Nonformal Education and Children's Social Resilience: Educational Strategies for Grooming Prevention

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Child grooming is a hidden form of violence that poses increasing risks in the digital era, especially for children with underdeveloped social and emotional competencies. This study aims to explore the strategic role of nonformal education in fostering children's social resilience as a preventive measure against grooming. Using a qualitative approach and a systematic literature review method, it analyzes 15 recent studies from 2020 to 2025 related to nonformal education, social resilience, and child protection. The findings indicate that nonformal education offers flexible, inclusive, and supportive learning environments that help children recognize, resist, and report harmful interactions. Key strategies include developing digital literacy, empowering educators and parents, promoting emotional learning, and reinforcing healthy peer relationships through informal and community-based settings. These learning spaces allow for greater contextual adaptation, active participation, and the building of trust between children and mentors or facilitators. Unlike traditional reliance on formal systems or parental monitoring, this approach places community-based learning at the forefront of prevention, emphasizing proactive, strength-based interventions. The study contributes new insights by positioning nonformal education as a holistic and sustainable strategy for protecting children from grooming in the digital age, while also highlighting its critical role in equipping children with life skills that foster resilience, safety, and well-being in increasingly complex social environments.

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Introduction

In today's digital era, grooming refers to a psychological manipulation process used by perpetrators to gain a child's trust before committing sexual exploitation (Collings, 2020). Grooming is classified under OCSEA (Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse), a form of child violence facilitated by digital technologies. According to data from the Online Information System for the Protection of Women and Children (Simfoni

PPA), there were 7,842 reported cases of child violence between January and June 2024 (Biro Hukum dan Humas Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak, 2024). In 2022, a grooming case involving three underage children by seven adults was reported in Bantul Regency (Erlin, 2022). In 2023, a 15-year-old child was found to have engaged in intimate acts with a 20-year-old adult (Pardede, 2023). In 2024, two major grooming cases emerged: the first involved a high school student in Gorontalo manipulated by a teacher who exploited the child's emotional vulnerability due to the loss of parents (Rahiem, 2024); the second involved a viral screenshot of sexually explicit conversations between an adult male and a minor (Polda Jawa Barat, 2024).

The increasing use of the internet and social media contributes significantly to the global rise in grooming cases (UNICEF, 2020). This phenomenon is receiving growing attention due to the prevalence of incidents occurring through digital communication platforms. Recent studies reveal that grooming behaviors, both online and offline, are spreading at an alarming rate. Drejer et al. (2023) found that in two-thirds of the cases studied, perpetrators used direct communication methods to approach their victims, including flattery, romantic language, and inappropriate personal questions. These tactics are intended to build emotional closeness and trust, increasing the child's vulnerability to abuse.

Chauviré-Geib and Fegert (2023) stress the serious impact of child sexual abuse facilitated by technology. Grooming is not merely the initial stage of sexual exploitation; it is a complex, layered process that can lead to profound psychological harm. Therefore, preventive measures require an in-depth understanding of grooming dynamics to develop effective interventions. Vale et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of addressing grooming within the broader framework of Technology-Facilitated Sexual Abuse (TFSA). This form of abuse targets children's psychological vulnerabilities through manipulation, necessitating preventive approaches that go beyond technical solutions to also address psychosocial factors.

Children with limited social and emotional skills are especially vulnerable, as they often struggle to recognize malicious intentions and maintain social boundaries (Álvarez-Guerrero et al., 2024). In this context, social resilience emerges as an effective preventive strategy by strengthening children's capacity to identify, reject, and report suspicious interactions. When developed early through emotional education, family support, and community involvement, social resilience can enhance children's protection against grooming risks (Calvete et al., 2022); Homoki, 2023).

Research on grooming behaviors and social resilience has gained considerable attention, particularly in the fields of psychological health and social behavior. Grooming is widely understood as both a product of social interaction and emotional regulation capabilities, playing a critical role in shaping how individuals respond to social pressure and build resilience. Social resilience refers to an individual's or community's ability to withstand and adapt to challenges stemming from social environments or crisis situations. Pai and Hwu (2024) highlight the role of social skills in fostering personal resilience. Strong social skills support the development of healthy interpersonal relationships, which in turn enhance adaptive capacity against stressors such as abuse.

