



Digital Governance of Social Media in Public Educational Settings: Equity, Inclusivity, and Responsible Digital Practices

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Abstract

The integration of social media and other digital technologies into the public sector education systems has become instantaneous, creating a demand for well-designed governance systems in safe, equitable, and inclusive teaching and learning while respecting the rights of students. A systematic review of digital governance policy among public sector education systems related to social media was performed. Peer-reviewed academic articles, institutional policy documents, and government reports, ranging from 2015 to 2026, were used. From an initial collection of forty-two selected documents, a PRISMA-guided, systematic, thematic analysis was performed on information gathered from a search of institutional and academic journals via Google Scholar, ERIC, PubMed, and the databases of UNESCO, OECD, UNICEF, and WHO. The analysis identified five major themes: a) the digital divide and equality in education, b) mental and emotional health outcomes and influences, c) online bullying and personal safety, d) student data security and privacy, and e) responsibilities and citizenship in online spaces. The review identified significant policy gaps across these five domains: equitable digital access, the provision of institutional mental health services, the accountability of third-party service providers, and the effective implementation of digital citizenship curricula. To address these gaps, the review proposes a four-part digital governance model encompassing policy and infrastructure, digital citizenship curriculum, mental health and well-being, and stakeholder input and actions. The study concluded with practical recommendations for policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and community stakeholders to strengthen the digital governance in the public education sector.

Keywords: Digital Governance, Social Media, Educational Policy, Digital Equity, Inclusivity, Cyberbullying, Student Wellbeing, Public Sector Institutions.

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the educational sphere in the public sector across the world has been revolutionized by the pervasive diffusion of digital technology and social media platforms. Public educational institutions, schools, colleges, and public-administered education centers increasingly rely on digital tools and technologies to develop community outreach, pedagogical innovation and the dissemination of information (Landri, 2018; Williamson, 2016). These developments carry enormous benefits regarding the potential for improved learning, but at the same time, they raise various concerns that could not have been answered efficiently by pre-existing institutional frameworks in the short run.

Digital governance refers to the set of rules, processes and mechanisms that guide the administration of digital resources and social media within an academic organization (OECD, 2023; Williamson, 2015). Public educational institutions in the public sector utilize more and more social media in their daily activities, including student-teacher and institutional-community interaction, as well as professional development for teachers and school personnel; the lack of appropriate institutional policies put students, teachers and administrators at a high risk of digital exclusion, the compromise of students' data privacy and psychological health issues (Rosenberg et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2024c).

The issue of digital inequality is central, given that students coming from less affluent socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately represented among the groups with inadequate access to a computer or the internet (Caldarulo et al., 2023; Xin et al., 2024). According to the OECD (2023), about one-fifth of the students can't complete their homework assignments due to a lack of internet connectivity, an inequality that seems detrimental to the education system and the students' prospects and social mobility. Another issue with the negative impacts of unsupervised social media use during adolescent years is widely accepted as well, the impact to adolescent mental health; research shows a link between adolescents with high social media use and adolescents with depression and anxiety levels, and decreased student involvement in studies (HHS, 2025; WHO, 2024); another negative is the presence of cyber bullying, a phenomenon which crossed school lines affecting nearly one in six teenagers (Stanford University, 2025).

International agencies, such as UNESCO (2025) and OECD (2025), stated that digital learning must be the driver of equality and inclusion instead of inequality between schools and students; therefore, the problem goes beyond access and moves towards inclusion. This will require the adoption of governance models focused on student digital citizenship, or the ability of students to use the digital space in an informed, responsible, and critical manner (Council of Europe, 2024; ISTE, 2024). The spread of digital resources throughout school practices emphasizes the need for a governance framework (Williamson, 2016).

This study conducted a systematic review of literature concerning digital governance and the use of social media in public educational institutions, bringing together the above pieces and identifying the gaps in governance structures, to then construct a research-based digital governance framework in public educational institutions.

