

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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How to influence and cultivate young adults' life purpose in the process of education: a systematic review of empirical studies

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Abstract

Introduction The objective of this systematic review is to show the features of the recent research in cultivating youth purpose in terms of purpose attributes, purpose determinants, and purpose interventions.

Methods We carried out a database search in both Web of Science and Scopus for relevant studies using 21 related research terms. At last, 25 journal articles were encoded by the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Results The results found that young adults' purpose is frequently examined from three perspectives in the past fifteen years, namely, psychological, sociological, and educational perspectives. From the psychological perspective, the determinants of youth purpose explored in researches included moral identity, self-efficacy, prosocial beliefs, intrinsic motivation, informative feedback, individual personalities and character strength, and health-risk behaviors. The sociological perspective of purpose researches emphasizes on the determinants such as social desirability, family support, parental trust, daily experiences, school support for community service, and student perceptions of teacher supports and teacher competencies. Researchers with an educational perspective emphasize how academic achievement, education level, relationships with mentors, and extra-curricular activities involvement can enhance young adults' sense of purpose.

Discussion The results provide three types of purpose interventions in cultivating youth life purpose: (1) motivating individual positive emotions and character strengths (2), improving support from family, school, and other sources, and (3) encouraging the willingness to participate in social activities. It will be useful for educators and administrators seeking to understand and come up with reasonable and practical intervention measures to nurture young adults' life purpose.

Keywords Purpose in life, Young adults, Purpose attributes, Purpose determinants, Purpose interventions, Systematic review

Introduction

Life purpose provides young adults with a moral compass in their lives [2], as purposeful people are more inclined to engage in activities with psychological well-being and meaningful engagement [6]. Many educators and administrators have kept a watchful eye on how to grasp the formation and development of young adults' life purpose and how to formulate interventions to cultivate noble purpose. College is supposed to be a crucial environment for young adults to find purpose in life and

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work for it [54]. Since educators and administrators are considered influential in cultivating youth purpose [72], it may be significant for interventions in college to help young adults understand the purpose in life so they, in turn, can engage in a life purpose that aims to have positive effects on others and society [61]. As such, while quantitative and qualitative methods identify what and how purpose is related to individuals, standard-centered and evaluation-focused approaches such as systematic reviews have the potential to capture and describe the purpose development and effective interventions in cultivating life purpose [69]. Systematic reviews can provide specific information about existing research related to current situations regarding individuals' purpose and corresponding educational measures, which can be helpful for educators and administrators to figure out valid and appropriate interventions for fostering purpose in life [64]. Extensive academic research articles identified the relationship between life purpose and educationally essential attributes (e.g., [33, 39, 46, 50, 59]) and some review articles have focused on the implications and directions of these articles in the broader field of youth purpose research [31, 33, 61, 78]. Having standardized and systematic information on measuring purpose attributes, determinants, and interventions is essential to generate and sustain trust in cultivating purpose for young adults. Thus, a systematic assessment of young adults' life purpose is vital as it will provide a much-needed foundation for educators and administrators to come up with reasonable and practical intervention measures in nurturing young adults' life purpose.

Definition and feature of young adults' life purpose

Purpose provides moral guidance for young adults to show their strengths and virtues in life. For young adults, a life built around a noble purpose is well spent [22]. Life purpose is defined as a stable and universal intention, which is to accomplish something meaningful to oneself and produce expected consequences beyond oneself [18]. Scholars proposed two related concepts to better explain the definition of purpose in life. The first is from the perspective of mental health, which is defined as people's overall satisfaction with life and assessment that they realize their potential [34, 60]; the second purposeful engagement refers to the extent to which a person finds participation in activities in various areas of life meaningful and valuable [72]. Having a purpose in life is a type of self-judgment for whether human behavior is worth it, and its significance lies in the contributions people make to society rather than fulfilling their interests [13]. In other words, an intense and persistent purpose can help individuals break free from negative emotions and ultimately achieve their life goals. It is manifested in the

youth's willingness to take on social and moral responsibilities, stimulate prosocial behavior, establish self-esteem, and achieve better academic and life results [9, 14, 18, 43, 73]. Life purpose can motivate young adults to continuously complete tasks, striving to achieve essential goals while contributing to beyond-the-self bodies [20]. On the other hand, having a purpose in life can help youth play a protective role when they experience danger, pressure, poverty, and other difficulties [5]. Young adults who have a life purpose can alleviate the pain they feel in different environments through meaningful goal direction, which is also crucial for others around them [8, 15]. On the contrary, the lack of life purpose will trigger a series of developmental problems for young adults and may also cause a lot of psychological problems and destructive illegal behaviors, as well as social life obstacles [1, 19]. Adolescence is regarded as the crucial period in cultivating purpose [22]; that is to say, purpose in life is an integral part of the formation of a healthy identity in adolescence. Research has shown that life purpose is formed and developed during adulthood [21], which dictates young adults' future life direction and moral belonging. Besides, the formation and development of life purpose vary with demographic information such as young adults' gender and age [9, 77].

