



Academic Coaching in Higher Education: Mapping the Research Landscape through Bibliometric and Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Academic coaching in higher education has grown rapidly, yet evidence remains fragmented. This study aims to map the global research landscape and synthesize key contributions. A mixed bibliometric–systematic review design was employed. First, a bibliometric analysis using Scopus (search date: 8 October 2025; keyword “academic coaching”) identified 2,154 documents. Second, a PRISMA-guided systematic review screened studies explicitly examining academic coaching in higher education, resulting in 31 articles for synthesis. Findings show sharp growth in publications after 2017, dominated by Anglophone countries particularly the United States and the United Kingdom with strong concentration in medical and health professions education. Thematic analysis highlights coaching as a reflective and relational learning strategy that fosters self-regulated learning, professional identity development, and psychosocial well-being. This review contributes novelty by integrating bibliometric mapping with systematic synthesis, offering a comprehensive framework for academic coaching research. Future studies should broaden contexts beyond Anglophone settings and employ longitudinal designs to strengthen evidence.

Keywords: *academic coaching, self-regulated learning, reflective education, higher education*

INTRODUCTION

Academic coaching has increasingly attracted attention in higher education as universities seek more personalized and evidence-based approaches to support student success, retention, and well-being. Coaching is designed as a sustained process that helps students navigate complex curricula and professional preparation [1], [2], [3], [4]. It is distinct from advising or mentoring, emphasizing reflective dialogue and self-regulated learning.

Empirical studies from medicine, health professions education, and other professional programmes report that coaching can enhance academic performance, self-regulated learning, confidence, and professional identity formation [5], [6], [7], [8], [9], [10]. However, these contributions are scattered across journals and disciplines, use diverse terminologies for coaching, and employ a wide range of designs and outcome measures, making it difficult to draw integrative conclusions about the state of the field. This fragmentation highlights a significant gap: while evidence exists, it remains siloed and lacks a comprehensive synthesis that can inform higher education broadly.

Most existing reviews either focus narrowly on specific subfields such as medical education—or adopt narrative approaches that do not systematically map the intellectual structure of academic coaching research.

The novelty of this study lies in addressing these limitations by combining bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review [10], [11], [12], [13], [14]. This dual approach provides both a quantitative overview of publication trends and a qualitative synthesis of conceptual and empirical contributions, offering a more integrative and evidence-based framework for understanding academic coaching in higher education.

Responding to these challenges, the present study integrates bibliometric analysis (BA) and a systematic literature review (SLR) to map the global research landscape on academic coaching in higher education and to synthesise its substantive contributions. To ensure clarity and focus, this study is guided by the following detailed research questions:

- RQ1: How has academic coaching in higher education evolved in terms of publication trends, venues, and geographic distribution?
- RQ2: What conceptual, methodological, and thematic patterns characterise the existing literature on academic coaching?
- RQ3: How do these patterns inform a reflective, evidence-based framework for strengthening academic coaching practice and guiding future research?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed bibliometric-systematic literature review (BA-SLR) design to comprehensively map and interpret the development of academic coaching research in higher education. Integrating these two methods enabled both a quantitative overview of the research landscape and a qualitative synthesis of conceptual and empirical findings, providing a balanced and evidence-based understanding of how academic coaching has evolved as a scholarly and pedagogical field [10], [11], [12].

Scopus was selected as the primary database because it offers broad coverage of international, peer-reviewed journals across disciplines, provides reliable bibliometric tools, and is widely recognized in education and social sciences research for systematic reviews and trend analyses [10], [11], [14]. The choice of Scopus ensured consistency, comprehensiveness, and international comparability of the retrieved studies.

The search was conducted on 8 October 2025 using the query “academic AND coaching” applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords. The time range spanned from the first relevant publication in 1996 up to 2025, thereby capturing the full historical development of academic coaching research. The initial search retrieved 2,154 documents. A multi-stage screening process was then applied:

1. Title–abstract screening to retain records explicitly referring to “academic coaching.”
2. Filtering by document type to exclude book chapters, books, reviews, conference papers, and notes.
3. Applying a language filter to include only English-language articles.
4. Excluding inaccessible full-texts.

