

Adlerian-Based Strategies to Support Students' Self-Efficacy and Higher Education Readiness: A Narrative Review

ABSTRACT


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Higher education institutions play a central role in fostering sustainable and inclusive learning environments, yet many students struggle during the transition from school to university due to increased academic expectations, emotional strain, and social adjustment challenges. Self-efficacy has been widely recognized as a key psychological resource that supports students' confidence, motivation, and persistence throughout this transition. However, despite growing interest in counselling interventions that enhance self-efficacy, limited attention has been given to the contribution of Adlerian principles within educational contexts. This gap restricts the integration of theoretically grounded, humanistic approaches in supporting student readiness and long-term academic sustainability. This narrative review therefore aims to synthesize existing literature on Adlerian concepts applied to strengthen students' self-efficacy in educational settings. A total of seven empirical and conceptual studies were analyzed. These studies were published between 2014 and 2025 and were conducted across diverse geographical contexts, including Iran, Indonesia, South Korea, Pakistan, and the United States. Five core themes emerged: (i) encouragement as a fundamental mechanism, (ii) reducing inferiority feelings and fostering courage, (iii) promoting social interest and interpersonal connection, (iv) purposeful behaviour and goal setting, and (v) recognizing personal strengths to build a positive self-concept. Collectively, these themes demonstrate Adlerian counselling's capacity to enhance students' cognitive, emotional, and motivational functioning, all of which underpin academic self-efficacy. The review recommends incorporating Adlerian-informed strategies into educational counselling, transition programs, and student support initiatives to strengthen learners' confidence, resilience, and adaptability which are the key components for sustainable success in higher education.

Keywords: Adlerian counselling, academic self-efficacy, school-to-university transition, encouragement, narrative review

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions are the significant key agents for sustainability development, as this is where the future generation leaders are educated, empowered and being prepared (Michael et al., 2020). In supporting the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), higher education helps in shaping responsible mindset of these future leaders, producing research and actions that support goals like reducing poverty, promoting health, gender equality, consumption responsibility and protecting the environment (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). As a potential driver of sustainability and the SDGs, the earliest factor to consider is how well students adapt to the transition from school-based education into higher educational learning as their ability to benefits from these efforts depends on this adjustment.

Püttmann and Gessner (2023) elaborate students' perspectives about the challenges in their transition to higher education such as emotional barriers, lack of academic preparedness, economic difficulties and family background. The stress, anxiety, fear and confusion are associated with the concerns of academic expectation, hazing, social and environmental adjustments (Dias & Sá, 2014; Zakaria & Warren, 2016). During this shift, students need to prepare and manage their living responsibility, adjusting to more independent learning and social adjustment which are the contributing factors to their mental health (Thompson et al., 2021; Zakaria et al., 2017). The failure of adapting to this shift might heightened risk of mental health difficulties. In relation to this, students' self-belief or confidence in their competence would be a help for a smoother transition in their adaptation period (Püttmann and Gessner, 2023).

The self-belief in this context is closely related to the concept of self-efficacy which was defined by Bandura (1997) as belief in one's capability to execute actions toward desired goals. It is widely acknowledged that self-efficacy is one of the psychological constructs that influences student's learning journeys (Pajares, 1996). Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (2023) outlines four transition stages to higher education going through by students, and it highlights the role of self-efficacy during these stages. Self-efficacy helps students to prepare confidently to enter higher education in pre-transition stage; managing emotional and behavioural response to stress and uncertainty in shock stage; adapting to new academic, social and personal demands in adjustment stage; and potentially supporting long-term development and continued growth during progression stage.

Recent literature examines the role of self-efficacy in education as the potential determinant of students' learning outcomes. For instance, academic self-efficacy has been found to mediate the relationship between study habit and procrastination (Svardal et al., 2022); predictor to academic achievement (Fakhrou & Habib, 2021); predicts critical thinking (Vachova et al., 2023) and positively correlate with academic competitiveness and cognitive flexibility (Zayed, 2024). Likewise, both academic self-efficacy and general self-efficacy, along with life satisfaction were shown to predict student's perception of a happy school (Döş, 2023). Conversely, low levels of self-efficacy among students have been associated with elevated risk of school dropout (Pedditzi, 2024). Therefore, Meng and Zhang (2023) suggested that higher education institution should have the initiatives in helping the students feel supported, connected and belong to academic community that positively associated with academic self-efficacy and academic outcomes.

Universities should adopt and design innovative, structures, interactive activities that enhance students' responsibility and autonomy in order to help them enhancing their self-efficacy in learning by targeting both psychological and academic outcomes (Yang et al., 2025). In strengthening students' belief in their academic capabilities, guidance and counselling can be the important mechanisms. According to Mathwasa and Sibanda (2020), guidance and counselling enhance students' self-efficacy by fostering self-awareness, emotional stability and confidence, which in turn their decision making, interpersonal skills, motivation, managing academic and personal challenges, and adaptability toward future demands (Carnes-Holt et al., 2016; Subarimaniyam et al., 2020; Warren et al., 2012; Zakaria et al., 2020). Information services, guidance group and counselling group services when infiltrated using varied

methods and tailored to student's characteristics and needs are among the effective counselling approaches for increasing student's academic self-efficacy (Wahid & Neviyarni, 2024; Zakaria et al., 2022).

The effectiveness of counselling approaches in enhancing self-efficacy has been consistently demonstrated across different domain in learning. Lee et al. (2025) reported a significance improvement in academic self-efficacy and learning motivation among students after group counselling intervention, while Rismawan and Gading (2021) found that behavioural group counselling improve career decision making self-efficacy by modifying their dysfunctional thoughts. While counselling in general has been shown to enhance self-efficacy of students, understanding this matter through the lens of relevant counselling theories would be crucial for providing deeper insight into the underlying processes and mechanisms of change.

Sweeney (2009) described self-efficacy as the ability to reason, solve problems and cope effectively with life tasks, reflecting the Adlerian concepts of self-worth, self-evaluation and encouragement through recognition of abilities, value-based decision-making, and meaningful contribution to others. Adlerian theory posits that human beings are inherently social beings who needs others to survive (Gehart, 2016). This social interest reflects not only a sense of belonging among community, but also the willingness to contribute meaningfully to others. However, Adler (1927) proposed that feelings of inferiority can interfere with an individual's striving for growth and the successful fulfilment of life tasks. Thus, Adlerian principles of social interest, encouragement and purposeful living align closely with the development of self-efficacy, as they emphasize positive self-evaluation through connection with others and goal-directed action. To ensure conceptual clarity, several key Adlerian constructs applied in this review are operationally defined as follow:

Encouragement refers to inspiring or helping others toward a conviction that they can work on finding solutions and that they can cope with any predicament (Sweeney, 2009).

