

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a Protective Factor Against the Negative Impact of Social Media Over-Exposure on Students' Mental Health: A Systematic Literature Review

Kus Hanna Rahmi, Shafa Salsabila Rahmadina, Tyo Hendryan

Fakultas Psikologi, Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of social media among students has generated multifaceted impacts on mental health, particularly under conditions of excessive exposure (Over-Exposure). A growing body of empirical and review evidence indicates that intensive and uncontrolled social media use is consistently associated with heightened anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, low self-esteem, body image distortion, cyberbullying, and declining academic performance—outcomes that are mediated not only by exposure intensity but also by students' limited capacity for emotional regulation, adaptive coping, and responsible digital decision-making. This systematic literature review aims to critically examine the role of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a protective mechanism against the negative psychological impacts of social media Over-Exposure on students' mental health. A systematic search was conducted across three databases—Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science—using predefined keywords and covering publications from 2019 to 2025. Guided by PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) procedures, a total of 57 records were initially retrieved, with 13 articles meeting the established inclusion criteria. Critical synthesis of the findings reveals that SEL consistently contributes to improvements in emotional regulation, self-awareness, empathy, psychological resilience, and adaptive coping skills, thereby reducing the risk of mental health problems associated with excessive social media exposure. Notably, studies diverge in their explanations of the psychological mechanisms involved: whereas some emphasize rumination and cognitive overload as key mediators, others highlight threat appraisal and coping capacity as central processes. A conceptual framework is proposed to illustrate how SEL functions as a multilevel protective system within the digital context. These findings support the systematic integration of SEL into school curricula as an evidence-based preventive strategy to promote students' mental health and digital well-being in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning; Over-exposure; Social Media; Mental Health; Systematic Review

INTRODUCTION

The use of social media among Indonesian students has expanded rapidly over the past decade, driven by widespread internet access and the proliferation of personal digital devices. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) for the 2020–2023 period indicate that social media penetration among adolescents has reached 80–90%, with daily usage often exceeding 3–7 hours—a figure that surpassed formal learning time in many cases, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic (Winandika et al., 2025). The high intensity and pervasiveness of this exposure suggest that for many students, social media has transcended its communicative function to become a dominant feature of their psychological and social landscape.

Social media Over-Exposure refers to conditions in which individuals are excessively and continuously exposed to digital content without adequate temporal regulation, resulting in mental exhaustion, emotional distress, and heightened risk of psychological disorders (Sara et al., 2025). Research has consistently demonstrated that intensive social media use is associated with anxiety, sleep disturbances, and broader negative psychological consequences in adolescents (Winarko, 2023). Furthermore, Over-Exposure can trigger social comparison, stress amplification, and depressive symptomatology (Asmanur et al., 2025), while also facilitating cyberbullying and online social pressure as additional pathways of harm (Ilat et al., 2023). Beyond the psychological domain,

excessive social media engagement has been linked to reduced study time and declining academic achievement (Fauzia et al., 2023).

These problems are not merely a function of exposure duration; rather, they are deeply intertwined with students' limited social-emotional capacities—specifically, their ability to regulate emotions, maintain self-awareness, develop empathy, sustain healthy interpersonal relationships, and make responsible decisions in digital environments. As Rahmi et al. (2025) emphasize, mental health challenges in educational settings are complex and require comprehensive interventions targeting individual, structural, and institutional factors simultaneously, rather than addressing any single dimension in isolation. This multi-level view provides the theoretical rationale for positioning Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a central protective framework.

Recent longitudinal and meta-analytic evidence has further established that protective factors—including resilience, social support, and emotional competence—play a crucial buffering role against the adverse psychological effects of digital exposure (Labelle, 2019; Anggraeni & Imania, 2025). These factors are conceptually aligned with the core competencies of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Tyas et al., 2024). Moreover, SEL-based interventions, including those adapted to digital environments, have been shown to significantly improve social-emotional skills, prosocial behavior, and psychological adjustment (Setia et al., 2024; Minarti et al., 2025).

