Social Intelligence in Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Its Implications for Guidance and Counseling

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Abstract
Social intelligence is an important competency for adolescents as they work through developmental tasks. However, its implications for school guidance and counseling have rarely been synthesized. This systematic review mapped the definitions, dimensions, measurement instruments, and school counseling implications of social intelligence in adolescents aged 12–18 years. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, Scopus was searched for studies published from 2016 to 2026. Of the 2,363 records identified, nine studies met the inclusion criteria and were appraised with the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool. Social intelligence was most often defined as the capacity to understand social cues and act appropriately in interactions. The Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS), with its three dimensions of social information processing, social skills, and social awareness, was the most common reference and was used in five studies (55.6%). However, reliability coefficients were often missing, only one study reported convergent and discriminant validity, and none tested cross-cultural measurement invariance. The implications for school counseling were grouped into five themes, namely classroom integration in collaboration with subject teachers, peer relationships, career and academic development, personal and culturally responsive counseling, and assessment. Only the first theme was examined in intervention studies. These studies were small and non-randomized, and their results were mixed. The other themes were inferred from correlational or descriptive findings. All studies were quantitative, and only one was conducted in Indonesia. However, the counseling implications still need to be tested directly through intervention research and complemented by qualitative studies.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is an important stage in the social development of an individual. This phase is characterized by changes in the social brain network as well as the wider and more complex relationships with peers outside the family environment (Kilford et al., 2016). In this period, the ability to understand social cues and interact effectively not only determines the quality of interpersonal relationships but also plays a role in building psychological resilience and mental well-being (Mitic et al., 2021). In contrast, failure to develop social competence is often associated with involvement in bullying, both as a victim and as a perpetrator, which has implications for the emergence of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and decreased quality of life (Ghardallou et al., 2024; Zhang & Chen, 2023). The importance of peer relations for adolescents has long been recognized (Brown & Larson, 2009). However, today's context presents new challenges as interaction patterns change due to the use of digital technology and social media. Empirical evidence shows mixed results. Steinsbekk et al. (2024) revealed that social media can expand social networks and keep friendships alive offline but also have the potential to lower the quality of face-to-face communication, especially in adolescents with high levels of social anxiety. In addition, the study by Senekal et al. (2023) emphasizes that the relationship between social media and adolescent psychosocial development is complex, including risks such as overuse and cyberbullying as well as benefits in the form of social support and identity formation. This complexity raises important questions about how adolescent social intelligence is formed, measured and facilitated in the context of formal education, including through guidance and counseling services.

Social intelligence as a psychological concept was first introduced by Thorndike (1920), which defines it as the ability to understand and manage others, whether men or women, and to act wisely in human

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relationships. Since then, this concept has continued to evolve and be distinguished from academic and emotional intelligence (Landy, 2005; Weis & Süß, 2007). However, the definition of social intelligence is not completely uniform because various reformulations are still ongoing (Husain et al., 2026). In the realm of practice, the link between social intelligence and school counseling has also been examined in practice. For example, Jueajinda et al. (2021) showed that a counseling program based on three components of social intelligence improved social intelligence and reduced bullying behavior. However, these kinds of studies are still limited and have not been systematically synthesized across contexts. The evidence of the study also confirms the importance of social competence in adolescence to long-term mental health. Good social competence is associated with better adaptive function and lower internalization symptoms in young adulthood (Romppanen et al., 2021). Social competence is also associated longitudinally with psychological well-being during adolescence (Gómez-López et al., 2022). Social-emotional competence is even seen as an essential factor in school-based prevention because it is related to academic achievement, healthy behaviors, and can be improved through effective and efficient interventions (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

Several previous systematic reviews have addressed adolescents' social-emotional skills more broadly, but with a different focus than social intelligence. Martinez-Yarza et al. (2023) reviewed instruments measuring social and emotional skills in school-aged children and adolescents. However, they mapped these instruments against the five competencies of the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, which is broader than social intelligence. Main et al. (2025) reviewed social and emotional skills in relation to the formation of a positive social identity, treating social identity as the outcome rather than mapping the social intelligence construct or its implications for school counseling. The review documents retrieved by the search string of the present study were also screened, and none specifically examined the definitions, dimensions, and instruments of social intelligence in adolescents or explored its implications for guidance and counseling. This review therefore aimed to map how social intelligence in adolescents aged 12–18 years has been defined and measured, to examine the psychometric evidence for the instruments used, and to identify findings relevant to school guidance and counseling, distinguishing implications that have been tested from those that are inferred. Three research questions guided the review: (1) How is adolescent social intelligence defined, and what dimensions are measured in the existing literature? (2) Which instruments are most widely used to measure adolescent social intelligence, and what psychometric evidence supports them? (3) What findings have implications for guidance and counseling services in schools?

