



Developing a Safe Social Media Use Education Program for Youth: A Library-Based Study

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Abstract : This article develops a safe social media use education program for youth through library-based study. The article addresses a practical gap in community education: although youth use social media for learning, identity work, social connection, and participation, many community programs still treat online risk in fragmented ways. A focused literature set was assembled from peer-reviewed studies, prioritizing publications from 2023-2025 while retaining several foundational studies where conceptually necessary. The analysis synthesized evidence on online risk typologies, problematic social media use, cyberbullying, misinformation, social media literacy, algorithmic awareness, digital citizenship, mediation, and school- or community-based interventions. The results show that an effective youth safety program should not rely on fear-based messaging alone. It should combine risk recognition, privacy and account protection, misinformation evaluation, respectful interaction and bystander action, and habit regulation with help-seeking. Based on this synthesis, the article proposes a five-module education program, an implementation matrix, and design principles suitable for schools, youth centres, and community service settings. The article concludes that secondary-data program development can make a meaningful contribution when the output is a usable, evidence-informed intervention blueprint.

Keywords : Social media safety, Digital citizenship, Misinformation, Cyberbullying, Community education.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is now part of the ordinary social infrastructure of adolescence. Young people use networked platforms to sustain friendships, participate in peer culture, explore identity, locate information, follow public events, and increasingly seek health or learning content. Recent reviews continue to describe adolescent social media use as inseparable from development and well-being, but also as difficult to evaluate through simplistic either-or claims because social media can simultaneously support connection and expose young users to harm (Salehi et al., 2025; West et al., 2024). This dual character is one reason community educators need intervention models that are balanced, practical, and evidence-informed rather than alarmist.

The current policy and public conversation often oscillates between enthusiasm and moral panic. On the one hand, digital media can be leveraged for support seeking, civic participation, identity affirmation, and mental health outreach, particularly for young people who may feel isolated offline (Hamilton et al., 2024; Salehi et al., 2025). On the other hand, youth may encounter cyberbullying, misinformation, sexualized or violent content, privacy threats, compulsive use patterns, unhealthy comparison, and victimization in digital spaces (Bozzola et al., 2022; Peprah et al., 2024; Savoia et al., 2021). The challenge for educators is therefore not whether youth should be online, but how communities can strengthen the competencies required for safer and more constructive participation.

This challenge is especially relevant for journals oriented toward community service. Many community-service publications value intervention design, public education, empowerment, and practical transfer of knowledge. Yet many authors working from secondary data hesitate to contribute because they assume that library-based work cannot produce a community-service outcome. That assumption is too narrow. A library-based article can still fit a community-service orientation if its endpoint is not a purely conceptual discussion but a usable program architecture, training model, implementation guide, or educational toolkit grounded in current evidence. The present article adopts that position. It uses secondary literature to develop a youth education program on safe social media use that is suitable for schools, community centres, youth organizations, and short community training initiatives.

The article pursues three objectives. First, it identifies the major dimensions of youth social media risk and protection that recur across recent literature. Second, it translates those dimensions into a coherent competency framework for community education. Third, it proposes a five-module program that can be delivered in feasible, low-cost settings with limited resources. The central argument is that safe social media education should move beyond narrow internet-safety checklists. It should integrate critical literacy, digital citizenship, emotional self-regulation, bystander ethics, and practical security habits within a developmentally appropriate framework (Taibi et al., 2023; Valle et al., 2025).

The gap this article addresses is therefore specific. Recent reviews establish that youth social media safety is multidimensional, and recent intervention studies show that single components such as cyberbullying response or misinformation checking can be taught as discrete modules. What the literature still lacks is a compact, community-service-ready program architecture that integrates risk recognition, security skills, critical and algorithmic literacy, digital citizenship, and emotional self-regulation within one coherent and low-resource design.

The novelty of this article is twofold. First, it consolidates dispersed evidence into a single five-module competency model rather than treating each risk in isolation. Second, it demonstrates methodologically that a library-based study can yield a legitimate community-service output, namely a deployable and evidence-informed intervention blueprint, rather than a purely conceptual discussion. The contribution is thus both substantive, in the form of a transferable program for schools and community settings, and methodological, in showing how secondary-data scholarship can serve community-oriented journals.