Present systematic reviews on purpose

To date, four studies have systematically reviewed purpose in life in the context of the positive development of individuals. A systematic search and review found that a higher reported sense of purpose is related to a range of better health and well-being outcomes for older adults, and it is testified that social and environmental factors such as residence and marital status appear to influence older adults' experience of purpose [36]. Ribeiro et al. [67] conducted a systematic literature review to identify and analyze significant theoretical and empirical information about associations between purpose in life and conditions related to good aging or positive adaptation in aging. They took life purpose as a moderator or resilience resource between risks and adversities and good adaptation. They found out that the studies revealed robust associations between high life purpose scores and lower outcomes (e.g., risk of death, disability, and sleep disorders) as well as high purpose in life and positive outcomes in health (such as cognition, emotional regulation, and sense of adjustment). Moreover, AshaRani et al. [3] conducted a systematic review of the conceptualization, measures, and determinants of purpose in life among older adults over 65 years old in the existing works of literature. They conceptualized life purpose in six different ways and identified six main questionnaires and semi-structured interviews used to capture the purpose

and several determinants associated with purpose. While taking promoting purpose in life as the cornerstone for successful aging and better health outcomes, there are no emphases and suggestions on how to cultivate the life purpose of young people. Massey et al. [57] published a systematic overview from various areas of psychology about adolescent purpose content and purpose pursuit since the publication of Nurmi's review in 1991. They explored and discussed the theories employed in these studies, methods of goal measurement, and the findings presented in the studies. Even though Massey, Gebhardt, and Garnefski's (2008) research aim is similar to this study, its reviewed articles range from 1990 to 2007, which are out of step with the present times.

While these systematic reviews are informative of the current state of research in purpose in life, they have two shortcomings that the present review seeks to address. First, the quality of the evidence for cultivating life purpose was not evaluated against pre-determined criteria. In other words, these systematic reviews need more rational selection criteria and even enough quantities of related articles. A standardized, systematic review allows for the following characteristics: (1) clear topics and purposes; (2) comprehensive retrieval strategies; (3) identified inclusion and exclusion criteria; (4) all selected/excluded studies and their specific reasons; (5) evaluation of the quality of the research methodology; and (6) report findings in a uniform format [32]. Despite the growing interest in youth purpose development and increasing numbers of summaries or review articles, more systematic reviews on this issue must be conducted with scientific collecting methods and unified evaluation criteria. Second, these systematic reviews mainly focused on elderly adults instead of the positive development of young adults. They took purpose in life as a defense or a confrontational power in the context. They discussed it in a manner of good aging or positive adaptation in the aging of elderly adults. Thus, the ignorance of concerned groups may be problematic. Significantly, studying whether and how young adults search for and identify life purpose can help us to understand and predict their positive development and dynamic behaviors and thus aid the progress of theories of interventions for cultivating purpose.

Therefore, the present systematic review aims to find out: (1) what kind(s) of purpose attributes of young adults has been examined in empirical studies; (2) what kind(s) of determinants has been found that have exerted influences on the life purposes of young adults through empirical studies; and (3) what kind(s) of educational interventions has been proposed in cultivating the life purposes of young adults.

Methods

A systematic review was carried out. According to Grant and Booth [27], systematic reviews are studies that notice a comprehensive summary within a field identified systematically through identifying, selecting, synthesizing, and appraising all high-quality shreds of evidence. Reviews of this type can assist researchers in answering research questions across a relatively narrow range of quality-assessed studies [70]. As such, the studies included in the present systematic review were investigated and selected through journal articles aimed at figuring out how life purpose is identified and developed among young adults.

Identification strategy

The initial literature search was conducted in February 2023 and then repeated in March 2023, using Web of Science and Scopus databases. The search strings were combined according to the databases, considering the "abstract, title, and keywords" search in Scopus and the "topic" search in Web of Science. To best capture related studies, the research terms were defined as: ("youth purpose" OR "life purpose" OR "life's purpose" OR "life of purpose" OR "purpose in life" OR "purpose in adolescence" OR "purpose during adolescence" OR "ideals in life" OR "ideals of life" OR "learn for purpose" OR "purpose for learning" OR "life goals" OR "personal goals" OR "goal setting " OR "adolescent goal" OR "adolescent purpose development " OR "aim in life " OR "finding purpose" OR "purpose development" OR " development of purpose" OR "developing purpose") AND "educat*". After data searching, we selected peer-reviewed and first-published journal articles in English from the subject category of social sciences, psychology, and arts and humanities (2000–2023). The initial search with the key terms noted yielded 2262 journal articles in the database of Web of Science and 2023 journal articles in the database of Scopus. In addition to research searched from bibliographic databases, this study also includes 228 pieces of research not retrieved in either database. All articles identified during the search were imported into Notexpress (version 3.7.0.9296). After removing the duplicated journal articles from further analysis, 3387 articles remained.

Screening and eligibility

The titles, abstracts, and keywords of the articles identified by the literature search were screened and assessed one by one personally using the following inclusion and exclusion criteria. Below are the criteria for the literature to be eligible for use in this review.

