

A Bibliometric Review of Research Trends in Educational Leadership

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Abstract: *Little attempt has been made to map global research trends in Educational Leadership. This paper presents a bibliometric review of the application of Leadership theories in OM to determine research trends and gaps in Educational Leadership. A total of 50 publications on Educational Leadership from 2015 to 2023 were reviewed. The analysis was done with the VOSviewer software (version 1.6.13). The analysis focused on the bibliographic coupling of countries, co-authorship of authors, citation of documents, and co-occurrence of keywords, Educational, Theories, Leadership, Organisation, and Culture which were presented as network visualization maps. The findings revealed that the Educational, Distributed, Social Justice Leadership, Theories, and Organisation Culture publication trends, although not completely gradient, have been upwards since 2015. United States, Finland, United Kingdom, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, and Malaysia were the countries that have had a great impact in this research area. Both the keywords and document citation analysis revealed three distinct phases in the evolution of Educational Leadership research. Only one data source - Scopus - was used. Therefore, the representation of publications presented in this study are limited to only Scopus data source.*

Keywords: educational leadership, theories, distributed leadership, organisation culture, social justice leadership, network visualization maps

INTRODUCTION

The importance of Educational Leadership lies in the belief that good leadership in schools helps to foster both a positive and motivating culture for staff and high-quality experience for learners. Leaders at all levels in schools can contribute to this by developing the top skills needed by school leaders (Jossey Bass). Educational

Leadership is a term that is used synonymously with school leadership in some countries especially the United States. It is important not only for teachers but also for students to experience leadership opportunities during their schooling to learn the art of building relationships within teams, defining identities, and achieving tasks effectively. This benefit avails itself only when there is good and effective educational leadership. Educational Leadership provides an opportunity to learn to identify and display effective communication and interpersonal skills. They are important skills to have because a good leader is able to bring out the best abilities in his or her team members and motivate them to work together in achieving a shared goal. A good leader is also organised and keeps the team on track and focused to avoid delays. The use of educational theories has gained popularity in all educational institutions. Although many educational institutions have been adopting educational theories and pedagogies for their operations over the years, the current system of education has added an extra impetus to the uptake of educational theories and pedagogies. It can be said in practical terms, that pedagogical authority is constructed in classrooms, in teacher-student interaction, and in the spirit of their physical presence, confidence, appreciation, responsibility, and respect, and in the way they both relate to the content and norms (<https://www.tandfonline.com>). On the question of how teachers view their pedagogical authority, Elina Harjunen (2011), in her “Students’ Consent to a Teacher’s Pedagogical Authority”, reasons along a similar line to Kirsi Tirri et al. (2010) that pedagogical authority is constructed in the classroom through the interaction between teachers and students. Journal of Education for Teaching. Gil-Madrona (2020) is of the view that the concept of pedagogical authority can be considered as a power that grants obedience and discipline in the classroom. Commenting on this, McDonald (2021) says that in essence, this means that assessment results for learners are not equal; the talents of all students are not the same. Educational Leadership offers several benefits and therefore underscores the need for more research on education, in all fields of study, including organizations, theories, culture, and leadership.

Research on the importance of Educational Leadership in countries abounds. For example, a recent study by the Wallace Foundation reported that effective school leaders make both a stronger and broader positive impact on student learning, especially in high-needs schools.

Yukl (2013) believes that leaders intentionally exert influence on organizational members in order to affect the organization. Yukl is of the view that leadership is the process of influencing others to understand what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. According to Lezotte and McKee (2006), effective leaders see to it that the organization internalizes the vision and the means used to achieve that vision, making apparent the critical difference between being an effective manager, and an effective leader. Edwards (2009) indicated that leadership is a practice that leads to positive influence, growth, and development of both individuals and groups for collective purposes.