Youth social media use as a double-edged environment. Recent literature increasingly avoids treating social media as a single exposure with a single effect. Instead, the strongest reviews portray adolescent social media use as context-dependent and developmentally embedded. West et al (2024) note that contradictory findings in the field often arise because adolescent well-being is shaped not only by frequency of use but also by motivation, platform affordances, quality of interaction, and the extent to which social media supports or frustrates autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Similarly, Liang et al. (2023) show through qualitative interviews that youth often experience social media as both connective and emotionally taxing at the same time.

This complexity matters for program design. If educators frame social media only as danger, they risk losing credibility with youth who use it for meaningful sociality, learning, and self-expression. If they frame it only as empowerment, they ignore genuine harms. Salehi et al. (2025) describe this tension as a double-edged sword and argue that effective interventions should address both risks and positive uses. Hamilton et al. (2024) extend this perspective by showing that digital media can also be used for mental health promotion, especially where online connection or information access fills gaps in offline support. A credible program therefore needs a balanced pedagogical starting point: social media is neither inherently good nor inherently bad, but an environment that amplifies both opportunity and vulnerability depending on how users engage with it and how surrounding adults support them.

Online risks, victimization, and problematic use. Several studies provide robust conceptual anchors for understanding youth online risk. Savoia et al. (2021) classify risky online situations into content risk, contact risk, and commercial risk. This typology remains useful because it moves beyond isolated incidents and helps educators explain that risks arise from what youth see, with whom they interact, and how digital systems or organizations exploit their attention and data. Bozzola et al. (2022) further show that the most frequently reported concerns around social media among children and youth involve mental-health-related

difficulties, sleep disturbance, problematic use, cyberbullying, body image pressure, sexting, and exposure to harmful content.

Problematic use deserves special conceptual care. The literature distinguishes intense use from problematic use. Boer et al. (2020) argue that intense use does not automatically indicate dysfunction because frequent online interaction may reflect ordinary adolescent social engagement. By contrast, problematic use is more strongly associated with diminished control, withdrawal-like distress, displacement of offline responsibilities, and lower well-being. Shannon et al. (2022) reinforce this distinction in a systematic review and meta-analysis, concluding that problematic social media use shows consistent associations with depression, anxiety, stress, and reduced well-being. Peprah et al. (2024) further demonstrate that problematic use can mediate the effects of cyberbullying victimization on psychosomatic complaints, indicating that harms are often interlinked rather than isolated.

Cyberbullying remains one of the most actionable areas for prevention. Classic work by Espelage & Hong (2017) remains relevant because it synthesizes intervention evidence and identifies recurring program components such as internet safety, responsible technology use, parental monitoring, school-home partnerships, and explicit anti-cyberbullying policy. More recent scholarship broadens this focus. Awad & Connors (2023) argue that youth need practical bystander strategies for social media-based microaggressions and cyberbullying, not only warnings about victimization. Hsieh & Gourneau (2023) also suggest that digital citizenship can function as a protective factor in the ecology of online victimization. Together, these studies imply that safety education should include not only self-protection but also peer-response ethics and collective responsibility.

Misinformation, social media literacy, and algorithmic awareness. A second major strand in the literature concerns information quality and critical evaluation. Diepeveen & Pinet (2022) argue that digital literacy responses to misinformation should not be reduced to simple fact-checking slogans. Rather, youth need support in accessing, analysing, evaluating, and creating content while also understanding the broader social dynamics through which misleading content circulates. Herrero-Diz et al. (2020) add that youth may share misleading content impulsively, especially when trust in peers or attractive content cues discourages verification. This reinforces the need for practical lessons in pause-and-check habits, source tracing, emotional triggers, and peer-sharing responsibility.

The literature on social media literacy has become much more sophisticated in the last few years. Wendt et al. (2023) validate a cross-country model of social media literacy that

responds specifically to insulting, hateful, or misleading online messages. Valle et al. (2025) propose a critical framework in which social media literacy includes not just operational skills but contextual, reflective, and critical capacities. Taibi et al. (2023) similarly stress that youth need more than platform familiarity; they need critical thinking, awareness of privacy implications, and reflection on the consequences of online action.