Social Interest refers to a person subjectively experiencing a sense that he or she has something in common with other people, is part of community, and benefits from cooperating with others in the community (Gehart, 2016).

Purposeful behaviour refers to teleological and goal-oriented behaviour, where people strive toward meaningful activity, success and achievement (Gehart, 2016).

Inferiority feelings refer to an individual's belief that they are unable to meet standards set by themselves or others, arising from inherent limitations and serving as the basis for striving toward superiority and a sense of completeness (Sipon & Hussin, 2022).

There are numerous studies on Adlerian concepts in educational environment such as (Badejo & Bola, 2020; Bilqis, 2021; Kim & Lee, 2025). These studies discuss the implication of Adlerian principles in enhancing learning process and outcomes among students. Meanwhile, self-efficacy study also has been popular topic on literature since before and recent, especially on its impact on student's academic (Basileo et al., 2024; Dadandi, 2023; Hamann et al., 2020; Manea et al., 2024). In light of this, numerous intervention-based studies on self-efficacy, both in educational settings and other fields, have been grounded in counselling theories. Existing literature demonstrates range of counselling approaches including Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, career counselling (Stipanovic et al., 2017; Türk & Katmer, 2019; Yu et al., 2024) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) (Budiman et al., 2020; Kaplan et al., 2023; Zeidi et al., 2020) are widely applied in improving one's self-efficacy. These approaches primarily strengthen self-efficacy through cognitive structuring, goal clarification, skills development and motivational support.

However, there has been relatively little interest to apply Adlerian theory as the theoretical framework for enhancing self-efficacy, particularly within educational context. This imbalance in literature highlights a need for greater attention to Adlerian principles, particularly given its emphasis on social

interest, encouragement and purposeful living in enhancing students believe in their capabilities. Given the potential of Adlerian concepts in enhancing self-efficacy, and the limited empirical evidence focusing on this matter, it becomes necessary to synthesize previous literature that have explored Adlerian-based intervention or principles on self-efficacy.

Therefore, this review adopts a theory-building narrative synthesis approach based on small and heterogeneous body of literature (n=7) aimed to explore and discuss the available studies on how Adlerian principles could address students' self-efficacy in educational contexts. This paper focused on specific interventions or techniques grounded in Adlerian principles that are designed to enhance student's self-efficacy. Thus, it provides synthesis of relevant concepts and strategies, and their potential impact on students' belief on their capabilities, particularly supporting their transition to higher education. Accordingly, this review potentially offers useful insights for counsellors in designing and facilitating theory-driven interventions that nurture student's self-efficacy, which lead to their adjustment and foster their academic outcomes. Therefore, the aim is not to make general conclusions, but to provide a conceptual understanding of how Adlerian principles may support students' self-efficacy and to suggest practical strategies for educational support.

Research objectives to guide this review are as follow:

1. RO1: To summarize empirical and conceptual studies that apply Adlerian principles to self-efficacy in educational settings.
2. RO2: To identify key Adlerian intervention features that support students during educational transitions.

Based on these objectives, the following research question is derived:

1. RQ1: What Adlerian concepts, principles and techniques have been identified in the literature as contributing to the enhancement of self-efficacy in educational contexts?

2. Methodology

In addressing the research question, this study employed a narrative review approach to synthesize and discuss the related existing evidence. Sukhera (2022) defines narrative review as a form of knowledge synthesis that provide summary, interpretation and critique of findings from broad range of studies in understanding a topic. Unlike systematic review that follow rigid protocol and focus on narrow research questions, narrative review allows critical interpretation and inclusion of diverse study type with more flexible, non-systematic approach.

To justify the selection of narrative review methods for this study, explanation on the strengths and weaknesses was reasonable, as described by Bourhis (2018). Bourhis explains that narrative review's strength lies on its flexibility enabling the researcher to combine different types of research, synthesizing findings in-depth, and placed the studies in wider historical and theoretical context. This approach is suitable for exploration of idea development and correlating various perspectives on the topic. However, narrative review has its own limitation, including vulnerability toward type I and type II in individual study, the absence of method to reduce error, combined with heavy reliance on researcher's interpretation which may increase subjectivity and reduce reproducibility. Therefore, even though narrative review gives more in-depth understanding on theory, the conclusion should be interpreted cautiously due to the potential inconsistencies within the underlying empirical evidence.

2.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Guided by Adlerian theory in counselling, the first step in selecting the relevant studies involved defining the theoretical foundation and specifying the research question, which focused on identifying the Adlerian concepts and techniques applied to enhance self-efficacy. In determining the required

characteristics of primary studies, inclusion and exclusion criteria was decided to ensure only relevant studies included and answer the research question. Table 1 outlines the inclusion and exclusion criteria established for selecting studies. These criteria help in guiding the review process in identifying the relevant literature that applied Adlerian principles within its intervention or discussion related to self-efficacy in educational context.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Type of study	Peer-reviewed journal articles include empirical or theoretical.	Non-scholarly sources or non-peer-reviewed materials and grey literature (eg., theses, reports, conference paper).
Focus area	Studies that discuss or examined self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, learning related self-efficacy or concepts theoretically linked to self-efficacy within Adlerian framework.	Articles unrelated to self-efficacy or not conceptually connected to it.
Educational context	Studies conducted in educational, school, university, training context, or those involving students.	Studies not involving students' population or non-educational settings.
Theoretical relevance	Studies that explicitly or implicitly applied Adlerian theory, Adlerian counselling principles or concepts (including theoretical, conceptual, or intervention-based work).	Studies grounded in other counselling or psychological frameworks, without reference to Adlerian concepts.
Language	Written and published in English.	Written and published in other than English languages.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of how Adlerian principles contribute to the development of self-efficacy in educational settings, this review included both empirical studies and conceptual papers. The limited number of empirical investigations applying Adlerian approaches directly to self-efficacy necessitated the inclusion of theoretical literature to strengthen the review's foundational perspective. Conceptual papers offered essential insights into core Adlerian principles such as encouragement, social interest, and purposeful behaviour, that help explain the mechanisms through which self-efficacy may be enhanced, leading to better transition to higher educational level. Including both types of literature allowed for a richer and more integrated synthesis of Adlerian concepts relevant to education.