Although studies on Educational Leadership in general and the application of theories in Educational Leadership abound, there is no evidence of studies that identified the research trends and determined the evolution of theories applied in Educational Leadership. Evidence of a bibliometric review in this area of study is lacking. This paper presents a bibliometric review of Educational, Distributed, Social Justice Leadership studies, Theories, and Organisation culture. The output of publications, key authors, and the collaborations among authors and countries, as well as the network of keywords, were explored with the aid of network visualization maps to identify research trends and determine the evolution of theories applied in Leadership. This can help school leaders become familiar with the current and cutting-edge theories that could promote effective and efficient leadership.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the authors used the Scopus database as the data source. Hosseini et al. (2018) believe that the Scopus database has a wide coverage of publications from diverse areas. Moreover, scientific research database such as Scopus provide researchers with information on the most important academic literature in any scientific domain (Chadegani et al., 2013). This makes Scopus a trustworthy database. This study focused specifically on Educational, Distributed, Social Justice Leadership studies, Theories, and Organisation culture as keywords for the study. The search was limited to documents published over the past nine years, i.e., 2015 to 2023. This helped to demonstrate how research on educational leadership has evolved. The first search resulted in a total of 176 documents. The search was further refined to include only Articles, Conference Papers, and Book Chapters published in the subject areas of Educational, Distributed, Social Justice Leadership Studies, Theories, and Organisation culture. This resulted in a reduction from 176 to 132 documents. The search was further limited to only documents published in English resulting in a reduction from 132 to 101 documents.

The second stage was the screening; the titles and abstract of the 101 documents were further screened to eliminate papers which do not align with the research title or theme. This was done by analysing the content of the titles and abstracts. After the screening, a total of 50 documents were deemed appropriate for the study. The search/filtering and screening of the titles and abstract was done on 30th December, 2023.

A bibliometric review was then conducted at the third stage to analyse the 50 documents obtained at the second stage. The bibliometric review was done with the VOSviewer software (version 1.6.13). Bibliometric review is a quantitative technique involving the visual and logical analysis of articles by assessing, mapping, and identifying structural patterns in a research domain, using mathematical models, visualization clusters and algorithms (Olawumi & Chan, 2018). Van Eck and Waltman (2014) clarified that the VOSviewer software, a bibliometric analysis tool, can help to display large

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visualization networks such that it become easily interpretable. Therefore, for this study, data was imported from the Scopus database into the VOSviewer software to create network and overlay visualization maps. Four visualization maps are presented in this study. The visualization maps used for the study are bibliographic coupling of countries and sources, citation of documents and authors, and co-occurrence of keywords. The network visualization map represents items by their labels in a circle. Three factors – size, color, and link – influence the analysis of the network visualization map (Van Eck & Waltman, 2019). First, the size of the label and the size of the circle of an item have a relation to the weight of the item; thus, bigger labels/circles represent higher weight. Secondly, all related items in a cluster network are presented in the same color. Finally, items are linked with lines; thus, the distance between two items indicates their relatedness. For example, the closer two items are to each other, the stronger their relatedness (Van Eck & Waltman, 2019). F-igure 1 shows the steps/stages adopted in this study.