The inclusion criteria were:

- (1) research objects include young adults, youth, emerging adults, adolescents, middle and high school students, college students, and graduates,
- (2) studies relating purpose in life and including at least one construct of purpose as described by Damon [20],
- (3) studies taking purpose as a dependent variable and examining the causal relationship between life purpose and other variables, and,
- (4) empirical studies reported quantitative and/or qualitative research measuring outcomes.

The exclusion criteria were:

- (1) studies only related to children, kids, pupils, the aged, old people, the elderly, and particular groups of young people (e.g., purpose exemplars, those with certain diseases, high-ability/talented adolescents, the youth of color living in urban, youth in Catholic schools, impoverished youth),
- (2) studies taking purpose in life as an independent variable discussing a specific issue related to it (e.g., the influence of life purpose on substance use),
- (3) studies tested the convergent validity of life purpose scales,
- (4) studies related to purpose profiles (e.g., descriptions of status quos and group divisions of youth purpose),
- (5) studies centering on youth purpose in life under a certain period of time or the specified backgrounds (e.g. the Great Depression), and,
- (6) studies are reviews, meta-analyses, conference proceedings, editorials, book chapters, unpublished theses, author manuscripts, or letters to an editor.

Screening and eligibility involved two steps. The first step involved screening titles, abstracts, and keywords which reduced the set of studies to 283. To check inter-coder reliability, two independent coders randomly selected and screened a quarter of the remaining articles based on the criteria. They completed this step for these papers, each making an independent judgment depending on the inclusion and exclusion of information stated above. The percentage agreement statistic (25%=0.73; 50%=0.88; 75%=0.92; 100%=0.98) indicated an acceptable level of reliability between their judgments. Disagreements were discussed, and a consensus was reached in all cases. The second step involved assessing full-text articles, which reduced the set of studies to 117. An information code scheme was developed in this step by the research team according to the

aims of this study, which was used to collect the data from the included articles. The information extracted comprised the following aspects: (a) study characteristics, such as authors' affiliation, participants, countries, and research methods, and (b) specific information concerning research questions, namely, purpose attributes, influencing factors, and purpose interventions. Two coders were assigned to each of the studies. They read and recorded all of the articles based on their understanding of the coding scheme while paying close attention to the updates and adjustments of the original scheme. As the information was extracted, two coders further deleted articles with the following characteristics: (a) studies that did not mention methods or interventions for cultivating youth life purpose, and (b) studies with only one of these information including purpose attributes, determinants, and interventions. Two coders performed a reliability check. They independently evaluated each included study, and discrepancies in scoring were discussed at calibration meetings to arrive at a consensus ($\kappa=0.97$). Finally, 25 papers were derived after full screening and eligibility checks. Figure 1 shows the selection process of publications for the present study.

Data extraction and risk of bias assessment

Based on the research questions and the articles that have been included, three data extracts related to life purpose have been selected as table items, namely purpose attributes, purpose determinants, and purpose interventions. The encoded articles are not missing any information related to these three items, so we do not process the missing data. Also, we extracted the sample size, age distribution, and gender ratio of each article to fill in the table as supplementary information without any inferences and assumptions. In addition, we also pay attention to author information, publication time, background of research subjects, and research methods to explore the basic characteristics of each selected article, to get an overview of existing research on youth purpose. The determination of the head of the code list, including classifying the research perspective of each article, has been discussed and modified by three authors, and it is completed under the premise of reaching an agreement ($\kappa=0.92$). Information was extracted from each report for textual summary and succeeding discussion, and the final code scheme was determined (Table 1). Through a joint discussion of the extracted data, we found that the perspectives of the existing research on the cultivation of young people's life purpose are mainly concentrated in three aspects, namely, psychological, sociological, and educational.