By answering these three questions, this review is expected to provide a conceptual map of adolescent social intelligence as well as provide a foundation for the development of more comprehensive school counseling services to meet the needs of students' social development.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study uses a systematic literature review (SLR) approach by following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines. This approach was chosen to ensure that the process of identification, selection, and synthesis of literature is carried out in a systematic, transparent, and replicable manner so as to minimize subjective bias in the selection of studies (Page et al., 2021).

2.2. Search Strategy

Literature search was conducted through the Scopus database as a data source. This selection is based on several methodological considerations, as Scopus is known as a bibliometric database that is strictly curated with a selection and evaluation process of content by an independent advisory board, thus guaranteeing high-quality metadata (Baas et al., 2020). In addition, Scopus has a wider scope of journals than the Web of Science in various disciplines, including social sciences and education (Aksnes & Sivertsen, 2019; Powell & Peterson, 2017). This constitutes an adequate selection basis for a single-database study in the field of educational psychology and guidance and counseling. The search was run on 20 June 2026 in the title, abstract, and keyword fields and was limited to publications from 2016 to 2026 to capture recent literature. The following Boolean search string was used: TITLE-ABS-KEY(("social intelligence" OR "social skill*" OR "social competence" OR "social-emotional competence" OR "social emotional competence" OR "social-emotional skill*" OR "socioemotional competence" OR "social competency" OR "prosocial skill*") AND (adolescen* OR teenager* OR "high school" OR "secondary school" OR "junior high" OR "senior high" OR "middle school")). Related terms such as social skills, social competence, and social-emotional competence were deliberately included because some studies use these labels interchangeably with social intelligence. Records retrieved through these terms were retained only if they met the operational definition of social intelligence set out in the eligibility criteria below. Scopus filters were then applied to remove reviews, articles in press, and records without open access (Figure 1). The bias that this open-access filter may introduce is addressed in the Limitations section.

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2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The eligibility criteria were set to keep the review focused on studies that were relevant, comparable, and methodologically sound. In this review, social intelligence was operationally defined as the capacity to perceive and interpret social cues and to act effectively in social interactions (Silvera et al., 2001). This definition sets it apart from social skills, which refer to observable interpersonal behaviors, and from social-emotional competence, which covers a broader set of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Studies were included if they (a) explicitly conceptualized or measured social intelligence or one of its named dimensions (e.g., social awareness or social information processing), rather than social skills or social-emotional competence in general; (b) involved participants aged 12–18 years, or, when age was not reported, a school grade corresponding to this age range; (c) were empirical studies or theoretical or conceptual articles; (d) were published in peer-reviewed journals at the final publication stage; (e) were written in English or Indonesian; (f) were published between 2016 and 2026; and (g) were available as open-access full texts. The terms guidance and counseling were not required, because relevance to school counseling was determined through the authors' interpretation during synthesis. Studies were excluded if they (a) addressed social skills or social-emotional competence without framing them as social intelligence; (b) included participants younger than 12 or older than 18 years; (c) were reviews, editorials, opinion pieces, book reviews, or conference abstracts; (d) were book chapters, theses, dissertations, or proceedings; (e) were articles in press; (f) were unrelated to educational or adolescent development contexts; or (g) were available only as abstracts.

2.4. Study Selection (PRISMA Flow)

Of the 2,363 records identified through Scopus, 1,242 were removed before screening using the database filters (reviews, n = 180; articles in press, n = 65; not open access, n = 997), leaving 1,121 records for title and abstract screening. At this stage, 1,091 records were excluded because they did not address social intelligence as defined above, leaving 30 articles for full-text assessment. Of these, 21 were excluded. Sixteen were excluded because the participants' ages fell outside 12–18 years or could not be verified, 4 because the full text was inaccessible, and 1 because it was written in a language other than English or Indonesian. Thus, nine articles were retained for data extraction and synthesis. Title-abstract and full-text screening were carried out by four of the authors, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. The PRISMA diagram is presented in Figure 1.