In children, the link between grooming and the development of social resilience is especially pertinent. Misran et al. (2023) show that social support acts as a protective factor against psychological distress, ultimately reinforcing emotional resilience during adolescence. This finding underscores the importance of strong social connections in mitigating the adverse effects of manipulative situations like grooming. Strengthening social resilience provides a solid foundation for protecting children against grooming attempts. One proven approach is through educational programs that incorporate emotional intelligence and awareness of grooming tactics. These programs empower children to recognize inappropriate behavior and express discomfort assertively. Nonformal education serves as an effective platform for delivering such programs. Research by Islahi and Nasrin (2022) demonstrates that nonformal education is increasingly embraced by communities for its accessibility and empowering potential.

This paper aims to explore the strategic role of nonformal education in enhancing children's social resilience to prevent grooming, based on a systematic literature review. The interconnection between grooming, social resilience, and nonformal education must be comprehensively understood to ensure that preventive strategies are truly effective. Nonformal education, which encompasses various forms of learning outside the formal system, holds significant potential to build children's resilience by equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to recognize and respond to grooming threats. However, despite its potential,

there remains a research gap regarding the specific mechanisms through which nonformal education can strengthen social resilience as a sustainable and effective grooming prevention strategy.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to examine the role of nonformal learning communities in fostering children's social resilience as a preventive effort against grooming. SLR was chosen because it allows researchers to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize scholarly literature relevant to the research topic (Siddaway et al., 2019). The review process follows the guidelines developed by Kitchenham and Charters (2007), which include: (1) formulating clear research questions; (2) identifying and selecting relevant literature based on inclusion and exclusion criteria; (3) assessing the quality of sources; (4) extracting and synthesizing thematic data; and (5) reporting findings in a structured manner.

Data were collected from national and international journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 through several databases such as Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, and DOAJ. Keywords used in the search included: "children's social resilience," "child grooming," and "nonformal learning communities,"." Articles selected had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) relevance to the research focus; (2) use of qualitative or mixed-method approaches; and (3) peer-reviewed publication status.

Data analysis was conducted thematically by organizing the reviewed literature into key themes related to the role of nonformal education in building children's social resilience and grooming prevention strategies. This process aimed to identify patterns, relationships, and gaps in the existing literature to support the development of theoretical synthesis and argumentation. This method is considered appropriate as it provides a comprehensive and in-depth approach to the phenomenon under study, while also supporting the development of conceptual understanding and practical implications based on the literature findings (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015).

The research question guiding this study is: *How can non-formal education foster social resilience in children to prevent them from becoming victims of child grooming?* . The literature search was conducted using the Publish or Perish search engine, employing keywords such as *non-formal education programs*, *social resilience*, and *child grooming prevention*. The reviewed articles were limited to those published between 2020 and 2025. A total of 215 articles were initially identified. Of these, 210 were obtained through searches across various academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ, and ResearchGate. An additional 5 articles were retrieved through manual methods, including reference list checking and citation tracking of relevant sources.

After removing duplicate entries, the screening phase commenced, leaving 210 unique records. These were evaluated based on their titles and abstracts. At this stage, 165 articles were excluded for being either irrelevant to the research focus or lacking sufficient information. The remaining 65 articles proceeded to the eligibility phase, in which a thorough full-text review was conducted. From this process, 50 articles were excluded for various reasons, such as not directly addressing the issue of child grooming, presenting only theoretical discussions without empirical evidence, or lacking methodological clarity.