2.2. Search strategies and selection

Retrieving a sample of potentially relevant literature involves choosing the right keywords and effective search strings that could answer the research questions and match the research purpose (Tranfield et al., 2003). The literature search was conducted in two stages. An initial search was carried out between August and September 2025, followed by an updated search conducted up to 20 January 2026 to capture potential newly published and previously missed studies. The literature search used a combination of keywords representing the main constructs for this review, including "Adler", "Adlerian Counselling", "Self-efficacy", "Academic self-efficacy", and "education". Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to combine selected keywords across structured online database using Scopus, SAGE and ERIC Journal. Additional databases were initially explored; however, no further studies meeting the specific focus on Adlerian-based strategies and self-efficacy outcomes in educational context were identified. In addition, a manual search was also conducted using Google Scholar to identify studies that might not be indexed in major databases, and to ensure the comprehensive coverage of potential studies. Database-specific search strings were adapted according to each platform's indexing system and are presented in Appendix A.

The search was limited to studies published between 2010 and 2026. This timeframe was selected to capture contemporary applications of Adlerian’s counselling interventions and self-efficacy within educational contexts, while avoiding very early studies that may not reflect current theoretical developments and educational practices. Only peer-reviewed articles, written and published in English were included for this review. Following the database and manual searches, records were screened at the title and abstract level to evaluate its relevancy for this review. Then only the full-text screening was conducted to select the potential study based on pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. These processes lead to final seven studies that identified as relevant studies to answer the research question. Recent study (2025) included in this review were published in peer-reviewed journals. Therefore, its findings are considered credible, although they are interpreted with appropriate caution due to their regency. The study selection process is illustrated in Figure 1, a PRISMA-style flow diagram, detailing the identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion stages.

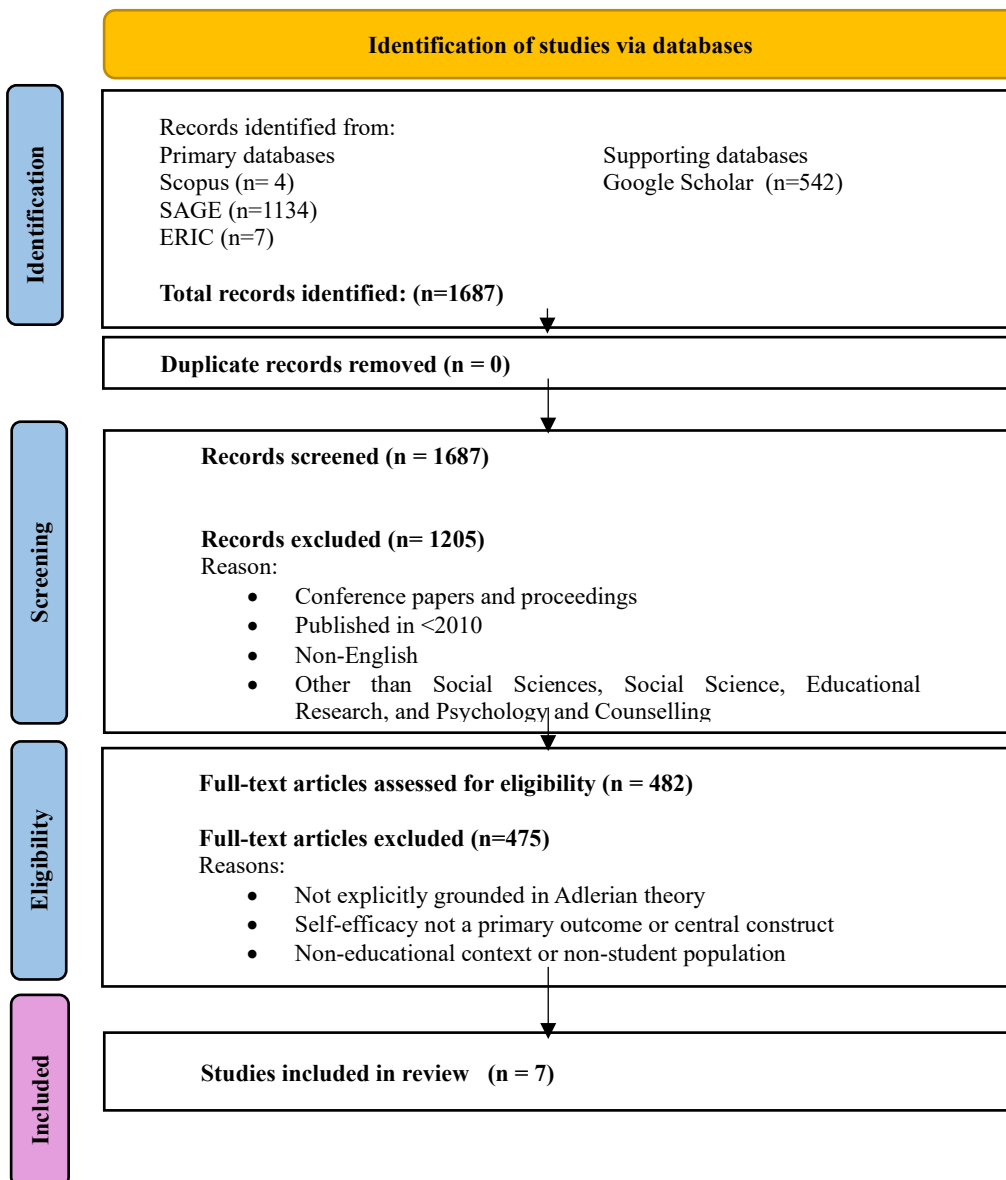


Figure 1. PRISMA-Style Flow Diagram of Study Selection

2.3. Quality appraisal of empirical studies

A brief methodological appraisal was conducted for the empirical studies included in this review. It is to describe the design characteristics and to assess overall study quality. The appraisal focused on the study design, sample size, intervention type and outcome measures that related to self-efficacy. As this study is a narrative review, no formal risk-of-bias scoring is applied. Table 2 outlines the methodological characteristics and descriptive quality appraisal of included empirical studies with the quality rating for each study.