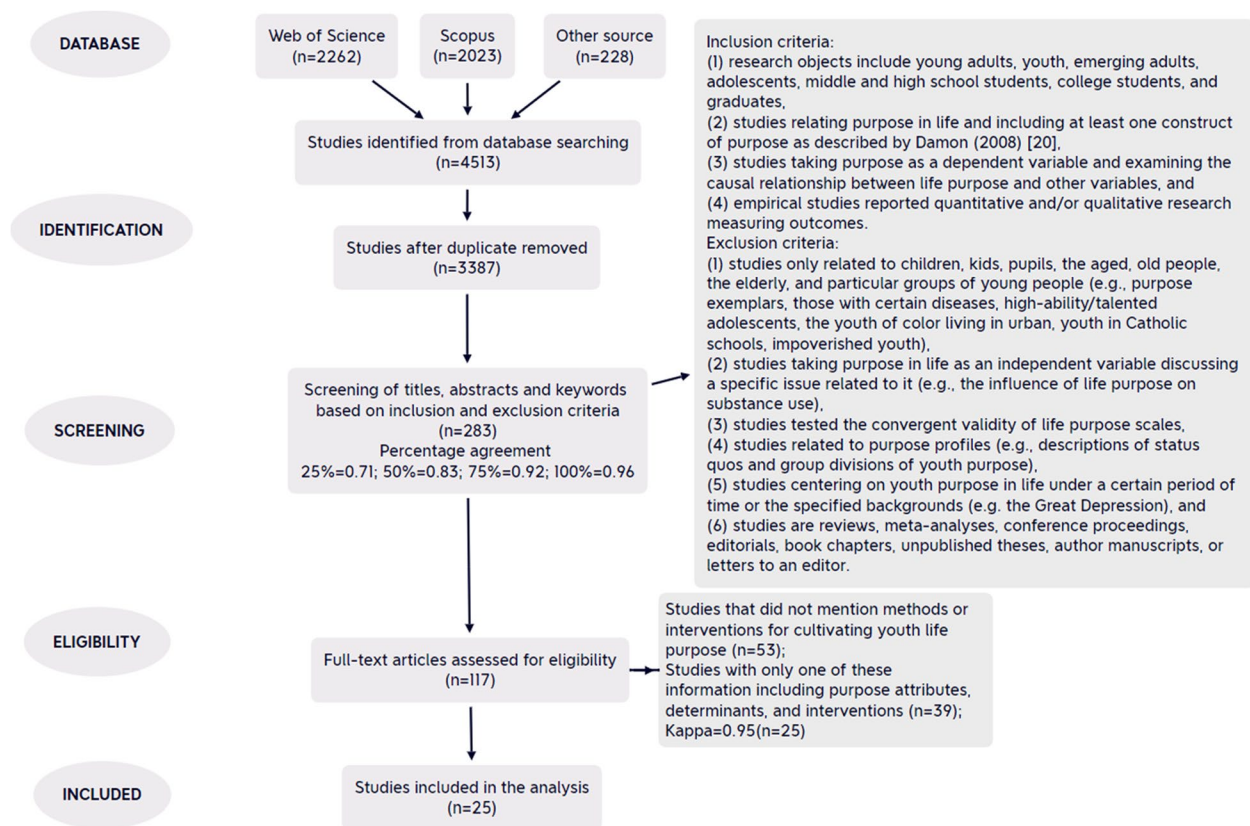


Fig. 1 Flow chart process selection adopted in the systematic review

Results

All studies were published in the last fifteen years and three within the previous three years. The authors' affiliation reveals that nearly all of the studies are co-authored by researchers from both Human and Social Sciences and Educational Psychology. Studies were conducted mainly in North America, Europe, and Asia. A significant part of the studies took place in schools or universities. Two were conducted in more than one cultural context (No.3; No.8). Participants' ages were mainly between 11 and 25 years old, with only two studies including middle-aged groups and the elderly (No.5; No.8). Three studies investigated female students or specific ethnicity participants (No.2; No.14; No.19). The most frequent study design was a quantitative survey, but a qualitative survey was also frequently implemented (No.16; No.22; No.24), as well as a multi-method approach (No.17; No.20). Only one study consists of a longitudinal process of data collection (No.7), and two studies involved investigations of survey groups other than students for further explanations (No.10; No.22). In academic researches, young adults' purpose is frequently examined from three perspectives, each emphasizing different aspects of purpose determinants and interventions. Fifteen articles reported the

cultivation of youth life purpose mainly focus on sociological perspective (No.1; No.2; No.3; No.5; No.9; No.10; No.11; No.12; No.14; No.16; No.18; No.19; No.20; No.22; No.24), eight focused on psychological perspective (No.4; No.5; No.7; No.8; No.13; No.17; No.21; No.23), and three on educational perspective (No.6; No.15; No.25). Among them, only one article mainly interferes with youth purpose from two perspectives (No.5).

Psychological perspective of cultivating youth purpose

The characteristics of psychology in cultivating youth purpose are mainly embodied in the attention to individual psychological development, cognitive and emotional factors, and the formation of self-consciousness. From the psychological perspective, researchers have explored the role of purpose in shaping young adults' identity, promoting self-esteem and well-being, and determining motivation, cognition, and behavior [20, 28, 29]. Scholars are primarily concerned with the cognitive and emotional development of young adults about life purpose and examine how young adults navigate their inner worlds and processes. For example, in a recent study, moral identity became a remarkable buffering determinant for the longitudinal shift in political