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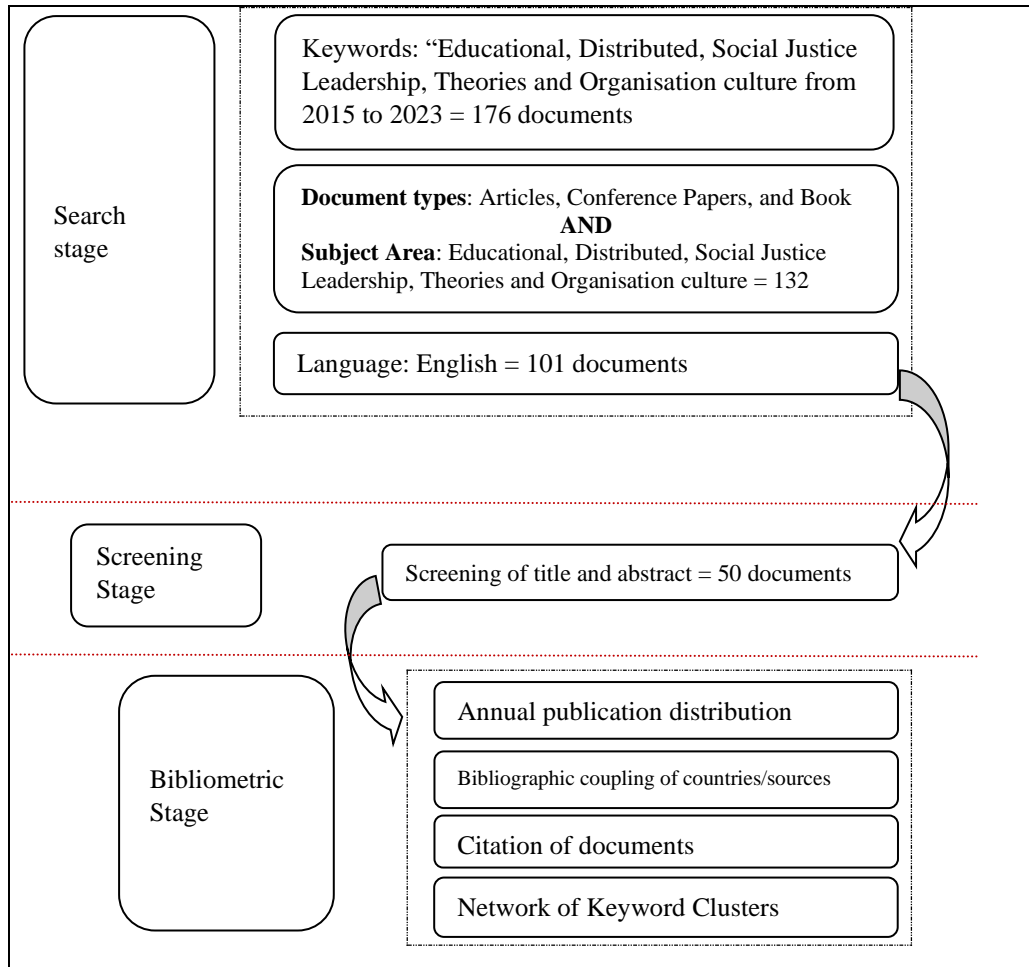


Figure 1: Steps followed in the methodology

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Annual Publication Distribution

The number of publications from 2015 to 2023 is demonstrated in Figure 2. It is evident that there were only three publications recorded in 2015 and five recorded in 2016 and 2021. The number of publications rose from three in 2015 to five publications in the year 2017. The highest increase was recorded in the years 2018 and 2019 with 9 publications. Then it increased sharply to 13 in 2023. This is probably due to the conferences organised that had a specific focus on Educational, Distributed, Social Justice Leadership studies, Theories and Organisation culture. Although the trend has not been smooth, the general trend of publications has been upward.