Table 2. Methodological Characteristics and Descriptive Quality Appraisal of Included Empirical Studies

Author, Year	Study Design	Sample Size	Methodological Notes	Quality Rating
Farahbakhsh et al. (2014)	Quasi-experimental, pre-test-post-test with control group (waiting list).	n = 28 teachers.	Convenience sampling; no randomisation at school level; small sample size; outcomes measured indirectly via teacher intervention.	★★
Lee et al. (2025)	Randomized controlled trial with pre-test, post-test, and follow-up (repeated-measures design).	n = 40 university students.	Conducted at a single university; participants were students receiving academic warnings; relatively small sample size; follow-up period limited to one post-intervention assessment.	★★★
Fatima & Ashraf (2018)	Correlational research design with mediation analysis.	n = 440 undergraduate and graduate students.	Cross-sectional design; purposive sampling; reliance on self-report questionnaires; mediation tested using PROCESS macro.	★★
Dortaj & Sohrabi (2020)	Semi-experimental (quasi-experimental) pre-test-post-test design with control group.	n = 60 female high school students.	Multi-stage cluster sampling; participants drawn from a single public high school in Tehran and from female group; outcomes measured at pre-test and post-test only; no follow-up assessment conducted.	★★
Sundah (2019)	Counselling action research (classroom) conducted in iterative stages (planning, action, observation, reflection).	n = 8 middle school students.	Very small sample size; single-school setting; absence of control or comparison group; qualitative descriptive analysis used; outcomes assessed within the action research framework.	★
Safara et. al., (2020)	Quasi-experimental two-group pre-test-post-test design (experimental and control groups).	n = 30 male high school students.	Cluster random sampling from a single high school; participants limited to male students; outcomes assessed at pre-test and post-test only; no follow-up assessment reported.	★★

Note: ★★★=strong (e.g., randomized or well-controlled design); ★★=moderate (e.g., quasi-experimental); ★= limited (e.g., small-scale study)

The methodological appraisal indicates considerable variation in study designs, sample sizes and outcome measures across the empirical studies included in this review. While one randomized controlled trial demonstrated stronger methodological rigor, most studies employed quasi-experimental or correlational designs with relatively small or context-specific samples and limited follow-up assessments. A simple quality appraisal rating was conducted by categorising the included studies as

strong (★★★), moderate (★★) or limited (★) based on the research design, sampling size, and methodological rigor. This indicator informed the interpretation of the findings, with greater emphasis placed on studies with stronger methodological design. Despite its constraints, all empirical studies consistently reported positive associations between Adlerian-based strategies and students' self-efficacy outcomes. In addition to the empirical evidence, one conceptual paper was included to elucidate the theoretical relevance of Adlerian principles such as encouragement, social interest, and purposeful behaviour in supporting the development of self-efficacy among students.

2.4. Data synthesis

To answer the research question related to the identification of counselling strategies based on Adlerian theory in increasing students' self-efficacy, this review uses a combination of deductive and inductive thematic analysis. Deductive analysis is carried out by developing initial categories based on key concepts in Adlerian Therapy such as encouragement, purposeful behaviour and striving for superiority, in line with the deductive analysis defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Simultaneously, inductive thematic analysis allows data-driven codes and themes to emerge within the categories, identifying specific counselling strategies or forms of intervention utilized in selected studies. The initial coding was performed by the main author and iteratively refined through two rounds of review. Codes were then grouped into broader categories and discussed with co-authors in three meetings to reach agreement. Through this iterative process, the final themes were developed and agreed upon the research team in order to enhance clarity and theoretical coherent. The identified themes are then synthesized narratively to explain the role of Adlerian approaches in supporting the increase in students' self-efficacy, specifically in helping them adapt and make successful transitions to higher education.

In brief, the screening and extracting data processes was mainly done by the main author. The title and abstract primarily screened based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, followed by full-text evaluation of the selected studies. To improve the reliability and minimize potential selection-biased, screening decisions and extracted data were reviewed and discussed further with the co-authors. Any discrepancies and uncertainties were dissolved through discussion until a consensus was reached. Besides that, the coding and thematic synthesis were refined iteratively through collaborative review from research team to ensure consistency and theory alignment.

Artificial Intelligence-assisted tools were used for this review to support language editing and clarity during manuscript preparation. It did not contribute to the research design, data selection, or analysis. All conceptual development, inclusion and exclusion decision, data interpretation, synthesis of findings and final content decisions were made by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.

3. Findings

3.1. Background of the Studies

Seven selected studies were published between 2014 and 2025, representing a decade of research integrating Adlerian principles in educational settings. These studies were conducted across diverse geographical contexts, including Indonesia, Iran, South Korea, Turkey, and Western regions. The samples primarily comprised middle school, high school, and university students, with study designs ranging from empirical intervention programmes to correlational research and conceptual analyses. This variation in publication year, country, and population provides diverse evidence base for synthesising Adlerian concepts relevant to the enhancement of self-efficacy in education. The summary of synthesis for this review is presented in Table 3.

3.2 Themes Derived from The Reviewed Literature

The Adlerian's principles, concepts and techniques that were identified from the selected studies were concluded in Table 3. The table comprises the Adlerian's concepts that were discussed and applied in the studies, that were potentially contribute to self-efficacy enhancement of students particularly in academic context. The findings of the literature synthesis outlined five main themes to answer the research questions, namely: (i) encouragement as the core mechanism for strengthening self-efficacy, (ii) overcoming inferiority and developing courage, (iii) social interest and interpersonal connection in building self-efficacy, (iv) purposeful behaviour and goal setting as drivers of self-efficacy development, (v) recognising strengths and positive self-concept development. These five themes were concluded based on the Adlerian elements that was implemented or discussed in their studies. Figure 2 illustrates the themes of Adlerian concepts related to self-efficacy enhancement emerged from the selected studies.

Figure 2. Thematic Synthesis of Adlerian Concepts Related to Self-Efficacy Enhancement