Literature Review

Digital Governance in Educational Contexts

Digital governance in the education sector has significantly evolved since the late 2000s, when foundational work by Williamson (2015, 2016) laid out views on the widespread deployment of digital systems to monitor, manage, and reform educational settings, typically through performance measurement by way of visualization, algorithmic scoring, and prediction. Landri (2018) built on this to theorize a framework for political and institutional dimensions of digital governance, arguing that technological adoption in education is never politically neutral but is embedded within social, political, and institutional contexts.

More recently, analyses from the OECD (2023, 2025) provide a policy perspective identifying governance gaps as systemic even among high-income OECD member countries. Issues like a lack of policy, procedures, and standards around social media usage, third-party provider use for data collection, and equitable access among students are identified as most problematic. Issues concerning aligning with policy by National governments are confirmed by the work of the Digital Regulation Platform (2025).

Social Media in Education: Opportunities and Challenges

In an educational setting, social media may provide meaningful learning opportunities, such as the sharing of resources, facilitation of dialogue, and student collaboration (Kind et al., 2010; Muls et al., 2020). Studies consistently indicate, however, that the institution is inherently ambivalent toward addressing the issues of social media governance. In a systematic review of high school social media policy, Muls et al. (2020) found most schools adopted policies focused on risk, compliance, and behavioral constraints, rather than on proactively fostering student competency. Similarly, Nathan et al. (2014) noted that institutional policy follows technology uptake, creating policy gaps sustained over time.

The prompt and systematic review conducted by Carras et al. (2024) identifies proliferation in prevention programs of digital well-being interventions in adolescents. They acknowledge that their integration with the educational institution is tenuous and is a result of individual institutional initiative rather than mandated policy, which may be due to institutions' difficulties in keeping pace with technology.

Digital Divide and Educational Equity

The digital divide is one of the most pervasive problems in education governance. Community-level broadband adoption was a strong, significant predictor of student outcomes according to Caldarulo et al. (2023). The research indicates that the disparity in socioeconomic level plays a part in digital access and literacy. Parental beliefs about technology and the provision of home broadband were the only two significant predictors of student performance in Xin et al. (2024), with results more prominent in lower-income homes. Institutional reports from IDRA (2024) and New America (2024) reinforce the long-standing disparities of infrastructure and racial and class inequality, which are disadvantageous to non-advantaged students. UNESCO (2025) has advocated extensively that digital equity cannot just extend to access and the availability of devices but must also account for the creation of pedagogically appropriate and culturally responsive digital learning environments. Achievement gaps will continue to grow and will be clearly linked to access, supported by data from NCES (2024).

Social Media, Mental Health, and Psychosocial Well-being

Social media usage has become one of the most extensively studied aspects of adolescent mental health. In the US Surgeon General's Advisory (HHS, 2025), evidence from both neuroimaging and behavioral studies confirms that a higher frequency of social media usage is correlated with structural and functional changes in areas of the brain involved in the regulation of emotion and the development of cognitive capacities. These findings are also corroborated by Johns Hopkins Medicine (2024), who point to how prolonged exposure to algorithmically managed social media interfaces impacts the processes of social comparison and self-evaluative cognitions in adolescents. Ning and Inan (2024) demonstrated that college students' social media addiction was significantly related to lower academic performance, and it was mediated by the students' stress level and sleep pattern. Stress also showed up as a mediating variable in a study conducted by Zhao (2023), showing that social media addiction predicted underperformance in academics through student stress levels. Excessive screen time and social media usage is one of the top contributing factors to the global adolescent mental health crisis that the World Health Organization (WHO) has named (2024), and the authors advocate for collaborative policy responses on the part of public education and public health institutions.

