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Usage of ICT among Social Educators—An Analysis of Current Practice in Spain

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to identify the usage of ICT tools among social educators within their professional activity. Technology among social educators is currently a very up-to-date topic. This is a professional group with its own characteristics that are different from those of teachers or other professionals in formal education. A mixed sequential two-phase method was proposed for the study: both quantitative and qualitative. In the first phase, the EdSocEval_V2 questionnaire was applied to a sample of 504 social educators from 17 autonomous communities. In the second phase, four focus groups were formed. The results presented reduced and basic usage of ICT: in management and administrative tasks and for communication with conventional tools. The COVID-19 pandemic has likewise increased the need for the use of ICT in socio-educational interventions, although their use for intervention among these groups is still very scarce. Training in and raising awareness of ICT among professionals for social interventions are priorities, as is the construction of a referential framework for professional training.

Keywords: social education; digital competence; non formal education



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1. Introduction

The importance of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and the transformation that ICT has triggered in society over recent years is an undeniable contemporary reality. The European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp) was published in the Union in 2013. It covers the meaning of digital competence with reference to five areas of competence [1]. In the educational sector, we can find the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) (Colás-Bravo et al., 2019) and, in Spain, the Marco Común de Competencia Digital Docente [The Common Framework for Digital Competence in Teaching] [2] directed at the area of public education.

The landscape of the socio-educational area is quite different. On the one hand, professional roles can be accessed with different educational backgrounds. Janer and Úcar [3] compiled 45 degree courses related to the field of social pedagogy within different countries and the professional development of their graduates with different initial profiles. In the case of Spain, it is configured as a four-year university degree with clearly marked indicators throughout its educational and pedagogical profile [4]. We find no common reference to digital competence in this sector within the European Union, although we can identify the Social Investment Packet (SIP), proposed by the European Commission to promote social inclusion within the European Strategy 2020 [5]. The SIP urges member States to invest in the modernization of systems of wellbeing, emphasizing social innovation as the foundation for increased ICT-based opportunities [6].

1.1. Uses of ICT within Social Education

Some decades ago, the first studies appeared in which the use of ICT among professional social educators was analyzed. Forés et al. [7] affirmed that practically all the

professionals in the social field had not used ICT in their employment. According to the same authors, the few who were using it did so with word processors for managerial tasks. Along the same lines, Prats [8] covered some of the possibilities that ICT offers within this field for contacting users. Castillo et al. [9] presented five practices for which ICT can improve efficacy and quality in social action: access to information, training, dissemination of messages, communication, and collaborative work.

Professionals in socio-educational action must “prepare social projects that use these new electronic technologies to respond in the best way to the demands and the needs of the population” [10] (p. 260).

The computer was practically indispensable as a tool for managerial tasks, but was rarely used for user-related interventions [11]. They likewise reported an unequal development of ICT in the different areas of intervention. Subsequently, Martínez-Rivera and Forés [12] prepared practical proposals for the use of ICT in social-educational activities, taking into account the possibilities that technology has to offer.

Santás García [13], centering on social services, identified a potential in ICT as a tool for communication, collaboration, improved efficiency, and the broad dissemination of entities and initiatives. Among the uses he identified at the time of the study, he highlighted management systems, information processing, and their application to communication and information.

For Samp Pedro [14], ICT in social education is a useful tool to facilitate the socialization of individuals. He identified it as an element for management and administration and as a medium that can be integrated in learning and communication processes and community interaction.

The use of ICT in social education from an integral and transversal perspective hinged on access to ICT and appropriation of its use [15]. They divided the relation between social education and ICT into three scenarios: for ICT, with ICT, and ICT as.

Internet in general, and social networks in particular, implies the existence of spaces that can be created without excessive resources and costs, both for showcasing the activity of social organizations and for mobilizing the population [16].

Martínez-Pérez and Lezcano Barbero [17] proposed the use of ICT in social education around seven uses: interprofessional communication, management and administration, time management, didactic tools, collaborative work, diffusion, and training.