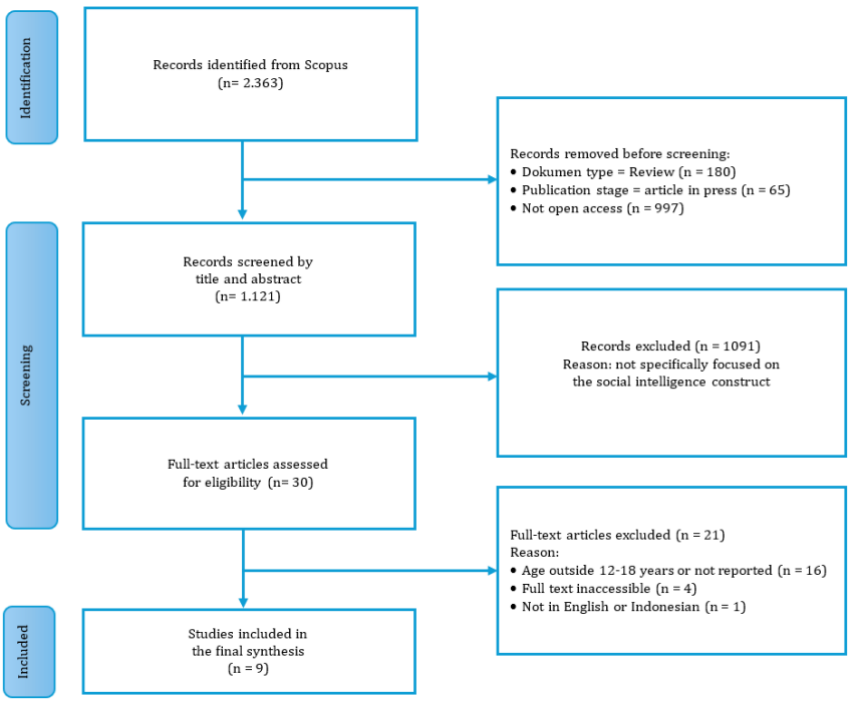


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart

2.5. Data Extraction

Data were extracted using a standardized form in Microsoft Excel that recorded the author, year, country, research design, sample size and age, measurement instrument, definition and dimensions of social intelligence, reported psychometric evidence (with reliability and validity recorded separately), key findings, and findings relevant to school counseling. All authors contributed to data extraction, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

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2.6. Methodological Quality Assessment

The methodological quality of the nine articles was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), a quality assessment instrument designed specifically for reviews that combines studies with diverse designs and has undergone a validity test of the content of the instrument through an e-Delphi study (Hong et al., 2018). The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool contains two common screening questions (S1, S2) and five specific criteria according to the design category. Of the nine articles, seven were classified as quantitative descriptive (Category 4) and two as quantitative non-randomized (Category 3). The appraisal was carried out by the same four authors, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. In line with MMAT guidance, no overall quality score was calculated. Instead, the rating for each criterion is reported in Table 1 and was used to weigh the evidence during synthesis.

Table 1. Quality Assessment MMAT

No	Author (Year)	Category MMAT	S1	S2	1 - 1.5 (Qualitative)	3.1 - 3.5 (Non-Random)	4.1 - 4.5 (Descriptive)
1	Almat et al. (2023)	4	Y	Y	-	-	C, C, Y, C, Y
2	Alloway et al. (2026)	4	Y	Y	-	-	C, N, Y, C, Y
3	Çelik (2016)	4	Y	Y	-	-	N, N, Y, C, Y
4	Zulmi & Tentama (2024)	4	Y	Y	-	-	Y, Y, Y, C, Y
5	Kozhakhmetov & Taibolatov (2025)	3	Y	Y	-	N, Y, C, N, Y	-
6	Palaščáková et al. (2024)	4	Y	Y	-	-	C, N, Y, C, Y
7	Balu et al. (2024)	4	Y	Y	-	-	Y, C, Y, C, Y
8	Ebrahim & Naji (2021)	3	Y	Y	-	N, Y, C, N, Y	-
9	García-Álvarez et al. (2020)	4	Y	Y	-	-	Y, Y, C, C, Y

Description:
S1 = Is the research question clear?
S2 = Does the data collected answer the research question?
1 = Qualitative category
3 = Non-Randomized Quantitative category
4 = Descriptive Quantitative category
Y = Yes
N = No
C = Can't Tell

2.7. Data Synthesis

Because the included studies differed in design, instruments, and outcomes, a meta-analysis was not feasible. The findings were therefore synthesized narratively, following the Synthesis Without Meta-analysis (SWiM) reporting guideline (Campbell et al., 2020). The studies were first grouped by research question, namely definitions and dimensions (RQ1), instruments and their psychometric evidence (RQ2), and findings relevant to school counseling (RQ3). For RQ2, the frequency of instrument use was counted, and reliability and validity evidence were tabulated separately. For RQ3, findings were grouped into themes, and each implication was labelled as either tested (based on intervention studies that evaluated a program or strategy) or inferred (based on correlational or descriptive findings and the authors' interpretation). The strength of each implication was judged in light of the design and MMAT ratings of the contributing studies.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Characteristics of the Included Studies

Before turning to the research questions, this section describes the nine included studies by year of publication, geographical region, and research design. The nine included studies were spread thinly across the review period (Figure 2). No more than one study was published per year until 2023, and the largest number appeared in 2024 (n = 3). One study was published in 2025 and one in 2026, suggesting continued interest in adolescent social intelligence, but the small number of studies does not allow firm conclusions about a publication trend.