Cyberbullying and Online Safety

One aspect of peer harassment where the prevalence of this practice is increased is by its pervasive nature, the ease with which adults can lack practical control in the digital sphere, and its relative ease of anonymity (Espelage & Hong, 2017; Feinberg & Robey, 2009). In their systematic review of school-based cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs, Tanrikulu (2018) notes the varied success rate of these programs and the need for coherent, evidence-based interventions as opposed to punishment. The Stanford Youth Safety and Digital Wellbeing Report (Stanford University, 2025) indicates that almost one in six American youth have been targets of technology-based bullying or harassment, which would lead one to believe that cyberbullying may be a systemic institutional issue.

Data Privacy and Security

The data of students in the era of extensive use of digital platforms is subject to numerous intricate legal, ethical, and institutional rules. Rosenberg et al. (2021) bring to the forefront a risk that may be overlooked: accidental infringement of student privacy by institutional use of social media. An example given is posting student photos that contain identifiable information onto a public institutional social media account. The many complex legal and institutional rules in place, such as FERPA in the U.S. and GDPR in the E.U. (U.S. Department of Education, 2024a, 2024c), make it even more complicated, but Zinkus et al. (2019) give evidence that data privacy needs to be a part of the student curriculum as a subject on its own, potentially by the use of a simulated "Fakesbook."

Identified Gaps in Literature

Despite the abundant research available on students' use of digital technology, gaps remain within this field. Firstly, large-scale longitudinal studies assessing the implementation outcomes of discrete digital governance frameworks within public educational institutions are lacking. Secondly, a comprehensive consideration of the interaction between digital equity, student mental health, and the governance of digital environments remains underserved. Thirdly, while international policy documents offer broad direction, there is an absence of research addressing the consistent implementation of these international documents into operational local policies in diverse educational settings. It is these specific gaps that this review will fill by synthesizing the extant literature and offering a synthesized governance framework based on available evidence and policy.

Research Objectives

- To synthesize existing literature and evidence on digital governance and social media policy in public schools.
- To investigate relationships between students' social media usage and students' psychological well-being, engagement, and digital equity.
- To identify structural weaknesses of existing institutional models of inclusivity, preventing cyber-bullying, and fostering responsible digital engagement.

Research Questions

- What are the current digital governance policies in public schools regarding social media use?
- What are the factors in the digital divide, and how does it affect educational equity?
- What is the association between social media use, cyber-bullying, and student psychosocial development?
- What constitutes effective digital citizenship curriculum to promote responsible social media use in the context of public schools?
- How can policies and public sector school administrators create mental health-enhancing and inclusive digital governance frameworks?

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The research design employed in this investigation was a systematic review research design. Through a systematic review research design, the research related to digital governance and social media use within the public sector education can be investigated in a comprehensive manner. A systematic review research design was preferred as it facilitates the complete, transparent, and reproducible integration of the present evidence, providing an evidence-based framework for decision-making processes in the relevant policy domain (Carras et al., 2024; Tanrikulu, 2018). The review of the present literature was done based on a framework derived from PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), with modifications to include not just research articles, but also institutional policy documents and government reports.

Search Strategy

A structured database search of existing literature was performed. The databases searched were Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), PubMed (to ensure retrieval of relevant mental health-related articles), and institutional archives at UNESCO, OECD, UNICEF, U.S. Department of Education, and the World Health Organization. The searches were performed between January and March of 2026 to ensure coverage of both fundamental scholarship and recent developments in research from 2015 to 2026.

The following search strings were employed, combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR):

- (“digital governance” OR “digital policy”) AND (“social media” OR “online platforms”) AND (“education” OR “school” OR “students”)
- (“digital divide” OR “digital equity”) AND (“educational institutions” OR “schools”) AND (“inclusion” OR “equity”)
- (“cyberbullying” OR “online harassment”) AND (“prevention” OR “intervention”) AND (“schools” OR “students”)
- (“student mental health” OR “psychosocial well-being”) AND (“social media”) AND (“education”)
- (“data privacy” OR “student data”) AND (“school” OR “educational institutions”) AND (“FERPA” OR “GDPR”)
- (“digital citizenship”) AND (“curriculum” OR “education”) AND (“public sector” OR “schools”)