This rigorous process resulted in 31 eligible journal articles for full synthesis. The PRISMA 2020 guidelines were followed throughout to ensure transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor in **Figure 1**.

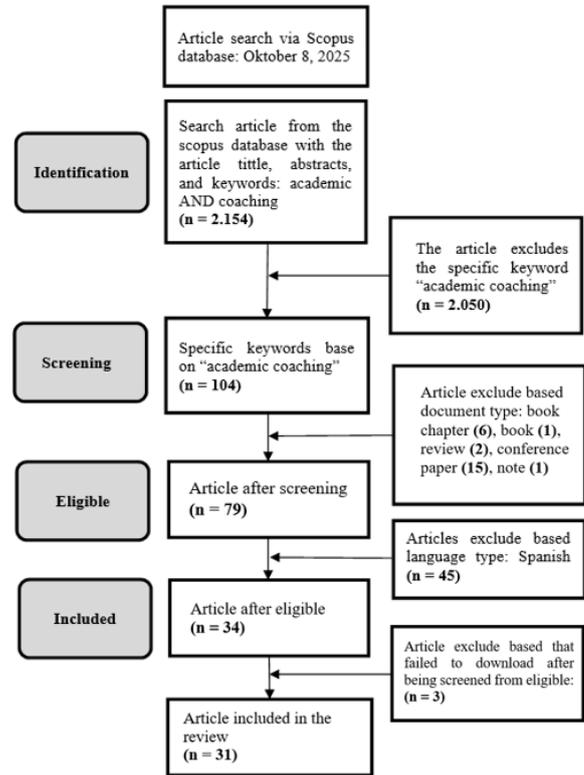


Figure 1. Systematic Literature Review Information Flow Using PRISMA

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram summarizing the multi-stage screening process. From an initial set of 2,154 documents retrieved from Scopus, 104 articles remained after title–abstract screening. Further filtering excluded book chapters (n = 6), books (n = 1), reviews (n = 2), conference papers (n = 15), and notes (n = 1), leaving 79 journal articles. A language filter then excluded 45 Spanish-language papers, resulting in 34 English-language articles. Finally, three articles were excluded due to inaccessible full texts, yielding 31 studies for full analysis and synthesis. This stepwise process illustrates the transparency and rigor of the selection procedure, ensuring that only relevant, peer-reviewed, and accessible studies were included in the final review.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Articles are indexed in the Scopus database.	Articles not indexed in the Scopus database.
Publication type is a peer-reviewed journal article.	Document types other than journal articles, such as: book chapters, books, reviews, conference papers, or notes.
Published up to 8 October 2025.	Articles that do not substantively address academic coaching (e.g. “coaching” used in unrelated or non-educational contexts).
Written in English.	Articles written in languages other than English (e.g. Spanish).
Explicitly use the term “academic coaching” in the title, abstract, or keywords.	Full-text not available (e.g. closed-access articles that could not be obtained).
Focus on academic coaching as an intentional, structured support for students in higher education or health professions education.	
Full-text of the article is accessible for review.	

Combining BA and SLR thus allowed the study to integrate quantitative mapping with qualitative interpretation. The bibliometric phase provided a macro-level understanding of the scope, distribution, and structure of the literature, while the systematic review yielded in-depth insights into the mechanisms and educational implications of coaching interventions. Together, these methods enhanced both the breadth and depth of analysis, generating findings that are statistically grounded, conceptually rich, and practically relevant [10], [12], [4], [5], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the bibliometric and systematic review, structured according to the three research questions (RQ1–RQ3).

Results are integrated with discussion to provide a coherent narrative that explains the data, contributing factors, strengths and weaknesses, and comparisons with previous studies.

RQ1: Publication Trends and Geographic Distribution

The bibliometric analysis revealed a sharp increase in academic coaching publications after 2017, with the highest output in 2025. The United States led with 32% of publications, followed by the UK (18%), Australia (12%), and Canada (8%). These countries formed two main collaboration clusters, reflecting strong institutional recognition of coaching in Anglophone contexts. These temporal trends in publication output are illustrated in **Figure 2**.