The nine studies came from eight countries in six regions (Table 2). Central Asia, America, and the Middle East contributed two studies each, while Europe, East/Southeast Asia, and South Asia contributed one each. Only one study was conducted in Indonesia (Zulmi & Tentama, 2024), which shows that research on adolescent social intelligence in the Indonesian context remains very limited.

All nine included studies used quantitative designs, and none met the inclusion criteria as qualitative or mixed-methods studies (Figure 3). Correlational, regression, or factor-analytic designs were most common (n = 3), followed by quasi-experimental designs (n = 2), SEM-PLS or mediation analyses (n = 2), and single studies

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using cross-sectional descriptive surveys and instrument development. Only two studies tested an intervention, both with small samples (n = 37 and n = 60). The predominance of quantitative designs aligns with how social intelligence is typically measured through standardized scales. Still, it also means that adolescents' own experiences of social intelligence have rarely been explored in depth.

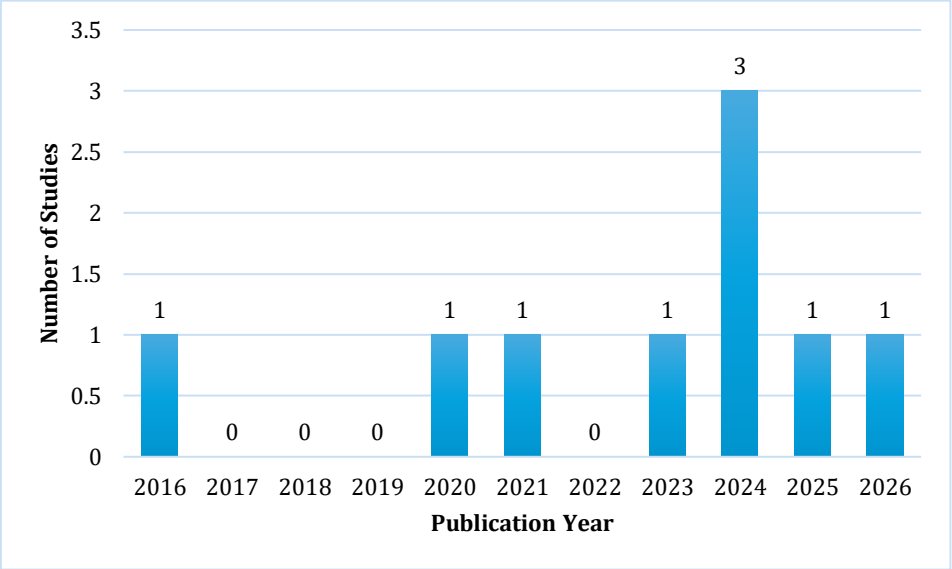


Figure 2. Study Distribution by Year of Publication

Table 2. Distribution of Study Areas

Geographical Region	Number of Studies	Country
Central Asia	2	Kazakhstan
America	2	United States, Uruguay
Middle East	2	Kuwait, Turkey
Europe	1	Ukraine
East/Southeast Asia	1	Indonesia
South Asia	1	India
Total	9	

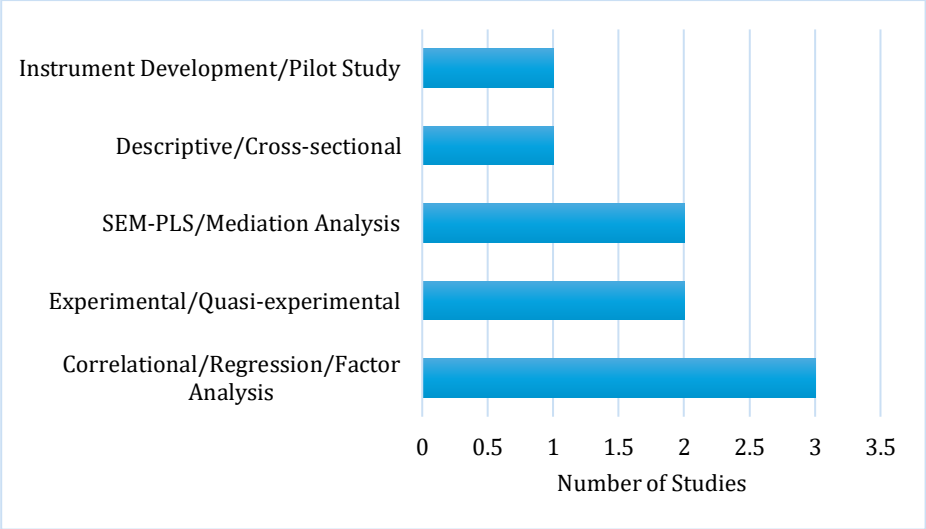


Figure 3. Types of Research Design

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3.2. Selected Primary Studies

Through the PRISMA-guided selection process as described in Section 2, nine articles were identified to meet all eligibility criteria for analysis. Their methods, measurement instruments, samples, and key findings are summarized in Table 3, which serves as the basis for answering the research questions in the following sections.