Fernández de Castro et al. [18] pointed to the way in which professional practice towards digitalization has been adapted within the socio-educational arena over recent years, transforming working models. This fact, as the authors affirmed, has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2. Experiences with ICT in Social Education

The use of ICT in social education must be understood as a complex and dynamic task, consisting of multiple layers that interrelate people, locations, and other elements that must be analyzed from within the context in which they take place [19]. The Documents for the professionalization of social education [20] now contain references to competence in ICT. Recent works on the skills profile of the social educator, such as Eslava-Suanes et al. [21], also pointed to this competence. Cabezas González et al. [22] indicated high levels of self-perceived digital competence among social educators in the knowledge dimension, average in relation to the use of tools, and low in the dimension of skills with the use of devices. In the knowledge dimension, they pointed out significant differences according to gender, and indicated that socio-occupational factors, such as accumulated professional experience or field, have predictive power in the three dimensions of digital competence studied. There are numerous authors who have pointed to the digital divide [11,14,15,19,23] as one of the difficulties that may be found in the field of social education. It is the older professionals with longer careers who directly influence this gap in the field of social education [18].

Over the past few years, we have become familiar with some experiences within the area that we are discussing. On the one hand, we have found dissemination and training

projects in Spain, such as #HablemosEduso [24], Edusosfera [25], and the meetings of bloggers [26]. We can point to direct experience of socio-educational intervention with ICT in penitentiaries [27,28], with those with serious mental disorders [29], in phone help-lines, with youth and homeless people, and targeting the public in general [12].

Broadening the outlook to the European Union, through the SIP program, an inventory can be found with 63 social innovation projects with ICT in such areas as participation, education, civil commitment, employability, social attention, and housing, among others [30]. Some authors reported country-specific experiences, such as Koskinen [31] in social services for attention in early childhood; Fan [32] on social isolation in the face of an aging population; Madama et al. [33] with older people; Manzoor and Vimarlund [34] on the inclusion of people with disability; and Hansen et al. [35] on social services directed at the public in general.

Although we have been able to report some experiences, the specific literature on ICT and social education is still very limited [18]. Even though the sector is being digitized, there is still a lack of a common strategy [36], as well as the absence of a reference framework for the development of ICT in social education, compared to in formal education [37]. This reality is due to the wide variety of groups with which we work: young people, the elderly, people with different types of disabilities, prostitution, rural areas, and others [21,38]. It has been possible to provide publications on different groups and their difficulties with the use of ICT [12,27,28,31–34], but few are available on different professional profiles.

We did find studies on social education students [39,40], but we believe that the high diversity of professional profiles and the lack of access to the sample discourage researchers.

In this study, we seek responses to the following questions: What do social educators use ICT for? Which programs/devices are the most widely used among those professionals? Are there any social and employment-related aspects (gender, employment experience, type of employer, and area of work) that influence the use of ICT? How does the use of ICT influence socio-educative interventions?

The objective of this work is to ascertain the uses of ICT among social educators. That objective is specified through the following sub-objectives: (1) to analyze why social educators use ICT; (2) to identify the main tools that social educators use in their professional social work; and (3) to determine social and employment-related variables that influence ICT use and tools among social educators.

2. Materials and Methods

A two-phase mixed sequential method was used for the development of the study: first of all, a quantitative study and its analysis and, subsequently, a qualitative study. This type of design is justified in that quantitative data allows us to obtain an overview of the research problem that is complemented by qualitative research, which allows us to explain the phenomena and relationships of the first stage [41].

2.1. Quantitative Phase

2.1.1. Research Tool

The EdSocEval_V2 questionnaire [42], created ad hoc, was used for the quantitative phase. It was validated through the expert opinion technique [43], with a panel of five professionals with broad experience in the field of social education, members of professional colleges, and university teachers.

Subsequently, the validity of the tool was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, factor analysis, and Varimax factor rotation. Cronbach's Alpha yielded a result for internal consistency of 0.891, which is usually considered high [44].

Prior to the factor analysis, both the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test (0.808) and Bartlett's sphericity test (significance 0.000) were performed, test results which indicate the viability of the data for factor analysis. A total of eight factors were extracted using orthogonal Varimax that explained 60.225% of the variance.

The Cronbach's Alpha of each factor of the questionnaire is shown in Table 1. The results referring to factors 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 were used in this work.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha of the EdSocEval_V2 questionnaire factors.