In the final inclusio stage, 15 articles were deemed to meet all the eligibility criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis. These selected studies provide valuable insights into efforts to prevent child grooming, particularly through the role of non-formal education in fostering social resilience.
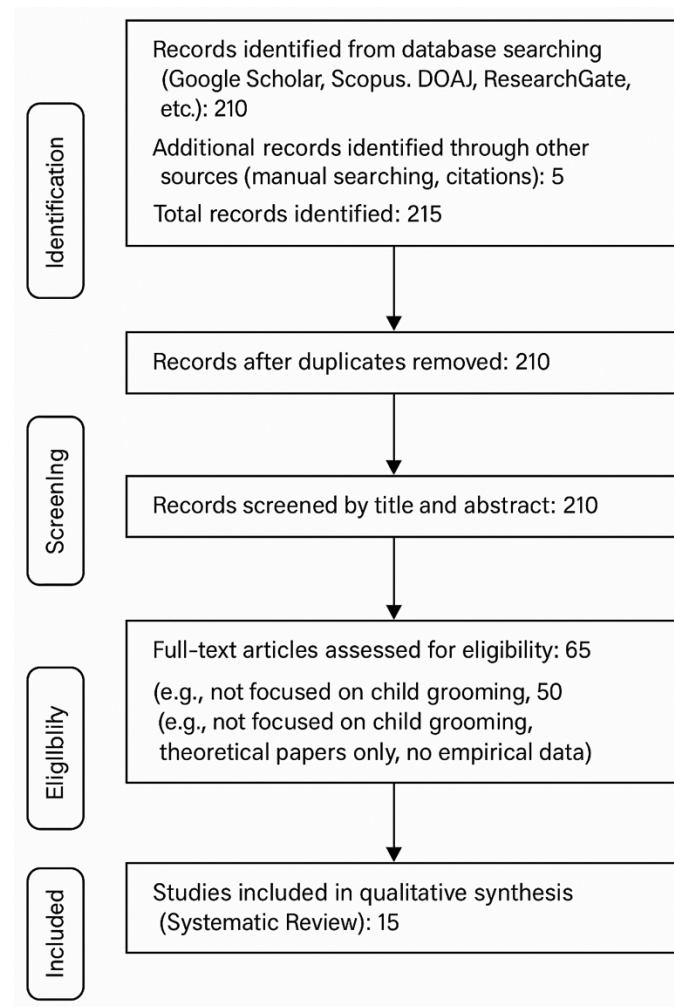
Picture 1. Screening Process of The Studies

Results and Discussions

Findings from the review indicate that nonformal education holds significant potential in fostering children's social resilience as a protective mechanism against grooming, particularly in the digital age where hidden risks are prevalent. Compared to top-down approaches such as parental control or formal institutional strategies, nonformal education offers a more inclusive, participatory, and contextualized approach. This makes nonformal education better suited to reach children in flexible social settings that align more closely with their everyday experiences.

Table 1. Research Findings: The Role of Non-Formal Education in Building Children's Social Resilience to Prevent Grooming

No	Article Titile and Author (Year)	Journal	Method	Result
1	*Efforts to Protect Children from Child Grooming through Digital Literacy* Indahri & Hermawan (2024)	Info Singkat	Qualitative	Nonformal digital literacy programs increase awareness and resilience in children, helping them recognize and resist online grooming attempts.
2	*The Opportunities of the Resilience Measurement in the Family and Child Protection System in Hungary*	Acta Medicinae Et Sociologica	Qualitative	Social resilience in children is strengthened through community-based family protection programs emphasizing nonformal educational support.

