
ChatGPT en Claude
Hoe heb je de tool(s) verantwoord gebruikt? Geef een korte toelichting:
Wanneer ik bij bepaalde zinnen het gevoel had dat ze niet vlot lazen of iets te informeel waren, vroeg ik aan AI een paar alternatieve constructies om mijn zin beter te maken, waaruit ik dan de beste koos. Wanneer ik bij sommige stukken in de knoop zat met de structuur, vroeg ik aan AI hoe mijn alinea's beter gestructureerd konden worden.

---

☐ Ik heb generatieve-AI-systemen gebruikt bij de **voorbereiding van mijn presentatie.** *Bijv. als hulpmiddel bij het maken van mondelinge presentatie, slides, poster, infographic, video, podcast, …*
Tool(s):

Hoe heb je de tool(s) verantwoord gebruikt? Geef een korte toelichting:

---

☐ Ik heb generatieve-AI-systemen gebruikt voor **andere doeleinden**.
Tool(s):

Hoe heb je de tool(s) verantwoord gebruikt? Geef een korte toelichting:

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2023, there was a major scandal in the Belgian media involving a group of teachers who sent discriminatory messages about pupils and colleagues in a WhatsApp group chat (Redactie, 2023). This sparked a debate about the privacy of such online group chats (Bryssinck & Lauwerier, 2023). However, this was not the first time that teacher group chats containing disrespectful remarks about pupils had surfaced in the Belgian media (Muylaert & De Witte, 2022). One of the arguments in the debate about such private group chats is that, although they may be perceived as purely social, professional ties between colleagues persist, meaning that professional guidelines still apply (Bryssinck & Lauwerier, 2023).

This raises questions about the use of instant messaging (IM) apps in professional contexts. In workplace communication, there has been a notable shift from the use of email to instant messaging (Jabbar et al., 2021). Prior literature has revealed that employees use instant messaging in the workplace for a range of purposes, such as posing quick questions (e.g., Bordi et al., 2018; Quan-Haase et al., 2005) and engaging in informal talk (e.g., Hirvonen et al., 2022; Jabbar et al., 2021). As instant messaging becomes embedded into both personal and professional life, understanding its effects on well-being becomes crucial. While the blurred boundaries of colleague group chats are one concern, work-related IM use is associated with implications for interactivity (e.g., Ou & Davison, 2011; Quan-Haase et al., 2005), interruptions (e.g., Lebbon & Sigurjónsson, 2016; Sonnentag et al., 2018), performance (e.g., Jabbar et al., 2021; Lebbon & Sigurjónsson, 2016), stress (e.g., Cho et al., 2019; Hurbean et al., 2022), work-life balance (e.g., Cheng et al., 2021; Soens et al., 2025) and interpersonal connections (e.g., Cansoy, 2017; Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016).

However, not every workplace is the same. Prior literature has mainly focused on desk jobs (e.g., Bordi et al., 2018; Cho et al., 2019; Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016). Limited research has focused in particular on distinct settings, such as residential elder care work (Hirvonen et al., 2022) and education (e.g., Jabbar et al., 2021; Tang & Hew, 2017). The existing research about instant messaging in the context of education mainly focuses on higher education (e.g., Jabbar et al., 2021; Lauricella & Kay, 2013; So, 2016; Tang & Hew, 2022) and the perspective of students (e.g., Lauricella & Kay, 2013; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018; So, 2016; Tang & Hew, 2022). Furthermore, much of this research is relatively dated (e.g., Doering et al., 2008; Lauricella & Kay, 2013; So, 2016), which is not ideal given the continuously evolving nature

of technology. Most research that did focus on teachers' perspectives in secondary education considered, for example, technical, educational and academic advantages, but the well-being of teachers was not a focal point (e.g., Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Cansoy, 2017; Elhay & Hershkovitz, 2019). Given that teacher burnout has been a recurring theme in the Belgian news media (Antonissen, 2021; Redactie & Belga, 2025), examining instant messaging in relation to teacher well-being in the context of Belgian secondary education is particularly relevant.

There are multiple reasons why the context of secondary schools is interesting. First, effective communication plays a central role in secondary schools, as teachers must interact not only with their colleagues (Cansoy, 2017) but also with pupils (e.g., Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Elhay & Hershkovitz, 2019), parents (Johari et al., 2022) and principals (Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023). Many secondary schools in Flanders use Smartschool as a communication channel (Bauwens et al., 2020). Smartschool is a learning environment in which communication takes place via the "Messages" feature, which has characteristics similar to email, such as a subject line and CC/BCC fields (https://www.smartschool.be/doelgroep/secundair-onderwijs/). However, internal IM apps (e.g., Microsoft Teams) could also be an option and even the external IM apps (e.g., WhatsApp) could be a mode of communication among teachers.

Second, the target group and context add value as well, as prior literature indicates that the choice for the type of communication channel often depends on whether the communication is formal or informal, with instant messaging typically serving as the informal channel (Jabbar et al., 2021; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). This may be particularly interesting regarding teacher-pupil communication because teachers must remain aware of the formal teacher-pupil relationship and be careful not to cross the line (Zarra, 2016). This raises the question of whether communicating with pupils through instant messaging, as is done by some teachers (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Elhay & Hershkovitz, 2019; Tang & Hew, 2017), blurs the boundary between formal and informal. Third, IM messages tend to create expectations of quicker responses (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Hirvonen et al., 2022; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). This raises the question of when teachers will opt for which channel and for what reason. This study will therefore investigate how teachers use the different IM types with different target groups and how they evaluate that use.

There are a number of potential advantages and disadvantages brought about by work-related IM use. If teachers choose instant messaging instead of email or the school's learning platform,

the question arises as to how this will affect their well-being. IM apps are often found on the mobile phones of the users, which means messages could come in after hours, as they are always available and connected. This could severely impact their time-out from work (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2021; Hurbean et al., 2022). The Belgian news media have reported that Belgian schools have been struggling with a teacher shortage, with the high workload being one of the many contributing factors (Frederix & De Wilde, 2026). They state that teaching professionals often struggle disconnecting from work after hours (Antonissen, 2021; Frederix & De Wilde, 2026). It is therefore important to explore if the use of instant messaging in any way contributes to work-life issues.

However, this after-hours communication could also prove to be useful in various ways. Teachers may be more accepting of such communication when it involves seeking assistance from or providing it to colleagues regarding work-related tasks. They may also feel satisfied after helping a student who, for example, has an urgent question about a test scheduled for the next day. This study will therefore explore how teachers' use of instant messaging affects their well-being in various ways. It is important to note that the problem of connectedness could also be the case for pupils, but the scope of this research will be limited to teachers.

Through in-depth interviews with 15 secondary school teachers in Flanders, I will explore how secondary school teachers use instant messaging in their communication with work-related target groups and how they experience the impact of this use on their own well-being. Although many schools have established policies regarding work-related digital communication, implementation by teachers may vary. This study will therefore also investigate teachers' awareness, implementation and perceptions of these policies. Lastly, based on my findings, I will develop a set of recommendations for schools and policymakers on how to guide the work-related IM use of their teachers.

# 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Defining instant messaging within the communication landscape

First, a clear definition of instant messaging is needed. IM apps, such as WhatsApp, support a range of multimedia features, including text and audio messaging, group chats, video calls and media sharing (e.g., Hirvonen et al., 2022; Jabbar et al., 2021; Tsai & Men, 2018). Compared

to SMS, IM apps need to be downloaded on the phones of sender and receiver and allow real-time communication at no cost using mobile internet connection (Church & De Oliveira, 2013). Email uses an internet connection as well, but as an asynchronous communication channel, it does not facilitate real-time communication (Holmstrom et al., 2006). IM apps also provide additional information, such as when users were last online, when they are typing and when the message has been delivered and seen (Church & De Oliveira, 2013). To further define instant messaging in the online communication landscape, it can be useful to compare it to social networking sites. IM apps and social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, are alike in that they are interactive and simultaneous, but the latter are used more frequently for many-to-many communication (Tsai & Men, 2018). By contrast, instant messaging is chosen for one-to-one or one-to-few communication, enclosing content that is also more intimate and private (Tsai & Men, 2018).

Two types of IM apps can be distinguished, namely external IM apps that everyone has access to and internal IM apps that are used by organisations (Soens et al., 2025). Examples of the former are WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Telegram (e.g., Soens et al., 2025; Tsai & Men, 2018). Internal IM apps, such as Slack, Microsoft Teams and Viva Engage (formerly Yammer), are also called enterprise social networking (ESN) apps (e.g., Ellison et al., 2015; Soens et al., 2025; Stray et al., 2019). These apps are a form of social networking sites and combine multiple tools, such as microblogging and instant messaging (Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016). Compared to the regular social networking sites, internal IM apps are only available to employees within the organisation (e.g., Ellison et al., 2015; Stray et al., 2019). This creates the ideal environment for forwarding information not suited for the public, commercial social networking sites (Ellison et al., 2015). Some differences can be found between the internal IM apps, depending on the type of communication needed. For example, Microsoft Teams is preferred for project collaboration in smaller groups, whereas Viva Engage is more oriented towards the entire organisation with a focus on building a community (Oosterveld, 2024).

One of the popular features of the different IM apps is the creation of group chats. On the external IM apps, group chats are created on the initiative of employees themselves and can therefore be found on their own smartphones. This means that no one is obliged to join them (Hirvonen et al., 2022). In the research of Stray et al. (2019) about the internal IM app Slack, however, the employees were also not obligated to join and could receive the necessary information via email. Nevertheless, in order to ensure good team work, all employees should

be involved in ongoing IM discussions (Stray et al., 2019). Usually, there are multiple different group chats on the external IM apps. In the context of residential elder care work, for example, there can be different group chats for the different social care units (Hirvonen et al., 2022). This is also the case for the internal IM apps, where we talk about different channels, rather than group chats. The objective is to create different channels for different topics, so the members do not have to explain the context every time they send a message (Stray et al., 2019). However, an excessive number of channels may make it difficult to maintain an overview of all communication (Stray et al., 2019).

When we take a closer look at internal IM apps explicitly for schools, Microsoft Teams for Education focuses on creating a communication app with many useful features dedicated to building the ideal learning environment. Microsoft Teams for Education suggests templates for the different channels: teachers and specific classes can use the template "Class", teachers of an academic department can use "Professional Learning Community", principals and teachers can use "Staff" and members of interest groups or clubs can use "Other" (Microsoft Support, n.d.). In these different teams, team leaders can, for example, post announcements and add files. Unrelated to the existing teams, it is also possible to converse in private individual chats and group chats (https://www.microsoft.com/nl-nl/education/products/teams).

## 2.2 Patterns and purposes of instant messaging use in professional contexts

When talking about the use of instant messaging in professional contexts, it is also of importance to take a closer look at the other popular channel that was preferred in the past, namely email. Around 1993 email completely transformed our way of communicating. However, communication is evolving once again and in recent years, there has been a growing recognition that WhatsApp also serves as a practical means of communication in the workplace (Jabbar et al., 2021).

Several studies (Bordi et al., 2018; Jabbar et al., 2021; Quan-Haase et al., 2005) examined the use of different communication tools, making a comparison between email and instant messaging possible. Employees opt for external IM apps when the communication has an informal character and thus see email as the more formal channel (Jabbar et al., 2021; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). They also prefer external IM apps for posing quick questions and asking for clarification (Quan-Haase et al., 2005), as well as sharing general information and ideas,

enhancing collaboration, informing multiple people and engaging in informal talk (Jabbar et al., 2021). The same applies to internal IM apps, where employees also engage in informal, personal conversations (Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016) and tend to choose instant messaging for quick questions (Bordi et al., 2018). Furthermore, employees also reach for instant messaging when the matter is more urgent because they simply know that the response will be more prompt when using instant messaging compared to email, thereby facilitating faster communication (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023; Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Hirvonen et al., 2022; Jabbar et al., 2021; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). Email, however, is rather used for extra-organisational communication and detailed explanations (Quan-Haase et al., 2005), discussing academic work and achievements (Jabbar et al., 2021) and more significant matters, as it serves as a form of documentation (Bordi et al., 2018). In conclusion, email stays an important communication channel, but the goals differ.

When looking at work-related IM use specifically in secondary schools, we can assume that teachers will use this communication channel among colleagues in a similar way. Cansoy (2017) conducted a content analysis of a year's worth of messages in a WhatsApp group created by science teachers at a private school and concluded that teachers successfully use these groups for their professional development. Teachers discussed their field knowledge by asking each other for clarifications, forwarded online learning material that they thought could be useful and shared photographs and videos of projects they performed in their classes. They also expressed their opinions on improving classroom management and teaching, planned social activities and congratulated and complimented each other.

Another target group that teachers need to communicate with is parents. In a secondary school in Malaysia, Johari et al. (2022) discovered through interviews with teachers and parents that teacher-parent group chats have become so standardised that they are viewed as the official school communication channel. The groups were used by both teachers and parents to exchange classroom information. For example, teachers shared important documents and links while also encouraging parental assistance regarding homework by sharing the correct answers. Yet, this is not the case everywhere. In a study of three Dutch secondary schools, Gerdes et al. (2022) conducted individual and focus group interviews with parents, who reported email as the main communication channel. One parent, however, described having a good connection with the student coordinator, characterised by regular informal communication and occasional messages via WhatsApp.

The choice of communication channel may differ, however, when pupils are the target group. The age groups and educational context may be of importance here. In higher education, teacher-student relationships are naturally more formal (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). Accordingly, Jabbar et al. (2021) found that teachers in higher education preferred email for engaging in teacher-student communication, as the communication has a more formal character and is documented for a longer period of time compared to WhatsApp. In secondary education, however, pupils report feeling very comfortable reaching out to their teachers via external IM apps, which encourages them to share more openly (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018), a tendency also observed by teachers (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014).

Beyond users' increased perceived approachability, external IM apps also have a practical advantage in the context of secondary education, as most pupils do not check their email or official school communication channel every day (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). Some teachers therefore use an external IM app as a supporting channel to alert their pupils to the messages they posted on the official school channel (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). Other teachers bypass the official school channel altogether and post directly in the WhatsApp groups to save time (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). In these teacher-pupil group chats, communication serves multiple purposes, including sharing informational and organisational messages and pursuing educational goals (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018), as well as managing misbehaviour or attendance issues (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). These practices, however, can lead to blurred boundaries in the teacher-pupil relationship, which poses significant professional and ethical risks for teachers and schools (Zarra, 2016). Ultimately, the choice of communication channel will likely depend on whether the teacher prioritises formality or reachability.

The variation in the types of communication channels used depending on the target group and communication goal leads to the first research question:

**RQ1**. "How do Flemish secondary school teachers use instant messaging in their communication with different target groups?"