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha
(1) ICT Desktop software/devices	0.928
(2) ICT training	0.900
(3) Storage and tablet	0.888
(4) ICT use and employment satisfaction	0.828
(5) ICT assessment	0.586
(6) Traditional multimedia equipment	0.840
(7) Audiovisual equipment	0.771
(5) Handheld equipment	0.781

The entire process of creating and validating the questionnaire can be consulted in depth in the following reference [42].

2.1.2. Sampling

In the quantitative phase, both convenience sampling and snowball sampling were used. Collaboration was forthcoming from various Professional Colleges to distribute the questionnaire among their members. It was also distributed through the Internet on websites related to social education. The questionnaire was available online, throughout 2018, through GoogleForms. The study was approved by the Doctoral School of the University of Burgos and all participants had signed/accepted the informed consent before completing the questionnaire.

2.1.3. Sample

Once the form was completed, the inclusion criteria used to determine the sample were as follows: (a) diploma in social education; (b) graduate in social education; (c) qualified as an educator by a Professional Association of Social Education. The following exclusion criteria were used to exclude participants: persons working in the social field but not related to the socio-educational field.

The final sample for this phase comprised 504 social educators from 17 autonomous communities of Spain and the autonomous city of Ceuta distributed, as indicated in Table 2. The majority were women ($n = 408$; 81%) rather than men ($n = 96$; 14%). Age indicated a minimum of 21 years and a maximum of 64. The average age was 37.3 years, the median 36, the mode 25, with a standard deviation of 9.47. With regard to employment, the majority ($n = 321$; 63.7%) worked in urban environments defined as municipalities of over 20,000 inhabitants; followed by those working in rural environments ($n = 93$; 18.5%); and in both rural and urban environments ($n = 83$; 16.5%). 1.7% ($n = 7$) of the sample indicated the option "Others" under this item.

Employment experience presented a minimum of one year and a maximum of 42 years. The average was 10.6 years and the standard deviation was seven. As regards the type of employment, the majority worked as employees within the private sector (51.4%), followed by the public sector (40.1%), and solely 4.8% indicated that they were self-employed. 2.4% of the sample were unemployed and 1.4% marked the option "Others" that includes scholarships and other similar situations.

Table 2. Sample of the quantitative phase distributed by Autonomous Community.

Autonomous Community	N	%
Andalucía	22	4.4
Aragón	8	1.6
Asturias	4	0.8
Baleares	74	14.7
Canarias	50	9.9
Cantabria	10	2
Castilla la Mancha	32	6.3
Castilla y León	46	9.1
Cataluña	95	18.8
Extremadura	22	4.4
Galicia	62	12.3
La Rioja	10	2
Madrid	24	4.8
Murcia	5	1
Navarra	5	1
País Vasco	21	4.2
Valencia	13	2.6
Ceuta	1	0.2
Total	504	100.00%

2.1.4. Data Analysis

The analysis of quantitative data was performed with the IBM SPSS program version 25 (Licensed to the University of Burgos). In the first place, the descriptive statistics were obtained, and then relevant inferences were proposed. Through close observation and the application of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the tests were performed that led us to affirm that the sample followed a normal distribution. The non-parametric Pearson Chi-squared test was used to test the relations of inference, establishing the significance level at 0.05.

2.2. Qualitative Phase

In the second, qualitative phase, the procedure that was followed was the formation of online discussion groups. Through this technique, the interaction between the participants led to in-depth examination of the questionnaire results [45].

2.2.1. Qualitative Sample

The sampling was intentional, inviting representations from professionals within different geographical areas, sectors, genders, and ages. The focus group technique was chosen with three or four participants, following authors who have stressed that a reduction in the number of online focus group members is necessary in comparison with traditional focus group numbers [46]. The recommended number varied; Brügger and Willens [47] and Abrams and Gaiser [48], respectively, proposed groups of three to five and groups of three to eight people.

The selected individuals were sent an email in which they were informed of the objectives of the study and their participation was requested. Having accepted and after having signed the informed consent form, they were then able to access the focus-group sessions. The details of the participants are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Focus group participants.