Table 1 Summary table of included articles

No.	Author(s) and Year	Participants	Purpose attributes	Purpose determinants	Purpose interventions	Perspective
1	Araujo Arantes, Klein, & Graciano (2014) [2]	1030 college students, aged 15–25, 41% male	Life goals (economic, aesthetic, pro-social, political, relationships, hedonistic, religious); Identified purpose (self-oriented and beyond-the-self purpose); Future plan concentration; Life goals achievement	Social engagement	1. Introducing service-learning curricula and moral and citizenship education curricula. 2. Using active learning methods to foster social engagement.	Sociological
2	Blattner, Liang, Lund, & Spencer (2013) [7]	207 female students, sixth, eighth, and tenth graders	Search for purpose; Commitment to purpose	Parental support (parental trust, parental alienation); Self-esteem	Providing adolescents with support from multiple sources such as peers and teachers in addition to parents in order to feel safe and confident while searching for purpose.	Sociological
3	Bundick, & Tirri (2014) [13]	381 U.S. and 336 Finland students, aged 13–18, about 50% male	Purpose identification; Goal-directedness; BTS-orientation of life goals	Student perceptions of teacher supports and teacher competencies	Promoting classroom and school environments.	Sociological
4	Csibi, & Csibi (2019) [17]	385 teenagers, aged 16–18, 47.3% male	Extrinsic goals (fame, appealing image, financial success); Intrinsic goals (personal growth, affiliation, community contribution); Health goals.	Health-risk behaviors	Incorporating and emphasizing the development of teenagers' life goals and purposes in the design and conceptualization of school-based prevention and health promotion programs.	Psychological
5	DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh (2009) [23]	344 college students, mean age of 19, 32.3% male	Construct of purpose in life	Self-efficacy (college, social, general); Social desirability	Creating interventions based on self-efficacy theory to positively influence behaviors that improve or augment students' subjective sense of purpose in life.	Psychological; Sociological
6	Han, Ballard, & Choi (2021) [30]	1578 high school graduates (48.60% males) at T1, 480 participants (40.21% males) two years later at T2	Political purpose (political activities, civic intention, beyond-the-self motivation)	Moral identity	1. Helping young people clarify their own moral values. 2. Integrating young people's moral values with their developing identities. 3. Learning from educational programs like Kohlberg's just community approach.	Psychological
7	Hill, Sumner, & Burrow (2014) [33]	179 undergraduates, aged 18–21, 23% male in study 1; 307 participants, average aged 35.3, 35% male in study 2	Purpose pathways	Personality	Providing multiple pathways for cultivating purpose, such as proactive engagement, reaction to significant life events, and social learning.	Psychological

Table 1 (continued)

No.	Author(s) and Year	Participants	Purpose attributes	Purpose determinants	Purpose interventions	Perspective
8	Hill, et al. (2018) [35]	624 students, graded 9–11, 46% male	Purpose commitment; Purpose engagement; Future orientation	Parental support; School relationships	Encouraging parents (and schools) to stay involved in cultivating a sense of meaningful future.	Sociological
9	Jiang, Lin, & Mariano (2016) [38]	213 college students, freshman to graduate, 39% male	Purpose status (purpose search, purpose identification, purpose engagement, purpose orientation)	Student perceptions of teacher supports and teacher competencies	1. Closely considering young people's own views of purpose and how they can be supported. 2. Giving special attention to young people's emic views.	Sociological
10	Jiang, & Gao (2018) [37]	284 students, aged 18–25, 17.9% male	Three levels of purpose (self-transcendent emotions, general sense of purpose, specific purpose domains)	University support for community service	Designing policies and courses to strongly support service work in a manner that is perceptible to students.	Sociological
11	Kiang (2012) [41]	180 students, average aged 14.97, 42% male	Daily sense of purpose	Daily experiences; Daily role fulfillment	Promoting social connectedness and activities that allow adolescents to feel like a valued family member.	Sociological
12	Law, & Shek (2009) [47]	5,946 students, aged 13–18, 36.9% male	Purpose in life	Beliefs about volunteerism; Beliefs about volunteering intention; Beliefs about volunteering behavior	1. Emphasizing prosocial beliefs in volunteer service training. 2. Devising means to enhance both beliefs and intention in an attempt to promote volunteering behavior. 3. Devising means to enhance purpose in life such as positive youth development programs.	Psychological
13	Liang, et al. (2017) [49]	207 girls, sixth, eighth, and tenth graders	Other-oriented purpose; Self-oriented aim	Parent-adolescent relationship (parental trust, parental communication)	Parents should cultivate relationships with their daughters characterized by mutual trust and communication—qualities that balance closeness with support for adolescent autonomy and agency.	Sociological

Table 1 (continued)

No.	Author(s) and Year	Participants	Purpose attributes	Purpose determinants	Purpose interventions	Perspective
14	Lund, Liang, Konowitz, White, & DeSilva (2019) [50]	194 college students	Purpose formation	Relationships with mentors	1. Encouraging and providing students with opportunities to develop relationships with mentors. 2. Considering the barriers students of different backgrounds face in forming mentoring relationships. 3. Supporting and rewarding both faculty and staff for the intensive mentoring support they provide to students.	Educational
15	Malin, Reilly, Quinn, & Moran (2013) [54]	146 adolescents, aged 11–21, 50% male	Forms of purpose (nonpurpose, precursors of purpose, purpose); Dimensions of purpose (future intention, meaningful engagement, Beyond-the-self reasons)	Developmental contexts	1. Providing parents support during middle and high school years by modeling ways to contribute to society and inviting their children to participate in that activity. 2. Providing young people with opportunities to take on valued community roles.	Sociological
16	Malin, Liuw, & Damon (2017) [52]	1005 eighth graders, 49.9% male	Important goal; Goal action; Beyond-the-self reason	Character strengths	Taking purpose as a character strength integrated with other strengths.	Psychological
17	Malin, Liuw, & Remington (2019) [53]	1304 students, eighth-graded, 50.2% male	Beyond-the-self life goal selection; Beyond-the-self life goal commitment	School supports	Providing intentional and sustained support for both beyond-the-self oriented, higher order goal setting and beyond-the-self goal commitment.	Sociological
18	Mariano, & Going (2011) [55]	46 girls, Mean age = 12.83 years	Purpose forms (beyond-the-self purpose, self life goal, dreamer, dabbler, drifter)	Social support (presence of support, importance of support)	The school's and teacher's job are to understand students' age-specific needs, and teach in accordance with these needs.	Sociological
19	Moran, Bundick, Malin, & Reilly (2013) [54]	1200 youth, graded 6/9/12, 50% male	Specific purpose content (intention, engagement, beyond-the-self reasons)	Support levels from close relationships	1. Internalizing social supports or "made one's own" as significant personal meanings. 2. Integrating social supports into a network of institutional foundations for supporting the youth's specific purpose.	Sociological