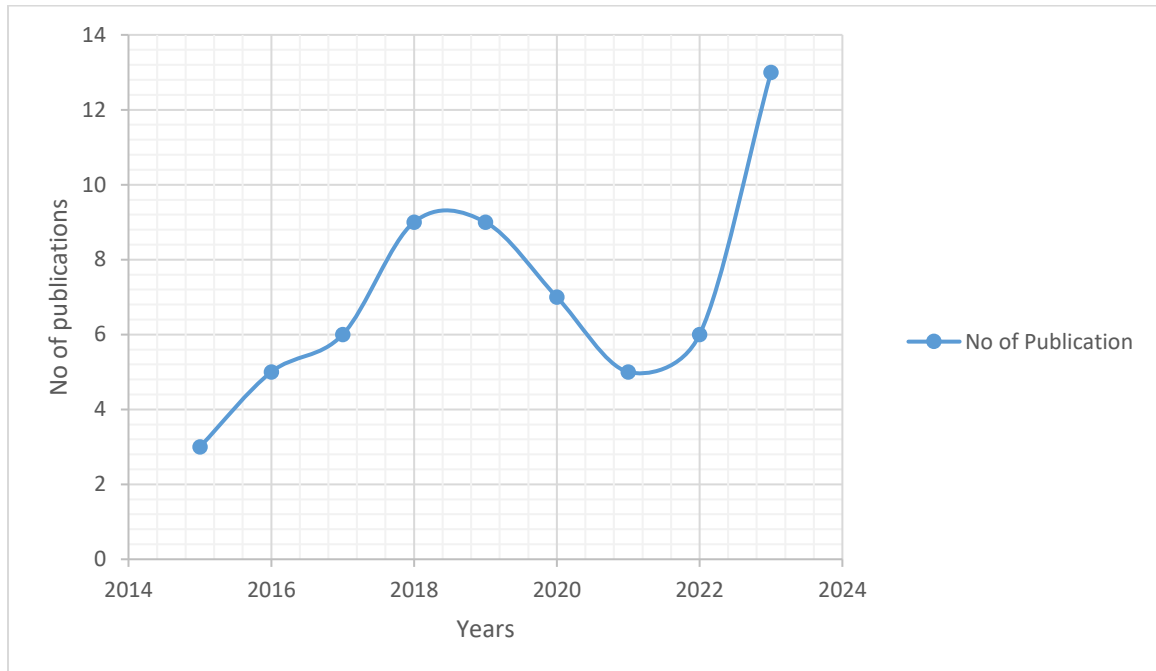


Figure 2. Annual Publication Research Trend

Bibliographic Coupling of Countries

A bibliographic coupling analysis of countries was done to first determine the number of publications recorded by each country, and secondly to evaluate the level of collaboration between/among the countries. The minimum number of documents of a country was set at 2 whilst the minimum number of citations of a country was set at 2. Out of the 26 countries, only 9 met this threshold. United States had the highest number of documents, i.e., 11 with 98 citations whereas Finland recorded the second highest number of citations, i.e., 25, with only 2 documents. Similar to Finland, Sweden, Malaysia and Spain recorded 2 documents each. However, in terms of citations, whereas Finland had 25, Sweden had 35 citations, Malaysia had as low as 4 citations with Spain recording the lowest citation of 2 with 2 documents. The country with the second highest citation was United Kingdom followed by Norway, Netherlands, Sweden and Australia. Respectively, they recorded 95, 45, 44, 35, and 23 citations. It is worth noting that no country in Africa met the threshold of 2 documents and 2 citations. This demonstrates that Africa lags in this area of research.

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Table 1. **Bibliographic Coupling of Countries**

No.	Author	Documents	Citations	Total link strength
1	United States	11	98	593
2	Finland	2	25	488
3	United Kingdom	8	95	162
4	Norway	4	45	141
5	Netherlands	3	44	89
6	Sweden	2	35	9
7	Malaysia	2	4	8
8	Australia	3	23	4
9	Spain	2	2	0

Regarding the link among the countries, United States had the strongest link whilst Australia had the weakest link. However, all countries had links with each other demonstrating a satisfactory level of research link among the countries, with exception of Spain which had no link at all with any country. The network visualization map also reveals 3 clusters: cluster 1 (United States and Finland); cluster 2 (United Kingdom, Norway and Netherlands); cluster 3 (Sweden, Malaysia, Australia, and Spain) (see Figure 3).