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies/documents were included if they: (a) were published in English; (b) were peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, formal policy documents issued by institutions, or established organizational guidelines; (c) directly corresponded to one or more of the following: digital governance, social media's impact on students, digital equity, cyberbullying, data privacy, or student psycho-social well-being in schools; (d) were published between 2015 and 2026; (e) applied to public sector primary, secondary, or post-secondary institutions. Studies were excluded if they: (a) were not published in English; (b) appeared in a predatory or non-indexed journal outlet; (c) did not focus on digital governance and education; or (d) focused only on the governance of private/corporate digital systems and did not directly relate to education.

Study Selection and Data Extraction

Initial search results were screened by title and abstract to apply the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and potentially eligible sources were identified. These sources were then retrieved and assessed for their eligibility. In the end, 42 sources were analyzed; these included 24 peer-reviewed journal articles, 12 institutional reports/policy documents, and 6

governmental/intergovernmental organization publications. Data extraction for each article included the context of the study, methods used, findings, and policy implications.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used as the principal method to synthesize data. This followed the six-stage framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006); namely, familiarizing ourselves with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and redefining themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, reporting the analysis. Five key themes emerged: (1) digital divide and equity, (2) psychosocial impacts and mental health, (3) cyberbullying and online safety, (4) data privacy and security, and (5) digital citizenship and responsibility. These themes guided the development of the findings section and the proposed governance framework.

Findings and Results

The synthesized findings are organized into the five key thematic areas identified through the systematic review. For each theme, empirical evidence, identified patterns in the literature, and analytical implications for institutional governance are addressed.

Digital Divide and Educational Equity

The literature clearly demonstrates that while digital technologies have immense potential for positive transformation of learning, the un-governed, or most commonly, exacerbate existing educational inequalities, creating greater divides between educational "haves" and "have-nots" (NEA, 2020; OECD, 2023). In addition to merely access to technology or consistent broadband, the "digital divide" encompasses structural inequalities related to digital fluency, infrastructure quality, and content cultural relevancy and, therefore, requires structural, system-level, not localized, fixes (NEA, 2020). Caldarulo et al. (2023) provides evidence of the extent to which adoption of broadband access on a community level predicts student achievement, thus demonstrating a clear causal relationship between digital infrastructure and academic performance, whilst Xin et al. (2024) identify parental beliefs in technology use and household access to broadband as inter-related determinants of equity in digital education. DRA (2024) and New America (2024) have identified significant racial and socioeconomic disparities in the availability of digital access across the U.S., arguing that the provision of broadband infrastructure to schools and communities remains not so much a feature of tech deployment in education, but its characteristic and structurally defining absent presence. OECD (2023) indicates that approximately one in five students in member nations can neither participate in nor complete digitally assigned coursework. Such systemic and significant issues require more than the good efforts of individual institutions. Most importantly, however, the literature posits that merely having access is insufficient in making a digitally inclusive environment; rather, an inclusively designed learning environment requires culture-responsive design and inclusively designed interfaces, along with governance frameworks that are grounded in the social context and the language of the individual student cohort; otherwise, digital learning can become yet another source of inequity.

Psychosocial Impacts and Mental Health

Psychosocial consequences resulting from the unregulated use of social media within educational environments comprise perhaps one of the most substantive findings of this corpus. Numerous studies and reports consistently link intensive and unsupervised social media use amongst adolescents to an increase in rates of depression, anxiety, a reduction in academic engagement, and sleep disturbances (HHS, 2025; WHO, 2024). The US Surgeon General's Advisory Report (HHS, 2025) supports the claim that it is in young people that intense use of social media is likely to lead to changes in brain regions that are crucial for emotional regulation and executive functioning, given their vulnerability to modification at this developmental stage. Johns Hopkins Medicine (2024) concurs with these findings, highlighting the negative role that algorithmically filtered content plays in adolescents' processes of social comparison and self-