Length	Gender	Area of Intervention	Ref.
Focus 1: 86 min	Male	Homeless people	1.1
	Female	Migration and refugees	1.2
	Female	Protection of minors	1.3
Focus 2: 65 min	Male	Minors with judicial measures and professor	2.1
	Female	Protection of minors	2.2
	Female	Rural Development	2.3
	Male	Functional diversity and dependence. Professor	2.4
Focus 3: 93 min	Male	Street education and university professor	3.1
	Male	Drug addiction and young people	3.2
	Male	Prison educator	3.3
Focus 4: 96 min	Female	Ethnic minorities and social services	4.1
	Male	Social Educator in Secondary Highschool	4.2
	Female	Rural area.	4.3

2.2.2. Development of the Focus Group

Four focus groups were developed between April and June 2020 with an average duration of 85 min (a minimum of 65 and a maximum of 96 min) (Table 3). The sessions were taped for subsequent analysis.

2.2.3. Analysis of the Qualitative Data

The analysis of the qualitative data followed an inductive approach, in accordance with the procedure proposed by Green et al. [49] in four steps: immersion in the data, encoding, creation of categories, and identification of the topics. A literal transcription of them all was prepared and, subsequently, the content was analyzed using the OpenCode software for the analysis of qualitative data.

3. Results

3.1. Survey Results

3.1.1. Uses of ICT

Based on the seven uses of ICT that have been proposed, we found that ICT was principally used as a management and administrative tool and for communication. The least frequent use was as a time management tool. In Table 4, the different statistics for each one are compiled.

Table 4. Uses of ICT in social education.

	Communication	Management and Admin.	Didactic Tool	Time Management	Collaborative Work	Dissemination	Training
Average score	3.96	3.96	3.26	2.88	3.34	3.27	3.44
Standard deviation	1.24	1.25	1.44	1.54	1.46	1.73	1.57
Variance	1.5	1.55	2.07	2.4	2.14	3	2.45
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

3.1.2. Usage of the Different ICT Tools

In Table 5, we cover the usage of the different ICT tools that were proposed. The printer and the photocopier stand out, followed by the desktop computer and an Internet cable connection. Other devices, such as the Tablet and the Interactive Digital Whiteboard (IDW), presented much more discrete measures of usage. Storage systems, USB, and portable hard drive devices were ahead of cloud storage alternatives.

Table 5. Use of ICT tools in social education.

	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Variance	Minimum	Maximum
Scanner	3.06	1.39	1.92	1	5
Printer	3.6	1.24	1.54	1	5
Wired con.	3.25	1.54	2.37	1	5
Wireless	2.7	1.5	2.3	1	5
Desktop	3.34	1.41	1.99	1	5
Laptop	2.32	1.46	2.15	1	5
Mobile work phone	2.35	1.57	2.46	1	5
Tablet	1.52	1.14	1.3	1	5
Cloud storage	2.4	1.5	2.24	1	5
Portable disk	2.65	1.44	2.07	1	5
Television	1.91	1.27	1.61	1	5
DVD/video player	1.78	1.15	1.33	1	5
Projector cannon	2.23	1.3	1.68	1	5
Sound system	2.12	1.29	1.66	1	5
Digital whiteboard	1.23	0.755	0.57	1	5

3.1.3. Differences as a Function of Gender, Experience, and Type of Employment Contract of Participants

With respect to the use of ICT, we found no significant differences as a function of the gender of the participants. In relation to employment experience, significant differences were only found in reference to the use of ICT as a time management tool. Individuals with more (>20 years) and less years (1–5 years) of accumulated experience had lower usage rates than those with intermediate (6–10 and 11–20) values of accumulated experience. Taking into account the type of employment contract, we found significant differences in three of the uses: as a didactic tool and for professional interventions, as a tool for dissemination, and as a training tool. As a teaching tool, public employees had higher levels of use than private employees. In use as a tool for dissemination and training, employees of private companies reported higher rates of use than public employees. Equally, three significant differences were noted as a function of the workplace: as a didactic tool, as a time-management tool, and as a training tool. The results are shown in Table 6. In all of them, professionals who work in a combination of rural and urban environments report higher usage rates than those who only work in one environment, whether rural or urban.