Table 1 (continued)

No.	Author(s) and Year	Participants	Purpose attributes	Purpose determinants	Purpose interventions	Perspective
20	Okun, & Kim (2016) [63]	576 undergraduates, aged 18–22, 34% male	Purpose in life	Motivation (pleasure-based prosocial motivation, pressure-based prosocial motivation); Frequency of volunteering	Targeting on youth who are low in pleasure-based prosocial motivation and sending them messages focused on moral obligations and social norms.	Psychological
21	Quinn, Heckes, & Shea (2019) [65]	26 high school students, 15.4% male; 9 teachers	Dimension of purpose (long-term intention, personal meaning, engagement, beyond-the-self contribution)	Purpose support from teachers' classroom practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Making connections to the realities of life. 2. Developing future orientation. 3. Building supportive teacher-student relationships. 4. Cultivating a willingness to try new things, persevere, and learn from mistakes. 5. Cultivating a prosocial orientation, perspective-taking, and collaboration. 	Sociological
22	Rajic, White, Liang, Diamonto, & Berado (2018) [66]	724 students, average graded 9	Conceptualization of purpose (structure, shape, form)	Academic achievement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encouraging self-understanding and giving sense to future development. 2. Developing critical sense and empathy. 3. Orienting moral self-determinations. 4. Overcoming one's own personal interests. 	Educational
23	Shin, Kim, Hwang, & Lee (2018) [68]	110 students, average aged 22.23, 37.7% male	Three dimensions of life purpose (Confidence in purpose, commitment to purpose, social contribution of purpose)	Motivation for volunteering; Informative feedback	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Allowing more choices of volunteer organizations and activities plus systematic monitoring. 2. Providing students with support and informative feedback from mentors. 3. Providing purpose-beneficial service-learning curricula in college. 4. Providing opportunities to fulfill students' intrinsic motivation. 5. Supporting students' service efforts through informative feedback. 	Psychological

Table 1 (continued)

No.	Author(s) and Year	Participants	Purpose attributes	Purpose determinants	Purpose interventions	Perspective
24	Wang, You, Li, & Huang (2022) [75]	41 participants, aged 18–25, 31.7% male	Beyond-the-self purpose; Self-oriented purpose	Personal experience; Family support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating environments with reciprocal values and pro-social behavior modeling. 2. Deepening individuals' self-knowledge as a prerequisite for nurturing a purpose. 3. Encouraging supportive parent-youth relationship and practice gratitude. 	Sociological
25	Zhang, Mariano, Zhu, & Jiang (2022) [79]	332 undergraduates, freshman-fourth year students, 44.6% male	Purpose content; Purpose identification; Purpose search.	Extra-curricular activities involvement	Considering how learning experiences can support students in purpose development.	Educational

purpose among a group of high school students [30]. This research concluded that adolescents with moral identity might consider political activities crucial to whom they are and tend to maintain their political purpose. Thus, young adults should clarify their moral values and integrate them with their developing identities to construct political purposes [30, 51]. Another study revealed the relationship between self-efficacy and adolescents' search for purpose and commitment to purpose. Its conclusion indicated that general, college, and social self-efficacy are significantly and positively associated with purpose in life, with the prominent result showing that general self-efficacy emerged as the most significant predictor of youth purpose in life [23]. A large sample study proposed that purpose in life is positively related to prosocial beliefs regardless of self-serving beliefs, and it is also significantly related to intention to volunteer and volunteer behaviors [47], so both beliefs and intention should be enhanced in an attempt to promote prosocial beliefs in volunteer service training. Another study showed that young adults' purpose commitment and social contribution of purpose increased when they received informative feedback on their volunteering efforts even if they started with relatively lower intrinsic motivation to participate in service learning, and intrinsic motivation and feedback both positively predicted students' confidence in purpose [68]. Similarly, research confirmed that prosocial motivation and frequency of volunteering exerted a joint effect on purpose in life in that frequency of volunteering was not significantly related to life purpose when young adults' prosocial motivation was low unless their pressure-based prosocial motivation increased [63]. It is important to provide young adults with intrinsically motivated experiences plus informative feedback that supports their purpose formation during service work. In addition, multiple purpose pathways for cultivating youth purpose are proven to be effective due to different individual personalities [33], for example, it is necessary to promote adolescents' proactive engagement, reaction to significant life events, and social learning during the process of cultivating life purpose. In a similar study, life purpose can be taken as a character strength integrated with other personalities and strengths [52]. Character strengths they investigated, such as gratitude, compassion, and grit, were significantly but not highly correlated with life purpose. Last but not least, health-risk behaviors and purpose in life bear a relevant influence through the predominance of extrinsic goals but without cause-and-effect relationships [17].