Algorithmic awareness is an increasingly important extension of literacy. Bell et al. (2023) show that youth often engage with personalized environments without understanding how platforms filter and prioritize content. When youth are unaware of personalization processes, they may misrecognize algorithmic curation as neutral reality. This is educationally significant because comparison pressure, polarization, and repeated exposure to misleading material are all intensified by the invisibility of recommendation systems. Any contemporary safety program that omits algorithms and personalization is therefore under-specified.

Digital citizenship, mediation, and intervention design

The notion of digital citizenship provides a bridge between risk prevention and positive participation. Recent studies conceptualize digital citizenship as a combination of responsible, ethical, competent, and participatory digital behaviour rather than as a narrow compliance checklist. Si et al. (2023) show that digital citizenship meaningfully shapes the relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Gutiérrez-Aguilar et al. (2024) argue that digital citizenship is strengthened when digital skills include navigation, curation, assessment, comprehension, creation, and interaction. Valdés-Cuervo et al. (2024) contribute psychometric support for adolescent digital citizenship as a measurable construct, which is useful when educators want to operationalize learning outcomes.

Another issue concerns how these competencies are learned. Schreurs & Vandenbosch (2024) show that youth' social media literacy develops in relation to parental and peer mediation, particularly around positivity bias and idealized content. Their findings imply that community programs should not isolate youth from their relational environment. Rather, the most feasible programs may pair youth sessions with short guidance for parents, teachers, or youth workers. Ananto & Ningsih (2023) also remind us that digital citizenship is not simply an individual trait; it is shaped by educational cultures and institutional expectations.

Finally, recent intervention work suggests that program development can be more precise than general awareness campaigns. Andersen et al. (2024) describe and pilot-test a school-based program aimed at increasing awareness and reflection about social media use. Their work is useful because it shows that social media interventions can be described as

teachable modules rather than diffuse messages. Taibi et al. (2023) also report a pilot social media literacy intervention linked to psychological well-being. These studies do not solve every implementation problem, but they provide support for a modular educational design. The remaining gap is the lack of a compact, community-service-friendly program architecture that integrates risk awareness, literacy, digital citizenship, and emotional self-management in one coherent model.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article uses a library-based qualitative design oriented toward program development. The study synthesized peer-reviewed literature to develop an evidence-informed educational program suitable for community implementation. Because the intended output was a usable intervention framework rather than a statistical estimate, the method combined focused literature mapping with conceptual synthesis.

Sources were identified through searches of Google Scholar and major publisher databases using combinations of the terms social media, youth, youth, online risk, social media literacy, digital citizenship, cyberbullying, misinformation, and intervention. Priority was given to peer-reviewed publications from 2023 to 2025 in order to reflect the current platform and evidence environment. A smaller set of foundational studies from 2020 to 2022 was retained where it supplied enduring conceptual anchors, such as the distinction between intense and problematic use, typologies of online risk, and established cyberbullying intervention components. Inclusion required that a study address youth social media use and carry a clear implication for education, prevention, literacy, or intervention design. Studies were excluded when they were remote from youth social media education, offered only broad technological commentary without educational relevance, or lacked any transferable practical implication.

Selection emphasized five strands that were directly relevant to program design: (1) youth social media use and well-being, (2) online risk and victimization, (3) misinformation and critical evaluation, (4) social media literacy, digital citizenship, and algorithmic awareness, and (5) intervention, mediation, or implementation studies. Sources that were too remote from youth social media education, lacked clear practical implications, or offered only broad technological commentary without educational relevance were excluded.

The analytical procedure had four stages. First, each source was coded for its primary contribution, such as risk framework, literacy construct, intervention evidence, or implementation insight. Second, recurring themes were grouped into higher-order categories

including risk domains, protective competencies, pedagogical principles, and delivery conditions. Third, these categories were translated into provisional educational modules. Fourth, the modules were refined against the literature to ensure that each one had a clear rationale, learning objective, and implementation pathway. To keep coding consistent, each source was first tagged with a single primary contribution before being grouped, and any source that could fit more than one strand was assigned to the strand matching its main empirical or conceptual claim. Table 1 records these assignments so that the link between each strand and the final program is transparent to the reader.