Table 6. Differences according to gender, experience, type of contract, and field in the use of ICTs.

	Gender		Cumulative Work Experience		Type of Contract		Field of Work	
	Chi-Squared Value	<i>p</i> -Value	Chi-Squared Value	<i>p</i> -Value	Chi-Squared Value	<i>p</i> -Value	Chi-Squared Value	<i>p</i> -Value
Communication	0.051	0.975	10.465	0.106	5.278	0.26	7.287	0.121
Management and admin.	0.421	0.81	4.866	0.561	1.444	0.837	6.644	0.156
Didactic tool	0.573	0.751	12.313	0.55	18.583	0.001 *	15.9	0.003 *
Time management	2.986	0.225	16.075	0.013 *	6.817	0.146	9.625	0.047 *
Collaborative work	0.319	0.852	6.891	0.331	4.555	0.336	2.226	0.694
Dissemination	4.243	0.12	10.638	0.1	9.979	0.041 *	6.567	0.167
Training	1.187	0.552	6.737	0.346	12.418	0.015 *	11.84	0.019 *

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

Regarding the use of the tools, more significant differences were observed for accumulated work experience, the type of contract, and the work location for nine out of the 14 tools under analysis. In terms of accumulated experience, the group with more experience claimed greater use of all the tools, except for the cell phone. In the latter, the rate of high use was slightly higher in the group with between six and 10 years of experience (30.8%) compared to the group with more experience (30.6%). Focusing on the type of

employment, private employees, especially the self-employed, showed higher usage rates for all the tools analyzed. The only exception was the use of printers and wired Internet connection, where the highest rates were found among public employees. In relation to gender, significant differences were observed for three out of all 14 tools. In all of them, men had higher usage rates than women. There are also three significant differences depending on the area of work. In this section, people who work in rural and urban areas combined reported greater use of the tablet and cloud storage, while those who work in rural areas use the portable storage disk. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Differences according to gender, experience, type of contract, and field in the use of tools.

	Gender		Cumulative Work Experience		Type of Contract		Field of Work	
	Chi-Squared Value	<i>p</i> -Value	Chi-Squared Value	<i>p</i> -Value	Chi-Squared Value	<i>p</i> -Value	Chi-Squared Value	<i>p</i> -Value
Scanner	5.192	0.075	38.036	0 *	4.067	0.397	8.183	0.85
Printer	2.747	0.253	38.222	0 *	11.835	0.019 *	3.413	0.491
Wired con.	6.9	0.032 *	43.677	0 *	26.517	0 *	5.978	0.201
Wireless	0.1243	0.537	12.653	0.049 *	16.388	0.003 *	8.788	0.067
Desktop	6.99	0.3	45.167	0 *	17.9	0.001 *	6.632	0.157
Laptop	4.414	0.11	5.044	0.538	17.326	0.002 *	7.766	0.1
Mobile work phone	8.197	0.017 *	29.953	0 *	23.871	0 *	7.894	0.96
Tablet	1.107	0.575	25.919	0 *	8.314	0.81	27.35	0 *
Cloud storage	3.939	0.14	21.404	0.002 *	8.123	0.087	13.58	0.009 *
Portable disk	13.964	0.001 *	8.557	0.199	14.967	0.005 *	1.651	0.031 *
Television	1.985	0.371	15.487	0.017 *	9.169	0.01 *	5.96	0.202
DVD/video player	1.8	0.407	2.09	0.911	3.758	0.153	5.579	0.233
Projector cannon	4.964	0.084	7.004	0.32	0.896	0.639	7.503	0.112
Sound system	3.261	0.196	6.558	0.364	8.879	0.012 *	1.402	0.844

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

3.2. Focus Group Results

The qualitative results were grouped around four emergent categories: types of use of ICT, tools, difficulties and demands, and future proposals.

3.2.1. Types of ICT Usage

Uses for the purpose of management and administration stand out: “At the level of the Foundation, we do use it (ICT), above all for management, team coordination” (Interview 4). Communication tasks, principally between colleagues, were also among the most frequently mentioned functions: “Yes, [...]we’ve been using the platforms more as management and communication models, more so internally between ourselves and, in a certain way, it’s helped us quite a lot at a professional level” (Interview 12). “At a professional level, obviously email has been used for some time in teams and between colleagues, when WhatsApp appeared . . . ” (Interview 1). We also found communication with users and families: “I use WhatsApp above all in this field for direct communication with users and families” (Interview 11). “And now we’re starting to use Telegram, we’re using a unidirectional channel for informing and communicating with users” (Interview 2).