## 2.3 Effects of work-related instant messaging use on teacher well-being

Teacher well-being is a broad, multifaceted concept. Therefore, several aspects need to be analysed to better understand the nuanced effect work-related IM use has on overall well-being. Fox et al. (2023) rightfully pointed out that a unified definition of teacher well-being is necessary to be able to compare research and interventions. They suggested four dimensions based on a systematic literature review: teacher efficacy, school support, workload and time pressure, and job satisfaction. First, they define teacher efficacy as teachers' confidence in their ability to instruct, build relationships with students and manage student behaviour. Second, school support refers to "the extent to which teachers feel supported by their colleagues and administrators", and third, workload and time pressure to "whether or not teachers feel capable of completing their teaching and non-teaching tasks within the given time frame" (Fox et al., 2023, p. 4192). Lastly, they define job satisfaction as the degree to which teachers feel content with their job in general.

Prior literature has documented various possible outcomes of work-related IM use, all of which can be conceptually linked to the dimensions of teacher well-being (i.e., teacher efficacy, school support, workload and time pressure, and job satisfaction). First, workload and time pressure relate to how work-related IM use influences interactivity, interruptions, performance, stress and work-life balance. Second, in relation to school support and the relationship-building aspect of teacher efficacy, the effects of work-related IM use on the experience of interpersonal connections will be discussed. As an overall evaluation of teachers' experience of their job, job satisfaction is assumed to be influenced by all outcomes (i.e., interactivity, interruptions, performance, stress, work-life balance and interpersonal connections). Where available, literature specifically concerning teachers will be reviewed. However, broader research on employees in general will also be incorporated to determine which effects can be expected for teachers.

### 2.3.1. Interactivity

Survey research on IM use among employees (Ou & Davison, 2011) shows that communication via instant messaging leads to higher interactivity. Employees can communicate in real-time through instant messaging without being in the same room (Cheng et al., 2021; Ou & Davison, 2011; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). This increase in interactivity

results in improved communication quality (Ou & Davison, 2011). In addition, instant messaging facilitates rapid, task-oriented knowledge exchange by enabling employees to seek immediate assistance from colleagues within their network and involve multiple individuals in the problem-solving process (Quan-Haase et al., 2005). These interactions can be understood as a form of internal crowdsourcing, where employees collectively contribute solutions to specific problems (Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016). The higher interactivity and connectivity can therefore be seen as beneficial for teachers considering the improved quality and ease of the communication, possibly reducing time pressure.

However, the increased interactivity could also be experienced as disruptive. Employees are often engaged in multiple online conversations simultaneously (Bordi et al., 2018; Ou & Davison, 2011; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). Employees do not switch between different communication channels and different communication partners but rather use the different channels at the same time to interact with different colleagues (Bordi et al., 2018; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). This switching and dividing of attention among multiple conversations can even go as far as answering IM messages in the middle of a face-to-face conversation (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023; Bordi et al., 2018; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). When this involvement in multiple conversations at the same time burdens the employees, this is called communication overload (Cho et al., 2019). Feelings of being overwhelmed by multiple people sending messages at the same time have also been reported in studies on IM use beyond organisational contexts (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023).

### 2.3.2. Interruptions

The IM notifications can therefore also be experienced as interruptions. Interruptions are unplanned, synchronous interactions imposed on the recipient that cause them to discontinue their current task (O'Conaill & Frohlich, 1995). The interruption always requires a response, even when the response is simply ignoring the message (Ou & Davison, 2011). When ignoring the notification, employees are still aware of the fact that a message has come in, which can then lead them to keep thinking about it (Sonnentag et al., 2018). Besides, the shift in attention is probably not limited to one specific message, since they will be aware of the fact that more messages could arrive and will likely prepare themselves for these interruptions (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023; Sonnentag et al., 2018). Employees report that they experience a decreased

concentration in work (Bordi et al., 2018; Jabbar et al., 2021; Lebbon & Sigurjónsson, 2016) and that the distraction created by instant messaging affects the completion (Bordi et al., 2018; Jabbar et al., 2021) and even quality of their work (Bordi et al., 2018). In addition, they find it more difficult to resume work after receiving an IM message (Lebbon & Sigurjónsson, 2016). Such continuous distractions could add to the workload of teachers.

However, the effect on workload and well-being depends on how teachers actually perceive these interruptions. Only the participants of one study (Sonnentag et al., 2018) experienced more interruptions because of instant messaging and along with that increased time pressure. Several studies (Garrett & Danziger, 2007; Ou & Davison, 2011), on the contrary, have shown that interruptions are a widespread workplace phenomenon and that the use of instant messaging does not increase interruption levels. Some employees who use instant messaging even experience fewer interruptions in comparison with employees who do not (Garrett & Danziger, 2007). An explanation for that could be that they use instant messaging for quick clarifications, which makes IM messages more frequent but also shorter in comparison with email, telephone or face-to-face conversations (Garrett & Danziger, 2007). Employees also seem to compensate for the time lost because of instant messaging by typing faster when they realise that their IM use might have a detrimental effect on their work (Lebbon & Sigurjónsson, 2016). In addition, some employees see instant messaging as a relaxation from the work pressure and welcome the distraction (Jabbar et al., 2021; Lebbon & Sigurjónsson, 2016).

### 2.3.3. Performance

This raises the question of how this shorter, more frequent communication affects employee performance. Several researchers considered employees' perception of the impact of such communication using surveys (Jabbar et al., 2021; Jia et al., 2019; Sonnentag et al., 2018; Tarafdar et al., 2020) and interviews (Lebbon & Sigurjónsson, 2016; Tarafdar et al., 2020). Most employees experience positive work-related outcomes, including increased productivity (Jia et al., 2019), greater perceived task accomplishment (Sonnentag et al., 2018) and improved performance (Jabbar et al., 2021). They feel like they complete their tasks more effectively due to the increased responsiveness (Sonnentag et al., 2018). Even just being responsive and answering messages makes them feel like they are being productive (Sonnentag et al., 2018). This increased productivity may be beneficial regarding employees' workload and time pressure.

However, the technology can also have negative effects on productivity (Tarafdar et al., 2020). For example, 79% of the participants in a study by Lebbon and Sigurjónsson (2016) thought instant messaging was detrimental to their work and concentration, while 16% perceived it as beneficial and 5% as both beneficial and detrimental. It is important to note that the participants in Lebbon and Sigurjónsson's study were undergraduate students reporting on their experience immediately after a simulated office task with interruptions, while the other studies asked employees to reflect on their general workplace experience. This methodological difference may explain the more negative reflections. It is also possible that less experienced employees, such as the undergraduates, initially struggle more with interruptions and only develop effective coping strategies over time. This may be an aspect worth monitoring, as the Belgian news media have reported that novice teachers are more vulnerable to leaving the profession (Verhaeghe, 2025).

#### 2.3.4. Stress

Beyond productivity, IM use can also give rise to negative feelings among employees. Several researchers have found that employees who use instant messaging often suffer from stress (Cheng et al., 2021; Cho et al., 2019; Hurbean et al., 2022; Johari et al., 2022; Sonnentag et al., 2018). Employees who experience more interruptions from online messages report greater time pressure (Sonnentag et al., 2018). The sender knows that the message has been received, which is why employees feel compelled to reply promptly (Quan-Haase et al., 2005). This pressure to reply puts them under constant stress (Johari et al., 2022). Some employees see a day without instant messaging as a day with more freedom, relaxation and relief (Jabbar et al., 2021), which implies that they consider a day with instant messaging as stressful. This suggests that instant messaging has a negative impact on well-being.

Furthermore, IM can bring with it various forms of overload, which can be a cause of stress. Some studies (Cho et al., 2019; Hurbean et al., 2022) focused on the different types of overload and the effects those have on employees. This includes information overload, which occurs when the employees receive more information through IM messages than they can properly process (Cho et al., 2019). This is heightened in group communication, especially when there are multiple group chats (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023; Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). In such settings, messages are often not relevant for everyone (Jabbar et al.,

2021; Johari et al., 2022). Information overload results in more severe emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal accomplishment, which signifies a burnout, and the wish to quit (Cho et al., 2019). Even Smartschool, which does not share the characteristics of instant messaging, had to change their settings because parents and teachers were complaining about the amount of notifications they were receiving (Van der Sande, 2025). This shows that information overload is a real issue in secondary education, with likely detrimental effects on teacher well-being.

These negative experiences with technology in the workplace are broadly captured under the concept of technostress (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2021; Hurbean et al., 2022; Tarafdar et al., 2020). Techno-complexity, for example, is one of the underlying factors of technostress (Hurbean et al., 2022). It refers to the complexity of the technology, which makes learning to work with the rapidly changing technologies harder (Cho et al., 2019; Hurbean et al., 2022). Techno-overload, in turn, occurs when employees experience higher expectations due to the use of technology, which causes them to work longer and faster (Hurbean et al., 2022). These two factors negatively impact employee well-being (Cho et al., 2019; Hurbean et al., 2022), although, surprisingly, techno-overload has also been found to positively affect individual work performance (Hurbean et al., 2022). It is important to highlight that the negative effects of techno-complexity will likely diminish as employees improve their IT skills (Hurbean et al., 2022; Tarafdar et al., 2020). The external IM apps have an advantage in this respect, as many people already use them in their daily life. Recent figures of the imec.digimeter in 2025 show that 67% of Flemish people use WhatsApp daily and 88% use it weekly (De Marez et al., 2026).

### 2.3.5. Work-life balance

Another factor of technostress is techno-invasion, which refers to employees feeling forced to stay available and connected through IM for work-related communication anytime and anywhere (Hurbean et al., 2022). If employees work after hours due to instant messaging, the boundary between work and personal life becomes blurred, leading to negative experiences in their free time and work-family conflict (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2021; Hurbean et al., 2022; Johari et al., 2022; Soens et al., 2025; Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023). To cope with the work-family conflict, moral disengagement may be activated. Moral disengagement occurs when individuals justify their actions in a way that allows them to

disengage from their moral standards, so the behaviour no longer feels wrong (Cheng et al., 2021). This moral disengagement then manifests as behavioural disengagement (Cheng et al., 2021). Such behavioural disengagement may include silencing group chats, ignoring messages or deleting entire conversations, which have been documented across multiple studies as coping responses (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023; Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Cheng et al., 2021; Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023). Employees must figure out through trial and error how to set boundaries to prevent getting disturbed after hours, which is why some employees even choose not to join the group chats at all (Hirvonen et al., 2022). Employees can also designate specific times and areas within their home for work (Tarafdar et al., 2020).

Research shows that teachers engage in IM conversations after hours with colleagues (Cansoy, 2017; Jabbar et al., 2021), pupils (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Elhay & Hershkovitz, 2019) and even parents (Johari et al., 2022) and principals (Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023). They report being bothered by messages invading their personal time and experience additional stress because of this (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Johari et al., 2022; Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023). Even just the use of digital learning environments, such as Smartschool, after hours leads to a reduced work-life balance (Bauwens et al., 2020). Moreover, teachers already face a blurred work-life balance even without digital communication, as they often work beyond regular working hours (Bauwens et al., 2020). The *Werkbaarheidsmonitor*, a large-scale job quality survey tracking the quality of jobs in Flanders every four years, found that in 2023 22.5% of teachers struggled with work-life balance compared to 12.9% for the average employee (Bourdeaud'hui et al., 2024). Taken together, prior research has found only disadvantages of work-related IM use regarding a work-life balance that is already precarious for many teachers, suggesting a detrimental effect of IM on teacher well-being.

### 2.3.6. Interpersonal connections

Regarding the social aspect of IM communication among colleagues, several researchers (Cansoy, 2017; Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016; Soens et al., 2025; Stray et al., 2019) identified the potential of instant messaging to strengthen interpersonal connections. The members of the self-created group chats thought the group chats were particularly helpful when they were sick and needed to stay home for a while (Hirvonen et al., 2022). This shows how the group chats make them feel connected and included, even when they are, for example, at home sick in bed. Employees also use the group chats and channels for personal, non-work-related conversations

(Cansoy, 2017; Hirvonen et al., 2022; Jabbar et al., 2021; Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016). The participants in the research of Cansoy (2017), for example, talked about birthdays being celebrated and photos and videos being sent. Interacting in group chats is thus another way to stay in contact and strengthen the sense of community. In addition, on the internal IM apps, employees frequently share personal explanations when they are out of office, often mentioning non-work-related activities, which improves trust and strengthens interpersonal ties (Stray et al., 2019). The effort that is put into staying in contact with colleagues also improves trust among them (Ou & Davison, 2011). In terms of well-being, it can be concluded that instant messaging likely has a positive effect due to stronger social connections.

However, not all consequences of group chats can be seen as favourable. If group chats are used for antisocial behaviour, such as gossiping, colleague relationships can deteriorate, which in turn negatively affects employee well-being (Soens et al., 2025). Further, it is possible for employees to suffer from fomo (fear of missing out), which means that they experience a type of social anxiety to miss out on potential social interactions. Regarding group chats, this means that they are afraid to miss notifications (Hirvonen et al., 2022). Accordingly, employees testify that a whole day without instant messaging would feel as if they were isolated from the world (Jabbar et al., 2021).

Another possible problem is an imbalance between active and inactive employees. Some employees are very active in the channels, while some barely contribute. The inactive members are often new, less experienced and do not have strong connections with other colleagues yet (Stray et al., 2019). We can presume that the employees not being active or not partaking at all, may be at risk of being excluded, since they may be missing out on or not sharing important information. Some employees feel obligated to join the groups out of fear that they would otherwise not remain up to date (Mustaffa et al., 2018). In addition, in view of the increased sense of community discussed above, the possibility of social exclusion might also be a problem. In this respect, a detrimental effect of instant messaging on well-being is possible.

In teacher-pupil group chats, there is also room for more informal conversation, which has a positive impact on class atmosphere (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). Teachers get to know their students better (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014) and pupils feel closer to their teacher (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). In individual conversations, teachers can also provide emotional support (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). In addition, group chats are seen as fun

and can even help elevate tension in classes that struggle with social conflict (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). However, pupils who choose not to join the group chats, may miss important information. Although their classmates might try to keep them up to date as much as possible, those pupils still feel excluded at times, which creates tension in the class atmosphere (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). Although this does not have a direct effect on teacher well-being, teachers should keep this in mind as well and be sensitive about including these pupils (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). In addition, some teachers may feel uncomfortable when exposed to the private world of their pupils (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). This discomfort may also arise in cases where pupils violate norms by using disrespectful language or sending inappropriate photos, directed at both teachers and pupils (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). It can be concluded that, regarding the effects of teacher-pupil group chats, the effect on well-being may vary considerably depending on the teacher, the pupils and the importance teachers place on extending social relationships beyond the classroom.