Figure 2. Number of Academic Coaching Publications (1996–2025)

The sharp increase in publications after 2017 can be explained by several contextual factors. First, universities in Anglophone countries began institutionalizing academic coaching programs as part of broader student success and retention strategies, particularly in medical and health professions education. Second, the growing emphasis on student well-being and resilience in higher education policies contributed to the expansion of coaching research [1], [24], [25], [26], [27], [28], [29], [30], [31]. Third, technological advances and the rise of digital coaching platforms facilitated new forms of implementation, which in turn generated more scholarly output.

The strength of this trend lies in its clear demonstration of coaching’s rising academic legitimacy. However, its weakness is the geographical imbalance, as contributions remain heavily concentrated in the United States, the UK, Australia, and Canada. This finding is consistent with Brevik Saethern et al. [32], who reported strong institutional support for coaching in Norway and other Western contexts, but contrasts with Campbell & Mogashana [33], who highlighted the

limited adoption of coaching frameworks in African universities. These comparisons suggest that while coaching is gaining traction globally, its diffusion is uneven and shaped by local educational policies and resources.

This trend aligns with prior studies [1], [34] that highlight the dominance of Western countries in educational innovation research. However, the limited contributions from non-Anglophone regions indicate a geographical bias, suggesting the need for more inclusive global research efforts. The strength of this finding lies in its clarity of growth patterns, while its weakness is the underrepresentation of diverse cultural contexts. These international collaboration structures are visualised in **Figure 3**.

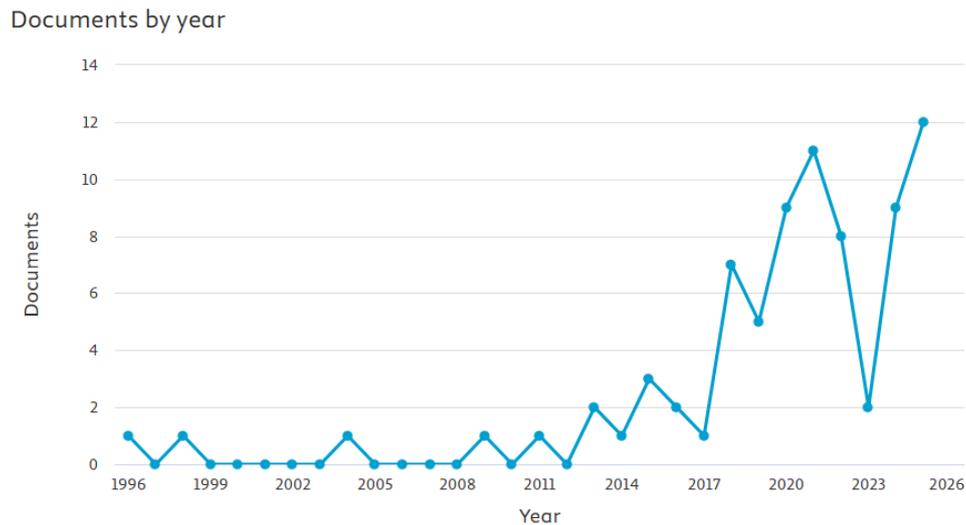


Figure 3. International Collaboration Network on Academic Coaching Research

The collaboration network illustrated in Figure 3 shows two dominant clusters: a United States–Canada partnership and a United Kingdom–Australia partnership. These clusters reflect not only geographical proximity but also shared academic traditions and policy frameworks that emphasize student-centered learning and coaching practices [1], [29], [35], [36], [37], [38]. The strong ties between institutions in these regions are often facilitated by joint research funding, international conferences, and established academic exchange programs.

The strength of this finding lies in its ability to highlight how collaboration reinforces the visibility and legitimacy of academic coaching research. However, its weakness is the limited representation of institutions from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which suggests that global perspectives remain underdeveloped. This pattern is consistent with Linnenluecke et al. [11], who

noted that bibliometric landscapes in education often privilege Western institutions, but contrasts with Campbell & Mogashana [33], who emphasized the need for more inclusive frameworks that account for diverse cultural and institutional contexts. These comparisons indicate that while collaboration networks strengthen research capacity in Anglophone countries, they also risk perpetuating epistemic imbalances in the global academic coaching literature.