It is still surprising that the testimony that we collected points to a very reduced use of ICT as either a didactic tool or as a means for socio-educational intervention: “But, it’s true that as a resource for intervention, I don’t think so” (Interview 4). “We used it among ourselves in the department and with the other departments of the organization” (Interview 2). However, some cases of intervention using ICT did indeed emerge: “As a social educator, above all as a street educator, the truth is that yes, that I’ve used social networks more than anything else [. . .]. It was useful for following up the kids, in other words, to be able to contact them. To have a way of reaching out to them. It gave us that immediacy that is also very adolescent” (Interview 8). Nonetheless, this type of intervention appears purely marginal: nobody, in a very technological world, makes reference to the teaching/didactic/intervention-related uses of tools that are habitually used in other teaching contexts.

Other uses were to spread information on social education, to support it, and as training and informative tools. “While I was at university, I found no social education content of interest to me, I didn’t see any activity on social networks. I didn’t see that visibility that I think was necessary and for that reason I decided to create an account on Instagram, Facebook and, then, a website” (Interview 3). “The question of publications on all areas of social education that there are on social networks appears to me to be super-important. Being able to read what other people are doing in other places can help me with what I do” (Interview 9). “For me, social networks were quite a discovery, at the time I used them to get to know social educators” (Interview 6). “On the topic of professional development, generation of networks. In this sense, as a member of Educablog; since then, we have used both the blog and social networks” (Interview 8).

3.2.2. Most Frequently Used Tools

The most frequently used tools were, in their majority, basic. It was a matter of commonly used applications directed mainly at management and communication tasks covered in the previous section. Thus, tools for collaborative work appeared: “Everything that the Drive involved, sharing documents, was a discovery, because we could prepare documents together: drafting, position statements, communications” (Interview 13). “We were working with SharePoint, and Office 365. We had a cloud of shared material” (Interview 1). We also found different social networks and applications for communication: “We all worked together very well, we usually made use of the Google platform at work. We organized videoconferences or with Zoom or Google Meet, we worked with Hangout, WhatsApp, Telegram. Never had any problems” (Interview 2). “We were always in contact through email and the networks” (Interview 4). “I think that quite recently there has been or there is, at least over these two months, a boom in the area of social education with so many things. At least on Instagram, [. . .] the network that I’m using most of all” (Interview 9). “Working the content on Facebook, to publicize the activities of the cooperative or to keep the links with the communities that we were forming around the project” (Interview 1). “It was a question of looking for short videos, on YouTube, that gave you loads of resources and tutorials” (Interview 12).

Confinement during the pandemic (COVID 19) extended the use of communication platforms for the production of videocalls, implying an obligatory advance: “Facing the participants of the programs, yes, there’s been a before and an after with COVID. For example, I’ve started to work with videoconferences with some of my clients, lads who’ve installed Internet at home, now we do see each other in videoconferences” (Interview 1).

“It’s true that well . . . , at the level of ICT, yes, I do think that we’ve gained a lot” (Interview 12). “I only knew about Skype and suddenly there’s Teams, Zoom, Google Duo . . . ” (Interview 9). Usage for relations with public administrations were also noted: “When registering public documents, reports, tenders, competitions . . . It’s all done electronically now” (Interview 3).

3.2.3. Difficulties and Demands

The principal difficulties that were noted referred to four points: the digital divide between users; the lack of means and resources to work with ICT; data-protection regulations; and the traditional face-to-face working presence within the sector.

With regard to the digital divide, we collected opinions referring to the diversity of the group, which imply different needs and demands between some users and others and how they make themselves felt, especially during confinement: “Then on the other hand, the groups with which we were working, access to ICT today, or more like no access, is a form of discrimination in the 21st C” (Interview 11). “We work for very diverse groups of people and that has to be taken into account. Sometimes, social content is created on networks that does not reach who it’s meant to reach” (Interview 3). “There is an obvious deficit and there is a gap with regard to digitalization. A lot of very hard work has to be done, the same as with conscientization of literacy, in the days of Freire” (Interview 1). “Yes, it’s

true that it's only now in these days of confinement when we really saw the digital divide, when we saw that everyone was obliged to use the networks available to us much more" (Interview 12).