This method is best described as a structured library-based synthesis for intervention design. Its strength lies in turning a dispersed body of literature into a coherent community education model. Its limitation is that the proposed program is evidence-informed rather than field-validated. For that reason, the results section presents the program as a deployable blueprint that still requires future pilot testing, contextual adaptation, and evaluation in specific youth settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literature map and synthesis logic. The literature map in Table 1 shows how the reviewed studies contributed to the final program design. The table does not list every source in the bibliography; rather, it presents representative studies from the major analytic strands. As Table 1 shows, no single study covered all dimensions needed for a community education model. The final program therefore emerged from cross-strand synthesis rather than direct adoption of one existing curriculum.

Table 1. Representative literature strands and their contribution to the program model

Strand	Representative recent studies	Main insight for program design	Implication
Well-being and use patterns	West et al. (2024); Liang et al. (2023); Salehi et al. (2025)	Effects depend on motivations, interaction quality, and context rather than time alone.	Start from a balanced rather than fear-based framing.
Risk typologies	Savoia et al. (2021); Bozzola et al. (2022)	Risks cluster into content, contact, commercial, and psychosocial harms.	Teach youth to name risk types and match them to responses.
Problematic use	Boer et al. (2020); Shannon et al. (2022); Peprah et al. (2024)	Problematic use is distinct from intense but ordinary use and is linked to poorer well-being.	Include habit regulation, self-monitoring, and help-seeking.

Misinformation	Diepeveen & Pinet (2022); Herrero-Diz et al. (2020)	Youth need verification routines and awareness of emotional sharing triggers.	Teach pause-check-share decision rules.
Social media literacy	Wendt et al. (2023); Valle et al. (2024); Taibi et al. (2023)	Literacy includes critical, contextual, and participatory competencies.	Move beyond technical safety tips to critical literacy.
Algorithmic awareness	Bell et al. (2022)	Personalization affects what youth perceive as normal, true, and desirable.	Include algorithmic literacy within misinformation education.
Digital citizenship	Si et al. (2023); Valdes Cuervo et al. (2024); Gutierrez-Aguilar et al. (2024)	Responsible participation and online respect are measurable educational targets.	Frame safety as ethical participation, not just avoidance.
Intervention and mediation	Andersen et al. (2024); Schreurs & Vandenbosch (2023); Espelage & Hong (2016)	Programs work better when reflection, mediation, and practical components are combined.	Design modular sessions and involve adults where feasible.

Core risk domains and educational competencies. Across the reviewed literature, five risk-and-competency clusters recurred most consistently. First, youth need conceptual risk recognition. They should be able to identify what kind of problem they are facing: harmful content, manipulative contact, misleading information, social pressure, privacy threat, or compulsive use. Second, they need practical security skills, including password hygiene, privacy settings, and account protection. Third, they need critical literacy for content evaluation, misinformation recognition, and algorithmic awareness. Fourth, they need relational and civic competencies such as respectful communication, bystander action, and digital citizenship. Fifth, they need self-regulatory competencies related to emotional triggers, time management, and help-seeking. These findings are summarized in Table 2. The table is central to the logic of the article because it translates the literature into educational targets. Rather than presenting risk as a random list of online dangers, Table 2 organizes the evidence into a teachable relationship between problem domain, youth vulnerability, required competence, and pedagogical response.

Table 2. Core risk domains, competencies, and pedagogical responses synthesized from the reviewed literature.

Risk domain	Typical youth challenge	Competency needed	Pedagogical response
Content and exposure risk	Violence, sexualized content, idealized images, harmful trends	Risk recognition and critical interpretation	Scenario-based discussion; content

Risk domain	Typical youth challenge	Competency needed	Pedagogical response
Privacy and security risk	Oversharing, weak passwords, public profiles, phishing	Account protection and digital identity management	classification exercises Hands-on privacy-setting walk-through and safety checklist
Misinformation risk	Impulsive sharing, weak source evaluation, emotional contagion	Verification habits and critical news literacy	Pause-check-share routine; source tracing and evidence prompts
Relational and participation risk	Cyberbullying, microaggressions, exclusion, harmful commenting	Respectful communication, bystander action, digital citizenship	Role-play, response scripts, peer norms discussion
Problematic use and emotional strain	Compulsive checking, sleep disruption, comparison pressure, distress	Self-monitoring, emotional regulation, help-seeking	Habit diary, trigger mapping, support pathway planning

Proposed five-module program. The main product of this study is a five-module program for youth that can be delivered in five sessions of 60-90 minutes or adapted into a one-day workshop plus follow-up activities.