evaluation. Ning and Inan (2024) undertook empirical research exploring social media addiction among college students and demonstrated a significant negative correlation between addictive use and academic performance through a mediator of reduced psychological stress and disrupted attention. Zhao (2023) echoed these findings, linking perceived academic stress as a mediator between social media addiction and underachievement. There appears, from the corpus reviewed, to be a failure on the part of institutions to consistently recognize, identify and address signs of digital distress amongst students; lacking systematic protocols for identifying risk and providing targeted support networks, many institutions cannot effectively discharge their duty of care to students regarding their mental health, putting vulnerable students at further risk.

Cyberbullying and Online Safety

Cyberbullying is a unique structural mode of peer harassment since it is carried into home environments, and there is never an end to it in digital form because the anonymity gives it an advantage of expansion (Espelage & Hong, 2009; Feinberg & Robey, 2009). From the Youth Safety and Digital Wellbeing report produced by Stanford (2025), one in six young people reported technology-based harassment in the US, which shows cyberbullying is systemic instead of being a disciplinary problem at school. Tanrikulu (2018) found a strong variability in the effectiveness of prevention programs within schools and found that effective strategies included multi-stakeholder participation, integration with broader SEL frameworks, and sustained longitudinal implementation as opposed to one-off activities. The American Psychological Association (2024) also strongly recommended systemic, ecologically embedded prevention programs. An important element that should be remembered about the results from this literature review is that the size of the issue and institutional solutions to it are vastly disconnected. According to the US Dept. Of Ed. Office of Safe and Supportive Schools (2024), institutions' reactive responses toward cyberbullying do not solve the problem and urge institutions to adopt active monitoring, open reporting mechanisms, and trauma-informed responsive practices in the effort against cyberbullying.

Data Privacy and Security

Student data governance remains an important and dynamic area of legal, ethical, and practical institutional challenges given the pervasive nature of social media. Rosenberg et al. (2021) highlighted the underestimated risk that the very act of publicly sharing photos or celebrating student successes through institutional means could lead to the violation of student privacy in unforeseen ways that are not addressed through institutional training and policy. This indicates a need for institutional governance regarding the training of school communication staff and the preparation of communication departments.

Legal constraints, including FERPA and GDPR, are increasingly complex as both sets of rules require different yet at times complementary mandates concerning the collection, storage, use, and parent/student consent for student data (U.S. Department of Education, 2024a, 2024c). Student data breaches of any form, whether they are the result of external security attacks or failed policies/procedures within institutions, could result in long-term damage for the student, such as identity theft, the public relations harm caused by damaged reputations, and the loss of trust from the institution.

Through the analysis of literature, the following weak institutional governance practices in student data governance have been identified with the help of third-party educational service providers: clarity of consent agreements, consistency of consent processes, and the frequency of digital security audits (U.S. Department of Education, 2024d; Zinkus et al., 2019). Evidence-based governance practices need to establish data protection as a fundamental value, rather than just a matter of regulation.

Digital Citizenship and Responsible Practices

This body of work repeatedly argues for moving away from a prohibitory approach to digital access and toward curriculum-integrated digital citizenship education. ISTE defines digital citizenship as "the responsible, ethical and safe use of digital technology" (ISTE, 2024) and considers digital competence a composite of knowledge, skills and attitudes: digital safety and security, media and information literacy, digital communication and collaboration, digital identity, problem-solving and creativity (Council of Europe, 2024). Common Sense Education (2024) offers evidence-based digital citizenship curricula that are widely implemented in hundreds of school districts and provide evidence that integrating digital citizenship skills into existing subject areas at all grade levels is feasible. Zinkus et al. (2019) offer evidence that student awareness of digital privacy issues improves using a social networking simulation called Facebook. A frequently recurring critique of the literature is the over-reliance on Acceptable Use Policies, which are primarily compliance-driven and punishment-oriented and offer no clear foundation of safe, ethical, and competent technology use for students (Kind et al., 2010; Muls et al., 2020). This compliance-without-competency approach can be counter-productive when it comes to raising truly digitally competent students; sound governance needs to incorporate competencies and regulations as inherently linked elements.