Despite the growing volume of literature on social media use and mental health, a clear theoretical integration explaining how SEL operates as a protective mechanism within this relationship remains underdeveloped. Most existing studies either enumerate risk factors or describe intervention outcomes in isolation, without systematically connecting both perspectives through a unified framework. To address this gap, the present systematic review adopts a protective factor framework, positioning SEL as a core multilevel mechanism that mediates and buffers the psychological impact of social media Over-Exposure. This review aims not merely to summarize existing evidence, but to critically synthesize divergent findings, identify points of convergence and contradiction, and propose a conceptual framework depicting how SEL functions as a protective system in digitally mediated educational environments.

METHODS

Study Design

This study employs a systematic literature review design, conducted in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. Unlike a conventional narrative review, this approach involves a structured and reproducible search strategy, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a transparent article selection process, thereby enhancing the credibility and methodological rigor of the synthesis.

Search Strategy and Databases

A systematic search was conducted across three major academic databases: Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. The use of multiple databases was deliberate: Google Scholar provides broad coverage of national and grey literature, Scopus offers indexed international peer-reviewed publications, and Web of Science ensures access to high-impact empirical studies in the fields of psychology, education, and public health.

The following keyword combinations were applied consistently across all databases: "Social Media Over-Exposure"; "Social Emotional Learning"; "Mental Health Students"; "SEL protective factor"; "social media adolescents mental health". Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to maximize retrieval sensitivity. Searches were limited to publications in Indonesian and English between 2019 and 2025.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 1 presents the explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during the article screening and selection process.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Article Selection

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Period	2019–2025	Publications before 2019
Language	Indonesian and English	Other languages without English translation
Topic Relevance	Studies examining SEL, social media use, and/or mental health in student populations	Studies focused on unrelated populations (e.g., adults in non-educational settings) or unrelated topics
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, including empirical studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses	Book chapters, conference abstracts, opinion editorials, theses without journal publication
Population	Children, adolescents, or university students (school-aged to young adult)	Studies exclusively involving adults aged 30+ or clinical/psychiatric populations
Outcome Variables	Mental health outcomes (anxiety, depression, well-being, resilience) and/or SEL competencies	Studies with no measurable psychological or educational outcomes
Accessibility	Full-text available for review	Abstract-only or paywalled records with no full-text access

PRISMA Selection Process

Article screening and selection followed the four-phase PRISMA flow procedure: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram for the study selection process.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Article Selection Process

<p>PHASE 1 — IDENTIFICATION</p> <p>Records identified through database searches:</p> <p>Google Scholar (n = 38) Scopus (n = 12) Web of Science (n = 7)</p> <p>Total identified: n = 57</p>
↓
<p>PHASE 2 — SCREENING</p> <p>Records after removing duplicates: n = 51</p> <p>Records excluded based on title & abstract (off-topic, wrong language, >2025): n = 26</p> <p>Remaining for full-text review: n = 25</p>
↓

<p>PHASE 3 — ELIGIBILITY</p> <p>Full-text articles assessed for eligibility: n = 25</p> <p>Excluded (no measurable outcomes, not peer-reviewed, no full-text access): n = 12</p> <p>↓</p> <p>PHASE 4 — INCLUSION</p> <p>Studies included in final synthesis: n = 13</p>

Data Extraction and Quality Appraisal

Data from each included article were systematically extracted using a standardized matrix covering: author(s) and year, journal and publisher, study design, sample characteristics, key findings, and relevance to SEL or mental health outcomes. Study quality was appraised using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), assessing criteria such as research design rigor, outcome measurement validity, and clarity of reported findings. All included studies demonstrated acceptable quality on these dimensions. A narrative synthesis approach was adopted, with findings organized thematically and critically compared across studies.