In light of the above findings from prior research, the second research question is formulated:

**RQ2.** "How does Flemish secondary school teachers' use of work-related instant messaging affect their well-being?"

## 2.4 Policies regarding work-related instant messaging use

To minimise the adverse effects instant messaging may have and to ensure effective use, organisations can develop policies. While organisations sometimes blocked the use of instant messaging at work in the past, many now recognise that, when used effectively, instant messaging can have beneficial effects on engagement, morale and the accomplishment of work tasks (Hurbean et al., 2022). In addition, blocking social media use may damage trust, as employees may interpret restrictions as a sign that their commitment and judgment are being doubted (Lebbon & Sigurjónsson, 2016). Instead, organisations should develop a well-defined IM policy and communicate it clearly across all levels of the organisation (Jia et al., 2019).

Rather than adopting one-size-fits-all strategies, however, organisations should develop flexible IT policies that offer employees multiple coping strategies, from which they can choose whichever suits them best (Rohwer et al., 2022; Tarafdar et al., 2020). Tarafdar et al. (2020) identify seven such strategies, grouped into three categories based on interviews and

surveys in the context of work-related technostress: reducing IT-related distress (venting, distancing), developing IT capacity (positive IT outlook, IT use skills) and developing IT use demarcations (IT use autonomy, time-related demarcations, separating work and non-work IT use). Although venting can reduce the impact of technostress, it can also be emotionally draining and reduce productivity, making it a suboptimal coping strategy (Tarafdar et al., 2020). Organisations should therefore support the use of functional coping strategies among their employees (Rohwer et al., 2022). In the context of IM use, time-related demarcations and work and non-work IT separation are particularly relevant to promote. To support employees in adopting these, organisations can issue availability guidelines in which expectations regarding response times are clearly communicated (Rohwer et al., 2022). When drawing up these policies, organisations should ideally involve their employees, so that a mutual understanding of these norms is obtained (Rohwer et al., 2022).

In addition, organisations should continuously monitor how their employees are using IM apps, as this could reveal any difficulties some employees may be experiencing (Stray et al., 2019). Where such difficulties are identified, organisations can offer information sessions on IT skills and different coping strategies, which may limit the negative outcomes of work-related IM use and improve well-being (Rohwer et al., 2022; Tarafdar et al., 2020). In these sessions, organisations should also encourage employees to share their coping strategies and experiences with each other (Rohwer et al., 2022). Overall, providing organisational support is a key resource in helping employees manage technostress (Rohwer et al., 2022).

In some contexts, however, such policies are mandated by law as part of broader efforts to address work-family conflict. This is the case in Belgium, where a law was passed in 2023 giving workers the right to be completely unreachable after hours. Organisations with at least twenty employees must establish an official agreement on when their employees should and should not respond after hours (ACV, n.d.). This also includes secondary education, where schools have to include the agreements in the employment regulations for teachers but also in the school regulations for pupils and parents (Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen, n.d.).

To guide the schools, some *onderwijskoepels* (educational networks) have developed templates for the disconnection regulations. When looking at the template from, for example, Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen, it contains a minimum framework of agreements. The template indicates that it cannot be expected from staff to read and answer official messages after hours.

Specifically, messages received during school opening hours are expected to be read by the second following working day. Messages sent after opening hours are considered to have been sent on the next working day.

In addition, the template clearly identifies which channels are to be used for work-related communication. The template specifies: “Other digital channels (including private tools such as social media) are not considered official communication channels. Staff members and school management are therefore not expected to communicate via these channels” (Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen, 2022, p. 2). The template also mentions that social media, although unofficial, is indispensable. That is why the schools are held accountable for regularly informing staff about the appropriate use of digital tools and the risks of constant connectivity. In addition, the schools should provide clear instructions that encourage staff to act in accordance with the agreed guidelines.

Despite the official stance in Flanders that external IM apps like WhatsApp are not official school communication channels for teachers, prior international research shows that teachers do, in fact, engage in conversations with colleagues (Cansoy, 2017), pupils (e.g., Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Elhay & Hershkovitz, 2019), parents (Johari et al., 2022) and principals (Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023) via external IM apps. As Jia et al. (2019) noted, not only are the policies themselves important, but employees’ perceptions of these policies also determine the actions they take. This leads to the third research question:

**RQ3**. “How do Flemish secondary school teachers perceive their schools’ policies regarding digital communication?”

# 3 METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Data collection

Because much research focuses on higher education (e.g., Jabbar et al., 2021; Tang & Hew, 2022) and the perspective of students (e.g., Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018; Tang & Hew, 2022), this study targeted teachers in secondary education. The study was conducted in Belgium, where inappropriate work-related teacher group chats on external IM apps have been brought to public attention through the national media (Bryssinck & Lauwerier, 2023; Muylaert & De

Witte, 2022; Redactie, 2023). To collect the right participants, both purposive and snowball sampling was used (Makwana et al., 2023).

First, a call for participants was posted on both Facebook and LinkedIn, of which a screenshot can be found in Appendix A. The post clearly indicated that for this study secondary school teachers who use IM with colleagues and/or pupils were needed. The post also included some examples of IM apps, such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Microsoft Teams. To account for the possibility that Smartschool is the most commonly used communication channel in Belgium and that external IM apps are less frequently used with pupils, teachers who used IM only to communicate with colleagues were also included. To obtain as broad a view as possible of the different uses of IM, teachers from a wide range of subject areas, *graden*[1] (cycles) and *finaliteiten*[2] (finalities) were considered. Through this post, I was able to reach nine participants.

As my post did not reach enough participants who met the criteria, snowball sampling was also used. Each participant was asked at the end of the interview if they knew colleagues who met the eligibility criteria and might be interested to participate. Six additional participants were reached as a result of snowball sampling. No specific schools were contacted directly for recruitment, to avoid participants assuming their principal would be informed of their participation, as the perceived involvement of authority figures could have increased social desirability bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020).

The literature review already revealed significant nuance in the potential effects of work-related instant messaging on employee well-being. In-depth interviews were chosen, as they allow participants to elaborate more fully on their complex thoughts and on the potential motivations and outcomes of work-related IM use. In addition, as self-reported behaviours are examined, concrete examples of messages could be shown during interviews, which may help mitigate the effects of social desirability bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020).

[1] Flemish secondary education, typically spanning ages 12 to 18, is divided into three cycles of two years each or three ‘graden’.

[2] In Flemish secondary education, there are three study tracks or ‘finaliteiten’ that orient pupils either towards higher education (higher education finality), the labour market (vocational finality) or both (dual-orientation finality). However, in cycle 1, the first two years of secondary education in Flanders, this threefold division is not present yet and pupils are differentiated between ‘A-stroom’ (A stream) and ‘B-stroom’ (B stream) based on their learning pace and educational needs.

Between November 4, 2025, and February 24, 2026, fifteen interviews were carried out. All interviews took place in Dutch and were carried out face-to-face. Eleven interviews took place at the school where the participant was employed and four at their home. Because of the high workload, most teachers preferred an interview at their workplace during free periods. A private room was always suggested in order to further limit social desirability bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020), though three participants opted for a less private setting. On average, the interviews lasted 45 minutes (ranging from 34 minutes to 1 hour and 23 minutes).

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Ghent University. Each participant received an information letter beforehand, which can be found in Appendix B. In this information letter, the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the data were clearly explained. Before starting each interview, the participants read and signed an informed consent form, which can be found in Appendix C. After obtaining consent, the required characteristics were double-checked and some additional information was written down about the participant, for example, which finalities they taught (i.e., A stream, B stream, higher education finality, dual-orientation finality and/or vocational finality).

To help structure the interview, a topic list was used. The topic list consisted of five parts. First, some introductory questions were asked to ease into the conversation, such as: “How long have you been working in education?” Next, the participant’s use of IM apps in general was explored to provide insight into how familiar they are with the apps in their free time. An example question that belongs to this part is: “On which IM apps do you have an account?” The part on work-related use followed, starting with the questions about IM use among colleagues, as all participants used IM with this target group. There was no clear order to the questions about usage and outcomes, as different uses can lead to different outcomes. The first question of this part was: “How often do you communicate with colleagues through IM?” When the part about colleagues was finished and the participants also used IM with pupils, the questions about pupils followed. These questions were mostly similar to those regarding colleagues. Another example question is: “Are there any classes where you have deliberately chosen not to create or allow a group chat?” Both parts about colleagues and pupils also included asking participants for three specific examples of conversations with each target group. Participants could either show me the examples or describe them, depending on how comfortable they felt. Only two participants preferred not to show their screen and described the conversations instead. Most participants spontaneously started scrolling through their messages, often providing more than

three examples. Lastly, the interview finished with questions about the social media policy of their school. This included questions such as: “Does your school have any rules about which types of communication channels may or may not be used to communicate with colleagues and/or pupils?” The full topic list can be found in Appendix D.

A total of fifteen participants were interviewed, including eight women and seven men. Three participants were between 20 and 30 years old, seven between 30 and 40 and five between 40 and 50. Among the participants, seven different schools were represented. Five schools were based in West Flanders ($N$ = 11) and two in East Flanders ($N$ = 4). Most participants taught across multiple cycles, finalities and subjects, which is why the following totals exceed the number of participants. Five participants were active in the first cycle, eight in the second cycle and eleven in the third cycle. Among the participants active in the first cycle ($N$ = 5), four taught in the A stream and three in the B stream. Among those active in the second and third cycles ($N$ = 13), nine taught in the higher education finality, eight in the dual-orientation finality and seven in the vocational finality. A wide range of subjects was represented, with most participants teaching more than one subject. These included language-related subjects ($N$ = 6), psychology-related subjects ($N$ = 2), integrated subjects ($N$ = 2), religious education ($N$ = 2), communication science ($N$ = 1), music ($N$ = 1), wood technology ($N$ = 1), history ($N$ = 1), film ($N$ = 1), art history ($N$ = 1), science ($N$ = 1) and cultural studies ($N$ = 1). In order to safeguard participants’ confidentiality and given the sensitive nature of some of the answers, no table is added with specific characteristics per participant.

There has been much research into the ideal number of interviews. As this is qualitative research, numbers are less important than the ability of the interviews to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the different opinions of teachers (Cobern & Adams, 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Provided that the topic is not vague, it is believed that between fifteen and twenty interviews are needed to hear all possible opinions (Cobern & Adams, 2020). However, even a sample size between nine and seventeen may be sufficient, particularly in the case of a homogeneous sample, such as the present study (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Most importantly, researchers should consider the specific study characteristics (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022) and evaluate whether saturation has been reached as they go (Cobern & Adams, 2020). After fifteen interviews in this study, saturation appeared to have been reached.

### 3.2 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim based on audio recordings. To assist with the transcriptions, the AI-tool Whisper was used. Whisper was connected to the HPC of Ghent University, which ensured that the data was stored locally. After the draft from Whisper, the transcripts were manually reviewed and modified. During this process, any information that could identify the participants was pseudonymised.

A theoretical thematic analysis was then applied to the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To discover which themes were present in the data, codes were assigned to the transcript using the software MAXQDA 24. Following Alhassan et al. (2023), the first step was open coding, during which all potentially relevant concepts were identified. Next, connections between categories were established through axial coding. Finally, selective coding was used to form a coherent narrative of the discovered themes. For example, various opinions concerning the disconnection law were initially coded separately. They were then categorised into categories such as “disconnection law ridiculous” and “disconnection law unnecessary” before being added to two main categories: “agrees with disconnection law” and “does not agree with disconnection law”.

## 4 RESULTS

External IM apps are used by secondary school teachers as a channel to communicate about work-related matters primarily with colleagues ($N$ = 15). Using these apps to communicate with pupils appears less common. Only three participants reported using an external IM app to communicate with their pupils. During international school trips, however, the use of external IM apps with pupils was more common ($N$ = 5). Additionally, five participants taught at schools where an internal IM app was the official school communication channel. Consequently, those participants used instant messaging with their colleagues and pupils, but this cannot be compared with the use of external IM apps as a choice specifically made by the teachers themselves. However, the characteristics of these IM apps may have implications for well-being as well. Both types of IM apps will therefore be discussed. Where relevant, this distinction will be addressed explicitly.

In what follows, the use of instant messaging will be elaborated on, starting with additional information on the use of the different apps and group chats, as well as the patterns and purposes of this use. Subsequently, the outcomes of these practices will be presented. As expected from the literature review, the perceived outcomes of work-related IM use by secondary school teachers are complex and subjective. Therefore, a distinction has been made between advantages, disadvantages and ambivalent implications. In some cases, the majority of participants perceive an implication from work-related IM use as beneficial, while a minority holds a different view. Such outcomes are classified as an advantage. Ambivalent implications, by contrast, refer to those for which there is no clear consensus regarding whether they are beneficial or detrimental. Each time, the results regarding communication among colleagues will be discussed first, followed by those concerning communication with pupils. Lastly, the policies of the different schools and the participants' strategies to manage IM communication will be explored. Quotes are translated from Dutch and have been lightly edited for readability without altering meaning.

## 4.1 The use of distinct instant messaging apps

The most popular external IM app was by far WhatsApp, as all participants reported using it in a work-related context. It was used with colleagues and was the preferred platform when communication with pupils took place via external IM apps. For most participants this was also the main app that they used in their private life. Other popular platforms were Facebook Messenger and Instagram DM, with Instagram DM only serving as a communication channel with colleagues. Messages via Instagram DM were never work-related and consisted mostly of reels and memes. Participant 10 explicitly mentioned that Instagram DM was reserved for colleagues with whom he had a closer connection. Regarding internal IM apps, all participants who used one reported using Microsoft Teams.

As for target groups other than colleagues, external IM apps were never the preferred channel. Although a few participants reported using external IM apps occasionally with parents, no participant made a habit out of this. Participant 6 reported that he used to give his number to parents but would never do so again, as some parents contacted him more frequently than he considered appropriate.

The use of external IM apps with principals was also not an established practice. All participants used their school's professional communication channel to communicate with their principals, whether that was Smartschool, email or Microsoft Teams. However, a few participants reported that in the case of urgent matters, work-related communication through WhatsApp occurred with their principals as well. A small number of participants also mentioned the occasional non-work-related communication with them, for example, to check on well-being or to wish someone a happy birthday.