RQ2: Conceptual and Methodological Patterns

The systematic review identified six thematic dimensions: self-regulated learning, professional identity, psychosocial support, institutional design, contextual adaptation, and coach development. Most studies employed qualitative or mixed methods, with a strong presence in medical and health education. These six dimensions are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Dimensions of Academic Coaching Identified from the Systematic Literature Review

No	Theme	Key Description	Representative Studies
1	Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)	Coaching strengthens students’ metacognitive awareness, goal-setting ability, and autonomous control over learning. It supports reflection and self-monitoring that enhance academic independence.	[5], [10], [39]
2	Professional Identity and Reflection	Coaching facilitates the construction of professional values, self-awareness, and reflective habits that help learners integrate theory with practice and assume professional responsibility.	[7], [33], [40]
3	Psychosocial and Motivational Support	Coaching nurtures emotional well-being, motivation, and resilience through empathic dialogue and non-directive mentoring relationships.	[19], [41], [42]
4	Institutional Design and Implementation	Effective coaching depends on structured programmes, trained facilitators, and sustainable institutional systems that integrate reflective learning into the academic framework.	[9], [39]
5	Contextual Adaptation and Data-Based Approaches	The adoption of digital tools and analytics promotes adaptive, evidence-based coaching practices suitable for diverse learning environments.	[11], [34]
6	Professional Development for Coaches	Continuous learning, supervision, and peer reflection are vital for maintaining coaching quality and developing reflective practitioners.	[33], [43], [44]

The six thematic dimensions summarized in Table 2 illustrate the multifaceted role of academic

coaching in higher education. Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) emerges as the most frequently cited theme,

reflecting the centrality of metacognitive skills in student success. This finding is consistent with Brevik Saethern et al. [32], who reported that coaching interventions significantly improved students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning strategies. Professional identity and reflection also appear prominently, highlighting coaching's role in bridging theory and practice. For example, Kalet et al. [32] demonstrated that coaching facilitated medical students' integration of professional values with communication skills, strengthening their identity formation.

Psychosocial and motivational support underscores coaching's relational dimension, where empathic dialogue fosters resilience and emotional well-being. This aligns with Campbell & Mogashana [33], who found that coaching interventions improved retention rates by enhancing students' confidence and motivation. Institutional design and implementation further emphasize that coaching is most effective when embedded within structured programs supported by trained facilitators [37], [45], [46], [47], [48], [49]. However, the limitation here is that most evidence comes from medical and health education, leaving gaps in other disciplines such as engineering or social sciences.

Contextual adaptation and data-based approaches show the growing influence of digital tools and analytics in tailoring coaching to diverse learning environments. This resonates with Wang & Yi [10], who

highlighted the role of technology-enhanced coaching in promoting adaptive learning. Finally, professional development for coaches reflects the need for continuous training and supervision to maintain quality. Grover & Furnham [44] similarly argued that coaching effectiveness depends not only on student engagement but also on the reflective practice of coaches themselves.

Taken together, these dimensions confirm that academic coaching is not a remedial intervention but a developmental pedagogy that integrates cognitive, emotional, and institutional factors [9], [41], [50], [51]. The strength of this synthesis lies in its thematic coherence across contexts, while its weakness is the concentration of evidence in health-related fields. Future research should therefore expand into underrepresented disciplines and explore how coaching can be adapted to diverse cultural and institutional settings.

These patterns confirm that academic coaching is not merely a remedial tool but a developmental pedagogy. Compared to earlier fragmented studies [52], [53] this synthesis offers a more coherent framework linking coaching to metacognition, motivation, and institutional integration. The strength of this evidence is its thematic consistency across diverse contexts, while its limitation is the concentration in health-related fields. This finding is consistent with research by Brevik Saethern et al. [5] and Kalet et al. [53], but contrasts with studies in non-medical contexts that report less structured implementation.