Discussion

Digital Governance as a Strategic Institutional Imperative

The review of the literature confirms that the lack of effective and evidence-based digital governance frameworks within public education institutions represents an immediate and critical risk to students' equity, safety, and well-being. Public education institutions, increasingly reliant on digital environments, consistently lag in their adoption, putting students at greater risk—most seriously those students who are already marginalized (Landri, 2018; Williamson, 2015, 2016). Institutional digital governance needs to move from its status as a crisis-response, problem-focused structure to a proactive, integrated structure that centers equity, safety, and digital citizenship in each level of an institutional policy structure (Digital Regulation Platform, 2025; OECD, 2025). Evidence supports that simply providing devices and the Internet is not enough to support students in a digital age: without corresponding governance structures, we cannot ensure that students from every socio-economic background have digital literacy, culturally relevant content, or quality digital resources (Center for Universal Design, 2024; IEEE CTU, 2023). This means a focus on institutional governance to comprehensively examine digital accessibility and measure inclusion goals institution-wide and system-wide.

Addressing Emotional and Behavioral Outcomes

The documented negative psychological and social impacts of unmonitored social media use necessitate a fundamental reevaluation of institutions' responsibility toward student mental health in digital spaces. Adolescents are exposed on an ongoing basis to the influences of algorithmic curation of content, constant peer comparisons, and potential harassment by peers in an environment where institutional policies fail to provide adequate protection (HHS, 2025; WHO, 2024). This poses a predictable and preventable harm that must be addressed by institutional governance in terms of systematic identification of digital distress, employment of trained personnel who can respond effectively to student needs, and implementation of evidence-based device use policies that account for the inherent risks of devices (Carras et al., 2024; Ning & Inan, 2024). Teacher training is also critical: educators need skills to identify the behavioral signs associated with cyberbullying, social media addiction, and digital distress and the know-how to integrate digital well-being into daily teaching (Nathan et al., 2014).

Cultivating Digital Citizenship

Literature overwhelmingly concludes that a robust approach to digital governance cannot be reduced to restriction and prohibition but must embrace a sustained and curriculum-

embedded approach to digital citizenship education. While Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) have a place as regulatory instruments, they are not a substitute for substantive educational programming that empowers students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become competent digital citizens (Common Sense Education, 2024; ISTE, 2024). Enabling students to critically evaluate information, protect their data, use digital technology respectfully, and consider the long-term consequences of their digital actions serves both the goals of education and the fundamental need for institutional safety and equity (Council of Europe, 2024).

Proposed Framework for Digital Governance in Education

This review posits a four-dimensional digital governance framework for public sector educational institutions. The framework has been designed to offer a practical tool for policymakers, administrators, teachers, and the public to support prevention and response across immediate and long-term institutional needs

Dimension	Key Objectives	Implementation Strategies
1. Policy and Infrastructure (Equity)	Bridge the digital divide; ensure inclusive access.	Provide subsidized devices and broadband to low-income families. Mandate digital accessibility standards for all educational software. Establish data privacy and security protocols compliant with FERPA/GDPR. Conduct annual audits of digital inclusion targets.
2. Digital Citizenship Curriculum	Foster responsible, ethical, and safe online behavior.	Integrate media literacy and digital well-being across core curricula. Teach students to identify misinformation and protect personal data. Promote positive digital identities and social responsibility. Adopt experiential learning tools for digital privacy education.
3. Mental Health and Well-being	Mitigate psychological risks; support emotional health.	Deploy school counselors trained in digital-age psychological issues. Implement early detection systems for cyberbullying and digital distress. Establish clear reporting and support mechanisms for online abuse victims. Develop evidence-based device-use policies that protect mental health.
4. Stakeholder Engagement	Create a collaborative digital safety ecosystem.	Develop comprehensive social media guidelines for educators and staff. Provide training resources for parents in home digital environments. Involve students in co-creating digital use policies. Build community partnerships with mental health and technology partners.