	Homoki (2023)		
3	*Pelatihan Peningkatan Kesadaran Orang Tua Pada Pendidikan Seksual Anak Usia Dini* Masykuroh & Qosyasih (2023)	BEMAS	Qualitative	Community-based training increased parents' understanding of child sexual education, contributing to grooming prevention at home.
4	*Pengasuhan Digital: Mengembangkan Nilai Sosial Anak Usia Dini* Maysara & Yuliani (2024)	Al-Muhadzab	Qualitative	Digital-based nonformal parenting fosters social values and child resilience against online threats.
5	*Enhancing Community Resilience… through Citizen Science-Oriented Non-Formal Education* Revilla et al. (2025)	CTU Journal of Innovation	Qualitative	Citizen science-based nonformal education enhances vulnerable children's engagement and social resilience in sustainability programs.
6	*Social Acceptability of Non-Formal Education in India* Islahi & Nasrin (2022)	European Journal of Education & Pedagogy	Qualitative	Nonformal education is socially accepted and provides supportive environments for underprivileged children vulnerable to exploitation.
7	*The Role of Non-formal Education in Social Development* Kaplan & Anustekin (2022)	IJSSIET	Qualitative	Nonformal education contributes to children's social integration and resilience building in marginalized communities.
8	*The Effect of a Community-Based Social Support Programme on the Resilience of Children from Vulnerable Families* Mampane (2020)	Journal of Migration and Health	Case Study (Qualitative)	The emotional and psychosocial support offered by social workers, volunteers, and peer interaction within the program fostered a safe and nurturing environment where children could build self-confidence, social skills, and coping mechanisms.
9	*Edutainment as a Strategy of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention* Aswadi et al. (2022)	Open Access Macedonian Journal of Medical Sciences	Literature Review (Qualitative)	Edutainment-based nonformal approaches enhance children's awareness and communication skills to identify and avoid abuse.
10	*A Preventive Intervention to Reduce Risk of Online Grooming Among Adolescents* Calvete et al. (2022)	Psychosocial Intervention	Qualitative (Mixed)	A psychosocial nonformal intervention helped adolescents develop self-awareness and resistance to digital grooming tactics.
11	*Transformation Prospect of a Non Disaster-Prepared-School in Child Safety Education* Widowati et al. (2020)	UNNES Journal of Public Health	Qualitative	Transforming schools into safety-focused nonformal institutions enhances children's awareness of risks including sexual exploitation.
12	*Factors Related to Violence Against Children in Families.* Hasritawati et al. (2022)	Bioscientia Medicina	Qualitative	Nonformal education in families contributes to preventing child abuse and improving children's social resilience.
13	Parents' awareness on online predators: Cyber grooming deterrence. Dorasamy et.al (2021)	The Qualitative Report	Qualitative	Although parents are concerned, their lack of specific knowledge about grooming often leaves adolescents exposed. Effective prevention requires empowering parents with digital literacy, refining school-based education, and implementing policy-level safeguards to improve early detection and intervention.
14	*Emotional Quotient to Improve Social Profile of Students* Leon (2023)	JETT	Qualitative	Emotional intelligence, taught through nonformal means, improves students' social functioning and resilience against harmful peer influence.

| 15 | *Youth Programs are Important Spaces for Emotional Learning* Larson & Rusk (2021) | Journal of Youth Development | Qualitative | Community-based youth programs foster emotional learning and resilience, reducing vulnerability to grooming and abuse. |

Based on the analysis of the selected articles, four key thematic findings have been identified and will be explained in the following sections.

Nonformal Learning Communities as Safe and Educational Spaces

The first finding emphasizes the strategic role of nonformal learning communities in creating safe, supportive, and educational environments for children crucial for preventing grooming practices. Nonformal learning spaces offer more flexibility than formal education systems, allowing children to freely express their feelings and experiences without the constraints of rigid structures (Larson & Rusk, 2021).These environments are essential in preventing grooming, which often begins with seemingly ordinary interpersonal interactions that gradually become manipulative and harmful(Milon-Flores & Cordeiro, 2022). Through nonformal learning communities, children can learn to differentiate between healthy and risky relationships, thereby increasing their awareness and protective capabilities.

Additionally, nonformal learning communities provide opportunities for children to develop essential social and emotional skills needed to build resilience, such as emotional regulation, empathy, and effective communication (Kaplan & Anustekin, 2022). These competencies are critical in strengthening children's defense mechanisms against manipulative situations, including grooming. According to the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies *(INEE, 2016)*, social-emotional skills developed in nonformal contexts are more adaptive, as the learning is experiential and context-based rather than theoretical.

Nonformal communities also facilitate the formation of social support networks that involve children, educators, parents, and community members. These networks play a vital role in building secure and responsive social bonds that meet children's needs (Revilla dkk., 2025). Within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979)**,** support from various environmental layers reinforces the microsystem and mesosystem, which are central to child development and secure child protection system.

A key strength of nonformal education lies in its ability to offer tailored programs that directly address child safety and sexual abuse tactics. For instance, community learning centers can develop specialized curricula that teach children about grooming techniques, such as flattery, compliments, and emotional bonding. This knowledge empowers children to recognize inappropriate behavior and respond appropriately. Nonformal learning communities act as both educational and social agents in developing social resilience, especially among children and adolescents. Through various activities, these communities aim to enhance individuals' capacity to face social and emotional challenges, foster solidarity, and reduce the influence of negative environmental factors such as grooming.