Table 3. Selected Primary Studies

No	Author (Year)	Method	Measuring Instruments	Sample	Key Findings
1	Almat et al. (2023)	Quantitative, factor and correlational analysis	Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS)	407 junior and senior high school students (12-18 yrs), Kazakhstan	Only the social awareness subscale correlated, weakly, with IQ subtests (r = .10-.12)
2	Alloway et al. (2026)	Quantitative, instrument development (pilot study)	Social Intelligence Test for Teenagers (SITT)	83 teens (14-18 yrs), Florida, USA	Communication skills are the strongest predictor of the quality of adolescent friendships
3	Çelik (2016)	Quantitative, correlational regression	TSIS Social Awareness subscale	368 teenagers (12-16 yrs), Istanbul, Turkey	High social awareness protects adolescents' happiness even when they shut themselves off
4	Zulmi & Tentama (2024)	Quantitative, SEM-PLS modeling	Social Intelligence Scale (based on Albrecht)	68 grade XII vocational high school students, Sleman, Indonesia	Social intelligence did not significantly predict employability (β = -0.05, p = .544), whereas adversity quotient did
5	Kozhakhmetov & Taibolatov (2025)	Quantitative, quasi-experimental (pre-post with control group)	Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS)	60 middle school students (13–15 yrs), Kazakhstan	Integrated subject instruction yielded higher TSIS post-test scores than conventional instruction, although the post-test means differ between the reported tables
6	Palaščáková et al. (2024)	Quantitative, correlational	Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS)	369 students (12-17 yrs), Ukraine (online school)	Social intelligence was associated with adolescents' interest in self-education and reading
7	Balu et al. (2024)	Quantitative, Smart-PLS mediation analysis	Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) and AIQ-IV	384 indigenous youth (12-18 yrs), Nilgiris, India	Rational thinking mediates the relationship between self-identity and social intelligence levels
8	Ebrahim & Naji (2021)	Quantitative, quasi-experimental	Social Intelligence Survey (Ebrahim, 2012)	37 10th grade students (15-16 yrs), Kuwait	Flipped learning improved biology attainment, but social intelligence did not differ from the control group (ANCOVA, p = .475)
9	García-Álvarez et al. (2020)	Quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive survey	Author-developed satisfaction questionnaire and open-ended questions	590 secondary school students (12–15 yrs), Uruguay	Students rated the program as useful, and social intelligence was the second most frequently reported strength applied (16.6% of coded references, self-reported)

3.3. Definition and Dimensions of Social Intelligence

Most included studies defined adolescent social intelligence in line with Thorndike's (1920) original idea: the ability to understand verbal and nonverbal social cues and act appropriately in social interactions. Several studies framed it as a cognitive-behavioral ability to read social cues and respond to them effectively (Almat et al., 2023; Balu et al., 2024). Three more specific conceptualizations were also found. First, social intelligence was treated as a character strength involving awareness of one's own and others' motives and feelings (García-Álvarez et al., 2020). Second, it was understood as a capacity that supports communication and cooperation, emphasizing its instrumental role in academic and career contexts (Palaščáková et al., 2024; Zulmi & Tentama, 2024). Third, it was viewed as a competency shaped through social interaction and schooling, drawing on sociocultural theory (Kozhakhmetov & Taibolatov, 2025). Despite these differences, all studies located social

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intelligence in understanding social situations rather than in observable social behavior alone, separating the construct from social skills and the broader domain of social-emotional competence.