Sociological perspective of cultivating youth purpose

Sociology generally focuses on the influence of social environment, social structure, and social relations on

the growth of adolescents. The sociological perspective of purpose researches emphasizes on how social contexts, cultures, and institutions influence youth purpose [54]. It examines the influence of family, school, peers, and societal expectations on youth purpose, exploring how these determinants shape individual purpose. Generally speaking, socially engaged young adults are more other-regarding oriented in terms of life goals, and they are more identified with beyond the self-oriented purpose and are more oriented to reach their life goals [2]. Social desirability was found to be modestly, although significantly, correlated to purpose in life [23]. Family and school support are two major paths to influence youth life purpose. A study evidenced that parental support and school relationships are positively and significantly related to envisioning a meaningful future [35]. Daily experiences that reflect family obligation or assistance and fulfillment of social roles among son or daughter, student, and friend domains were consistently and strongly related to life purpose [41]. In another similar study, personal experience may be responsible for the shape of a self-oriented or beyond-the-self purpose [75], so creating environments with reciprocal values is a prerequisite for nurturing a purpose. Family support influences youth purpose development during middle and high school years, because parents can help their children develop purpose by modeling ways to contribute to society and inviting them to take part in that activity [54]. An investigation study of females found that the association between parental relationships and other-oriented purposes appears to be mediated by prosocial behavior [49]. Additionally, another study focusing on female youth groups found that parental trust may be necessary but not sufficient to buffer the negative association between the search for purpose and self-esteem [7]. It is worth noting youth with higher perceived parental support are not likely to show evidence of beyond-the-self reasons and engagement because the associations with engagement and beyond-the-self reasons were expected as a presupposition [58]. It is in stark contrast to the findings of another study, which concluded that young adults who had a beyond-the-self purpose were inclined to report their family supports as a positive model [75]. In other words, encouraging parents and friends to stay involved in cultivating a sense of a meaningful future is irreplaceably important for youth purpose development [54, 58]. For instance, parents could cultivate relationships with their children characterized by mutual trust and communication to balance closeness with support for adolescent autonomy and agency [49].

On the contrary, perceived presence and importance of school supports differentiate between the different forms of purpose, and it is not those adolescents with

more organized forms of purpose that derive most support from school [55]. Surprisingly, a study showed that school support for community service related to searching for purpose rather than purpose identification and to negative rather than positive self-transcendent emotions [37]. Another study elucidated that the relationship between school supports and dimensions of purpose only exists concurrently, and school supports at one-time point do not predict or support purpose growth after that time without intentional and sustained support for both beyond-the-self oriented, higher-order goal setting and beyond-the-self goal commitment [53]. In the educational process, it is worth noting that student perceptions of teacher support and teacher competencies can play an important role in fostering youth purpose [13], and another similar study showed significant positive associations between students' ratings of teacher purpose support and students' purpose search and purpose identification [38]. These studies demonstrate a focus on students' emic views while promoting classroom and school environments [13, 38]. In specific aspects of teacher support, making connections to real life and talking about future plans showed that teachers do contribute to supporting young adults' life purpose [65].

Educational perspective of cultivating youth purpose

Pedagogy cultivates young people's life purpose by focusing on educational objectives, contents, and methods. Researchers with an educational perspective emphasize the role of education and learning experiences in shaping the purpose of young adults [71]. Here, scholars explore how various pedagogical strategies and school-based experiences can enhance young adults' sense of purpose. It is noted that academic achievement statistically significantly influences the way adolescents understand purpose [66]. Success during studies, as an indicator of academic giftedness, is a significant variable informing of purpose as a form of intrapersonal giftedness, but the opportunities that exist outside of an academic context may be equally conducive to purpose development. In terms of purpose cultivation, bolstering the generalizability of cultivating youth purpose in life to encourage self-understanding will give sense to individual future development [66]. Furthermore, the relationships with mentors and extra-curricular activities involvement were discussed among scholars when mentioning school experiences. It is shown that students who did not have a mentor reported significantly lower levels of commitment to purpose compared to students who had at least one mentor, and quality of relational health instead of the number of mentors was significantly associated with higher levels of commitment to purpose [50]. That is to say, providing students with opportunities to develop relationships

with mentors can support students in purpose development [50]. Another study indicated that more frequent and well-rounded extra-curricular activities involvement is positively associated with young adults' purpose in life [79], so considering how learning experiences can support students in purpose development is a main question for educators and administrators.

Discussion

Adolescents and young adults rarely have a clear and careful idea of what they want now or in the future and how to achieve their life goals. Data showed that only one in five youths can identify such goals in the future Damon [20]. Fortunately, it is possible to cultivate youth's life purpose consciously, and adolescence is the best time [6]. Overall, existing theoretical and practical research put forward three types of purpose interventions in cultivating young adults' life purpose: (1) motivating individual positive emotions and character strengths (2), improving support from family, school, and other sources, and (3) encouraging the willingness to participate in social activities.