Enhancing Digital Literacy among Children and Their Caregivers as a Strategy for Prevention

The second finding highlights the importance of strengthening digital literacy for children and their companions (such as parents, teachers, or facilitators) as an effective preventive strategy in addressing the risks of grooming, particularly in today's digital era. Digital literacy encompasses not only technical skills in using digital devices but also critical awareness of content, interactions, and potential dangers that may arise in virtual spaces (Indahri & Hermawan, 2024). Modern grooming often takes place through digital platforms, where perpetrators employ subtle and manipulative techniques that are difficult for children to recognize—especially those who lack adequate digital literacy skills (UNICEF, 2019). Therefore, strengthening children's digital literacy aims to equip them with the ability to identify warning signs, understand the importance of privacy and personal data security, and develop a healthy sense of skepticism toward suspicious messages or relationships.

Companions such as parents, educators, and facilitators within non-formal learning communities play a crucial role in supporting the development of children's digital literacy. Digitally literate adults can provide active guidance and appropriate supervision, while also fostering open dialogue with children about their experiences and challenges in the digital world. Their involvement helps children feel safe to share, reduces

feelings of fear or shame, and enhances early detection of potential grooming threats. Recent studies also indicate that digital literacy programs integrated within non-formal education can enhance children's critical skills in using digital technology, while simultaneously strengthening their awareness of self-protection and digital ethics (Nurfazri et al., 2024). Parents' digital literacy plays a significant role in shaping how children access and engage with digital media (Maysara & Yuliani, 2024). For example, teaching children how to identify inappropriate behavior and establish healthy personal boundaries can significantly bolster their resilience against grooming risks (Islahi & Nasrin, 2022).

Critical thinking and media literacy are essential elements in reinforcing children's resilience against grooming practices. Educating children about digital safety, how to recognize grooming patterns, and the risks of sharing personal information online equips them with the capacity to make informed and wise decisions. The resilience developed through this process also supports the formation of adaptive coping mechanisms when facing social pressures, including potential exploitation (Larson & Rusk, 2021). In today's technology-driven era, education that integrates digital literacy is becoming increasingly relevant and urgent.

From the perspective of the social ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) digital literacy among children and their companions functions as part of the microsystem and mesosystem, which interact to create a safe and protective digital environment. Non-formal education, as a flexible learning space, offers optimal opportunities for the contextual and sustainable development of this capacity. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy for both children and their companions is a strategic and essential preventive measure in addressing the complex threats of online grooming. This effort contributes to the formation of social resilience, helping individuals avoid falling victim to grooming. Leon (2023) emphasizes that resilience plays a critical role in both educational success and personal development, as it influences how individuals cope with social adversity. Non-formal education that integrates digital literacy training can produce children who are not only technologically competent, but also critically aware and vigilant about potential risks in the digital world.

Empowering Educators and Parents as Key Agents in Child Protection Against Grooming

In addition to educating children, empowerment efforts can also involve parents and communities in building a shared understanding of the risks associated with child grooming. Parental involvement in such educational programs strengthens family social networks, as it allows for open discussions about safety issues and the exchange of information and resources. (Homoki, 2023) argues that resilience can be enhanced by increasing social capital and community education, ultimately reducing children's vulnerability to grooming threats. When parents and guardians are better informed and more vigilant, they are better equipped to protect their children from the manipulative tactics used by perpetrators.

This third finding emphasizes the critical importance of empowering educators and parents in their roles as primary protectors of children against grooming and other forms of sexual violence. Educators and parents do not serve merely as supervisors; they also act as companions who provide emotional support and continuous education about the dangers of grooming and strategies for prevention. This empowerment includes training in digital literacy skills, recognizing signs of grooming, and developing effective communication strategies with children. According to a study by Dorasamy et al. (2021) educators and parents who possess a strong understanding of digital risks and sexual violence are more likely to proactively identify suspicious behaviors and respond appropriately, thereby reducing the likelihood of child exploitation.