RESULTS

Overview of Included Studies

Following the PRISMA selection procedure, 13 articles were included in the final synthesis. The included studies span diverse methodological designs—including quantitative surveys, systematic and narrative literature reviews, meta-analyses, cross-sectional studies, and longitudinal panel studies—published in peer-reviewed national and international journals between 2019 and 2025. Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of each included study.

Table 2. Characteristics and Findings of Included Studies

No.	Author(s) & Title	Design	Publisher	Key Findings
1	Sara et al. (2025) Mental Health Among Teens Due to Social Media Overexposure	Literature study + semi-structured interview	JIKOMNUS	Social media use of 5–8 hours/day correlated with social anxiety, low self-esteem, and sleep disorders among Gen Z. Constant comparative content exposure drives mental exhaustion.
2	Sahin et al. (2025) Social Emotional Learning Skills and Social Media Use in High School Students	Descriptive survey	Frontiers in Psychology	Significant negative correlation between SEL competencies and social media use intensity. Responsible decision-making was the strongest SEL dimension; relationship skills were weakest. Gender differences in self-awareness favored female students.
3	Karinta (2022) Negative Effects of Social Media Use on Mental	Literature review	Media Kesmas	Use exceeding 3 hours/day consistently associated with anxiety, depression, FoMO, insomnia, and self-image

	Health in Adolescents			distortion. Adolescents identified as most at-risk demographic.
4	Sari et al. (2024) Impact of Social Media on Elementary School Students' Mental Health	Library research	DIDIKA Journal	Negative impacts (anxiety, cyberbullying, decreased concentration) dominated when use was uncontrolled. Parental and teacher guidance identified as critical protective factors.
5	Safina et al. (2025) The Influence of Social Media on Learners' Mental Health	Quantitative causal-associative	Practice of Science of Teaching Journal	Instagram use explained 58.5% of variance in mental health outcomes. High-intensity use significantly predicted psychological distress; school-based health education recommended.
6	Setia et al. (2024) Innovating SEL to Enhance Positive Engagement of Youth with Social Media	Comprehensive narrative review	Cureus (Springer Nature)	SEL integrated with digital literacy improves self-regulation, emotional awareness, and mental resilience. Mindful use programs help students reduce negative social media impact.
7	Gao et al. (2020) Mental Health Problems and Social Media Exposure During COVID-19	Cross-sectional quantitative	PLOS ONE	High social media exposure significantly associated with anxiety and comorbid depression-anxiety during the pandemic. Infodemic and information overload amplified psychological distress.
8	Hong et al. (2021) Social Media Exposure and College Students' Mental Health: Rumination and Mindfulness	Quantitative moderated mediation	Cyberpsychology, Behavior & Social Networking	Social media exposure indirectly increases distress through rumination; mindfulness moderates this effect. Highlights cognitive mediation as a key mechanism distinct from direct exposure effects.
9	Labelle (2019) Positive Outcomes of an SEL Program to Promote Resiliency	Literature studies	Contemporary School Psychology	SEL (Positive Action program) consistently increased resilience, positive self-concept, and mental health while reducing aggressive behavior. Strong student-teacher relationship identified as mediating factor.
10	Huang et al. (2025) Does Age Matter? Impact of Social Media Exposure on Mental Health	Two-wave longitudinal panel	Health Policy and Technology	No direct effect of social media exposure; indirect effects via threat appraisal (negative) and coping appraisal (positive). Age-differentiated effects: young adults benefited from coping appraisal; older groups dominated by threat perception.