Table 3. Proposed five-module safe social media use education program for youth

Module	Objective	Core content	Suggested learning activity	Expected output
1. Understanding opportunities and risks	Recognize benefits and risks	Benefits; content/contact/commercial risk	Platform-use map	Risk-opportunity map
2. Privacy and digital identity	Strengthen safety habits	Passwords, 2FA, privacy settings, oversharing, phishing	Privacy audit	Safety action plan
3. Misinformation and algorithms	Evaluate content critically	Verification, source cues, emotional triggers, algorithms	Feed-check exercise	Verification card
4. Respectful communication and bystandership	Build peer-protective responses	Cyberbullying, reporting, support, civic participation	Bystander role-play	Peer response guide
5. Well-being and help-seeking	Support healthier habits	Problematic use, sleep, comparison, triggers, support	Trigger diary	Well-being plan

Each module is grounded in a distinct strand of the reviewed evidence. Module 1 follows from the well-being and use-pattern literature, which shows that effects depend on motivation, interaction quality, and context rather than screen time alone, so the program opens

with a balanced opportunity-and-risk framing rather than fear-based messaging (Liang et al., 2023; Salehi et al., 2025; West et al., 2024). Module 2 operationalizes the risk-typology and victimization literature, which identifies content, contact, and commercial risks alongside privacy threats, into concrete security and digital-identity skills (Bozzola et al., 2022; Savoia et al., 2021). Module 3 translates the misinformation, social media literacy, and algorithmic-awareness literature into verification routines and recognition of personalization effects, since youth often treat algorithmic curation as neutral reality (Bell et al., 2023; Diepeveen & Pinet, 2022; Herrero-Diz et al., 2020; Valle et al., 2025; Wendt et al., 2023). Module 4 draws on the digital-citizenship and bystander literature, which frames safety as ethical participation and peer responsibility rather than self-protection alone (Awad & Connors, 2023; Hsieh & Gourneau, 2023; Si et al., 2023). Module 5 reflects the problematic-use and well-being literature, which distinguishes intense from problematic use and links the latter to poorer well-being, motivating self-monitoring, emotional regulation, and help-seeking (Boer et al., 2020; Peprah et al., 2024; Shannon et al., 2022). In this way each module corresponds to an identifiable body of evidence rather than to a generic awareness theme.

Implementation conditions and delivery recommendations. The literature suggests that effective delivery depends on moderation, reflection, and contextual adaptation rather than information dumping. Andersen et al. (2024) show the value of structured awareness-building activities, while Schreurs & Vandenbosch (2024) indicate that mediation from parents and peers can reinforce literacy development. Espelage & Hong (2017) emphasize the enduring importance of school-home partnerships and explicit policy language. Taken together, these findings support a low-cost but relational implementation model: youth-focused sessions should remain central, but where possible they should be supplemented by one short adult briefing or handout so that parents, teachers, or youth workers can reinforce the same vocabulary and routines.

A practical implementation format in community settings would involve five sessions, each with four recurring parts: warm-up reflection, mini-input, applied exercise, and action commitment. The warm-up surfaces lived experience; the mini-input adds structured knowledge; the applied exercise translates ideas into behavior; and the action commitment ensures that each session ends with something the participant will try before the next meeting. This structure keeps the program accessible in resource-constrained settings while preserving educational depth.

The results also suggest that the program should not target only deficits. A strengths-based orientation is essential. Sage & Jackson (2022) draw on Positive Youth Development to show that interventions should build relational competence and support youth contribution, not merely suppress risky behaviour. Hamilton et al. (2024) similarly remind us that digital media can be leveraged for health-promoting purposes. Therefore, each module should acknowledge positive uses of social media alongside prevention content. In practice, this means teaching youth not only how to avoid harm, but also how to create healthier feeds, support peers, seek accurate information, and participate responsibly in digital communities.

This study contributes to the youth social media education literature in three ways. First, it demonstrates that a library-based article can produce a community-service-oriented output when the endpoint is a deployable program rather than a purely conceptual discussion. This is important for authors working with secondary data who want to publish in journals that prioritize public engagement, empowerment, or educational intervention. The present article does not claim empirical effectiveness; instead, it offers an evidence-informed intervention blueprint that can be adapted in practice and evaluated in future field studies.