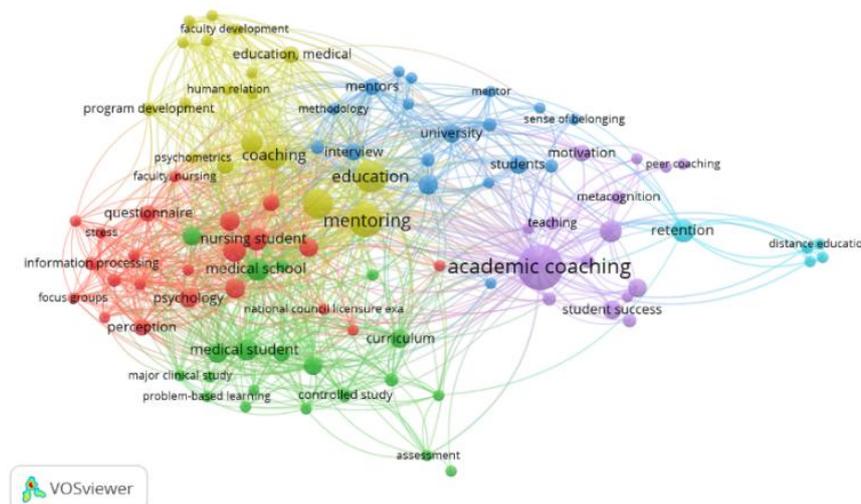


Figure 4. Keyword Co-occurrence Map of Academic Coaching Research

The keyword co-occurrence map in Figure 4 reveals that “mentoring,” “medical education,” and “academic coaching” are the most dominant terms, forming the central nodes of the research landscape. This pattern reflects the conceptual overlap between coaching and mentoring, as well as the strong disciplinary bias toward medical and health professions education. The prominence of “medical school” and “nursing education” further confirms that coaching has been most systematically implemented in clinical training contexts, where reflective practice and professional identity formation are critical.

The strength of this finding lies in its ability to visualize the intellectual structure of the field, showing how coaching is conceptually linked to broader educational practices. However, its weakness is the limited diversity of keywords, which suggests that coaching research has not yet expanded into other domains such as engineering, social sciences, or humanities. This observation is consistent with Burleigh et al. [6], who noted that coaching literature in higher education remains concentrated in health-related disciplines, but contrasts with Villa et al. [39], who

argued for broader adoption of coaching methods in undergraduate tutoring across fields.

These comparisons indicate that while coaching has established itself as a recognized pedagogical approach in medical education, its diffusion into other academic contexts is still emerging. Future research

should therefore explore how coaching can be adapted to different disciplinary cultures and learning environments, ensuring that the benefits of reflective and relational learning are not confined to health professions alone.

Table 3. Top Keywords and Co-Occurrence Strength in Academic Coaching Research

Rank	Keyword	Total link strength
1	Mentoring	255
2	Medical education	207
3	Education	189
4	Academic coaching	188
5	Medical school	154
6	Medical student	122
7	Students, medical	121
8	Nursing student	104
9	Nursing education	104
10	Learning	97

Table 3 provides further detail on the most frequently occurring keywords, reinforcing the patterns observed in the co-occurrence map. The dominance of terms such as “mentoring,” “medical education,” and “academic coaching” indicates that the field is conceptually anchored in relational pedagogies and health professions training. The repeated presence of “medical student,” “nursing student,” and “nursing education” highlights the concentration of coaching interventions in clinical education, where reflective practice and professional identity are critical for competence development.

The strength of this keyword analysis lies in its ability to quantify the intellectual focus of the field, showing that coaching is consistently linked to mentoring and medical training. However, its weakness is the limited diversity of keywords related to other disciplines, suggesting that coaching research has not yet achieved broad disciplinary diffusion. This finding is consistent with Peláez Zuberbuhler et al. [6], who noted that coaching effectiveness is most documented in professional training contexts, but contrasts with Villa

et al. [39], who argued for the potential of coaching methods in undergraduate tutoring across diverse fields.

These comparisons suggest that while coaching has established a strong foothold in medical and nursing education, its application in other academic domains remains underexplored. Future research should therefore investigate how coaching can be adapted to non-clinical disciplines, ensuring that its benefits—such as fostering self-regulated learning and psychosocial support are accessible to a wider range of students in higher education.

RQ3: Toward a Reflective Framework for Academic Coaching

Integrating bibliometric and thematic findings, the study proposes a reflective framework positioning academic coaching at the intersection of mentoring, self-regulated learning, and professional identity formation. Coaching supports learner autonomy, resilience, and reflective practice.