11	McComb et al. (2023) Meta-Analysis: Social Media Exposure to Upward Comparison Targets	Meta-analysis (48 studies, n=7,679)	Media Psychology (Taylor & Francis)	Upward comparison on social media significantly degraded self-esteem, subjective well-being, body image, and mental health. Contrast effect dominated over assimilation.
12	John & Bates (2024) Barriers and Facilitators: Media and Technology in SEL	Narrative review & theoretical synthesis	Social and Emotional Learning (Elsevier)	Technology is a dual-edged factor: unguided Over-Exposure impairs emotion regulation and social skills, while pedagogically integrated technology can facilitate SEL. Context and adult mentoring are decisive.
13	Anggraeni & Imania (2025) SEL as a Protective Factor Against Cyberbullying: SLR in Indonesian Context	Systematic literature review (PRISMA)	Jurnal Kreativitas Pendidikan Modern	SEL significantly reduces cyberbullying victimization and perpetration by improving empathy, emotion regulation, and conflict resolution. Peer social support is the strongest protective mechanism in Indonesian contexts.

Conceptual Framework: SEL as a Multilevel Protective System

Based on the synthesis of included studies, a conceptual framework is proposed (Figure 2) to represent the relationship between social media Over-Exposure, psychological risk mechanisms, SEL competencies, and mental health outcomes. The framework adopts a risk–protection interaction model, wherein social media Over-Exposure generates psychological risk through multiple pathways—including rumination, upward social comparison, threat appraisal, and information overload—while SEL competencies function as a multilevel buffer that attenuates these pathways and promotes adaptive mental health outcomes.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework: SEL as a Protective Mechanism Against Social Media Over-Exposure

RISK FACTORS		PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS		MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media Over-Exposure (>3h/day) • Unregulated content consumption • Cyberbullying exposure • Information overload (Infodemic) 	→	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rumination (Hong et al., 2021) • Upward social comparison (McComb et al., 2023) • Threat appraisal (Huang et al., 2025) • Cognitive-emotional dysregulation 	→	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety & depression • Low self-esteem & body image distortion • Sleep disturbances • Academic decline
<p>↑↑ SEL PROTECTIVE BUFFER — Modulates risk pathways ↑↑</p> <p>Self-Awareness • Emotion Regulation • Empathy • Responsible Decision-Making • Social Competence • Resilience</p>				
<p>PROTECTIVE OUTCOMES WITH SEL INTEGRATION:</p> <p>Reduced psychological distress • Adaptive coping • Positive digital engagement • Enhanced resilience • Healthy academic performance</p>				

The framework highlights three critical insights. First, the impact of Over-Exposure is not direct but operates through cognitive-emotional mediators, meaning that interventions must target internal regulatory capacities rather than simply limiting screen time. Second, SEL competencies cut across all risk pathways—addressing rumination through mindfulness and self-management, moderating social comparison through self-awareness and empathy, and strengthening coping appraisal through responsible decision-making skills. Third, the protective effect of SEL is not static but developmental, strengthening over time as competencies are reinforced within educational and social contexts.

DISCUSSION

The Impact of Social Media Over-Exposure on Students' Mental Health: Convergences and Divergences Across Studies

Converging Evidence on Threshold Effects and Psychological Risk

Across the included studies, a consistent pattern emerges: the risk of psychological harm from social media is not incidental but cumulative, and appears to intensify beyond identifiable thresholds of daily use. Sara et al. (2025) and Karinta (2022) converge on the finding that daily social media exposure in excess of 3–8 hours correlates with heightened anxiety, sleep disturbance, and self-esteem erosion among adolescents—a dose-response pattern that implies the existence of psychological carrying capacity limits. Critically, however, both studies differ in their emphasis: Sara et al. foreground the role of emotional exhaustion and competitive content as proximal drivers, whereas Karinta focuses on the broader epidemiological profile of risk, including FoMO and narcissistic tendencies. This distinction is meaningful: it suggests that not all users at equivalent exposure levels will experience identical outcomes, and that content type and subjective appraisal modulate risk.

Sari et al. (2024) extend this evidence to elementary school-aged children, demonstrating that early-onset exposure without structured guidance accelerates psychological vulnerability—a finding with significant implications for early intervention. In contrast to studies focusing on adolescents, this finding points to a developmental gradient of risk, wherein younger students may be disproportionately affected due to their less mature self-regulatory capacities. Taken together, these three studies converge on the conclusion that unguided exposure is harmful across age groups, while diverging in the specific psychological pathways most implicated.