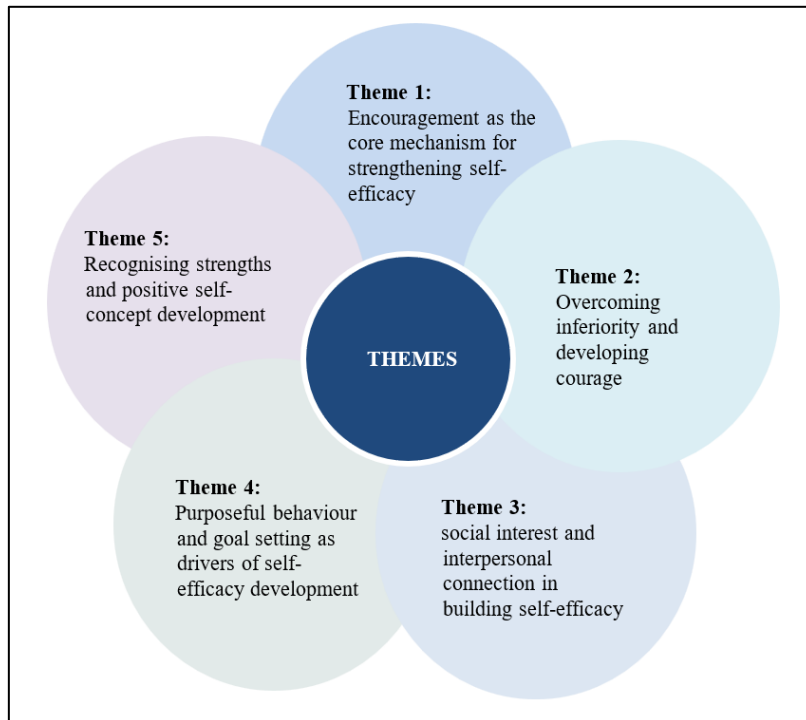


Table 3. Summary of Study Background and Adlerian Concepts and Techniques Used

Author, year, country	Study Design	Sample Size	Population	Type of Intervention	Adlerian Principles, Techniques, or Concepts Identified / Findings
Farahbakhsh et al. (2014) Iran	Quasi-experimental, pre-test–post-test with control group (waiting list).	n = 28 Teachers (14 experimental, 14 control); outcomes measured on students.	Middle school teachers (intervention) and students experiencing academic failure.	Teacher’s instruction – Teacher attending several training sessions, learned and practiced Adlerian-based encouragement methods for interacting students with academic failure.	– Train teachers on Adlerian encouragement techniques to replace criticism with positive reinforcement, strengthen social interest, and build supportive teacher-student relationships. – Improvements in students’ academic self-efficacy, and other construct such as motivation, emotional regulation and planning.
Lee et al. (2025) Korea	Randomized controlled trial with pre-test, post-test, and follow-up (repeated-measures design).	n = 40 university students (Experimental = 20; Control = 20).	University students under academic warning (South Korea).	Group counselling program – 8-week (120 minutes per session) group counselling program grounded in Adlerian Individual Psychology and Positive Psychology principles.	– The program builds on Adlerian’s principle, emphasizing social interest, encouragement, and purposeful living . – Integrated Adlerian concepts and techniques: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement and social interest (foster belonging and motivation) • Exploration of inferiority and superiority complexes (to help students reframe feelings of failure) • Lifestyle assessment and early recollections (to increase self-awareness and insight into private logic) • Goal setting, “as if” techniques, and strength-based activities (to enhance purpose and responsibility) • Mutual support and community building (contribution to others) – Improved student’s academic self-efficacy, and other construct (self-determined learning motivation, GPA).
Safara et al. (2020) Iran	Quasi-experimental two-group pre-test-post-test design (experimental	n = 30 high school students; Experimental = 15, Control = 15.	Male secondary school students (Grade 9) in Iran.	Group guidance session – Self-Encouragement Training Program for 10 sessions (60 minutes each, twice per week for five weeks)	– The intervention employed Adlerian self-encouragement training based on Schwanker’s model , incorporating principles such as encouragement, courage to be imperfect, purposeful behavior, positive interpersonal communication, and a sense of belonging. – This helps in:

	and control groups).			<p>– Intervention grounded in Adlerian Individual Psychology following Schwanker’s self-encouragement training model (2009).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement leads to greater feelings of competence and capability. • Positive interpersonal interactions improve confidence. • Accepting imperfections reduces fear of failure and supports trying new tasks. • Feeling a sense of belonging improves motivation and belief in one’s abilities.
Fatima & Ashraf (2018) Pakistan	Correlational research design with mediation analysis.	n = 440 students (220 males, 220 females).	Undergraduate and graduate students, aged 17–25, from colleges and universities in Pakistan.	<p>Correlational research study</p> <p>– Used three instruments: the Psychological Birth Order Inventory to assess perceived family position, the Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) to measure beliefs in one’s capabilities, and the Achievement Motivation Scale to evaluate students’ drive to achieve goals.</p>	<p>– Applied the Adlerian concept of psychological birth order to examine its relationship with self-efficacy and achievement motivation among university students.</p> <p>– It aims to explain how family dynamics and perceived roles influence motivational and efficacy beliefs among university students.</p> <p>– It is found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological birth order was significantly associated with both variables: first-born students reported higher self-efficacy, while middle-born and only born students showed lower levels, and youngest-born students showed no significant association. • Birth order was also linked to achievement motivation, with first-born and youngest students displaying lower motivation. • Self-efficacy was found to mediate the relationship between certain birth-order positions (middle and only born) and achievement motivation.
Dortaj & Sohrabi (2020) Iran	Semi-experimental (quasi-experimental) pre-test-post-test design with control group.	n = 60 female high school students (Experimental = 30; Control = 30).	Female high school students in public high school in Tehran, Iran.	<p>Training program</p> <p>– Self-encouragement training based on Adler’s Individual Psychology, delivered as an 8-session training program (once a week, 90 minutes per session).</p>	<p>– The intervention applied Adlerian self-encouragement training, which focused on helping students recognise their personal strengths, increase their self-esteem and confidence, build optimism and hope, develop social interest, feel valued and capable, and reduce discouragement</p> <p>– The Adlerian concepts of encouragement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement strengthens the internal belief of “I can.”

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing strengths increases students' sense of capability. • Developing optimism and hope enhances psychological capital, which includes self-efficacy. • Feeling valued and connected improves motivation and confidence. <p>– Increased the academic engagement and psychological capital of female students include self-efficacy (by helping them recognize their strengths, increase confidence, feel more hopeful and optimistic, and foster social interest).</p>
Sundah (2019) Indonesia	Counselling action research (classroom) conducted in iterative stages (planning, action, observation, reflection).	n = 8 middle school.	Students with low self-efficacy in a middle school in Indonesia.	<p>Group counselling session</p> <p>– Six counselling sessions grounded in Adler's Individual Psychology, which each session targeted different Adlerian theme.</p>	<p>– Intervention used Adlerian Group Counselling, built on the core concepts of Adler's Individual Psychology as session components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing courage (to build students' courage to face academic tasks and challenges) • Encouragement (a central technique used to support students in building confidence and self-belief) • Social interest (students were guided to develop cooperation, belonging, and positive interaction with peers) • Goal setting or purposeful behaviour (help students identify goals and understand purposeful direction in academic life) • Understanding strengths and abilities (students learned to recognise their own potentials and personal abilities).
Wong (2015) USA	Conceptual/theoretical review.	Not applicable.	Not applicable (conceptual paper).	<p>Not applicable</p> <p>Theoretical analysis</p> <p>– presents a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the concept of encouragement, highlighting its Adlerian origins and its relevance across contemporary counselling and psychological practice.</p>	<p>– Encouragement strengthens an individual's belief in their capability, promotes resilience, and reduces feelings of inferiority, aligning closely with Adler's goals of fostering courage and social interest.</p> <p>– Proposed The Tripartite Encouragement Model (TEM) conceptualises encouragement across three domains: foci, features, and levels. The foci distinguish between challenge-focused and potential-focused encouragement. The features describe how encouragement is communicated, emphasising framing, credibility, and reinforcing the individual's</p>

					ability and effort. The levels illustrate that encouragement can occur interpersonally, intrapersonal, or as a group norm. Together, these components explain how encouragement strengthens confidence, capability beliefs, and resilience--core elements relevant to self-efficacy.
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4. Discussion