## 4.2 The use of group chats

Although one-to-one conversations also took place, the most popular way of communicating via instant messaging was in group chats. Most participants reported having more than one group chat, all serving a variety of purposes. When looking at communication among **colleagues**, both work-related and non-work-related group chats were common on the external IM apps. Most participants had several work-related group chats for different topics. There were group chats including teachers from the whole department (e.g., the English department), as well as group chats including teachers from only one specific year. Most participants taught multiple year groups, so the number of group chats sometimes added up. In addition, group chats were also made for non-teaching activities, such as the organisation of teambuilding activities, graduation ceremonies, proms and other festivities. A few participants reported that the group chats were sometimes not used for their specific purpose. Especially in the bigger groups concerning the whole department, messages were often sent that were not relevant to everyone. This even went as far as using the "@" tagging feature to directly address a single colleague in a group chat, despite the message being unrelated to the group context, rather than reaching out in a private conversation.

A problem that was specific to Microsoft Teams as the IM channel was the sheer number of groups. Since this channel served as the official school platform that was used for all work-related communication, a new group was made for each issue that needed to reach multiple people instead of sending an email to multiple addresses. Participant 3 gave the example of a play that had been scheduled for the pupils. Several teachers were required to accompany this activity and several teachers' classes were suspended because of their pupils being away. However, the play itself was cancelled last minute and a group including all

concerned teachers was created to relay this message. As a result, such groups often contained only a single announcement and were never used again, despite remaining in the message feed.

There is a difference between work-related group chats that contain necessary information and those who do not. A few participants mentioned that some colleagues deliberately chose not to join work-related group chats on the external IM apps. When asked whether those individuals miss important information, participants indicated that this is taken into account and that important information is forwarded to them via another channel. However, participant 15 reported that the head of department used WhatsApp as the primary communication channel, which contributed to her feeling a sense of obligation to remain in the group. This obligation was also driven by a fear of potential reactions to leaving the group. When asked whether she was scared of something, she answered: "Yes, the reaction. And that they might think I do not want to belong."

The other type of group chats was non-work-related, which usually consisted of a mix of different colleagues from different departments. Most participants belonged to one or more social groups, consisting of, for example, colleagues who like partying, having brunch or traveling together. Although those groups were not work-related, they occasionally contained references to school. Most participants, however, explicitly indicated that they viewed these groups as recreational, since they considered these colleagues their friends. This is important to note as the experience of, for example, receiving messages after hours in these groups was not considered intrusive, given that such groups were part of the participants' leisure time.

When asked about the selectiveness of group chats, participants had different opinions. A few participants explained that these groups grew organically and that no ill intent was meant. Another few participants mentioned that there was a conscious choice about who was allowed in these groups. There was even a case of a certain group that kept on growing, when eventually a new group was made to keep the others out again. No participants felt that they were excluded themselves, although a few mentioned that they knew of certain groups without them. Initially this bothered them to some extent, but eventually they accepted this, as they were also part of certain exclusive groups.

Participant 12 reflected on a specific case within her department. As colleagues join and leave over time, those who have remained formed their own smaller group alongside the larger

department group, which is updated each year. A consideration raised by the participant regarding whom to include was the concern that this might limit their ability to gossip. She could understand that this structure may lead to negative feelings among newer colleagues but considered it possible that colleagues could be added to this more exclusive group after several years, as had already happened with one colleague. She reflected:

*And it is certainly not the intention to be an exclusion mechanism. But it is also kind of nice that you want to protect that bond in some way, I think.*

The participants that reported using external IM apps with their **pupils** also mainly communicated in group chats. All teacher-pupil group chats were work-related, although some non-work-related messages were sent, mainly by the pupils. There were two types of group chats. First, a small number of participants created a group chat with pupils from classes for which they served as class teacher. However, one of these participants was only part of this group out of a perceived obligation to her co-class teacher. In addition, participant 4 mentioned a pupil not wanting to join, which he respected, but did not elaborate further on how this impacted this individual. These group chats were active the entire year. The second type of group chats was only active during the occasion of an international trip. Uniquely, participant 13 also reported a WhatsApp group chat that included parents rather than pupils. During long international trips, he and the fellow accompanying teacher would create group chats with parents to send updates about their children.

## 4.3 Purposes of instant messaging use

When the school used an internal IM app as the official communication channel, teachers used it the same way that teachers with Smartschool used that platform. However, they continued to use external IM apps alongside it, making the reasons for using external IM apps more revealing. Six purposes of external IM app use with **colleagues** could be identified and are presented in order of how frequently they were mentioned: sending non-work-related messages, using media affordances, sending short announcements and questions, scheduling in-person meetings, sending urgent messages, and venting. Table 1 provides an overview of the different purposes, along with a quote as an example.

First, all participants reported using group chats or individual chats on the external IM apps to send non-work-related messages, even in the conversations that were mostly about school. This could range from the surface-level mention of private matters during a work conversation to extensive conversations about hobbies. A few participants, however, mentioned that they do not need external IM apps for non-work-related conversations, since they still see each other at school. Some participants did not always like these extra conversations either. Some colleagues would ask the group chat what they should wear to a party or some would send photos of attending parties. This often resulted in a number of messages that some participants even referred to as "foolish" or "useless". Another phenomenon mentioned by a few participants as annoying was the chains of goodwill messages. Participant 14 explained what happens each time someone writes that they are sick:

*But then thirty messages come in: "get well soon", "get well soon", "get well soon". Alright, enough already, we all know that person is sick.*

Second, the media affordances of the external IM apps were of great use. The most widely used feature among all participants was the sharing of photos and videos. Funny videos, memes, quotes or photos of pets to lighten the mood were present in at least one IM conversation of each participant. These features of IM apps were not only used for non-work-related content but also for sharing educational materials, such as photos of schedules or subject-related YouTube videos that could be used in class. Other affordances included forwarding documents, creating polls to vote on a meeting date and sending voice messages for more confidential and lengthy information. An interesting use of photos and videos was found in the WhatsApp conversations of participant 4, who taught a practical subject. When a problem arose with one of the machines, photos and videos could be sent very quickly in the department group chat to illustrate exactly what was wrong.

Third, short announcements and questions were sent very frequently via external IM apps. These included questions such as "Where can I find the worksheets?", as well as announcements such as "We have run out of lab materials." Those messages often concerned multiple people. Instead of entering each recipient individually and becoming entangled in a loop of emails, the group chats are already there. An interesting use of WhatsApp for this

practical reason in one school was during *klassenraden*[3] (class-level meetings). Teachers only need to attend the class-level meetings of the pupils they teach, but a clear schedule is difficult to draw up. To make it easier for teachers, they created a group chat just for the purpose of class-level meetings, where someone simply sends the class name when they start discussing it. That way, teachers can anticipate when they will need to be present. This practice would simply not be practical via email.

Fourth, most teachers used external IM apps to schedule in-person meetings. This included scheduling official work-related meetings, as well as spontaneously proposing social meetings to grab a drink. Fifth, many participants mentioned urgent messages. If participants wanted to inform colleagues quickly or receive an answer as fast as possible, they would reach for an external IM app instead of the official school communication channel. However, participant 4 explicitly preferred telephone calls, arguing that they are even faster than instant messaging. Others disagreed, as they felt calls were intrusive and left little room for reflection. Several participants did not mention calls at all, suggesting it may not be a widely used channel for work-related communication.

Sixth, a few participants mentioned external IM apps for venting. Participant 14 even made a habit of asking three to four colleagues each week how they were doing and encouraging them. Interestingly, participant 5, who used an internal IM app, switched to an external IM app when venting because she was scared that the principal team would be able to read through the messages. However, even on the external IM apps, forwarding sensitive information was not always agreed upon. Four participants would also talk about pupils with colleagues on WhatsApp. Conversely, three other participants explicitly mentioned that they considered online conversations about pupils dangerous and inappropriate altogether. Participant 7 even mentioned the incident that received much attention in the Belgian media about teachers who were suspended after discriminatory messages about pupils and colleagues were discovered in their group chat (Redactie, 2023).

Some participants made a clear distinction between the use of external IM apps and the use of the official school communication channels. Some explicitly mentioned that when the content

[3] At the end of each semester, teachers meet during ‘klassenraden’ or class-level meetings, chaired by, for example, the principal, to discuss each pupil’s results and progression.

is strictly work-related and professional, they would go through the official channels. Others made a distinction based on working hours, with everything between eight and four to five happening on the official channels. Most participants, however, did not make such a distinction.

**Table 1**

*Purposes of External Instant Messaging App Use with Colleagues*

| Purpose | Example |
|---|---|
| 1. Non-work-related messages | *It is about everything, about the kids, about life, about partners, about Christmas trees.* (participant 9) |
| 2. Media affordances | *And today, for example, I sent the video of Ian McKellen reciting Shakespeare on The Colbert Show.* (participant 12) |
| 3. Short announcements and questions | *And then it ranges from things like "We found keys on the playground" to "Does anyone know where the report folders are?"* (participant 9) |
| 4. Scheduling in-person meetings | *(...) to find a date together: "When can we meet up and get to know each other and also talk about work?"* (participant 1, who started working in a new school) |
| 5. Urgent messages | *Unless it is really, really, really urgent, like, for example, "I am sick, can you give that assignment to that class tomorrow?"* (participant 10) |
| 6. Venting | *And then during exam season too, that is also a peak moment in the WhatsApp groups, when you complain to each other.* (participant 12) |

The conversations with **pupils** on the external IM apps were quite alike in terms of patterns. Four main purposes could be distinguished in those conversations, namely sending important messages or reminders, sending short questions, using media affordances, and engaging in light-hearted social interaction. Table 2 provides an overview of the different purposes, along with a quote as an example.

First, in the WhatsApp groups for international trips, important messages and reminders were sent, such as "Bright and early at the bus stop tomorrow at eight o'clock." Participant 4, who created a group chat as a class teacher, also used this for important reminders in terms of crucial deadlines. Participant 13 rarely initiated conversations himself but wanted his pupils to let him know when they were running late, which he thought was important. Second, short questions were sent, both by teachers and pupils, such as teachers asking, "Could you come by during

break to pick up the documents?" and pupils asking, "Do we need to submit as a PowerPoint or a PDF?" Third, media affordances were utilized, as many photos and videos were sent. Another useful feature was the sharing of locations during internships and international trips. In most conversations, however, the pupils were the ones using the features.

Fourth, light-hearted social interactions took place. There was room for non-work-related conversations, such as funny messages or expressions of gratitude. A few teachers would send jokes themselves, but mostly it was the pupils sending non-work-related messages. However, as was the case among colleagues, there was a thin line between acceptable non-work-related messages and messages that were perceived as nonsense. Pupils very quickly used the group chats the way they would use them without teachers. They would have random conversations among themselves or would send countless stickers, memes and photos. Interestingly, one participant disclosed that they were very approachable and open to such non-work-related conversations, allowing their pupils to vent or share sensitive information. This participant even mentioned that he had received very personal information once from one of his students, who sought out his advice.

**Table 2**

*Purposes of External Instant Messaging App Use with Pupils*

| Purpose | Example |
|---|---|
| 1. Important messages and reminders | *Because that had really big consequences: if they submitted it late, it would be zero.* (participant 4 on sending reminders) |
| 2. Short questions | *With students, those are very direct questions: what, how, where, when, or when there are actual problems.* (participant 14) |
| 3. Media affordances | *But also, for example, if they are somewhere and do not know where they are, they can just send a photo.* (participant 13 about international trips) |
| 4. Light-hearted social interactions | *Here they are expressing thanks: "You guys are the best.", and [colleague] sending: "Thanks everyone."* (participant 15 about international trips) |

Although the teachers who used internal IM apps with their pupils used this the same way as other teachers used Smartschool, sometimes small non-work-related messages would also appear on the internal IM apps. Smartschool users did not mention this, although it should be

noted that they were not explicitly asked to provide specific message examples on Smartschool, unlike participants using internal IM apps. Participant 7 reported receiving a photo on Microsoft Teams of a pupil waving with the message “Have a nice weekend, sir.” He also mentioned a pupil asking them for a photo of his dog, to which he agreed. A few teachers also sent such friendly messages to their pupils on their own initiative to, for example, compliment them on their progress.

The participants who did not use external IM apps with pupils simply did not consider it necessary, as they were sufficiently approachable via the school platform or in class. In addition, a few participants expressed concern about pupils potentially abusing access to the private IM accounts of teachers. For example, participant 1 felt that this generation of pupils is simply too technologically advanced, while participant 2 discussed the requirement of sharing personal phone numbers on WhatsApp:

*But well, they have your number, you know. They never do not have your number anymore once you have given it.*

A few participants mentioned the occasional prank call, but those stopped immediately once addressed. One participant recounted a colleague's experience in which a pupil in a state of mental instability called a teacher's number obtained through WhatsApp, which was serious enough to involve the principals. However, none of the participants who used external IM apps with pupils reported experiencing unwanted situations or abuse themselves. Some did note that external IM apps would not be suitable for certain classes or pupils and that they would not be willing to use it in those cases. They indicated that it requires careful judgement to determine which classes and pupils are responsible enough and, as participant 4 explained, that it is ultimately a trust-based favour granted by the teacher.

## 4.4 Advantages of instant messaging use

Nearly every participant mentioned two advantages of IM use, namely speed and the strengthening of bonds. The following sections address each of these advantages in turn.

First, the use of IM apps among **colleagues** when messages were urgent reveals the crucial advantage that communication via instant messaging flows faster. When sending emails,

participants included a formal opening and closing and made sure to formulate their message clearly. When using instant messaging, however, they would simply send one or two lines and keep it brief, on both the external and internal IM apps. Participant 1 even mentioned using GenAI to check whether emails were well-written, while typing freely on IM apps, making the drafting of her messages faster and, in turn, her reactions in conversations. What further added to the speed of work-related communication via external IM apps was the popularity of these apps. Many participants reported opening their external IM apps more frequently than the official school platforms, meaning messages there were seen faster than emails or announcements on the school platforms. This reachability often became a deciding factor, as participants questioned whether their message would be seen in time on the school platform. Finally, group chats made sending messages faster because the recipients can be reached with one click, and due to the multitude of people involved, the likelihood of a prompt response increases.

This speed was also mentioned in the interviews about the use of external IM apps with **pupils**. The main explanation for this was the fact that pupils rarely open the school platforms but are online on the external IM apps all the time. The ease of being able to contact everyone at once in group chats instead of sending each pupil separately was also mentioned a few times. In addition, some participants noted that pupils would respond to each other even before the teacher had the opportunity to do so.