Competing Explanations of Psychological Mechanisms

A particularly important point of divergence across studies concerns the psychological mechanisms through which social media exposure translates into mental health harm. Hong et al. (2021) propose a cognitive mediation model in which rumination—the tendency to repetitively process negative information—functions as the primary mediator between exposure and distress. Mindfulness, as an element of self-awareness, moderates this process by interrupting ruminative cycles. By contrast, Huang et al. (2025) offer a different explanatory framework, emphasizing threat appraisal and coping appraisal as competing mechanisms. In their longitudinal model, the psychological consequences of exposure are bidirectional: threat perception degrades mental health, while coping self-efficacy enhances it. These two models are not mutually exclusive, but their implications for intervention diverge meaningfully.

If rumination is the primary mechanism (Hong et al., 2021), then interventions should prioritize mindfulness-based and cognitive reframing strategies. If appraisal processes dominate (Huang et al., 2025), then building students' coping self-efficacy becomes the central goal. This distinction has direct relevance for SEL curriculum design: a comprehensive SEL framework should address both pathways—incorporating mindfulness and self-management skills to reduce rumination, alongside decision-making and problem-solving components to strengthen adaptive coping appraisal.

McComb et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis adds a third explanatory layer: upward social comparison. Across 48 experimental studies, exposure to idealized content on social media consistently degraded self-evaluation and emotional well-being, with effects persisting regardless of content domain (appearance, achievement, lifestyle). This finding is particularly relevant for adolescents who are developmentally predisposed to identity formation

through social benchmarking. Unlike the cognitive models of Hong et al. and Huang et al., McComb et al.'s framework operates through a social-evaluative pathway, suggesting that exposure effects are not purely information-processing phenomena but also social-psychological ones.

Taken together, these competing explanatory models—cognitive mediation, appraisal processes, and social comparison—point toward the conclusion that the psychological impact of Over-Exposure is multiply determined. No single mechanism is sufficient to account for the full range of observed outcomes. This complexity reinforces the need for multi-component interventions such as SEL, which simultaneously targets cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of functioning.

Limitations of Restrictive Approaches

Setia et al. (2024) and Safina et al. (2025) both caution against relying exclusively on restrictive measures—such as screen-time limits or social media bans in schools—as primary prevention strategies. While restriction may reduce exposure quantities, it does not build the internal capacities needed for students to navigate digital environments adaptively when restrictions are lifted. Safina et al. demonstrate quantitatively that without education-based skill-building interventions, even students in low-exposure groups remain psychologically vulnerable. This aligns with the theoretical argument advanced in the conceptual framework (Figure 2), that the critical variable is not exposure per se, but the adequacy of students' internal regulatory resources relative to the demands of digital exposure.

The Role of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in Mitigating Over-Exposure: Critical Comparative Analysis

SEL and Self-Regulation: Converging Evidence Across Methodologies

One of the strongest convergences in the literature concerns the relationship between SEL-based self-regulation competencies and healthier social media use patterns. Sahin et al. (2025), using a large-scale survey of high school students, found a statistically significant negative relationship between SEL skill levels and social media use intensity—indicating that students with stronger SEL competencies demonstrate more controlled engagement with digital platforms. Importantly, however, the association was weak in absolute terms, suggesting that SEL is a necessary but not sufficient condition for healthy digital behavior, and that contextual and environmental factors also play important roles.

This finding is corroborated from a qualitative and mechanistic standpoint by Hong et al. (2021), who identify mindfulness—a construct closely aligned with SEL's self-awareness component—as a significant moderator of rumination and its downstream effects on anxiety and depression. The convergence between these two studies, despite their methodological differences (survey vs. mediation model), provides cross-validation for the argument that SEL competencies protect against harmful media engagement patterns. However, an important divergence exists: Sahin et al.'s finding of weak effect sizes suggests caution against overstating the power of SEL in isolation, a nuance not always foregrounded in optimistic narrative reviews.