In terms of dimensions, five of the nine studies drew on the three-dimensional framework of the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS), namely social information processing, social skills, and social awareness (Almat et al., 2023; Balu et al., 2024; Çelik, 2016; Kozhakhmetov & Taibolatov, 2025; Palaščáková et al., 2024), although Çelik (2016) used only the social awareness subscale. This framework follows Silvera et al. (2001), who operationalized Thorndike's early ideas. Even within this group, researchers did not always apply the dimensions consistently. For example, Kozhakhmetov and Taibolatov (2025) administered the three TSIS domains but reported their component results as empathy, social skills, and conflict resolution. Other studies used more context-specific dimensions: Alloway et al. (2026) measured expression, responses to bullying, communication, and conflict. Zulmi and Tentama (2024) used the five dimensions of Albrecht's model, namely situational awareness, presence, authenticity, clarity, and empathy. Ebrahim and Naji (2021) focused on using social intelligence in collaborative classroom learning. The dimensions of adolescent social intelligence therefore remain unsettled (Husain et al., 2026). This variation supports the view that social intelligence is context-dependent, since social cues considered appropriate in one culture may not carry the same meaning in another (Weis & Süß, 2007).

3.4. Psychometric Instruments and Quality

The TSIS was the most frequently used instrument, appearing in five of nine studies (55.6%) (Almat et al., 2023; Balu et al., 2024; Çelik, 2016; Kozhakhmetov & Taibolatov, 2025; Palaščáková et al., 2024). Alloway et al. (2026) also administered the TSIS, but only as a comparison measure for their new instrument. The remaining four studies used different instruments. Two were developed for adolescents or classroom settings: the Social Intelligence Test for Teenagers (SITT) by Alloway et al. (2026) and the Social Intelligence Survey by Ebrahim and Naji (2021). Zulmi and Tentama (2024) used an Albrecht-based scale, and García-Álvarez et al. (2020) used an author-developed questionnaire. The questionnaire used by García-Álvarez et al. (2020) measured students' satisfaction with a character strengths program and their perceived application of it, so it did not measure social intelligence directly. Thus, although the TSIS is the most commonly cited instrument, no single instrument has been adopted across cultural contexts. Reliability and validity evidence should be considered separately because studies reported them unevenly. For reliability, studies reported at most internal consistency (Cronbach's α, KR-20, or composite reliability), and none reported test-retest reliability. Only three studies reported coefficients obtained from their own samples. Çelik (2016) reported α = .79 for the TSIS social awareness subscale; Alloway et al. (2026) reported α = .70 for the SITT total score and α = .58–.70 for its subscales; and Zulmi and Tentama (2024) reported α = .867 and a composite reliability of .768 for an Albrecht-based scale. Other studies reported coefficients from previous samples or pilot groups rather than from their own participants (Balu et al., 2024; Ebrahim & Naji, 2021; Palaščáková et al., 2024), and two studies reported no coefficients at all (Almat et al., 2023; Kozhakhmetov & Taibolatov, 2025). The α of .908 reported by García-Álvarez et al. (2020) refers to a satisfaction questionnaire rather than a social intelligence measure.

Validity evidence was even more limited. Zulmi and Tentama (2024) were the only authors to report a full measurement model for social intelligence in their own sample, including convergent validity (loadings = 0.885–1.000, AVE = 0.684) and discriminant validity based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Alloway et al. (2026) identified a four-factor structure for the SITT that explained 63.3% of the variance, and two of its subscales predicted social connectedness, empathy, and friendship quality. However, the SITT was not significantly correlated with the TSIS, so its convergent validity was not supported, and the facial and eye expression items were dropped because of low reliability (α = .48). Almat et al. (2023) analyzed the TSIS subscales together with IQ subtests in a principal component analysis. The three TSIS subscales loaded on a separate component, and only social awareness correlated weakly with IQ subtests (r = .10–.12). This suggests that the TSIS captures something distinct from general intelligence. However, the study did not test the TSIS's factor structure. Çelik (2016) and Ebrahim and Naji (2021) relied on validity evidence from an earlier adaptation study or an expert panel rather than testing validity in their own samples. None of the studies tested measurement invariance across cultural or demographic groups. This gap matters because the TSIS was developed and validated in Norway (Silvera et al., 2001) and was later used in Kazakhstan, India, Ukraine, and Turkey without reported evidence of structural or semantic equivalence. The MMAT ratings showed a related pattern (Table 1). The most common weaknesses were sample representativeness and non-response in descriptive studies, and control of confounders in non-randomized studies. Most studies used convenience or purposive samples from a single school or location, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the wider adolescent population. Some studies also showed reporting inconsistencies. Kozhakhmetov and Taibolatov (2025) reported different post-test means for the same groups in two tables, and Balu et al. (2024) reported a different sample size and age range in the results (N = 394, aged 12–19 years) than in the method (N = 384, aged 12–18 years).

3.5. Implications for Guidance and Counseling Services

The implications for school counseling were grouped into five themes (Table 4). Following the procedure described in Section 2.7, each theme is labelled according to the type of evidence behind it. Only one theme was

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examined in studies that directly tested an intervention. The other four are inferred from correlational or descriptive findings and should be read as proposals that still need evaluation in school counseling settings.