Second, beyond speed, participants also valued the strengthening of bonds with **colleagues** as a positive outcome of communication through external IM apps. Many participants reported communication after hours but also, for example, during the summer break. Because of this, they felt more connected to their colleagues:

*Back then you would see each other in the teachers' lounge and after that it was done, and now you keep hearing from each other, which is why I think friendships form more easily because it is not just about school but also about interests.* (participant 9)

Many participants had a reassuring feeling that they could always turn to their colleagues when needed. Some participants mentioned that this made the harder moments more bearable. Participant 11 suffered from a burnout a few years back and the communication with her

colleagues during this time at home helped her through. Another participant suffered a great loss and received much support during this time from her colleagues.

For teachers that were new to the team, this communication via external IM apps also helped them integrate faster and was perceived as a welcoming sign. Being added to group chats created a sense of belonging, as was confirmed by participant 3:

*I was MEGA happy that I was in that group. That was really […] like that feeling from secondary school where you just do not know like which group should I stand with. That was a confirmation that I belong to a group.*

Naturally, those excluded from these groups would miss out on these benefits. While no participants reported experiencing this themselves, when asked what non-participants might lose by not joining, one participant suggested they would only miss certain team-building aspects. Notably, however, not all teachers have a strong desire for this bonding aspect of instant messaging. A few participants acknowledged the social effect of instant messaging but mentioned it was not something they considered necessary. Participant 8, for instance, noted that face-to-face interactions were sufficient and that external IM apps were not needed to get along. Participant 14 only reported on the stronger bond when asked explicitly and expressed his indifference towards this:

*So it gives a stronger bond, yes, but that is also where it stops. And I do not feel that it makes me happier because we have that.*

This strengthening of bonds was not a prominent theme in the discussions about instant messaging with **pupils**. Although there was room for non-work-related messages and heavier topics, in both the external and internal IM apps, none of the participants explicitly reported feeling a stronger connection to their pupils as a result.

### 4.5 Disadvantages of instant messaging use

The disadvantages of instant messaging are often intertwined, as one disadvantage often goes hand in hand with another. Still, to provide an overview, an attempt to establish categories was pursued: a lack of overview, information overload, disruptive notifications and a disrupted

work-life balance. These disadvantages were mainly reported in relation to communication among **colleagues**, since communication with pupils occurred less frequently and was less extensive.

First, most participants were familiar with the apps and found the interface quite organised and easy to work with. In some cases, IM apps were easier for group communication because emails and Smartschool often end up in a chain of back-and-forth messages, while IM apps keep everything in one group chat and enable users to reply using stickers instead of written messages. However, almost half of the participants still struggled to maintain an overview. This was due to the existence of multiple separate chats. Participants used both the official school communication channel and the external IM apps, which meant that information was spread across multiple channels. In addition, many participants were part of different group chats, for example, of both the whole department and a specific year group. This resulted in participants having trouble finding information:

*That was truly hell with that group because things came in through Smartschool, through [WhatsApp groups] for [class 1], [class 2], then I had the [3rd cycle subject] group, then I had the [subject] plus group, and then also the department group, so five groups. I genuinely no longer knew where to find everything.* (participant 15)

This issue was most pronounced in the internal IM app Microsoft Teams, where the creation of numerous group chats resulted in a high volume of messages. Participant 3 noted that this had been an ongoing challenge since the school's transition to Microsoft Teams. In response, the IT department and the school's principal team have attempted to introduce more structure within the platform by, for example, deciding on a pattern to name the different groups, but this has not been easy.

This is intertwined with the second disadvantage, namely the experience of information overload in both external and internal IM apps. Roughly half of the participants reported struggling with the amount of information they received, particularly in group chats with many colleagues. A key focus in one school has been guiding staff in distinguishing what information is relevant to share with colleagues on the internal IM apps. In addition, employees have been encouraged to use stickers rather than each member sending short individual replies.

This leads to the third disadvantage that was a struggle regarding both external and internal IM apps as well: disruptive notifications. Some participants reported that their tasks took much longer to complete because they kept getting distracted by the incoming messages. For participant 13 this even happened during classes because of his watch being connected to his device. In addition, participant 3 mentioned that part of her brain processor was occupied by just knowing that a message was waiting for her. Furthermore, multiple participants noted that their curiosity made it difficult to resist checking incoming messages, even when doing so interrupted their work.

Inherent to these notifications, is the fact that the recipient has no control over when they arrive, which leads to the fourth disadvantage: a disrupted work-life balance. This issue was raised in nearly all interviews and proved particularly complex, as participants frequently expressed contradictory statements in the same interview depending on the situation. Almost all participants reported receiving work-related messages during their free time on both the external and internal IM apps. However, opinions on whether this was problematic or not varied considerably. Half of the participants who raised this issue expressed annoyance regarding this, while the other half indicated that this did not bother them. Participant 9 attributed this to the fact that she regarded her colleagues as friends and wanted to help. Others reasoned that, as teachers, clearly defined working hours do not exist to begin with. For participants who frequently worked late hours, after-hours messages posed little issue, given that they were already engaged in work-related activities.

Yet the picture was more nuanced. Participant 15 did not object to receiving messages while working but still found it disrespectful when messages arrived during leisure activities. In addition, participants who found after-hours messages disruptive nonetheless admitted to sending such messages themselves. Participant 15 even reported that her principals had complained about receiving WhatsApp messages from teachers as early as five in the morning. The most common feeling that arose when participants got disturbed during their free time was a sense of pressure to work as well. This was illustrated by participant 11, who disabled notifications “to not feel stress on the couch”. At the same time, many participants emphasised that the responsibility ultimately lies with the recipient to decide whether to allow these messages to disturb them.

The participants who used external IM apps with their **pupils** did so out of a desire to help and were therefore not bothered by after-hours messages. Similarly, most participants who used the official school communication channels did not mind late messages either, as pupils are at school during the day and only have the opportunity to contact them after hours.

## 4.6 Ambivalent implications of instant messaging use

Some outcomes of instant messaging cannot be seen as clearly advantageous or disadvantageous, as participants' opinions are divided. Participants mentioned both the informality of instant messaging and the increased approachability of users through instant messaging as something that can be advantageous or disadvantageous depending on the situation.

Firstly, when looking at some of the conversations among **colleagues** that participants shared, it became clear that the atmosphere was quite informal on the external IM apps. Group chats often had funny names, many conversations contained several emojis, and messages were not drafted with the typical formal openings and closings. However, there was a difference to observe between novice teachers and older teachers. In one department group chat on WhatsApp, it stood out that all members simply wrote one or two lines, whereas a young novice teacher used the formatting of an email each time, including blank lines. The participant who shared this chat but was not the novice teacher was quite surprised when this was pointed out during the interview because she felt the conversations did not require such formality. Participant 1, who was a novice teacher, also admitted to rereading her WhatsApp messages a few times to ensure it was polite enough, as the connection with colleagues was still in its early stages. This shows that novice teachers often struggle with this blurriness between formal and informal, as they are still exploring what is appropriate.

A few participants also explicitly mentioned that WhatsApp felt more informal and familiar, which is why they would turn to email or the official school communication channel when matters were more serious and professional. Participant 2 even expressed discomfort towards the use of external IM apps with principals, feeling that instant messaging causes a certain distance to disappear. For some participants, this was also the case with **pupils**. Half of the participants reported trying to safeguard the teacher-pupil boundary. They valued the formality of this relationship, with three participants explicitly saying that although they enjoy having a

good connection with their pupils, they are still their teacher, not their friend. Consequently, when conversations with pupils took place via external IM apps, they still preferred a formal atmosphere. A few participants were opposed to the use of external IM apps with pupils altogether because of the boundary-blurring nature of those apps. Only participant 14 felt strongly that building a close relationship with pupils was part of his job and therefore valued the more informal use of IM. It can therefore be concluded that the informality associated with external IM apps is welcome in certain circumstances and to certain people but uncomfortable in other situations and to other people.

Secondly, the informality of instant messaging erodes a certain distance, which also increases approachability, as illustrated by participant 3:

*An email still represents a higher barrier than a chat message, which often led to more deliberate consideration of when it was useful to write an email.*

Participant 7 also recalled that **colleagues** used to apologise for sending a second email in one day, which does not happen with messages on Microsoft Teams. For this participant, the approachability was negative, as it leads to receiving more messages than necessary. However, the increased approachability was also seen as something positive by participant 14, as it allowed their colleagues to more openly express how they truly felt via WhatsApp.

This approachability paradox was also present in the communication with **pupils**. A few participants mentioned that pupils send an IM message for the slightest thing nowadays, on both the external and internal IM apps. Especially in group chats on the external IM apps, many unnecessary messages were sent. In addition, participant 6, who used an internal IM app, also felt that because the teachers are so approachable, pupils tend to be more disrespectful. However, some participants also saw advantages in being more approachable through instant messaging. They reported that it is easier to address the heavier stuff with pupils. Participant 7 explained that if he is worried about a pupil, it is often too direct to ask them to stay behind after class, as the other classmates are curious as well and tend to hang around for that reason. If he can then send a one-to-one message on Microsoft Teams at night, pupils feel more comfortable sharing. Participant 14 mentioned that being approachable is also necessary with certain pupils who, for example, tend to be more closed-off and harder to reach. This

participant, who teaches classes that prepare pupils for the labour market, felt strongly about the value of external IM apps:

*[…] those people [exaggerating] "but you have to do it through the official channel or I will not answer", come on, I mean, in the vocational finality I am just happy that they are communicating at all.*

## 4.7 School policies

In order to regulate the use of IM and mitigate its potential adverse effects, schools can formulate a policy in this regard. This policy can include (a) which channels are appropriate to use and (b) how soon teachers are expected to answer their messages. The former is discussed first, followed by the latter. The interview questions focused on teachers' knowledge of a policy within their school. Interestingly, many participants emphasised that they receive so much information, that it is impossible to remember everything. If they were not sure of certain rules, they blamed themselves for not paying closer attention.

First, approximately half of the participants reported that the school clearly communicated that social media platforms are not official communication channels. Some participants recently received reminders of this via email, others vaguely remembered something from a meeting. In most cases, the school merely sought to remind teachers which channels were considered official, without imposing formal consequences. Only participant 4 was aware that if something were to go wrong, he had to be able to provide evidence from one of the official channels. If it happened on the unofficial ones, this would be the teacher's problem, and he would need to contact the police. Nevertheless, most participants still made the choice to use these apps. The other half of the participants could not remember any guidelines regarding the use of different channels for work-related matters.

Second, roughly half of the participants reported that they clearly knew how quickly a response was expected of them. A few others were aware that guidelines existed but could not recall them precisely, while a minority were unaware of them. Some participants also questioned how many of their colleagues were aware that guidelines were in place. Interestingly, in the schools that used Smartschool, a feature was activated to encourage respect for recipients' free time. If anyone, whether a teacher, pupil or other staff member, attempts to send a message after a

predetermined time in the evening, the message is automatically scheduled for delivery the following morning. The sender does, however, still have the option to send it immediately. The suggestion to postpone encourages them to consider the importance of the message. In one of the schools, an announcement was posted on the school platform on the Friday before a holiday break, encouraging staff to respect the right to disconnect. The message emphasised that this period was intended for rest and for stepping back from work. Staff were therefore asked to avoid contacting colleagues unnecessarily. While truly urgent matters could still be addressed, everything else could wait, allowing everyone the chance to return with renewed energy.

After I had informed all participants about the disconnection law during the interview, opinions on providing guidelines regarding this were divided. Most of the participants were pleased that schools intervene regarding disconnection. Participant 9 reported that, prior to this law, she used to feel a certain moral obligation to work during the weekend. She also mentioned that now even the principals send apologies along the lines of "Sorry for bothering you with this on a Sunday." Still, a few participants were not fully convinced of these guidelines. Some participants simply thought it was unnecessary, since everyone is an adult capable of using good judgement. However, there were also two very contradicting opinions among the sample. Participant 5 perceived this as an additional pressure, as she felt that 48 hours were not enough. She argued that in other professions delays in responding are generally understood, whereas teachers are not granted the same flexibility and are expected to be available immediately. Others, on the contrary, felt this was ridiculous coddling. Participant 4 shared this view and added that certain expectations can be held of teachers:

*How many months a year are we already at home? Do you still think that is a right? To also [disconnect] on top of that… I think that is pushing it.*

Despite these differing views, almost all participants reported replying much more quickly. Many participants considered a 48-hour response window too long. Most responded as soon as they saw the message, which ranged from within a day to within an hour or even within 30 minutes. Several reasons were given for this promptness. Some participants noted that they were aware of how frustrating delays can be and therefore did not want to leave the other party waiting. In addition, some pointed out that most questions from pupils are no longer relevant after 48 hours. Others simply wanted to get it over with and cross the response off their list.

Participant 7 explained that by postponing checking messages, one effectively “punishes” oneself, as the messages accumulate, along with the stress levels.

Another factor to consider is the differences in individuals’ schedules. Many participants noted that they or their colleagues first need to attend to household responsibilities after school, such as caring for their children. As a result, they often only return to their desks after the predetermined hour from Smartschool. While they valued the notification for raising awareness of the late hour, they also recognised that it is not always feasible for some individuals to send messages before this deadline. Participant 15 further indicated that when messages are postponed, she tends to receive a large number of messages all at once the following morning, even though she could have addressed them the previous evening while she was still working.

In one school, a guideline to not share personal numbers with pupils was introduced following an incident in which a pupil contacted a teacher about personal issues. Despite this, the participant from this school reported that she continues to share her number and is aware of many colleagues who do the same. Another school uploaded a document outlining the guidelines regarding digital communication, in which it clearly said social media is not to be used for professional communication. Still, the teachers at this school engaged in work-related conversations on WhatsApp. Several participants also questioned how teachers would respond to stricter rules, such as a ban on communication via external IM apps, suggesting that this would lead to protest. Participant 14, who used external IM apps to communicate with pupils, indicated that his principals are likely unaware of this practice and would probably disapprove. Nevertheless, the participant stated that even if such behaviour were formally prohibited, he would continue, adding that losing his job would not be a concern, as he could find another position. In conclusion, even when clear policies are established, it remains uncertain whether teachers will consistently adhere to them.

## 4.8 Strategies for managing instant messaging communication

Some schools supported teachers in managing the adverse effects by promoting disconnection, providing guidance for the effective use of the apps and fostering digital etiquette, for example, encouraging the use of stickers instead of written messages. In one school, feedback surveys were distributed to gather teachers’ perspectives on their experience with the communication

apps. Other schools shared practical tips via the school platform, such as activating “do not disturb” mode on devices to limit interruptions.