SEL and Psychological Resilience: Complementary Perspectives

The role of SEL in building psychological resilience is supported by two distinct lines of evidence that complement each other in important ways. Labelle (2019), reviewing outcomes of the Positive Action SEL program across diverse school populations, found consistent improvements in resilience, prosocial behavior, and mental health, alongside reductions in problematic conduct. This body of evidence demonstrates that school-based SEL programs can produce durable resilience gains over time. Anggraeni & Imania (2025), conducting a systematic review specifically in the Indonesian context, similarly found that SEL reduces cyberbullying victimization and perpetration by strengthening empathy, conflict resolution, and emotional awareness.

Comparing these two studies reveals both convergence and contextual specificity. Both affirm SEL's resilience-building function; however, Anggraeni & Imania (2025) highlight that in the Indonesian cultural context, peer social support is the most potent protective factor—more so than individual SEL skills alone. This finding

suggests that SEL programs in Indonesia and similar collective-oriented societies may need to be adapted to emphasize relational and group-based components, rather than focusing exclusively on individual competency development. The cultural embeddedness of resilience, a point absent from Labelle's (2019) review, has significant implications for program design and implementation in diverse national contexts.

SEL and Digital Literacy: The Integration Debate

An important theoretical tension in the literature concerns whether SEL should be implemented as a standalone educational framework or integrated with digital literacy programs. Setia et al. (2024) strongly advocate for integration, arguing that SEL's effectiveness in the contemporary educational context depends on its adaptation to digital environments. Their comprehensive review shows that SEL programs incorporating mindful social media use and digital citizenship components produce stronger outcomes for adolescents than traditional SEL curricula alone. This position represents an evolution of earlier SEL frameworks, which were developed in pre-digital educational contexts.

John & Bates (2024) provide a more nuanced and critical perspective, arguing that the relationship between technology and SEL is not straightforwardly facilitative. Their review demonstrates that technology can function as both a barrier and a facilitator for social-emotional development, depending on content quality, duration, and the presence of adult mentoring. Excessive or unguided technology use actively undermines emotional regulation and relational skill development, while pedagogically curated digital engagement can support SEL goals. This finding directly challenges uncritical integration narratives and calls for careful pedagogical design when embedding digital tools in SEL programs.

Reconciling these perspectives, the available evidence suggests that integration is beneficial when it is intentional, content-curated, and accompanied by teacher guidance—not as a default outcome of placing students in digital environments. This conclusion has important implications for practitioners and policymakers developing SEL curricula for the digital era.

Toward a Comprehensive Understanding: Risk, Protection, and the Role of Context

The synthesis of the 13 included studies reveals that neither social media Over-Exposure nor SEL operates as a uniform construct with homogeneous effects. Rather, the relationship between digital exposure and mental health is shaped by multiple interacting variables, including age and developmental stage (Sari et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2025), cultural context (Anggraeni & Imania, 2025), content type and appraisal processes (McComb et al., 2023; Hong et al., 2021), and the presence or absence of guiding relationships (John & Bates, 2024; Labelle, 2019).

What unifies the findings, despite their divergences, is the consistent identification of internal regulatory capacity as the central moderating variable. Students with stronger emotional regulation, more developed coping strategies, and higher levels of self-awareness consistently show better mental health outcomes under equivalent exposure conditions. SEL directly targets these capacities through its core competency framework, making it uniquely positioned as a preventive and promotive intervention. However, the evidence also suggests that SEL cannot operate effectively in isolation; its impact is amplified by contextual supports such as positive teacher relationships (Labelle, 2019), peer social networks (Anggraeni & Imania, 2025), and structured digital environments (John & Bates, 2024).