Table 4. Implications for School Counseling by Type of Evidence

Theme	Supporting studies	Type of evidence
Integration into classroom learning, in collaboration with subject teachers	Ebrahim & Naji (2021); Kozhakhmetov & Taibolatov (2025)	Tested (two quasi-experimental studies; mixed results)
Peer relationships	Alloway et al. (2026); García-Álvarez et al. (2020)	Inferred (instrument development; self-report)
Career and academic development	Palaščáková et al. (2024); Zulmi & Tentama (2024)	Inferred (correlational; mixed findings)
Personal and culturally responsive counseling	Balu et al. (2024); Çelik (2016)	Inferred (correlational)
Assessment of social intelligence	Studies reviewed under RQ2	Inferred (psychometric evidence)

Integration into classroom learning (tested). Two quasi-experimental studies evaluated teacher-delivered classroom programs, with mixed results. Kozhakhmetov and Taibolatov (2025) found that students taught with an integrated, subject-based curriculum obtained higher TSIS post-test scores than students in conventional classes. However, the post-test means reported for the same groups differed between tables. In contrast, Ebrahim and Naji (2021) found that flipped learning improved biology attainment but did not change students' use of social intelligence compared with direct teaching ($p = .475$). Both studies used small samples of intact classes and were rated as non-randomized in the MMAT. Collaboration between school counselors and subject teachers is therefore a plausible route for developing social intelligence, but the evidence is still inconclusive. Peer relationships (inferred). In the SITT pilot study, communication skills predicted both friendship quality and social connectedness (Alloway et al., 2026). After a character strengths program, students also reported applying social intelligence in their relationships with peers, family, and community, and social intelligence was the second most frequently mentioned strength (García-Álvarez et al., 2020). However, this finding reflects students' perceptions rather than measured change. Group guidance on peer relationships could therefore include social intelligence content, but this has not been tested directly.

Career and academic development (inferred). Social intelligence was associated with adolescents' interest in self-education (Palaščáková et al., 2024). In contrast, in the only Indonesian study, social intelligence did not significantly predict employability among vocational high school students. Within the same model, only adversity quotient significantly predicted employability (Zulmi & Tentama, 2024). Career and academic guidance may still treat social intelligence as a supporting competency, but the current evidence is mixed. Personal and culturally responsive counseling (inferred). Among Indigenous adolescents in India, rational thinking mediated the relationship between self-identity and social intelligence (Balu et al., 2024), and social awareness suppressed the relationship between self-concealment and life satisfaction (Çelik, 2016). These findings point to individual and cultural factors that counselors may consider when planning personal-social services. Assessment (inferred). Because reliability coefficients were often missing, validity evidence was limited, and no instrument had been tested for cross-cultural equivalence, counselors who assess social intelligence should choose instruments with documented local validity and combine scale scores with other information, such as observation or teacher reports. Overall, the included studies support a multidimensional approach to developing social intelligence through school counseling. However, most recommendations are inferences that still need testing in counseling interventions.

This review found that adolescent social intelligence is most often framed as the ability to understand social cues and act effectively, with the TSIS framework most commonly cited. However, even the TSIS, used in five of the nine studies, was applied inconsistently. Other studies drew on positive psychology (García-Álvarez et al., 2020), on Albrecht's model of social intelligence at work (Zulmi & Tentama, 2024), or on sociocultural views of learning (Kozhakhmetov & Taibolatov, 2025). The construct therefore still lacks a single accepted definition. This mirrors the long-standing difficulty of separating social intelligence from related constructs (Landy, 2005; Weis & Süß, 2007) and the continuing efforts to redefine it (Husain et al., 2026). For school counseling, the practical consequence is that the label social intelligence can mean different things across studies. Hence, counselors and researchers need to check which dimensions an instrument measures before comparing results or choosing an assessment. The findings also need to be weighed against the design and quality of the studies. Seven of the nine studies were cross-sectional or correlational, so they show associations but cannot establish that social intelligence leads to better peer relationships, learning interest, or well-being, or the reverse. The two intervention studies provide the most direct evidence, but both were small and non-randomized, and their results conflicted. One reported gains in TSIS scores, though figures varied across tables (Kozhakhmetov & Taibolatov, 2025), while the other found no effect on social intelligence (Ebrahim & Naji, 2021). The evidence from García-Álvarez et al. (2020) is even weaker, as it rests on students' satisfaction with a program rather than measured change. Where social intelligence was tested alongside other predictors, it also

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did not always contribute. In the only Indonesian study, it did not predict employability, whereas adversity quotient did (Zulmi & Tentama, 2024). Taken together, the current evidence is sufficient to describe how social intelligence is conceptualized and how it relates to some adolescent outcomes, but not to claim that particular school counseling services are effective in developing it.