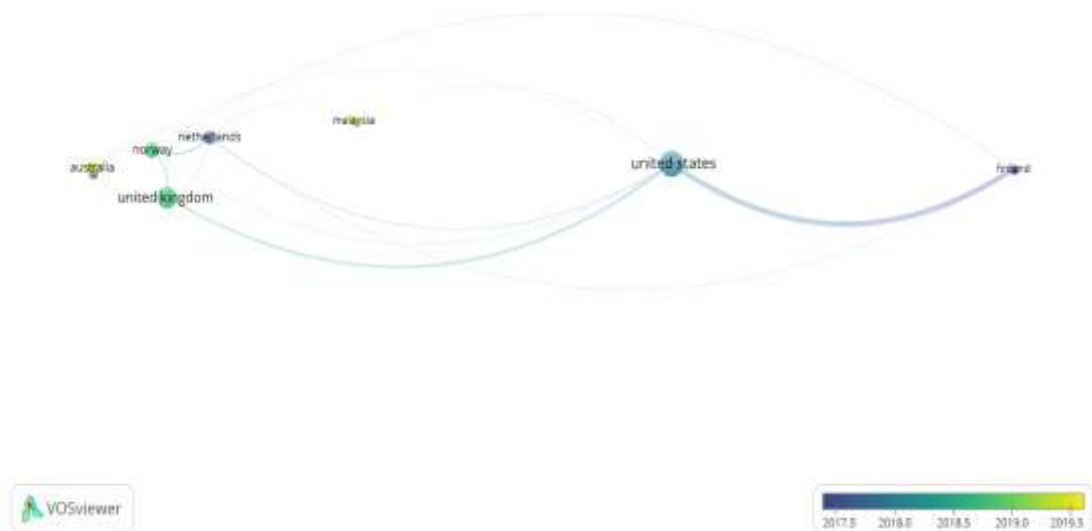


Figure 3. Country Network Visualization Map

Bibliographic Coupling of Sources

According to the bibliographic records, a total of 47 sources had publications in this area of study. Using the VOSviewer software, a minimum number of documents was set at 10 and the minimum citations was set at 10. Out of the total of 47 sources, only 16 met this threshold. These, without doubt, are the sources that have contributed in this area of research. It is quite revealing that all these 16 sources have either an element of Educational, Distributed, Social Justice Leadership, Theories and Organisational Culture in the title. Table 2 further reveals that Journal of Educational Administration, BMC medical Education, International Journal of Leadership in Education, BMC Health Services Research, and Medical Teacher had the highest number of 2 documents each followed by the remaining 10 of the top 15 selected sources with one document each. However, in terms of citations, Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied was the journal with the highest number of citations, i.e. 42 citations. The rest of the top 15 sources had a citation range from 37 to 10. Apart from Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied, BMJ Quality and Safety, and Advances in Developing Human Resource Journals, it appears all the other sources have a good link (see figure 4).

Table 2. **Top 15 sources**

No.	Sources	Documents	Citations	Total link strength
1	BMC medical Education	2	35	5
2	International Journal of Leadership in Education	2	19	5
3	Educational Governance Research	1	19	4
4	Implementation Science	1	34	4
5	BMC Health Services Research	2	19	3
6	Journal of Organizational Change Management	1	22	3
7	Medical Teacher	2	16	3
8	Frontiers in Marine Science	1	10	2
9	Nursing Ethics	1	17	2
10	Journal of Educational Administration	2	13	1
11	Learning Organization	1	13	1
12	Research in Organizational Behavior	1	11	1
13	Advances in Developing Human Resource	1	33	0
14	BMJ Quality and Safety	1	37	0
15	Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied	1	43	0