Complaints about availability and quality were recorded in relation to equipment and resources. "I don't think that we had the best resources to rely on to carry out the work, because the computer was old, the Internet's slow . . . Then, in the end, we've got ICT but, at times, using it isn't easy for us" (Interview 3). "The economic aspect's all right. There are resources, but then they arrive late or we need the computer for the youngsters and we don't have enough to do the tasks" (Interview 4). "They're social groups at risk of social exclusion and they often don't have either equipment or an Internet connection" (Interview 11). "I'm from a rural zone, the digital divide that we have in the villages with the little coverage available to us. [. . .] We don't have the same access" (Interview 13). Nevertheless, some participants also highlighted the quality of the resources available to them: "In the office, we all have computers, good connections, good computers" (Interview 2).

In third place, we found opinions relating to the difficulty that data protection implies for the use of some ICT tools: "There's the question of data protection. The fact that parents give you permission" (Interview 8). "At first, we decided to use email, for privacy, and we ended up buying a specific mobile phone to talk to the boys. [. . .] The Law was not as strict or hard as it is now" (Interview 1). "The change with regard to communications and video calls. The problem is as always data protection" (Interview 10). "We've had to pick out, according to instructions from the data-protection officer, whoever wants to belong to a school WhatsApp group at a provincial level and get them to sign a form" (Interview 13).

Finally, regarding the habitual face-to-face presence in the sector, opinions were collected in relation to the use of ICT: "We have to adapt ourselves, it's a reality that's there. But it's true that we're very used to being direct in social education, face-to-face, verbal communication, direct contact with people and so on . . . Well logically, it'll be a little more difficult for us" (Interview 4). "They've often had that halo of reticence towards using the technologies, above all for intervention. It's something that the students also hang on to, because, although they're very skillful at managing social networks and the like, when it comes to interventions . . . As there is resistance and they don't want to. They want a face-to-face presence, which also appears quite right to me, but there's well a lot of resistance in that sense" (Interview 8).

3.2.4. Future Proposals

The principal proposals for the future centered on responding to the digital divide that emerged during the pandemic and accompaniment for the use of ICT: "The challenge that we face for digitalization is the work of conscientization, the divide that before was reading and writing is now digital. To be a citizen in your own right you have to have a minimum level of skills for the use of technologies" (Interview 1). "As social educators, we had abandoned our responsibility for social education on Internet. [. . .] That is the digital divide, because that is also a responsibility of social education, in so far as we call ourselves leaders of social integration. [. . .], the digital divide is a very important area in modern society and we're not paying enough attention to it. And, on the other hand, in the accompaniment of our work. Not only the digital divide but, also making good use of technology" (Interview 8).

Favorable opinions toward the integration of ICT in socio-educational actions were also collected: "Don't see the ICT as an enemy. In the end, I believe that's fundamental. Because it's the future, come on!" (Interview 3). "All these changes over recent months and all these technologies that we're using have come or must have come to stay. We must take advantage of this step forward so we don't lose it and go backwards again, deepening this digital divide" (Interview 12). "Social education will be digital or it won't. [. . .] Social education has to be in the context where things are happening. In the same way as our approach to handing out needles or we approach or set up a bar to engage with prostitutes in a neighborhood in France, well we have to be part of this digital context" (Interview 1).