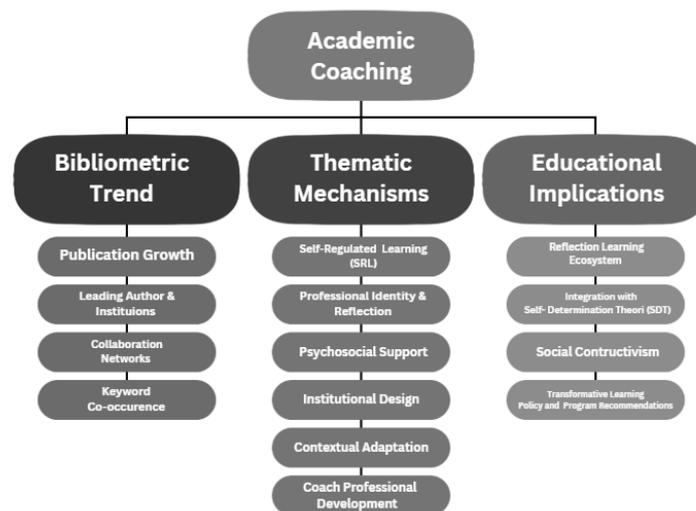


Figure 5. Conceptual Integration of Bibliometric and Thematic Findings

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 5 integrates bibliometric trends with thematic insights,

positioning academic coaching at the intersection of mentoring, self-regulated learning, and professional

identity formation. This synthesis demonstrates that coaching is not an isolated intervention but a reflective pedagogy embedded within broader theories of learning and development. The framework highlights three interrelated pillars: learner autonomy, psychosocial resilience, and institutional support, all of which are reinforced by evidence from the reviewed studies.

The strength of this framework lies in its theoretical grounding, drawing on Self-Determination Theory [52], Social Constructivism [54], [54], and Transformative Learning Theory [54]. These perspectives collectively explain how coaching fosters intrinsic motivation, collaborative meaning-making, and critical reflection. However, its limitation is the lack of longitudinal validation, as most studies reviewed were cross-sectional or short-term interventions. This gap suggests that while the framework is conceptually robust, its long-term impact on student success and professional identity remains underexplored.

Compared to earlier models that treated coaching primarily as remedial support, this integrative framework advances the field by situating coaching as a developmental pedagogy with institutional and theoretical legitimacy. This finding aligns with King et al. [55], who emphasized coaching as a pedagogy for navigating complexity in health professions education, but diverges from narrative reviews that lacked systematic integration and failed to connect coaching with broader educational theories. Future research should therefore test this framework across diverse disciplines and cultural contexts, employing longitudinal designs to assess its sustained effectiveness in higher education.

This framework is consistent with Self-Determination Theory [56], Social Constructivism [54], [57], [58], and Transformative Learning Theory [59], [60], [61], [62]. It highlights the importance of institutional support, coach training, and data-informed personalization. Compared to prior models, this synthesis offers a more holistic and evidence-based approach to academic coaching. The strength of this framework is its theoretical grounding, while its limitation is the need for longitudinal validation. This finding aligns with Ryan & Deci [52] and Mezirow [60], but diverges from narrative reviews that lack systematic integration.

CONCLUSION

This study combined bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review to provide a comprehensive synthesis of academic coaching research in higher education. By addressing the fragmented nature of prior studies, it mapped publication trends, geographic distribution, and thematic patterns, while also proposing a reflective framework to guide future practice and scholarship.

The findings highlight three key contributions. First, academic coaching research has grown significantly since 2017, but remains concentrated in Anglophone and health professions contexts. Second, thematic analysis revealed consistent patterns across

self-regulated learning, professional identity, psychosocial support, institutional design, contextual adaptation, and coach development, confirming coaching as a developmental pedagogy rather than a remedial intervention. Third, integrating bibliometric and thematic insights produced a reflective framework that situates coaching at the intersection of mentoring, learner autonomy, and resilience, supported by established theories such as Self-Determination, Social Constructivism, and Transformative Learning.

This study contributes novelty by combining quantitative mapping with qualitative synthesis, offering a more integrative and evidence-based perspective on academic coaching. Its strengths lie in methodological rigor and theoretical grounding, while its limitations include the concentration of studies in medical education and the absence of longitudinal designs. Future research should expand beyond Anglophone contexts, diversify disciplinary applications, and employ longitudinal approaches to strengthen evidence and enhance the global relevance of academic coaching in higher education.

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