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

This systematic review contributes to the theoretical literature by providing a conceptual integration of risk and protective factor frameworks, positioned within the context of digital media exposure. The proposed conceptual framework (Figure 2) offers a testable model that can guide future empirical research, including longitudinal studies examining the mediating and moderating roles of SEL competencies in the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes. The identification of competing psychological mechanisms (rumination

vs. appraisal processes vs. social comparison) provides a basis for mechanistic research that can help clarify which SEL components are most impactful for which students under which conditions.

Practical Implications

At the school level, findings highlight the need to move beyond reactive and restrictive policies toward proactive, competency-building approaches. SEL programs should be integrated into the regular curriculum—not positioned as supplementary or crisis-response activities—and should include components specifically adapted to digital environments. Teacher training is a critical enabler: teachers must be equipped not only with SEL content knowledge, but also with pedagogical skills for facilitating SEL in digitally integrated classrooms. School counselors and psychologists should be involved in program design to ensure adequate targeting of students at elevated risk, particularly those with early-onset heavy social media use or limited social support.

Policy Implications

Educational policymakers in Indonesia and comparable national contexts should consider SEL as a core component of national mental health promotion strategies in the digital era. Policy frameworks should support: (1) curriculum-level SEL integration from primary through secondary education; (2) teacher professional development standards incorporating digital-context SEL competencies; (3) funding for school-based mental health programs that combine SEL with digital literacy; and (4) national-level monitoring of social media Over-Exposure trends among students, informing evidence-based updates to educational policy. Cross-sectoral collaboration between education, mental health, and technology sectors will be essential for translating research findings into scalable, sustainable programs.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations of this review warrant acknowledgment. First, the relatively small number of included articles ($n = 13$) limits the generalizability of conclusions, and future systematic reviews with broader search strategies may identify additional relevant evidence. Second, the included studies are heterogeneous in design, sample characteristics, and outcome measurement, which constrains direct quantitative comparison. Third, few studies have examined SEL interventions in explicitly Indonesian or Southeast Asian educational contexts, leaving questions of cultural transferability partially unresolved.

Future research should prioritize: (1) longitudinal studies examining whether SEL skill development over time predicts changes in social media use patterns and mental health outcomes; (2) randomized controlled trials evaluating SEL programs specifically designed for digital contexts; (3) studies testing the proposed conceptual framework using structural equation modeling; and (4) qualitative research exploring students' subjective experiences of SEL in relation to digital stressors. Researchers in the Indonesian context are particularly encouraged to investigate how collective cultural values can be leveraged to strengthen peer-based SEL components.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review, conducted across three databases and guided by PRISMA procedures, synthesizes evidence from 13 included studies to conclude that social media Over-Exposure constitutes a significant and multidimensional risk factor for students' mental health. The psychological harms associated with excessive social media use—including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, low self-esteem, and cyberbullying—are not determined solely by exposure intensity, but are mediated by cognitive-emotional mechanisms such as rumination, social comparison, and threat appraisal. This finding underscores the inadequacy of restrictive measures alone as primary prevention strategies.

A critical comparative analysis of the included studies reveals both important convergences and meaningful divergences. Studies consistently converge on the centrality of internal regulatory capacities as protective factors, while diverging in their mechanistic explanations—a tension that enriches rather than undermines the evidence base. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) emerges from this synthesis as an empirically supported,

theoretically coherent, and practically applicable protective framework that directly strengthens the competencies most relevant to healthy digital engagement: self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, adaptive coping, and responsible decision-making.

The conceptual framework proposed in this review positions SEL as a multilevel protective system that modulates psychological risk pathways between social media Over-Exposure and adverse mental health outcomes. SEL is most effective not as an isolated intervention, but as a systematically integrated, contextually adapted, and relationally supported educational approach. The integration of SEL with digital literacy programs represents a strategic and sustainable response to the mental health challenges posed by the contemporary digital landscape, with implications for curriculum design, teacher professional development, and educational policy at the national level.

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