4. Discussion

In this study, ICT tools and their use among social educators have been analyzed, a task that is still very contemporary. In our work we analyze the seven uses of ICTs proposed by Martínez-Pérez and Lezcano-Barbero [17], highlighting the most traditional ones. Forés et al. [7] and Planella and Martínez [11] proposed their principal use as tools for management, while Prats [8] set out their possibilities for communication with users. Both tasks were those that had the greatest use in our work, twenty years later. Castillo et al. [9] reported new possibilities, such as training, collaborative work, and dissemination, all of which did appear in our work, although with lower rates of use than the earlier ones. Planella et al. [11] affirmed that, as a tool for intervention, it was still scarce, which was also maintained in our results, in both the quantitative and the qualitative phases. Although our work focuses on Spain, the results of Misouraca and Pasi [30] allow us to draw a similar scenario in other countries: the United Kingdom is in the lead in social innovation experiences in the European Union, followed by Italy, Spain, and France. We coincide with Sampedro [14] and Santás García [13] in that ICT can be a great ally in socio-educational interventions. In this respect, we found favorable opinions toward the use of ICT for socio-educational intervention in our work, although this interest had no relation to the socio-educational practices that we observed. We believe that this may be related to the complexity of the sector, as suggested by Taylor [19]. Improved digital competence among professionals and raising awareness of their own interests become necessary, for which reason we consider that there is a need to implement training plans, through continuous training [18], which respond to both the needs and the demands of professionals that differ in accordance with the fields of intervention, and to other aspects such as extent of professional experience, coinciding with the results of Cabezas González et al. [22]. In addition, the special characteristics of the field of intervention in which we are active should be taken into account, as listed by Taylor [19], and the specific conditions of social groups at risk of exclusion with which socio-educational professionals work, such as the digital divide, should be addressed [23]; these were repeatedly raised in the different focus groups that were organized.

Digital competence is necessary among social educators [20,21] and programs that imply social innovation through ICT, such as SIP, can help to develop this competence, to recognize experiences and good practice and to encourage the use of ICT in social education. Misuraca and Pasi [30] referred to over 600 experiences within the European Union in different areas of socio-educational intervention. In addition, the social entities themselves have tools on the network that can serve as loudspeakers to spread their messages and to mobilize the population, as Carrasco-Polaino et al. [16] pointed out.

It would also be of interest to have some sort of referential framework for the socio-educational context similar to those that exist in regulated education [50] or the DigComp [1]. Coordination between administrations is required for the implementation of ICT and digital competence among social educators [36,37].

Finally, we must lend attention to the contractual conditions of professionals which, together with professional experience, point to significant differences in the use of ICT. It could be an interesting aspect to develop in subsequent investigations, because different authors [38,51] have pointed to a progressive privatization in the social services sector that might have some influence on this aspect.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, we consider the following points:

In relation to our first and second objectives:

1. The usage of ICT in social education, still at an incipient stage, is centered on management and communication tasks.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have brought this reality to light and have driven a small advance in the use of ICT that should be exploited for its future development.

3. Digital literacy and accompaniment in the use of ICT within the framework of non-formal education should be a role for professional social educators. In present-day society, the digital divide and the lack of access or competence in the use of ICT can increase social exclusion.
4. The development of digital competence among professionals from the socio-educational area is necessary through training and the dissemination of good ICT practice.
5. The design of a digital competence framework for social educators might be of interest with different areas and performance levels.
6. In relation to our third objective, our work points to social and employment-related differences that can influence the use of ICT. Aspects such as gender, employment experience, the type of employer, and the workplace environment are aspects that should be taken into account when implementing ICT activities and training actions among social educational professionals. Adapting to the different needs, to the available resources, and to the characteristics of the groups to which they provide a service and environments within which they work will be fundamental, so that the different ICT initiatives in the socio-educational sector are as successful as may be expected.
7. Educational intervention in social contexts through ICT are at some distance from the needs of their social groups. The “Technological Revolution” has still not arrived.

In summary, in response to the research questions, ICTs are still in an incipient process of use among social education professionals. Professionals use them mainly as management and communication tools. In addition, we observed differences in use according to aspects such as gender, work experience, field, and type of employer. ICTs influence socioeducational intervention and some professionals are still reluctant to introduce them for direct intervention with users.

This is an initial work that may lead to future research. Among the limitations, we found that it was not possible to carry out a random sampling to achieve representativeness. Limitations include the need to adequately contextualize the research, since our work is carried out in Spain.

In future studies, it will be interesting to focus the research on specific fields of work in social education—minors, the elderly, groups with functional diversity, women—since not all ICTs are used in the same way. It would also be useful to extend the work to other countries to find out whether the situation is similar or different in those countries.

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