However, although schools can promote such practices, the responsibility for implementing them ultimately lies with individual teachers (see Table 3 for an overview of strategies at both levels). The interviews revealed several self-regulation strategies aimed at managing digital communication. The most popular measure was turning off notifications, although participants described several variations of this practice. Participant 15 went furthest, turning off all notifications on her phone, both professional and private, and described feeling a sense of peace as a result. Others deliberately selected which work-related conversations to mute. Some muted these conversations permanently, while others chose to activate “do not disturb” mode on their phones in the evening or during periods requiring concentration. Similar to muting conversations, two participants used the “archive” feature on WhatsApp, but for different reasons. Archived chats are stored in a separate folder within the WhatsApp feed to help better organise conversations. In addition, messages in archived chats typically do not send notifications to your phone (WhatsApp Helpcentrum, n.d.). Participant 2 archived conversations for which she did not want to receive notifications, describing this as a step further than simply muting them, while participant 15 archived all work-related conversations as a way of maintaining an overview and separating private life from work life. A small number of participants simply did not download the school platforms on their personal devices. In line with these measures, some participants mentioned choosing when to read their messages, allowing them to decide for themselves when the workday was over. Overall, these strategies were employed to gain a sense of control over when they deal with messages.

In some cases, participants also took more direct measures to manage group communication. Participant 13 reported leaving a group chat when the messages were no longer perceived as relevant. Another interesting measure to avoid overly active group chats was described in the context of communication with parents. During an international trip, participant 13 created a WhatsApp group to provide updates but configured the settings so that only teachers could send messages, preventing parents from posting in the chat.

A further set of strategies concerned the establishment of clear agreements. Participant 14 indicated that he explicitly informed colleagues when he would be unavailable, for example, during a trip. Participant 6 explained that, due to information overload, he did not read all

messages but communicated this clearly to colleagues, asking them to address messages directly to him when a response was required. In addition, several participants reported addressing pupils when communication norms were not followed, such as sending excessive messages when stickers would suffice or using informal language. Participant 4 who used external IM apps with pupils stated that clear boundaries were set from the start, including a warning that abuse would lead to police involvement. Finally, participant 1 noted that, if she were to ever use external IM apps with pupils, she would pin a message outlining all agreed-upon rules.

**Table 3**

*Strategies Regarding Digital Communication Management*

| School-level strategies | Teacher-level strategies |
|---|---|
| Issuing guidelines regarding the use of different channels | Disabling all notifications |
| Issuing guidelines regarding disconnection | Muting work-related conversations |
| Activating delayed sending of after-hours messages on Smartschool | Activating “do not disturb” mode |
| Sending reminders to promote disconnection | Archiving certain chats |
| Teaching digital etiquette (e.g., replying with stickers instead of messages) | Not installing school platforms on personal phones |
| Sharing practical tips (e.g., how to activate “do not disturb” mode) | Choosing when to read messages |
| Sending out feedback surveys about the communication channels | Not reading every message |
| | Leaving group chats |
| | Blocking members from sending messages in large group chats |
| | Establishing clear agreements with colleagues and pupils (e.g., about communication norms) |

## 5 DISCUSSION

This study explored how secondary school teachers use instant messaging and what this means for their well-being. Because teachers’ well-being is an increasing concern in the Belgian media (Antonissen, 2021; Redactie & Belga, 2025) and because news stories have surfaced

regarding inappropriate use of IM channels by groups of secondary school teachers (Bryssinck & Lauwerier, 2023; Muylaert & De Witte, 2022; Redactie, 2023), I wanted to explore this matter extensively through in-depth interviews with 15 Flemish secondary school teachers.

The first research question aimed to explore how Flemish secondary school teachers use instant messaging in their communication with different work-related target groups, namely colleagues, pupils, principals and parents. Consistent with Cansoy (2017), all teachers in this study frequently used external IM apps to communicate with colleagues. However, this pattern was less prominent for communication with the other target groups, pointing to potential cultural differences between the Belgian context and the settings of previous studies (e.g., Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Johari et al., 2022; Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023). While the use of WhatsApp with pupils seemed, for example, popular in Israel (Elhay & Hershkovitz, 2019), only three out of fifteen Flemish participants engaged in regular communication with their pupils through external IM apps. Similarly, while communication through external IM apps with parents is a standardised practice in Malaysia (Johari et al., 2022), no Flemish participants did so regularly. Even the occasional communication with parents was only mentioned by three participants, with one participant explicitly stating that he would never allow this again. Furthermore, while principals create WhatsApp groups with their teachers in Turkey (Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023), only half of the Flemish participants reported any communication through external IM apps with their principals and this was still far from regular.

Taken together, these findings suggest that Flemish teachers are more inclined than teachers in other countries to maintain a strict boundary between communication channels for private use and those for work, whereas in other countries these tend to overlap more, though further cross-cultural research would be needed to confirm this. In line with this, a few participants made a clear distinction between the official school platforms for formal, work-related communication and the external IM apps for informal, non-work-related communication. This aligns with Soens et al. (2025), who found that Belgian employees experienced greater work-life conflict from work-related IM use than American employees. As for why colleagues stand out from other target groups in this study, many participants explicitly referred to them as friends, which might explain why the use of more informal channels is more established with this target group and why Belgian secondary school teachers feel comfortable engaging in conversations with them through external IM apps such as WhatsApp.

Looking more closely at the communication through IM apps, all teachers were members of one or more group chats. This included work-related and non-work-related teacher-teacher group chats, teacher-pupil group chats for class teachers and teacher-pupil group chats for school trips. When teachers used external IM apps with colleagues, different purposes and motivations could be identified, namely engaging in non-work-related conversations (e.g., about parties), using media affordances (e.g., sending photos of schedules), sending short announcements and questions (often directed at multiple people), scheduling in-person meetings, sending urgent messages, and venting. This is in line with previous research showing that instant messaging is used for posing quick questions (Quan-Haase et al., 2005), sending urgent messages (Hirvonen et al., 2022; Quan-Haase et al., 2005), forwarding educational material, planning social activities (Cansoy, 2017), informing multiple people and engaging in informal talk (Jabbar et al., 2021). However, not all non-work-related conversations were welcomed by all participants, as some teachers described certain messages as annoying or useless. This included chains of goodwill messages and conversations about parties.

The purposes were roughly the same when teachers used external IM apps with their pupils, namely sending important messages or reminders, sending short questions, using media affordances (e.g., sending photos during international trips) and engaging in light-hearted social interactions (e.g., thanking each other). Some participants' official school communication channel was Microsoft Teams. The use of this internal IM app was similar to how other participants used platforms such as Smartschool. Nevertheless, the internal IM app also facilitated non-work-related conversations, with both colleagues and pupils, consistent with findings about internal IM app use among colleagues in organisations (Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016). By contrast, none of the participants who used Smartschool mentioned non-work-related conversations on that platform. The characteristics of internal IM apps may thus influence what content is viewed as appropriate.

The second research question explored how Flemish secondary school teachers experience the impact of work-related IM use on their own well-being. No participants specifically reported that their overall well-being was strongly influenced by work-related instant messaging. Only participant 15 stood out with a consistently negative experience, expressing a preference for a ban on work-related communication via external IM apps. All other participants had a more nuanced view and reported both advantages and disadvantages with no strictly positive or negative impact on well-being. While no participants used the term "well-being" explicitly,

several themes emerged that speak to it. These themes could be divided into outcomes that were mainly perceived as advantages, disadvantages or as ambivalent by participants.

First, the main advantages of work-related IM use were speed and the strengthening of bonds. IM messages were generally perceived to be faster, in both sending and receiving. This advantage was observed in conversations with both colleagues and pupils. This was due to the widespread everyday use of the external IM apps, resulting in messages being seen more quickly. This is consistent with Bouhnik and Deshen (2014), who found that teachers experienced low compliance when using email with pupils, as students tended to open it less frequently. In addition, the less strict format of instant messaging compared to email contributes to this speed. The informality and the lower importance of things such as message layout are characteristics of instant messaging that enable faster communication. Furthermore, group chats on both external and internal IM apps allowed teachers to reach multiple people at once and receive faster responses from any member who is online first. Prior research found that employees can also feel pressured, however, to respond more quickly to IM messages (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2023; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). The teachers interviewed in this study did not mention this potential side-effect. Some rather suggested that recipients on WhatsApp can decide for themselves when to view the messages.

Second, the ability of work-related IM use to strengthen bonds was only observed in conversations among colleagues using external IM apps. The IM messages made them feel supported, connected to each other and, in the case of group chats, welcome. Prior research found this effect in both group chats among colleagues and group chats with pupils (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Cansoy, 2017; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018), but in this study no such effect was observed in teacher-pupil group chats. Prior research about employees also observed a positive effect of non-work-related conversations on internal IM apps (Stray et al., 2019), but most participants reserved their non-work-related messages for the external IM apps. In addition, some participants were indifferent to such additional online conversations, as face-to-face interactions at school were sufficient for them.

In addition to advantages of work-related IM use, teachers also shed light on four main disadvantages: lack of overview, information overload, disruptive notifications and a disrupted work-life balance. First, the lack of overview was caused by the existence of multiple separate chats, making information difficult to find on both the external and internal IM apps. Stray et

al. (2019) described the challenge of creating too many different channels, a pattern also observed in participants' experience with Microsoft Teams. This led to the second disadvantage, namely the problem of information overload. This problem was also identified by office workers in the context of work-related IM use (Cho et al., 2019) and by pupils in secondary education in the context of teacher-pupil group chats on WhatsApp (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). Teachers in this study struggled with the amount of information they received via instant messaging, both in the external and the internal IM apps. Third, teachers reported being distracted by the disruptive notifications, both during classes and preparations. This disruptive nature of instant messaging also had a negative effect on task completion in prior research about employees (Bordi et al., 2018; Jabbar et al., 2021). Teachers must process large amounts of information that is difficult to find while dealing with frequent interruptions.

Lastly, nearly all teachers experienced a disrupted work-life balance, as they frequently work after hours, something most participants described as inherent to their job. After-hours IM messages often intensified this experience, which aligns with prior research on work-family conflict associated with IM use by employees (Hurbean et al., 2022; Soens et al., 2025). However, opinions were divided on this matter. Roughly half of the participants reported feeling stressed whenever they receive work-related messages in their free time, while the other half was not bothered by this, suggesting that the impact of work-related messages after hours varies considerably between individuals. Interestingly, most participants continued sending messages after hours themselves, even those who experienced such messages from others as disruptive, with some expressing that the responsibility of managing boundaries ultimately lies with the recipient. A notable exception, however, was after-hours contact with pupils via the external IM apps. No participant objected to this, as being approachable after hours was precisely the purpose.

Finally, some elements associated with work-related IM use were not clearly considered an advantage or a disadvantage, namely the informality of instant messaging and the increased approachability of users through instant messaging. These aspects were perceived differently by participants depending on the situation. First, instant messaging is seen as an informal communication channel (Jabbar et al., 2021; Quan-Haase et al., 2005). No one objected to the informal character of the conversations via instant messaging among colleagues. Interestingly, however, novice teachers especially seemed to struggle with the boundaries of how (in)formal this communication is supposed to be. Further, some participants felt that serious matters were

better discussed on the official school communication channels. Regarding communication with pupils, most teachers valued formal communication, even on the external IM apps. Because of the blurred boundaries in the teacher-pupil relationship on the external IM apps (Zarra, 2016), some teachers avoided using these altogether. However, one participant valued this informality as a way to bridge the gap between teacher and pupil. The informality may thus lead to discomfort but may also be appreciated.

Second, approachability is also increased through instant messaging, on both the external and internal IM apps. Prior research found that pupils are particularly more comfortable to share more openly via instant messaging (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018). Some participants viewed this increased approachability as a negative consequence, as more messages came through from both colleagues and pupils, while others saw it as an opportunity to address heavier topics and reach more closed-off pupils.

The third and final research question explored participants' perceptions of their school's policy regarding digital communication. Prior research (Jia et al., 2019) has noted that, to ensure effective use of work-related instant messaging, organisations should develop well-defined policies that are communicated clearly across the whole organisation. However, many participants reported difficulty recalling their school's policy, which may suggest that these policies are not consistently communicated or well established in all schools. First, approximately half of the participants were aware of guidelines defining the official communication channels for teacher communication, excluding social media. However, no formal consequences were connected to violations of this guideline. Only one participant knew that when problems arose through unofficial channels such as social media, the teacher was personally responsible and the school did not intervene, but no framework was given to guide the teachers in this use.

Second, roughly half of the participants knew that they had 48 hours to answer work-related messages. Most teachers valued this rule, while others found it either suffocating, ridiculous or unnecessary. Strikingly, almost all participants answered their messages even quicker. Only three out of seven schools actively promoted disconnection by, for example, activating push notifications to alert senders when a message is sent late at night. Previous research has also highlighted the importance of presenting employees with coping strategies (e.g., setting time-related demarcations) (Rohwer et al., 2022; Tarafdar et al., 2020). However, only participants

from two schools indicated that their school provided practical tips, such as activating “do not disturb” mode.

# 6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, only a small sample of Flemish secondary school teachers was interviewed. Most participants were based in West Flanders, with only two schools located in East Flanders. Furthermore, no participants belonged to the age category of 50+. This is relevant, as Hurbean et al. (2022) suggested that employees belonging to the tech-savvy Internet generation are less likely to perceive techno-complexity due to their familiarity with IM, implying that older, less digitally experienced teachers might have a different experience with IM use. Future research should therefore include a more diverse sample in terms of both region and age to improve the representativeness of the findings.

Second, the findings regarding the use of external IM apps for communication with pupils were interesting, yet few participants reported using IM with this target group. Future research using surveys with a larger sample could explore whether this limited use reflects a broader pattern in Flanders or whether it was specific to this sample. The same applies to other target groups such as parents and principals, with whom IM communication was also uncommon in this sample.

Third, participants were asked to show only a few examples of their IM conversations, and one participant chose to describe these rather than show them. Although requesting examples helps limit social desirability bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020), future research could make use of message logs to obtain more objective data. Given the scandals reported in Belgian news media regarding discriminatory messages in teacher group chats (Muylaert & De Witte, 2022; Redactie, 2023) and the fact that some participants in this study already expressed disagreement about the appropriateness of discussing pupils in online group chats, log data could provide a more accurate picture of whether such antisocial behaviour is common.

# 7 CONCLUSION

As most prior research has focused on the use of instant messaging in higher education, on how teachers use it or on student perspectives, little is known about the outcomes of such use for teacher well-being in secondary education. This study aimed to address that gap. In addition, this study examined how established the school policies are by questioning the awareness, perception and opinions of teachers regarding the guidelines of their schools. Based on the findings related to teachers' work-related IM use, their well-being and the school policies, some theoretical and practical implications are discussed in the following sections.