The measurement findings are particularly relevant to the Indonesian context. The TSIS was developed in Norway (Silvera et al., 2001) and used in Central Asia, South Asia, Eastern Europe, and Turkey without reported tests of measurement invariance. Few of these studies reported reliability coefficients for their own samples. The only Indonesian study used a different, Albrecht-based scale and was the only one to report convergent and discriminant validity (Zulmi & Tentama, 2024). Because the meaning of social cues and of appropriate responses varies across cultures (Weis & Süß, 2007), scores from an untested translation may not reflect the same construct. The cross-cultural adaptation and validation of the TSIS or a comparable instrument for Indonesian adolescents is therefore a necessary step before such scores are used to plan or evaluate counseling services. Evidence outside the scope of this review points in a similar direction. Jueajinda et al. (2021) reported that a counseling program based on social intelligence components reduced bullying among Thai lower secondary school students, and school-based programs targeting social-emotional competence have been linked to better adjustment and lower risk (Domitrovich et al., 2017). These studies indicate that counseling-based interventions are feasible, yet none of the included studies evaluated a program delivered by school counselors. Future research should therefore shift from correlational designs to controlled evaluations of counseling interventions and include qualitative or mixed-methods studies that explore how adolescents experience and use social intelligence.

3.6. Implications

Theoretically, this review shows that adolescent social intelligence is most often operationalized through the three dimensions of the TSIS. However, the variation in definitions and instruments calls for a conceptual framework that better reflects cultural and institutional contexts. Practically, the findings offer school counselors two kinds of guidance that should be kept apart. Researchers have tested integrating social intelligence into classroom learning in collaboration with subject teachers, but only in two small, non-randomized studies with conflicting results. In contrast, proposals to strengthen peer relationships, provide career and academic guidance, offer personal and culturally responsive counseling, and assess social intelligence are derived from correlational, descriptive, or psychometric findings and require evaluation before they can be considered evidence-based. For researchers, the predominance of TSIS and quantitative designs highlights the need to validate instruments for Indonesian adolescents and complement them with qualitative studies of adolescents' experiences.

3.7. Limitations

This review has several limitations. First, the search was limited to one database, Scopus, and only English- and Indonesian-language studies were included, so relevant studies indexed only in other databases, such as Web of Science, ERIC, or Indonesian national databases (e.g., SINTA or Garuda), may have been missed (Wanyama et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant to the Indonesian context, where much guidance and counseling research is published in national journals. Second, the open-access filter removed 997 records before screening. Studies published behind paywalls may differ systematically from open-access studies in quality, region, or funding, so the included studies may over-represent certain regions and journals. Third, applying the 12–18 age criterion strictly excluded several studies with partly overlapping samples (e.g., ages 10–17 or 15–19) and one study that did not report participants' ages, which reduced the evidence base to nine studies. Fourth, all included studies were quantitative, and no qualitative or mixed-methods study met the criteria, so adolescents' subjective experiences of social intelligence could not be explored. Fifth, several primary studies reported incomplete or inconsistent psychometric and statistical information, which limited the precision of the synthesis. Finally, the implications for school counseling were largely derived from the authors' interpretation of studies that did not involve counseling services. Although each implication was labelled as tested or inferred, this interpretation may still be subject to bias.

4. Conclusion

This systematic review mapped how social intelligence in adolescents aged 12–18 years has been defined, measured, and linked to school counseling in nine studies indexed in Scopus. Social intelligence was most often understood as the capacity to recognize social cues and act appropriately in interactions. However, the studies also framed it as a character strength, as a competency for academic and career tasks, and as a product of social learning in school. The TSIS was the most common instrument, used in five studies (55.6%). However, it was applied inconsistently; four other instruments were also used, reliability coefficients were often missing, only one study reported convergent and discriminant validity, and none tested cross-cultural equivalence. The implications for school counseling were grouped into five themes. Intervention studies examined only the integration of social intelligence into classroom learning, in collaboration with subject teachers, and these studies were small, non-randomized, and inconsistent in their results. The other themes, namely peer relationships, career and academic development, personal and culturally responsive counseling, and

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assessment, remain proposals that need to be tested, and the evidence for the career theme was mixed. Given the small number of studies, reliance on a single database and open-access articles, and the absence of qualitative designs, these findings should not be taken as representative of the whole literature. Future research should validate social intelligence instruments for Indonesian adolescents, evaluate counseling-based interventions with controlled designs, and use qualitative approaches to understand how adolescents experience social intelligence in everyday school life.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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