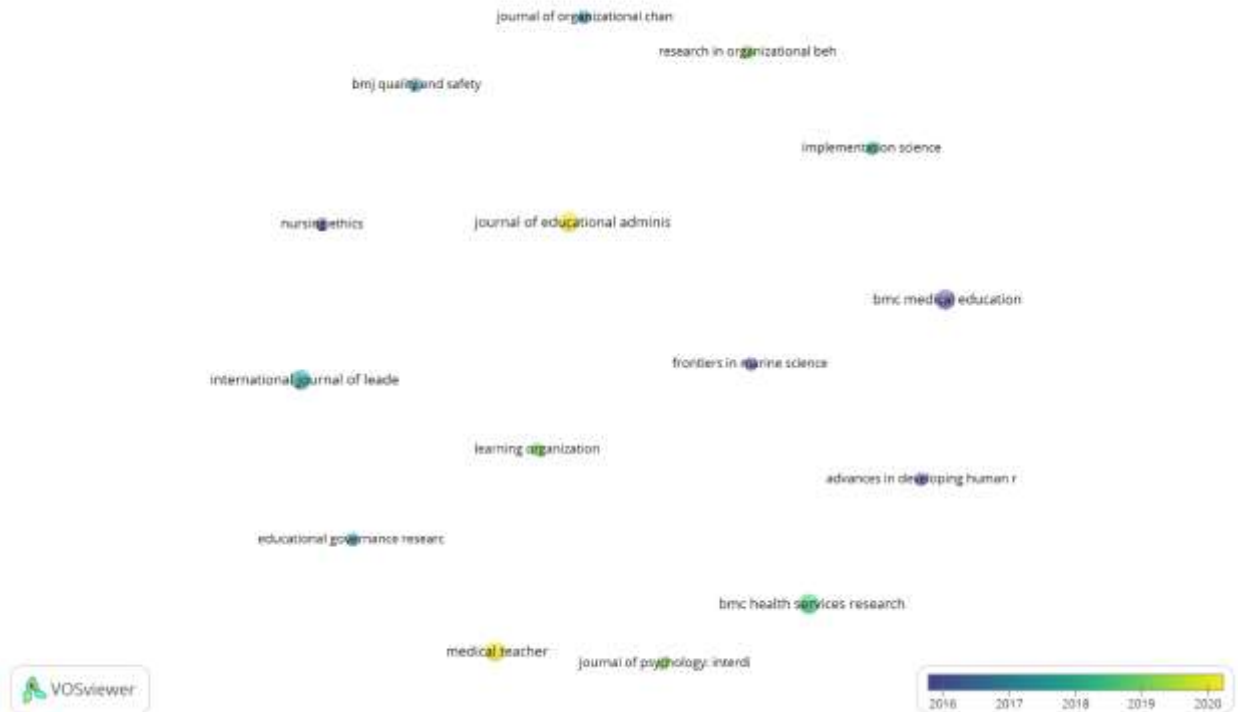


Figure 4. Sources Network Visualization Map

Citation of Documents

A citation analysis of documents was done to determine the level of citations of the specific documents. The minimum number of citations of a document was set at one. Out of the 125 documents, 15 met the threshold. For each of the 15 authors, the total strength of the citation links with other authors was calculated, but it was realized that there were no linkages between them, an indication that there was not much team work or collaboration between these 15 top authors. This is illustrated in the figure 5 below.