Second, the article argues for a broader definition of social media safety. Many practical programs still overemphasize stranger danger or technical privacy settings in isolation. The literature reviewed here shows that youth safety now depends on a more integrated competency set that includes critical literacy, algorithmic awareness, bystander ethics, digital citizenship, and self-regulation. Valle et al. (2025) and Wendt et al. (2023) are especially important in this respect because they move the field from narrow media skills toward socially and critically informed literacy. Likewise, Schreurs & Vandenbosch (2024) and Si et al. (2023) show that psychological and relational dynamics matter in how youth interpret and experience social media.

Third, the article reinforces the idea that risk reduction should be paired with positive developmental goals. Youth do not approach social media only as consumers of danger; they approach it as a space of belonging, curiosity, identity work, and participation. Programs that ignore this are unlikely to sustain attention or trust. The reviewed literature supports a balanced message: youth should learn to recognize harm, but they should also learn how to use digital spaces in ways that foster connection, reflection, and well-being (Hamilton et al., 2024; Salehi et al., 2025). This is particularly relevant in community-service settings, where education is often short, practical, and relationship-based.

The proposed model also has operational value for educators. Because the five modules are cumulative and time-bounded, the program can be adapted for schools, after-school clubs, community centers, youth religious organizations, or local NGO activities. Module 2 can be expanded if the context has strong concern about privacy and cybercrime. Module 3 can be prioritized during misinformation crises or election periods. Module 4 can be emphasized in schools experiencing peer-conflict problems. Module 5 is particularly useful in settings where educators report concerns about sleep, distress, or compulsive checking. This modularity increases transferability.

At the same time, several limitations must be acknowledged. The article is based on secondary literature, not direct observation of one local youth population. Its recommendations therefore require contextual adaptation for language, platform preference, age, and cultural norms. In addition, some foundational studies retained in the article are older than the preferred three-year window. They were kept because certain conceptual distinctions - such as risk typologies, intense versus problematic use, and cyberbullying intervention components - remain influential and have not been rendered obsolete. Another limitation is that the article synthesizes literature across multiple countries, which strengthens breadth but may blur local specificity.

A further limitation concerns cross-cultural and cross-platform transfer. The reviewed evidence was produced largely in high-income and Western contexts, where platform ecosystems, regulatory regimes, parental mediation norms, and help-seeking cultures differ from those in many community settings where the program might be delivered. Norms around privacy, online disclosure, authority, and reporting are culturally variable, so activities such as bystander role-play or help-seeking planning may require adaptation rather than direct transfer. Platform variation adds a second layer: the dominant platforms, their affordances, and their recommendation systems shift quickly and differ by region and age group, which means that examples used in Modules 1 to 3 will date and should be localized at the point of delivery. We therefore present the program as a culturally adaptable template whose content, examples, and emphasis must be calibrated to the local platform environment and cultural context, and we recommend that future pilot work explicitly test this cross-cultural and cross-platform adaptability.

Future work should pilot the proposed program with actual youth groups and assess outcomes such as risk recognition, misinformation evaluation, privacy behavior, bystander confidence, and perceived self-regulation. Short pre-post measures could be combined with

reflective journals or focus groups. The more recent measurement literature on social media literacy and digital citizenship may be particularly useful for such validation work (Wendt et al., 2023; Valdes Cuervo et al., 2024). A second avenue for future research is implementation research: examining which delivery settings, facilitator profiles, and adult-involvement models produce the strongest uptake.

CONCLUSION

This article used library research to develop a safe social media use education program for youth. The literature shows that youth social media safety is multidimensional: it includes exposure to harmful content, privacy and security threats, misinformation, cyberbullying, problematic use, and broader psychosocial strain. At the same time, the same environment may support connection, participation, and access to information. Effective education must therefore be balanced, critical, and practical. The article's main result is a five-module community education program built from verified secondary literature. Its value lies in translating dispersed scholarship into an actionable design for schools and community-service contexts. The wider implication is methodological as well as practical: secondary-data scholarship can make a legitimate contribution to community-oriented journals when it produces a usable intervention model. The next step is empirical validation, but the present blueprint already offers a clear foundation for training, adaptation, and implementation.

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