The synthesis of the selected studies highlights multiple Adlerian elements that contribute to development or enhancement of one's self-belief on their capabilities to complete tasks in educational context. These themes demonstrate that Adlerian counselling offers both cognitive and emotional mechanism in helping students to improve their self-efficacy. This were done through supporting one's emotion through encouragement and positive relationship, and changing their though pattern through purposive goal, courage and awareness on self-strength. The discussion below interprets the five emerged themes in relation to Adlerian theory and broader self-efficacy framework.

4.1. Theme 1: Encouragement as the Core Mechanism for Strengthening Self-Efficacy

The prominence of encouragement across all seven reviewed studies reinforces Adler's view that encouragement is a primary mechanism for fostering psychological growth and strengthening capability beliefs. Empirically, encouragement was implemented through positive teacher reinforcement (Farahbakhsh et al., 2014), peer-supported group counselling (Lee et al., 2025; Sundah, 2019), and structured self-encouragement training designed to build courage and self-acceptance (Safara et al., 2020; Dortaj & Sohrabi, 2020). From these studies, two quasi-experimental studies involving secondary school students ($n = 30$ and $n = 60$, respectively) reported significant pre-post improvements in academic self-efficacy following Adlerian-based self-encouragement training programmes. These interventions typically emphasised positive reinforcement, reframing of perceived failure and strengthening students' beliefs in their academic capabilities. In addition, a randomised controlled trial conducted among university students under academic warning demonstrated that group counselling incorporating encouragement-based Adlerian principles led to significant gains in academic self-efficacy compared with a control group. However, across the reviewed literature, empirical evidence remains limited by relatively small sample sizes and short-term outcome assessments, and no large-scale or longitudinal trials were identified. Another interesting finding from Fatima and Ashraf (2018) who discuss this pattern by demonstrating that differing levels of encouragement within family birth-order roles shape students perceived competence, suggesting that encouragement influences self-efficacy even outside formal intervention settings.

These findings are in line with other study, where Keller and Szakál (2021) in their experimental study demonstrated that self-efficacy increases in response to encouraging messages that affirm past success and convey confidence in future performance of students. Its highlight encouragement's impact on cognitive and affective. Taken together, these external and reviewed studies suggest that encouragement plays a dual and important role as it reduces discouragement and simultaneously support capability beliefs, making it a central driver of self-efficacy development in educational contexts.

4.2. Theme 2: Overcoming Inferiority and Developing Courage

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that Adlerian interventions help students reduce feelings of inferiority and build the courage needed to engage with academic tasks. Adler conceptualized inferiority as the feeling of incompleteness, helplessness and dependency shaped from childhood that urge the individual to compensate this through guiding fantasies of strength (Adler, 1927). When these feelings become stronger and prolong, it developed to inferiority complex, where individual felt not adequate, perceives others as more capable and feels unable to face challenges. In contrast, superiority complex refers to overly high opinion on oneself. From the review, developing courage is one way to compensate this. Farahbakhsh et al. (2014) showed that shifting from criticism to supportive communication reduces inadequacy and strengthens students' confidence. Similarly, Lee et al. (2025) and Sundah (2019) used group counselling processes such as peer affirmation, shared problem-solving, and reflective dialogue to help students confront discouraging self-beliefs and develop academic courage. Self-encouragement programmes implemented by Safara et al. (2020) and Dortaj and Sohrabi (2020) further reinforced the courage to be imperfect, encouraging students to accept personal limitations while reframing perceived weaknesses more constructively.

Overall, empirical support for this theme is drawn from a small number of intervention studies employing quasi-experimental, action research and randomised controlled designs, with sample sizes ranging from small group interventions to moderate-sized school and university samples. Across these studies, interventions targeting inferiority-related beliefs through encouragement and supportive group processes consistently reported improvements in students' academic self-efficacy and courage to engage with academic tasks, although the evidence remains limited by short-term assessments and modest sample sizes.

These findings align with broader evidence showing that addressing inferiority and promoting courage directly enhances self-efficacy. For example, Berezyuk et al. (2023) found that individuals who acknowledged and worked through inferiority tendencies showed higher self-efficacy than those with superiority complexes, suggesting that confronting inferiority can be an adaptive pathway toward self-belief. Likewise, Habsy et al., (2025) demonstrated that Adlerian techniques in counselling effectively increase student self-esteem by changing student's self-perception which consequently enhance their confidence and courage, while improving their social engagement. Addressing inferiority feelings and cultivating courage, which are one of the potential pathways to strengthening students' academic self-efficacy are highly relevant to students who are entering higher education, where feelings of inadequacy and fear of failures during this phase can hinder their academic and social adjustment (Thompson et al., 2021).

4.3 Theme 3: Social Interest and Interpersonal Connection in Building Self-Efficacy

A few studies explicitly applied Adlerian principles of social interest and interpersonal connection to strengthen students' self-efficacy. Social interest refers to an individual's sense of connectedness with others and genuine concern for the well-being of the broader community and expressed through cooperative behaviour aiming at contributing to collective progress rather than pursuing personal advantage (Gehart, 2016). These concepts were found implemented in the selected empirical studies such as, Farahbakhsh et al. (2014) promoted social interest by fostering supportive teacher–student relationships that enhanced students' sense of belonging. Lee et al. (2025) and Sundah (2019) incorporated peer cooperation and mutual encouragement in group counselling, enabling students to experience acceptance, connection, and shared competence. Wong (2015) also highlighted social interest as a core Adlerian principle, emphasising that feeling connected and contributing to others is foundational to developing confidence and self-efficacy.