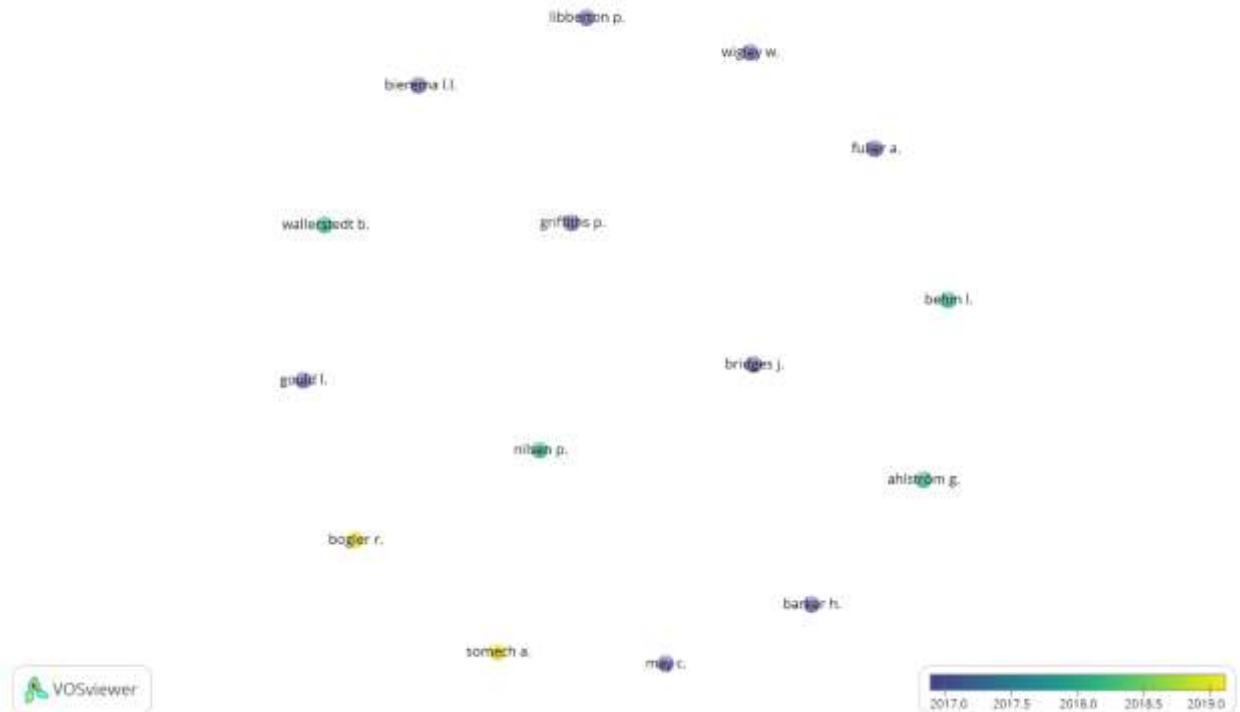


Figure 5. Documents Citation Network Visualization Map

Network of Keyword Clusters

A keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted to determine the trends and evolution of Educational, Distributed, Social Justice Leadership, Theories and Organisational culture. Hu et al. (2019) revealed that clustering analysis helps to identify patterns by grouping sources that share similar words and attribute value. The scope of any research study is determined by the keywords. A network of keyword clusters was derived from a total of 460 keywords. A minimum number of 5 co-occurrence of keywords was set and 14 keywords co-occurred. To ensure that only relevant keywords were captured in the network, some words such as human, female, male, and adult were taken out. Four main words were identified to have strong linkages with other words. These were “leadership, Organisational Culture, Education, and Learning. Under the keyword, Leadership, words that had linkages with other educational leadership words were organization and management, organizational culture, education, learning, and motivation.

Under the keyword, Organizational Culture, there were strong linkages between leadership, education, learning, organization and management, motivation and interview.

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Under the keyword, education, there were strong linkages between education and organization and management, organizational Culture, leadership, learning and motivation.

Under the keyword, learning, there were linkages between organizational culture, education, leadership, organization and management and human development

Two clusters emerged from the analysis. Cluster 1 had 8 keywords; some of the keywords related to Educational leadership in this cluster are education, leadership, organization and management, organizational culture, learning, human equipment, interview, and humans. Cluster 2 had 2 keywords which were article and motivation.

To allow for an informed discussion, the clusters are presented in different colors to demonstrate the timeframe where such words dominated (see the visualization map in fig. 6). It can be inferred from Fig 6 that keywords in Cluster 1 are represented in blue, Purple, and green; these were the keywords which dominated between 2015 and early 2019. The keywords in cluster 2 are represented in Yellow; these keywords dominated from late 2019 until 2023.