## 7.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of this study confirm previous research conducted primarily in the context of office work (e.g., Bordi et al., 2018; Cho et al., 2019; Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016) while also offering insights into the specific outcomes of work-related IM use within the teaching profession. While studies about employees in general have linked work-related IM use after hours to work-family conflict (Cheng et al., 2021; Hurbean et al., 2022; Soens et al., 2025), this study suggests that for secondary school teachers specifically, the target group seems to play a particularly important role. While some participants were also bothered by messages from their colleagues after hours, participants did not mind messages from pupils, on both the IM apps and the official school platforms. This may be related to the unique nature of the teaching profession that prioritises helping pupils. Yet, as was also the case with communication among colleagues, there is a thin line between acceptable messages and unnecessary messages, so the content of the messages may be of relevance too. However, only a limited number of participants frequently used external IM apps with their pupils, so future research could explore this further.

In addition, this study suggests some cultural preferences in deciding to use instant messaging for work purposes. While studies in other countries found that teachers use external IM apps with various target groups, such as pupils (e.g., Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Elhay & Hershkovitz, 2019), parents (Johari et al., 2022) and principals (Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023), most Flemish teachers in this study valued more formal communication channels with target groups that were not their colleagues.

## 7.2 Practical implications

Based on the interviews and the existing literature, I will formulate a number of practical guidelines and suggestions for school administrators on how to handle instant messaging in secondary schools, as organisational support is a key resource in managing technostress (Rohwer et al., 2022). The suggestions focus on observation, flexible policies, coping strategies and consistency.

First, as Stray et al. (2019) advised, organisations should continuously observe how their employees are using IM apps. As one participant's school did, schools could send out surveys to gain insight into how staff use instant messaging and how they experience this. Once they have a clearer picture of the communication dynamics that are already present in their school, it becomes easier to evaluate existing policies and identify any gaps. For example, survey results might reveal that many teachers in a particular school are unaware of the disconnection law, as was the case for roughly half of the participants, which could then be addressed by revisiting the guidelines in meetings.

Second, when asked what schools could do to limit the negative effects of instant messaging, one participant suggested banning work-related group chats on external IM apps. Previous research has pointed out that blocking IM use might not be the ideal solution, as trust can be damaged (Lebbon & Sigurjónsson, 2016) and effective use can actually be beneficial (Hurbean et al., 2022). In addition, the interviews also showed that work-related group chats have become a routine part of teachers' lives, with one participant even expecting protest if a ban were to be implemented. For this reason, rather than prohibiting the use of work-related communication via external IM apps, schools could focus on guiding teachers in using them effectively and managing any negative consequences. Organisations should work on flexible IT policies that offer employees multiple coping strategies to improve well-being and minimise adverse effects of work-related IM use (Rohwer et al., 2022; Tarafdar et al., 2020). These coping strategies can be communicated in information sessions (Rohwer et al., 2022; Tarafdar et al., 2020). Such sessions also provide an opportunity to clearly communicate guidelines.

Third, regarding the content of the coping strategies, schools should focus on promoting functional coping strategies (Rohwer et al., 2022), such as distancing, developing a positive IT outlook, developing IT use skills, developing IT use autonomy, setting time-related

demarcations and separating work and non-work IT use (Tarafdar et al., 2020). Some of these strategies were also mentioned by the teachers in the interviews, such as setting time-related demarcations by activating “do not disturb” mode. Schools could also encourage their staff to share their coping strategies and experiences with each other (Rohwer et al., 2022).

Lastly, consistency in policy is important. One school had uploaded a document outlining guidelines for proper use of digital communication, which is a good idea, as it gives teachers easy access to the guidelines at all times. Yet this document stated that social media should not be used for professional communication. This guideline, however, was not adhered to within the school, with the principal team’s knowledge. Such inconsistencies risk causing confusion among teachers, as it becomes unclear which guidelines are actually expected to be followed.

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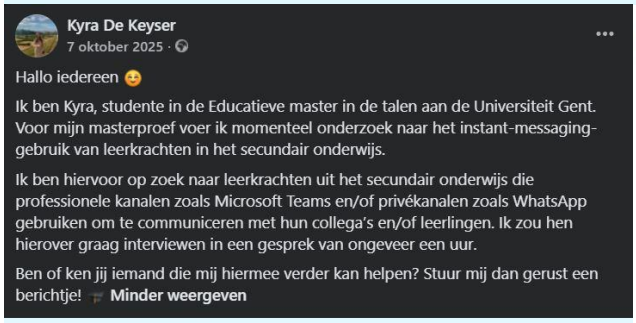
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**Appendix A**
**Call for participants**












## Appendix B
## Information letter

### Onderzoek naar het instant-messaging-gebruik van leerkrachten in het secundair onderwijs

Geachte meneer/mevrouw,

Mijn naam is Kyra De Keyser. Ik ben studente in de educatieve master aan de Universiteit Gent, meer specifiek bij de vakgroep Vertalen, Tolken en Communicatie. Voor mijn masterproef voer ik momenteel onderzoek naar het instant-messaging-gebruik van leerkrachten in het secundair onderwijs. Ik wil nagaan hoe en waarom ze instant-messaging-kanalen gebruiken om te communiceren met collega's en/of leerlingen, en welke gevolgen dit met zich meebrengt. Met instant-messaging-kanalen bedoel ik zowel professionele kanalen zoals Microsoft Teams als privékanalen zoals WhatsApp.

Alvast hartelijk dank voor uw interesse in deze studie. Met deze brief wil ik u uitnodigen om deel te nemen. Vooraleer u een beslissing neemt over uw deelname, vraag ik u om onderstaande tekst te lezen. Daarin overloop ik de studie.

**Doel van het project**
Deze studie onderzoekt hoe leerkrachten in het secundair onderwijs instant-messaging-kanalen gebruiken om te communiceren met collega's en/of leerlingen tijdens en/of na de werkuren. Het doel hiervan is om na te gaan hoe leerkrachten communiceren, waarom ze dat doen en welke gevolgen ze daarvan ondervinden.

**Waarom ben ik gekozen?**
Voor deze studie ben ik op zoek naar participanten die als leerkracht werkzaam zijn in het secundair onderwijs. Omdat het onderzoek gaat over het gebruik van instant-messaging-kanalen, is het belangrijk dat elke participant ten minste één instant-messaging-kanaal gebruikt om te communiceren met collega's en/of leerlingen.

**Wat houdt deelname aan de studie in?**
Deelnemen aan deze studie houdt in dat ik een interview van u zal afnemen. Dit is een gesprek tussen u en mij, waarbij u vragen zal krijgen over uw instant-messaging-gebruik als leerkracht. Het interview zal ongeveer een uur duren. De plaats en het tijdstip van het interview zullen in samenspraak worden bepaald. Bij het interview zijn enkel u en ikzelf aanwezig. Er zal een audio-opname van het interview worden gemaakt, zodat ik het gesprek achteraf kan transcriberen. Uw anonimiteit wordt gedurende de verwerking van de interviews verzekerd.

**Wat zijn de mogelijke nadelen en risico's van deelname?**
Het zal nodig zijn om voldoende tijd uit te trekken voor het interview. Ik verwacht niet dat het interview ongemak zal veroorzaken maar indien er onderwerpen zijn die u liever niet wenst te bespreken, dan kan u dit mij gewoon laten weten. Wanneer u dat wenst, kan het interview steeds worden stopgezet of even worden onderbroken. Eventuele audio-opnames kunnen op dat moment op uw vraag worden gewist. Ik houd daarbij steeds rekening met wat u wenst. Alle informatie wordt anoniem verwerkt, en enkel gebruikt voor dit onderzoek.

**Kan ik mijn deelname uitstellen of stopzetten?**
Wanneer u het interview wenst op te schorten of wanneer u uw deelname wil stopzetten, kunt u dit doen zonder dat u daarvoor een reden moet opgeven. U krijgt de gelegenheid om na het interview nog vragen te stellen. U kan, indien gewenst, voor verdere inlichtingen ook

steeds contact opnemen met mij, onderzoeker Kyra De Keyser, of met professor An-Sofie Claeys (zie contactgegevens aan het eind van dit document).

**Wat zijn de mogelijke voordelen van deelname?**
Er zijn geen rechtstreekse voordelen voor u als persoon. Het is niet mogelijk om een vergoeding te voorzien voor uw tijd of deelname. Het doel van deze studie is om een beter inzicht te krijgen hoe, waarom en met welke gevolgen leerkrachten communiceren via instant-messaging-kanalen. Op basis van mijn bevindingen zal ik nuttige aanbevelingen formuleren die leerkrachten kunnen helpen om eventuele ongewenste gevolgen van het gebruik van deze kanalen te vermijden of beperken. Door uw deelname kan u mijn onderzoek ondersteunen.

**Zijn er kosten verbonden aan een deelname?**
Uw deelname aan de studie brengt geen bijkomende kosten mee voor u.

**Moet ik deelnemen?**
Het staat u volkomen vrij om deel te nemen of niet. Indien u beslist om deel te nemen zal u worden gevraagd om een toestemmingsformulier te tekenen. U kunt weigeren om deel te nemen zonder dat u hiervoor een reden moet opgeven en zonder dat dit een invloed zal hebben op uw relatie met de onderzoekers of de UGent. U kan tot 7 dagen na het interview uw mening herzien. In dat geval kan u contact opnemen met mij, onderzoeker Kyra De Keyser, of met professor An-Sofie Claeys (zie contactgegevens aan het eind van dit document).

**Vertrouwelijkheid**
In overeenstemming met de Algemene Verordening Gegevensbescherming en de Belgische wet van 30 juli 2018 (bescherming van natuurlijke personen met betrekking tot de verwerking van persoonsgegevens), respecteren wij uw persoonlijke levenssfeer. Uw persoonlijke gegevens zullen worden versleuteld en worden bewaard op een paswoord-beveiligde PC zodat ik gedurende de studie contact met u kan opnemen. Als de resultaten van de studie worden gepubliceerd, dan worden de gegevens die ik van u verzamelde gepseudonimiseerd. Dat wil zeggen dat alle gegevens die u rechtstreeks zouden kunnen identificeren (bv. uw naam, organisatie, functie…) uit het databestand worden geschrapt. Alle participanten krijgen een uniek nummer in de plaats. Daarnaast worden ook maatregelen genomen om onrechtstreekse identificatie te vermijden (bv. door heel concrete unieke elementen die u vermeldde in het interview te vermijden). De Data Protection Officer kan u desgewenst meer informatie verschaffen over de bescherming van uw persoonsgegevens. Contactgegevens: mevrouw Hanne Elsen, tel: +32 9 264 95 17 of privacy@ugent.be, Campus Ufo, Rectoraat 2, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 25, 9000 Gent.

**Wat gebeurt er met de gegevens?**
De opnames van de interviews zullen woord voor woord door mij worden uitgeschreven en geanalyseerd. De elektronische versies (transcripts) en de opnames zullen aan de Universiteit Gent worden bewaard op een gedeelde netwerkschijf van de onderzoekers, beschermd met een paswoord. Deze netwerkschijf is een uiterst vellige opslagplaats aangezien deze enkel toegankelijk is voor de onderzoekers. Bovendien wordt de schijf beheerd en onderhouden door de dienst ICT van de Universiteit Gent. Op het eind van de studie zullen de audio-opnames worden vernietigd en blijven de gepseudonimiseerde transcripts nog bewaard voor een periode van minstens vijf jaar. Om de bevindingen van deze studie te delen met andere onderzoekers en beleidsmakers, zullen ze worden neergeschreven in academische publicaties. Alle informatie over participanten zal daarbij geanonimiseerd zijn.

**Wie heeft toegang tot mijn gegevens?**

Het onderzoeksteam heeft toegang tot de opnames en de transcripts. In elk geval zullen alle persoonlijke gegevens en alle informatie die mogelijk naar u kan leiden uit de interviewtranscripts worden weggelaten.

**Kan ik de resultaten van de studie inkijken?**
U kan een kopie van de samenvatting van de resultaten ontvangen indien u dat wenst. De verwerkingsverantwoordelijke voor de gegevens is Kyra De Keyser (zie contactgegevens onderaan).

**Wie organiseert en financiert dit onderzoek?**
Dit onderzoek wordt niet gefinancierd. Het onderzoeksteam bestaat uit: Kyra De Keyser (masterstudent aan de UGent) en An-Sofie Claeys (professor aan de UGent).

**Wie heeft deze studie goedgekeurd?**
Deze studie werd goedgekeurd door de Ethische Commissie van de faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte. In geen geval dient u de goedkeuring door deze commissie te beschouwen als een aanzet tot deelname aan deze studie.

**Hartelijk dank voor het lezen van deze informatie en uw interesse in dit onderzoek!**

**Contact voor verdere informatie:**
Indien u zou willen meewerken of indien u nog wat extra informatie wenst, kan u mij steeds bereiken via kyra.dekeyser@ugent.be.

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Kyra De Keyser, masterstudent aan de UGent, kyra.dekeyser@ugent.be
An-Sofie Claeys, professor aan de UGent, ansofie.claeys@ugent.be

**Appendix C**
**Informed consent**

## GEÏNFORMEERDE TOESTEMMING

### Onderzoek aan Universiteit Gent naar het instant-messaging-gebruik van leerkrachten in het secundair onderwijs

Geachte meneer/mevrouw,

In het kader van een project binnen de vakgroep Vertalen, Tolken en Communicatie aan de Universiteit Gent wordt momenteel een onderzoek gevoerd naar het instant-messaging-gebruik van leerkrachten in het secundair onderwijs.

Door middel van interviews met leerkrachten in het secundair onderwijs, onderzoekt deze studie hoe en waarom zij instant-messaging-kanalen gebruiken om te communiceren met collega's en/of leerlingen, en welke gevolgen dit met zich meebrengt. Onder instant-messaging-kanalen verstaan we zowel professionele kanalen zoals Microsoft Teams als privékanalen zoals WhatsApp.

Het onderzoek zelf bestaat uit een éénmalig interview. Door middel van open vragen peilen we naar uw instant-messaging-gebruik als leerkracht. U krijgt de kans om te antwoorden in uw eigen woorden. Het interview zelf beslaat maximum een uur van uw tijd. Om de gegevens goed en juist te kunnen verwerken, wordt het interview opgenomen.

Alle gegevens die in het kader van het onderzoek verzameld worden, worden volstrekt vertrouwelijk behandeld. Uw gegevens worden met andere woorden niet doorgegeven aan derden. Indien het verzamelde materiaal verwerkt wordt in een (academische) publicatie, wordt uw anonimiteit verzekerd (uw naam wordt niet vermeld, eventuele fragmenten uit het interview worden anoniem gepresenteerd).