The findings of this review align with broader evidence showing that social connectedness and belonging, a central element of Adlerian social interest play a significant role in strengthening self-efficacy. Datu and Yuen (2020) in their correlational study involving high school students in Hong Kong found that strong connections with parents and peers significantly predicted students' academic and career self-efficacy, with gratitude mediating this relationship. Although not framed within Adlerian theory, this reinforces Adler's assumption that a sense of relational embeddedness nurtures psychological resources that support capability beliefs. Similarly, another correlational study with 245 preservice teachers in three university teacher education programmes by Bjorklund et al. (2020) demonstrated that preservice teachers with a stronger sense of belonging and higher network centrality reported higher self-efficacy, supporting the idea that interpersonal connection enhances one's confidence to handle academic or professional demands. This convergence of Adlerian theory and contemporary empirical evidence indicates that fostering interpersonal connection could be meaningful pathway for enhancing self-efficacy for the students, especially during transition period as Püttmann and Gessner (2023) concludes family support and peer relationship were among the most significant facilitators throughout the transition journey. The feeling of belonging and togetherness would help them lessen their burden in this matter.

4.4. Theme 4: Purposeful Behaviour and Goal Setting as Drivers of Self-Efficacy Development

Several studies in this review applied Adlerian ideas of purposeful behaviour and goal-directed action as mechanisms for strengthening self-efficacy primarily employing quasi-experimental and action research designs with modest sample sizes. Safara et al. (2020) and Dortaj and Sohrabi (2020) used self-encouragement training that guided students to set meaningful goals, act intentionally, and monitor their progress, a process that helped them develop a clearer sense of competence. Likewise, Sundah (2019) showed that engaging students in purposeful actions during group counselling reinforced their academic confidence through deliberate effort and persistence. Across these studies, purposeful behaviour and goal-directed activities were embedded within broader Adlerian self-encouragement and group counselling interventions rather than examined as isolated mechanisms. Despite this limitation, consistent pre-post improvements in academic self-efficacy were reported, suggesting that purposeful action may play a meaningful contributory role in strengthening students' self-beliefs. Wong (2015) in his conceptual paper further emphasized that purposeful striving is central in Adlerian counselling, as it directs individuals toward constructive action that nurtures belief in their abilities.

These findings are supported by broader literature linking goal-directed behaviour to self-efficacy development. Sides and Cuevas (2020) demonstrated that receiving feedback on progress toward personal goals enhances students' self-efficacy by providing concrete evidence of capability and improvement. Similarly, Jun (2021) found that students with higher self-efficacy tend to adopt stronger goal orientations and aspire toward more challenging academic and career pathways, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between purposeful striving and belief in one's competence. These studies affirm that goal setting, purposeful action, and progress monitoring, core Adlerian ideas could serve as meaningful pathways for enhancing students' academic self-efficacy. A study in Malaysia reported that self-efficacy concurrently has strong influence on the way university students set their goals and persistence, exhibit healthy self-development growth, and supports important soft skills especially needed for employability (Abdullah et al., 2014). This is among the ground focus that need to be paid attention to when students are preparing another phase of learning in their life.

4.5. Theme 5: Recognizing Strengths and Positive Self-Concept Development

The reviewed studies highlight that recognising personal strengths and cultivating a positive self-concept are central Adlerian strategies for enhancing self-efficacy. Safara et al. (2020) and Dortaj and Sohrabi (2020) demonstrated that self-encouragement training enables students to identify their abilities and replace discouraging self-evaluations with more constructive beliefs. Similarly, Sundah (2019) showed that supportive feedback within Adlerian group counselling helped students acknowledge their competencies, while Wong (2015) emphasised theoretically that affirming strengths is foundational to the development of confidence. The evidence from this review demonstrates that helping students recognise their strengths is essential in building the confidence needed to enhance their self-efficacy.

These past literatures have widely discussed the psychological and academic value of recognising one's strengths. García-Álvarez et al. (2024) found that acknowledging character strengths such as leadership, hope, and persistence significantly predict both general and academic self-efficacy among university students. Recognizing personal strengths is strongly associated with academic achievement, suggesting that students who perceive themselves as capable are more likely to perform well academically (Alipour, 2024). Additionally, Firmansyah (2025) noted that strong self-recognition in self-efficacy encourages the use of metacognitive strategies, which enhances academic performance while fostering resilience and adaptability. Collectively, these studies support the Adlerian view that affirming strengths and developing a positive self-concept provide a psychological foundation upon which stronger academic self-efficacy can be built. This is also a crucial part as recognition in one's strength helps students to feel more confident and quickly adapt to academic demands and perseverance in handling the shift into higher education that are more challenging (Lin et al., 2021).

Taken together, while the findings across the reviewed studies consistently suggested positive relationship between Adlerian-based strategies and students' self-efficacy, a few limitations among this

empirical evidence should be acknowledged. Most of the empirical research employed either quasi experimental studies (Dortaj & Sohrabi, 2020; Farahbakhsh et al., 2014; Safara et al., 2020) or action research with small sample size (Sundah, 2019), which might limit the generalizability of the findings. Besides, lack of long-term follow-up assessments restricts the ability to determine sustainability of the outcomes that were reported from time to time. Some of the research also put the focus on specific populations such as single-gender samples or students from single institutions (Dortaj & Sohrabi, 2020; Safara et al., 2020), which might limit applicability of the findings to a broader educational contexts. These methodological variations and constraints highlight the need to interpret the findings cautiously and support the positioning of this review as exploratory rather than conclusive.

4.6. Contextual and Cultural Moderators

Another consideration in interpretation of the findings of this review is on sociocultural orientation of the population involved. This study primarily involves countries such as Iran, South Korean, Indonesia and Pakistan which often characterised by more collectivist cultural orientation rather than individualist. As refers to Hofstede (1980), collectivist culture emphasis connectedness, similarities and harmony within their group, whereas individualist want to be autonomous, distinct and independent from others. So, in such context, Adlerian principles such as social interest, encouragement and belongingness may align closely to population from collectivist cultural values.

The cultural factor such as family, teacher and peers’ encouragement might influence more to this culture and impact on how they respond to counselling interventions. Therefore, while suggesting that Adlerian-based strategies may support student’s self-efficacy, their effectiveness may also vary across cultural and educational context. This highlights the importance of adapting Adlerian-based approach to suit sociocultural background of the student when applied in diverse setting.