Empowering educators and parents within the context of non-formal education can strengthen a collaborative and systemic child protection network. As a result, children are not only protected individually by their closest caregivers, but also supported within a broader social ecosystem that is responsive and alert to grooming threats. This empowerment also enhances parents' and educators' awareness of the importance of building open relationships with children, providing a safe space where children feel comfortable reporting negative experiences or discomfort related to interactions with others, including those occurring in digital environments. This model of open communication is a key factor in fostering children's social resilience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

It is also essential that educators and parents are trained to engage in open discussions about sexuality and child abuse issues that are often considered taboo. Without familiarity, this discomfort can hinder the development of open dialogue, which is vital for prevention efforts. Research has shown that engaging and age-appropriate methods such as edutainment can effectively increase children's knowledge of sexual abuse, while also fostering self-protective attitudes and behaviors that are critical for their safety (Aswadi et al., 2022).

Despite the emphasis on empowerment, few studies evaluate long-term outcomes of resilience training. Non-formal education has the advantage of reaching parents and educators directly through workshops, training sessions, and ongoing mentoring, allowing for empowerment efforts that are contextual and adaptive to local needs and conditions. Identifying the role of social support from parents and community structures can facilitate discussions around health and sexual abuse, thereby strengthening children's ability to protect themselves (Hasritawati dkk., 2022).

All these efforts to empower educators and parents contribute to building children's social resilience, as they help foster collective awareness and enhance children's self-protection skills. Mentorship programs, in which trusted adults actively build relationships with children also play a crucial role in shaping resilience, by modeling healthy interactions and creating safe spaces for dialogue about situations that may lead to grooming.

Building Healthy Social Relationships as a Foundation for Children's Social Resilience Against Grooming

The fourth finding highlights the importance of building and strengthening healthy social relationships as a fundamental foundation for enhancing children's social resilience against the risks of grooming and sexual violence. Healthy social relationships—whether with peers, family members, or the broader social environment—serve as crucial sources of emotional support and protection for children's psychological development Calvete et al., 2022).According to Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecology Theory (1979) children's interactions across multiple environmental systems—microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem—greatly influence their ability to cope with challenges. Positive social relationships help children feel accepted, valued, and secure, which in turn enhances their ability to recognize and avoid risky situations (Mary & Antony, 2022). Non-formal education plays a significant role in creating social contexts that foster such relationships. Through learning community activities, children not only acquire knowledge and skills but also experience healthy and supportive social interactions. These conditions help strengthen children's social networks and improve their capacity to form and maintain safe, positive relationships.

Recent literature also emphasizes that healthy social relationships can strengthen children's resilience mechanisms by enhancing self-confidence, communication skills, and empathy (Kaplan & Anustekin, 2022). These abilities are essential not only for minimizing the traumatic impact of grooming attempts but also for preparing children to become more emotionally resilient. Furthermore, healthy social interactions facilitate the exchange of information and mutual support among children and within the broader community, serving as an early warning system to identify and prevent potential dangers (Mampane, 2020) Thus, strengthening healthy social relationships benefits not only the individual protection of children but also reinforces the social ecosystem around them. Overall, fostering and strengthening healthy social relationships through non-formal education represents an effective strategy for enhancing children's social resilience and stands as a key pillar in the preventive efforts against grooming and sexual violence.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of grooming against children necessitates a comprehensive and sustainable preventive approach. Based on the findings of this literature review, non-formal education plays a pivotal role in strengthening children's social resilience by providing supportive, safe, and empowering learning communities, empowerment initiatives, and targeted training programs. Non-formal education fosters social resilience through approaches such as strength-based education, enhancement of digital literacy, promotion of healthy social relationships, and active engagement of parents and the broader community. These strategies have proven effective in building children's capacity to recognize, confront, and prevent potentially grooming-related situations.

This study is limited to literature published between 2020–2025 and calls for empirical research to test the proposed framework. Future studies should explore the effectiveness of non-formal education models across diverse sociocultural contexts and assess their long-term impact on children's resilience against grooming. From a policy perspective, integrating non-formal education programs into national child protection strategies, allocating resources for parental and community engagement, and promoting cross-sectoral collaboration may significantly enhance preventive efforts against child grooming. Such initiatives will ensure that prevention is not only reactive but also proactive, inclusive, and sustainable.

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