Deelname aan het interview is volledig vrijwillig. U heeft op elk moment van het interview de mogelijkheid om uw deelname stop te zetten, zonder dat u daar een reden voor moet opgeven.

Ik, ondergetekende, bevestig hierbij dat ik

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | de informatie over het onderzoek heb gelezen en begrepen. Ik heb de gelegenheid gehad om de informatie en mijn deelname te overwegen en vragen te stellen die naar mijn tevredenheid werden beantwoord. | ☐ |
| 2. | begrijp dat mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek geheel vrijwillig is en dat ik mijn deelname op elk moment tijdens het interview kan stopzetten zonder dat ik hiervoor een reden moet opgeven. | ☐ |
| 3. | begrijp dat ik bij stopzetting van mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek, mijn reeds verzamelde gegevens kan terugtrekken tot 7 dagen na het interview. Een eenvoudige e-mail of telefoon naar de onderzoeker volstaat hiervoor. Ik hoef geen reden op te geven voor de terugtrekking van mijn gegevens. | ☐ |
| 4. | begrijp dat stopzetting van mijn deelname geen enkele invloed zal hebben op mijn relatie met de Universiteit Gent. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5. | begrijp dat ik geen financiële compensatie zal ontvangen voor mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek. | ☐ |
| 6. | toestemming geef aan de onderzoekers om het interview op te nemen (audio-opname). | ☐ |
| 7. | begrijp dat de data die worden verzameld gedurende deze studie zullen worden verwerkt in overeenstemming met de wettelijke bepalingen en de informatie die mij werd verstrekt. | ☐ |
| 8. | ervan op de hoogte ben dat ik een samenvatting van de onderzoeksresultaten kan krijgen. | ☐ |
| 9 | hierbij toestemming geef aan de onderzoekers om de onderzoeksresultaten op basis van de informatie die ik verstrek, te publiceren in wetenschappelijke tijdschriften en te bespreken tijdens wetenschappelijke bijeenkomsten op voorwaarde dat mijn identiteit daarbij niet achterhaald kan worden. | ☐ |
| 10 | ermee instem deel te nemen aan het onderzoek. | ☐ |

U ontvangt als deelnemer een exemplaar van dit toestemmingsformulier.

De deelnemer:

| Naam | Datum | Handtekening |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

Indien u een samenvatting van de resultaten wenst, gelieve hieronder een (e-mail)adres op te geven waarop u deze samenvatting wenst te ontvangen:

| |
|---|
| |

De persoon die toestemming vraagt:

| Naam | Datum | Handtekening |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

**Naam en contactgegevens van de onderzoeker(s):**

Indien u graag meer informatie wenst over het onderzoek, of indien u opmerkingen heeft over het onderzoek, kan u zich wenden tot Kyra De Keyser (masterstudent aan de UGent) via kyra.dekeyser@ugent.be of An-Sofie Claeys (professor aan de UGent) via ansofie.claeys@ugent.be.

**Hoe kan ik een klacht indienen?**

Als u een klacht wil indienen over de manier waarop uw persoonsgegevens worden behandeld of als u vragen heeft met betrekking tot uw persoonsgegevens in het kader van dit onderzoek, dan kan u contact opnemen met de functionaris voor gegevensbescherming van de Universiteit Gent via privacy@ugent.be of T +32 (0)9 264 95 17.

U kan ook een klacht indienen bij de Gegevensbeschermingsautoriteit, Drukpersstraat 35, 1000 Brussel (e-mail: contact@apd-gba.bep) en/of de Vlaamse Toezichtcommissie (e-mail: contact@toezichtscommissie.be).

**Appendix D**
**Topic list**

## Topiclijst interview

** De onderzoeker overloopt eerst en vooral nog eens de vereisten voor deelname met de participant en schrapt wat niet past **

- ☐ De deelnemer is werkzaam in het secundair onderwijs.
- ☐ De deelnemer is 18-30 / 30-40 / 40-50 / 50-60 / 60+ jaar oud.
- ☐ De deelnemer is man / vrouw / X.
- ☐ De deelnemer geeft les in de 1ste / 2e / 3e graad.
- ☐ De deelnemer geeft les in de doorstroomfinaliteit / de dubbele finaliteit / de arbeidsmarktfinaliteit.
- ☐ De deelnemer gebruikt ten minste 1 instant-messaging-kanaal (professioneel zoals Microsoft Teams of privé zoals WhatsApp) om te communiceren met collega's en/of leerlingen.

** De onderzoeker overloopt samen met de participant het formulier voor geïnformeerde toestemming. Pas nadat de participant dit formulier ondertekend heeft, kan het werkelijke interview van start gaan. **

**Inleidende vragen:**

- Hoelang werkt u al in het onderwijs?
- In welke school werkt u momenteel? Hoelang al?
- Hoeveel leerkrachten telt uw school (ongeveer)?
- Hoeveel leerlingen telt uw school (ongeveer)?
- Welke vakken geeft u?
- Hoe zou u de band met uw collega's omschrijven?
- Hoe zou u de band met uw leidinggevende (de schooldirecteur) omschrijven?
- Hoe zou u de band met uw leerlingen omschrijven?

**Algemeen instant-messaging-gebruik:**

** De onderzoeker leidt dit onderdeeltje kort even in, bijvoorbeeld "Ik ga u nu eerst enkele vragen stellen over uw gebruik van instant-messaging-kanalen in het algemeen, dus nog los van uw job als leerkracht" **

- Op welke instant-messaging-kanalen heeft u een account?
- Hoeveel tijd per dag besteedt u gemiddeld op die kanalen?
- Met wie communiceert u doorgaans via die kanalen?
- Waarover communiceert u doorgaans via die kanalen?

**Instant-messaging-gesprekken <u>met collega's:</u>**

** De onderzoeker leidt dit onderdeeltje kort even in, bijvoorbeeld "Dan ga ik u nu vragen stellen over hoe u instant-messaging-kanalen gebruikt in uw job als leerkracht, en dan specifiek om te communiceren met uw collega's" **

- Hoe vaak communiceert u met collega's via instant-messaging-kanalen?
    - Communiceert u ook met de schooldirecteur(s) via instant-messaging-kanalen? Hoe vaak?

- Welke instant-messaging-kanalen gebruikt u hiervoor?

    - In het geval van meerdere kanalen: wanneer kiest u voor het ene kanaal en wanneer voor het andere?

- In welke mate gebruikt u instant-messaging-kanalen voor individuele gesprekken met leerkrachten?
    - Waarover gaan die conversaties?
        - Welke werkgerelateerde zaken worden er zoal besproken?
        - Welke niet-werkgerelateerde zaken worden er zoal besproken?

- In welke mate gebruikt u instant-messaging-kanalen voor groepsgesprekken met leerkrachten?
    - Wie heeft deze chatgroep(en) aangemaakt?
    - Hoeveel leden zitten er in deze chatgroep(en)? Wie zijn ze?
    - Hoe voelt het om lid te zijn van deze chatgroep(en)?
    - Hoe actief bent u in deze chatgroep(en)?

    - Waarover gaan de conversaties in die chatgroep(en)?
        - Welke werkgerelateerde zaken worden er zoal besproken?
        - Welke niet-werkgerelateerde zaken worden er zoal besproken?

- Hoe vaak vinden de gesprekken met collega's via instant-messaging-kanalen plaats tijdens uw werkuren?
    - Hoe voelt u zich daarbij? Hoe gaat u daarmee om?

- Hoe vaak vinden de gesprekken met collega's via instant-messaging-kanalen plaats buiten uw werkuren?
    - Hoe voelt u zich daarbij? Hoe gaat u daarmee om?

- Kan u even het meest recente instant-messaging-gesprek met één of meerdere collega's bekijken en me vertellen waarover dat gesprek ging? Dat mag abstract of in detail, u mag zelf kiezen of u het wilt tonen of liever beschrijven.
  ** Lees als interviewer de berichten voor en/of beschrijf de (audio)visuele inhoud, zodat alles in het transcript opgenomen kan worden **

    - Op welk kanaal werd dit gesprek gevoerd?
    - Waarover ging het gesprek?
        - Voert u wel vaker dit soort gesprekken met collega's?
        - Om welke redenen doen jullie dat?
    - Vond dit gesprek plaats tijdens of buiten uw werkuren?

  ** Nadat er één voorbeeld besproken is, blijven doorvragen naar andere gesprekken tot er drie concrete voorbeelden besproken zijn. Probeer ervoor te zorgen dat er zowel voorbeelden van individuele als van groepsgesprekken besproken worden.**

- Welke voordelen ziet u in het communiceren via instant-messaging-kanalen met leerkrachten? Kunt u een voorbeeld noemen waar het voordelig was?

- Welke nadelen ziet u in het communiceren via instant-messaging-kanalen met leerkrachten? Kunt u een voorbeeld noemen waar het nadelig was?

- Welke verschillen zijn er tussen hoe u met collega's via deze instant-messaging-kanalen communiceert en hoe u met collega's via andere kanalen (bijvoorbeeld e-mail) communiceert?

**Instant-messaging-gesprekken <u>met leerlingen</u>:**

** De onderzoeker leidt dit onderdeeltje kort even in, bijvoorbeeld "Dan ga ik u nu vragen stellen over hoe u instant-messaging-kanalen gebruikt om te communiceren met leerlingen" **

- Hoe vaak communiceert u met leerlingen via instant-messaging-kanalen?

- Welke instant-messaging-kanalen gebruikt u hiervoor?
    - In het geval van meerdere kanalen: wanneer kiest u voor het ene kanaal en wanneer voor het andere?
    - In het geval van privéapps zoals WhatsApp: wordt uw nummer soms misbruikt door leerlingen? Op welke manier? Hoe voelt u zich hierbij?

- In welke mate gebruikt u instant-messaging-kanalen voor <u>individuele gesprekken</u> met leerlingen?
    - Waarover gaan die conversaties?
        - Welke schoolgerelateerde zaken worden er zoal besproken?
        - Welke niet-schoolgerelateerde zaken worden er zoal besproken?

- In welke mate gebruikt u instant-messaging-kanalen voor <u>groepsgesprekken</u> met leerlingen?
    - Wie heeft deze chatgroep(en) aangemaakt?
    - Hoeveel leden zitten er ongeveer in deze chatgroep(en)? Wie zijn ze?
    - Hoe actief bent u in deze chatgroep(en)?
    - Zijn er klassen waarbij u er bewust voor hebt gekozen om geen chatgroep aan te maken of toe te staan? Waarom?
    - Welke schoolgerelateerde zaken worden er zoal besproken?
    - Welke niet-schoolgerelateerde zaken worden er zoal besproken?

- Hoe vaak vinden de gesprekken met leerlingen via instant-messaging-kanalen plaats <u>tijdens uw werkuren</u>?
    - Hoe voelt u zich daarbij? Hoe gaat u daarmee om?

- Hoe vaak vinden de gesprekken met leerlingen via instant-messaging-kanalen plaats <u>buiten uw werkuren</u>?
    - Hoe voelt u zich daarbij? Hoe gaat u daarmee om?
- Kan u even het meest recente instant-messaging-gesprek met één of meerdere leerlingen bekijken en me vertellen waarover dat gesprek ging? Dat mag abstract of in detail, u mag zelf kiezen of u het wilt tonen of liever beschrijven.
  ** Lees als interviewer de berichten voor en/of beschrijf de (audio)visuele inhoud, zodat alles in het transcript opgenomen kan worden **

    - Op welk kanaal werd dit gesprek gevoerd?
    - Waarover ging het gesprek?
        - Voert u wel vaker dit soort gesprekken met leerlingen?
        - Om welke reden doet u dat?
    - Vond dit gesprek plaats tijdens of buiten uw werkuren?

** Nadat er één voorbeeld besproken is, blijven doorvragen naar andere gesprekken tot er drie concrete voorbeelden besproken zijn. Probeer ervoor te zorgen dat er zowel voorbeelden van individuele als van groepsgesprekken besproken worden.**

- Welke voordelen ziet u in het communiceren via instant-messaging-kanalen met leerlingen? Kunt u een voorbeeld noemen waar het voordelig was?

- Welke nadelen ziet u in het communiceren via instant-messaging-kanalen met leerlingen? Kunt u een voorbeeld noemen waar het nadelig was?

- Welke verschillen zijn er tussen hoe u met leerlingen via deze instant-messaging-kanalen communiceert en hoe u met leerlingen via andere kanalen (bijvoorbeeld e-mail) communiceert?

- Communiceert u ook met ouders via instant-messaging-kanalen?
    - Hoe vaak?
    - Is dat op uw initiatief of op initiatief van de ouders?
    - Waarover?
    - Hoe voelt u zich daarbij?

**Socialemediabeleid en richtlijnen:**

- Heeft uw school een bepaald socialemediabeleid? Dat zijn regels en aanbevelingen om het gebruik van sociale media (zoals instant-messaging-kanalen) door werknemers in goede banen te leiden.
    - Heeft uw school bijvoorbeeld regels over welk soort kanalen wel/niet gebruikt mogen worden om te communiceren met collega's en/of leerlingen?
    - Heeft uw school bijvoorbeeld regels over hoe snel leerkrachten verwacht worden om te antwoorden op berichten van collega's en/of leerlingen via deze kanalen?
    - Biedt uw school bijvoorbeeld ondersteuning voor leerkrachten om deze kanalen optimaal in te zetten?
    - Indien ja:
        - Wat is uw mening over die regels/ondersteuning?
        - In welke mate houdt u rekening met die regels? Waarom wel/niet?
    - Indien nee:
        - In welke mate zou u dergelijke regels/ondersteuning nuttig vinden?
        - In welke mate zou u dergelijke regels volgen?

- Wist u dat er sinds 1 september 2023 een lokaal 'afsprakenkader deconnectie' opgenomen moet zijn als bijlage bij het arbeidsreglement en het schoolreglement?
    - Dit is een document dat de regels vastlegt over het 'recht op deconnectie', zodat werknemers buiten de werkuren niet meer bereikbaar moeten zijn via digitale kanalen (zoals instant-messaging-kanalen)
    - In welke mate vindt u dat uw school hier rekening mee houdt?
    - Wat vindt u daarvan?

- Neemt u zelf bepaalde maatregelen op vlak van instant-messaging-gebruik?
    - Maakt u bijvoorbeeld bepaalde afspraken met leerlingen? Welke?
    - Maakt u bijvoorbeeld bepaalde afspraken met collega's? Welke?
    - Zet u bijvoorbeeld soms de meldingen uit van bepaalde chatgroepen?

- Heeft u zelf nog vragen, opmerkingen of toevoegingen?

Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan dit interview.