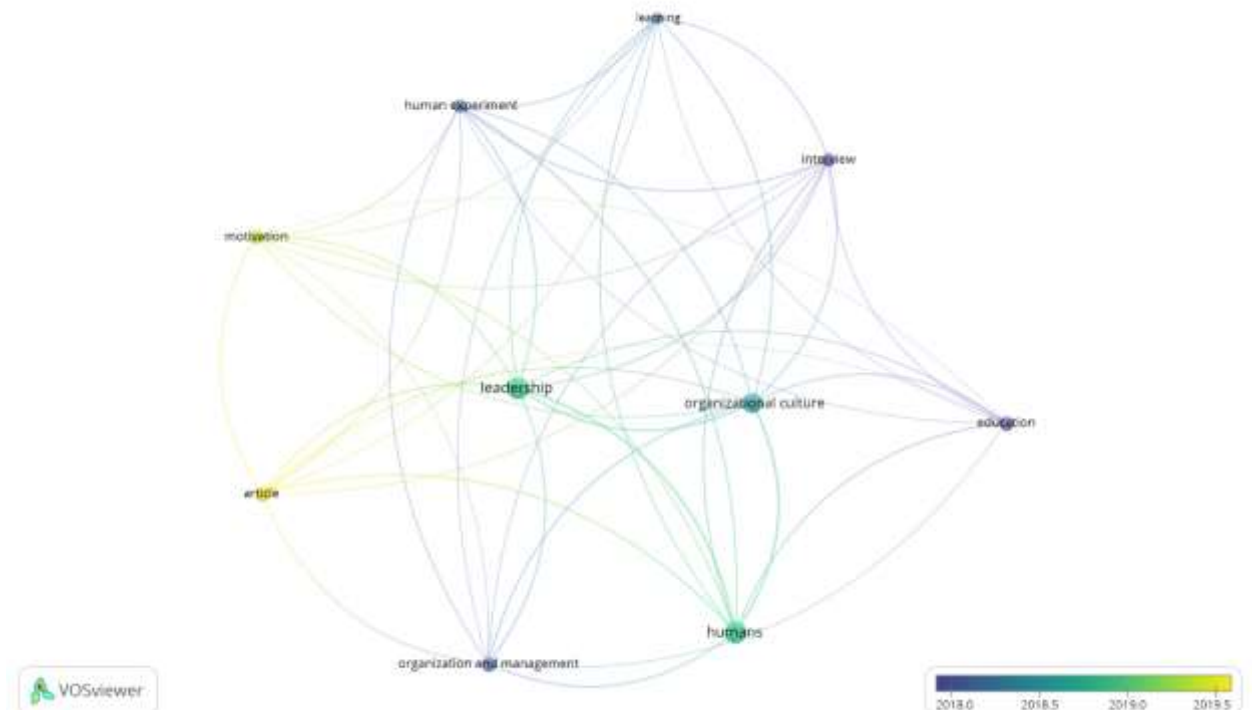


Figure 6. Overlay visualization map of co-occurring keywords

DISCUSSION

Educational leadership, a critical component of effective educational systems, has witnessed evolving research trends that mirror the dynamic nature of educational environments. This discussion provides a concise overview of three prominent research trends: distributed leadership, technology integration, and social justice leadership.

It is evident that the general trend in publications on Educational, Distributed, Social Justice Leadership, Theories and Organisation culture, although not completely gradient, has been upwards since 2015. Recent scholarship emphasizes the shift from traditional hierarchical leadership structures towards more collaborative and distributed models. Spillane et al. (2004) propose a distributed perspective, highlighting the shared nature of leadership responsibilities. Harris (2008) notes the importance of understanding and leveraging distributed leadership, challenging conventional notions to enhance organizational adaptability. The integration of technology in education prompts a re-evaluation of the role of educational leaders. Fullan (2021) discusses the significance of leaders in navigating digital transformations and the implications for teaching and learning. Davis et al. (2011) identify emerging trends and challenges in K-12 education, emphasizing the need for leaders to effectively utilize digital tools for organizational improvement.

Addressing issues of equity and social justice, educational leadership research increasingly centres on leaders' roles in fostering inclusive environments. Theoharis (2009) introduces the concept of social justice leadership, focusing on leaders' ability to resist systemic inequalities. Darling-Hammond (2017) stresses the importance of leaders in creating educational systems that promote diversity and equal opportunities for all students.

Moreover, several other studies on the application of educational theories in organisations, and culture, have been done recently (Schein, 2004). Research on the application of educational theories in organisations, like the other fields in leadership, also thrive. For example, Kouzes and Posner's (2012) study pointed out that for conducive atmosphere to prevail at school, leadership practices and commitments are commendable. Mankoe (2007) was of the view that the burning desire in many developing countries to provide education for more children and to cater for the large numbers of illiterate adults is aimed at increasing the literacy rate, and it is believed that if this is effectively done, it will confer many advantages on developing nations.

It also became evident from the country analysis that whereas countries like United States, Finland, United Kingdom, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, Malaysia, Australia, Spain – all in the Americas, Asia, and Europe have had great impact in this research area, no country in Africa was found to have had a significant contribution in this research area.

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This creates an opportunity for researchers on the continent to focus more attention in this research domain to help address the gap in this research area. This also opens up an opportunity for research collaboration and partnership with other countries outside the continent. There is also the need for organisations and research institution to provide support to promote this research agenda.

CONCLUSION

This study presented a bibliometric review on Educational, Distributed, Social Justice Leadership, Theories and Organisational culture, using publications from the Scopus database. A total of 50 relevant publications were used for the analysis, focusing on the number of publications annually, the publication distribution across countries and continents, bibliographic coupling of sources, citation of documents, and co-occurrence of keywords. This trend provides a direction to guide future investigation in this area of research. The representation of publications presented in this study are somewhat limited since the data set used for the analysis was limited to Scopus database. Also, only documents published in English were considered, excluding other possibly relevant documents published in other languages. As educational leadership continues to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century, these research trends underscore the need for leaders who can navigate change, harness technology, and champion social justice. The interdisciplinary nature of these trends reflects the multifaceted responsibilities of educational leaders in fostering inclusive, innovative, and equitable learning environments.

Therefore, the study recommends further studies be conducted using more than one database. Moreover, it is evident that Africa lags in this area of research. It is, therefore, highly recommended that researchers on the continent focus more attention in this research domain to help address the gap in this research area.

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