Recommendations

Drawing on the synthesized evidence and the proposed governance framework, the following recommendations are made to the key stakeholders in the governance of public sector education:

To policymakers: National and regional education authorities should mandate universal

adoption of standardized digital governance frameworks across all public sector institutions with clearly defined policies regarding digital equity, data privacy, cyberbullying prevention, and digital citizenship education. Legislation should include a provision requiring periodic independent audits to determine institutions' compliance with their student data protection obligations, including third-party service providers. Policy mechanisms should also include a set of minimum requirements for broadband connectivity in underprivileged regions, acknowledging the fact that digital access is a prerequisite for education rather than a discretionary add-on (OECD, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

To school administrators: Institutions should develop accessible social media governance policies that clearly outline acceptable practices, specify frameworks for consequences, and provide distinct mechanisms for the reporting of cyberbullying incidents and misuse of data. Institutions' policymaking should include provisions for yearly reviews of social media governance policy in consideration of the quickly evolving nature of the digital landscape. Institutions should have a plan for consistent investment in professional development opportunities to ensure that teachers have the required competencies to recognize digital distress and support the digital well-being of students by actively and systematically integrating digital citizenship education into the curriculum (Muls et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2024b).

To teachers: Teaching practitioners should be supported to meaningfully integrate teaching skills for digital literacy and the critical evaluation of digital information into instruction that covers various academic subjects and make digital citizenship education a systematic rather than stand-alone course module. Teachers should be trained in specific skills required for the detection of behaviors that indicate victimization through cyberbullying, the development of addiction toward social media and overexposure to digital platforms, and the appropriate implementation of the procedures established for the referred students (Nathan et al., 2014; NEA, 2020).

To community stakeholders and parents: Schools should have a mechanism in place through which families participate in the creation and evaluation of digital governance policies, and support for parents and families with evidence-based, easily accessible guidance for the responsible use of technology in the home is also essential for these policies to transcend the school setting and constitute a community-wide digital safety web (UNICEF, 2024).

To researchers: Future empirical studies should prioritize comprehensive and longitudinal analyses that examine the outcomes of the implementation of digital governance interventions across various institutional and national contexts. An important area for researchers to focus on should be the interaction between digital equity, mental health, and governance for students of diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

Conclusion

The incorporation of social media and digital technologies into the governance of public sector educational institutions represents a complex and continuously evolving governance challenge that requires a systematic and evidence-based approach. In this systematic review, structural deficiencies were found in digital governance frameworks within five different themes: digital equity, psychosocial well-being, cyberbullying prevention, data privacy, and digital citizenship education. Such deficiencies have a real impact on the overall education and mental well-being of students of all socioeconomic backgrounds. None of these weaknesses can be addressed through superficial or reactive means.

The findings of this review make it clear that robust digital governance of public education institutions requires a fundamental change in perspective; it calls for a proactive educational approach based on educationally embedded governance that prioritizes digital equity, student safety, and digital citizenship as central institutional values rather than focusing on compliance and reaction to incidents. The four-dimensional framework that is presented in

this study is a coherent and practical approach for achieving this reorientation, based on the integration of empirical research, international policy guidance, and institutional best practices.

In conclusion, the appropriate use of technology within education is intimately tied to the broader mandate of equitable education and student welfare. Whether digital technologies realize their potential for learners of all backgrounds or circumstances hinges on the quality and integrity of the governance structures that public sector institutions develop and sustain. Therefore, the use of digital governance mechanisms informed by evidence and research should be viewed not as optional but rather as a constitutive element of the educational mission in the 21st century.

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