4.7. Implications for Higher Education Transition Support Practices

Based on the findings and discussion of this review, the authors propose a brief Adlerian-based strategies according to their level of implementation feasibility and resource requirements: immediate (low-cost), medium-term (moderate cost), and long-term (high cost). Immediate strategies, such as encouragement and peer support, can be applied directly in classroom settings. Medium-term strategies, including small-group counselling and structured programmes, require planning and facilitator training. Long-term strategies, such as curriculum integration and institutional interventions, involve broader systemic changes. This classification provides practical guidance for prioritising implementation based on available resources. The proposed practical implementation is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Practical Implementation of Adlerian-Based Strategies

Activity	Feasibility/ Cost
Encouragement practices, positive feedback, peer support activities	Immediate (Low-cost) – Can be implemented directly by lecturers or counsellors in classroom settings to foster students’ confidence and sense of belonging
Small-group counselling, structured psychoeducational sessions, mentorship programmes	Medium-term (Moderate cost) – Require some planning and training to support targeted development of self-efficacy through guided activities
Curriculum integration, institutional counselling programmes, policy-level interventions	Long-term (High cost) – Involve systemic changes to embed Adlerian principles into educational practices and student support systems

5. Conclusion

This narrative review synthesised seven studies that applied Adlerian concepts within educational contexts to strengthen students' self-efficacy. The findings demonstrate that Adlerian principles particularly encouragement, overcoming inferiority, social interest, purposeful behaviour, and recognition of strengths play meaningful roles in shaping students' beliefs in their academic capabilities. Across diverse countries, populations, and intervention formats, these principles consistently supported positive cognitive, emotional, and motivational outcomes, including enhanced academic self-efficacy, improved motivation, greater psychological capital, and stronger engagement. Collectively, the review highlights that Adlerian counselling offers a holistic, theory-driven framework capable of addressing students' self-belief through both interpersonal connection and intrapersonal change. This synthesis therefore underscores the potential value of integrating Adlerian-informed strategies into educational counselling practices to support students' learning and development.

Importantly, the findings from this review are closely related to the psychological demands that need to be faced by students during transitional phase from school-based learning to higher education. This phase is typically marked by emotional pressure, new academic expectation, and a more complex adaptation challenges (Dias & Sá, 2014; Thompson et al., 2021). Since self-efficacy plays a significant role in determining how far the students could navigate these changes comprising confidence, persistence and their preparedness in fulfilling universities' demands (Lin et al., 2021; Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (2023), Adlerian mechanisms were identified through this review offers potential pathway in supporting the transition. The elements of encouragement, overcoming inferiority and developing courage, social interest and interpersonal connection, purposeful behaviour and goal setting, and strengths acknowledgement sustain motivation throughout this phase. By strengthening students' sense of abilities and belonging (Abdullah et al., 2014; Meng & Zhang, 2023), Adlerian based strategies potentially playing pivotal role in helping the students in shifting to higher education smoothly, with resilience and confident.

Integrating these psychological principles into higher educational practice are significant in ensuring the potential long-term benefits in educational system. However, this remains to be confirmed through longitudinal studies. As the institutions strive to enhance student's well-being and cultivating resilience learners, strengthening self-efficacy could be the grounding strategies in supporting these goals. Adlerian-based approaches offer a humanistic and theory-driven pathway in helping higher educational institution to foster students who are not only capable in academic, but also socially connected, emotionally prepared and motivated. Therefore, supporting self-efficacy development efforts could potentially contribute significantly to development of sustainable, inclusive and future-ready higher education systems. At its core, the process begins with students' belief about their own capabilities.

5.1. Limitations

Despite its contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the review is based on a small number of studies, reflecting the limited empirical work explicitly linking Adlerian principles to self-efficacy in educational settings. This restricts the generalisability of the findings. Second, the included studies varied widely in design, ranging from group counselling interventions to correlational and conceptual papers, which limits the ability to draw firm causal conclusions. Third, because the search strategy relied partly on manual identification of articles, there remains a possibility that relevant studies were not captured due to indexing limitations or terminological variations in how Adlerian concepts are described in the literature. Finally, most interventions were conducted in specific cultural contexts (e.g., Iran, Indonesia, Korea), raising questions about cultural transferability and applicability to broader or more diverse student populations.

Lastly, although the reviewed studies provide valuable insights into Adlerian-informed strategies for enhancing academic self-efficacy, their transferability across cultural contexts remains limited. Most empirical evidence is concentrated within specific cultural and educational settings, which may

influence how Adlerian concepts are experienced and expressed by students. Issues of cultural transferability should be considered when interpreting and applying the findings of this review. While certain Adlerian-based strategies such as encouragement may be relatively vigorous across cultural contexts due to its alignment with universal support processes, other techniques such as early recollections, may require cultural adaptation depending on students' comfort with self-disclosure and their cultural norms.

Therefore, the applicability of these activities may vary across sociocultural settings. As such, the applicability of these findings to diverse higher education contexts should be interpreted with caution. Future study is needed to examine the implementation of Adlerian-based intervention across diverse contexts, including pilot studies with fidelity measures, mixed-methods evaluations, and longitudinal follow-up designs.

5.2. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should expand the empirical study that incorporates the Adlerian concepts into structured interventions that aims in enhancing self-efficacy. Based on this synthesis, it is recommended that future researcher to consider designing and developing an Adlerian-based intervention that focusing on education or transitional phase among the students as practical tools for counsellors in educational contexts, align with students' need. There is also the necessity for more rigor and diverse research design, such as Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT), longitudinal studies, and mixed methods design in understanding how Adlerian's mechanism functions from time to time.

Future researcher also suggested to explore how Adlerian's principles interact with contemporary counselling approach such as CBT, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy in developing integrative model that were suitable to be used in educational settings. Besides that, more culturally diverse studies are needed to examine how social interest, encouragement, and purposeful living manifest across different educational systems and cultural backgrounds. Future studies also should consider examining specific components such as lifestyle assessment, early recollections, and strength-based strategies, to determine which Adlerian techniques most effectively contribute to changes in students' self-efficacy.

Declaration of AI Use

The authors declare that artificial intelligence-assisted tools were used to support language editing and clarity during manuscript preparation. All conceptual development, data interpretation, synthesis of findings and final content decisions were made by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.

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Appendix A: Full search string for each database

Database	Search string
Scopus	(Adler OR "Adlerian counseling" OR "Adlerian counselling") AND ("self-efficacy" OR "academic self-efficacy") AND (education OR school OR university OR students)
SAGE	(Adlerian OR Adler) AND ("self-efficacy" OR "academic self-efficacy") AND (education OR school OR university OR students)
ERIC	("Adlerian counseling" OR "Adlerian counselling" OR Adler) AND ("self efficacy" OR "academic self efficacy") AND (education OR school OR university OR students)
Google Scholar	"Adlerian counselling" OR "Adlerian counseling" "self-efficacy" education