Firstly, works of literature provide evidence for the functional outcomes of positive emotions and character strengths from young adults to the development of their life purpose [12, 16, 26, 42]. From a psychological point of view, purpose provides direction for passion, which can transform it into immediate actions [74]. As previously noted, passion is a strong inner desire that can be motivated to cultivate youth purpose through working on things they enjoy and generally acquiring positive results [10]. Additionally, enhancing gratitude is another way to cultivate the life purpose of young adults [25]. The research found that encouraging a sense of gratitude and helping youth focus on the happiness and well-being in their lives led to the idea of rewarding others by fulfilling their life purpose [8], which has been proven that the experience of gratitude can foster strong goal-direction of youth. Earlier empirical research linked purpose with the ability to recover from adversity [62], and results showed that resilient individuals are more likely to succeed mentally and academically and can fulfill their life purpose. Moreover, continuous reflection, positive states, and identity cognition are vital to improving self-efficacy and feasibility of action for young adults to realize their purpose in life [55, 56].

Secondly, with the absence of support from family members, mentors, and essential others, young adults' search for the purpose may be prolonged, leading them to give up for fear that they will not find it [40, 48]. A study found that mentors and like-minded peers provided essential sources of support for youth purpose formation [12], and other scholars have come to similar conclusions

that support from individuals outside the family is essential to the desired development of adolescents [20]. For example, teachers' competence in cultivating adolescents' purpose and adolescents' perception of teachers' support is positively correlated with the development of adolescents' purpose in life [13, 38, 50]. In addition, data showed that youth purpose is positively correlated with daily family support, such as close family connection and recognition from family members [7, 41].

Thirdly, young adults spending much time outside the school in extracurricular activities and volunteer service programs develop their awareness and understanding of purpose without the pressure of complex tests [45] since such experience improves their ability to identify life goals and increased the frequency of prosocial behaviors [24]. Young adults who participate in social activities such as community service will get a deeper understanding of purpose in a permeable way [76], which encourages them to take action to realize their purpose [4]. Last, further studies on adolescents with a clear purpose in life showed that support from outside the school, such as parents or social environment, is critical in their search and identifying purpose [44].

As the central strength of this systematic review, we emphasize the fact of a new area to a varied measure concerning current study about young adults' life purpose. Moreover, we add evidence to the potential that has been acknowledged to influence and cultivate young adults' life purpose in the process of education. Nevertheless, some limitations must be considered. We note that relevant research may not have been contained in this systematic review because of strict inclusion criteria and regional-restricted searching barriers. Additionally, limitations inherent to selecting specific databases and the search terms may have led to missing some researches.

Conclusion

This systematic review explored how to influence and cultivate young adults' life purpose in education. We may find justification for the short, direct mentions of purpose in life as the dependent variable. So far, studies concerning youth purpose have focused mainly on purpose attributes that provide orientation for changing their life purpose. The sociological perspective of cultivating youth purpose was usually adopted by the majority of authors in implementing empirical investigations related to youth purpose, and psychological and educational perspectives were also involved and distinct among studies. Overall, purpose interventions were appeared and discussed comprehensively because of the common influence of subjective and objective factors on youth life purpose. On the one hand, the factor of the youth own is a core dimension of youth purpose [6, 11] and has been

considered a vital element of studies focused on cultivating purpose in the context of positive youth development [9, 18]. It concludes in this regard that it is significant to mention that some authors [8, 62, 74] have recently introduced a more multifaceted intervention of life purpose, which comes across with the individual mental and physical determinants of purpose cultivation. This notion is based on personal development with future life goals, focusing research on the difference and potential of young adults with subjective activity. On the other hand, the objective factors affecting the life purpose of adolescents are complex and varied. Direct anthropic impacts from the body other than the youth oneself, including support from teachers, mentors, and peers in schools and close relationships in a family, are usually focused on in empirical studies. Interactions and communications with those important others, in turn, are mainly associated with youth purpose in the studies included in this review [7, 12, 13, 38, 41]. In other words, these people constitute the surrounding environment that adolescents are exposed to and are well-placed to have a positive impact on their life purpose. Studies have shown that the indirect effects of implementing extracurricular activities and social programs can also have a certain impact on young adults' life purpose [24, 76, 79].

This study explored the influencing factors and relative interventions for cultivating youth life purpose in education. The conclusions of this systematic review confirm some findings of previous reviews on life purpose [21, 36, 57] but also emphasize novel main findings that are overlooked by past studies. As mentioned before, researches concerning youth purpose have concentrated mostly on purpose attributes that provide orientation for changing youth purpose. Besides, purpose interventions were argued comprehensively in terms of personal, familial, scholastic, and social aspects. Future research that aims for finding effective ways to cultivate life purpose for adolescents needs to look toward combined interventions.

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Authors' contributions

MZ and WLZ conducted systematic searches, screened for the inclusion of studies, and evaluated the quality of measures used in studies. MZ wrote the manuscript. FJ critically revised it. FJ and WLZ met frequently with MZ to provide feedback. All authors also met regularly to review updated drafts and provide feedback. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Data availability

No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declarations**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

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Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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