

Journal of
Higher Education Policy
And
Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

<https://johepal.com>

**Classroom Justice in Higher
Education: A Bibliometric
Analysis of 1990-2025**

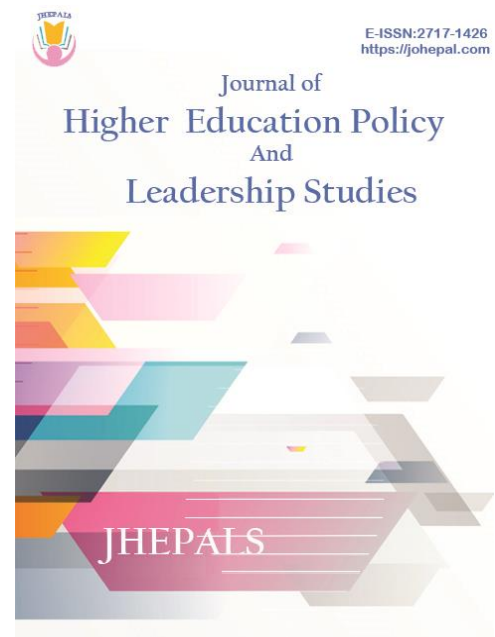
Zahra Banitalebi

*Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences,
Shahid Beheshti University, IRAN*

Email: z_banitalebi@sbu.ac.ir



<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7137-9669>



Colloquium Received
2025/11/11

Colloquium Accepted
2026/03/08

Published Online
2026/03/31

Cite colloquium as:

Banitalebi, Z. (2026). Classroom justice in higher education: A bibliometric analysis of 1990-2025. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, 7(1), 111-120. <https://dx.doi.org/10.66224/johepal.7.1.111>

Banitalebi, Z.

“Colloquium”

Classroom Justice in Higher Education: A Bibliometric Analysis of 1990-2025

Journal of Higher Education
Policy And Leadership
Studies (JHEPALS)

E-ISSN: 2717-1426

Volume: 7 Issue: 1

pp. 111-120

DOI:

10.66224/johepal.7.1.111

Highlights

- This bibliometric study explores the academic landscape regarding classroom justice in higher education, utilizing 250 publications sourced from the Web of Science database covering the years 1990 to 2025.
- The research focuses on several key elements, including the identification of influential journals, authors, and institutions, the analysis of collaboration patterns between countries, an exploration of co-cited documents, and an examination of commonly used keywords and their thematic groupings.
- Findings reveal that Higher Education and Teaching in Higher Education journals are the leading contributors, with four authors identified as significant figures. The USA is the primary contributor, with the strongest collaborations between USA and New Zealand and UK and New Zealand. Co-citation networks emphasize key foundational paper by Colquitt (2001), highlighting theories of procedural and distributive justice. Keywords are grouped around themes of procedural and organizational justice, evolving to issues of identity.

Zahra Banitalebi *

Keywords: Bibliometric Analysis; Higher Education; Classroom Justice; Procedural and Organizational Justice; Identity

*Corresponding author's email: z_banitalebi@sbu.ac.ir

Introduction

Justice within higher education involves the fair allocation of resources, equitable procedural practices, and acknowledgment of various identities present in academic institutions (Sharma et al., 2023). This complex concept, which includes distributive (fair allocation), procedural (fair processes), and interactional (fair treatment) aspects, tackles ongoing issues such as disparities in access, campus environments, and biases in assessment (Martínez-Heredia et al., 2022). With the globalization of higher education, social justice issues have become increasingly significant, shaped by decolonization movements that reveal systemic inequities in teaching, research, and administration (Cock et al., 2025).

Bibliometric analysis serves as an effective tool to quantify and depict scholarly trends, highlighting key authors, networks, and changing discourses. Although previous research has charted topics within higher education, such as ethics (Sharma et al., 2023), inequality (Martínez-Heredia et al., 2022), and sustainability (Machado & Davim, 2022), studies focusing specifically on justice-related bibliometrics are still lacking. This lack of exploration is crucial, as research on justice contributes to the formulation of policies aimed at enhancing participation and equity, especially in diverse environments (Sheeraz et al., 2021).

This paper analyzed 250 English-language publications from 1990 to 2025 (Nov.), a period of economic recovery, social upheavals, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified justice debates (Cock et al., 2025). Guided by four research questions, the study elucidates the field's structure:

1. Which journals, authors, and institutions contribute most to this field?
2. What are the patterns of collaboration among authors and countries?
3. Which papers are most co-cited and cited, and what does that reveal about theoretical foundations?
4. What are the most frequently used keywords, and how do they cluster thematically?

Research Methodology

Data Collection and Search Strategy

The dataset was compiled from Web of Science (WoS), using queries such as ("justice" OR "social justice" OR "equity" OR "fairness") AND ("higher education" OR "university" OR "college"), filtered for peer-reviewed articles, reviews, and book chapters (see Supplementary File for full search string). WoS was chosen due to its reputation for quality and rigor. This methodology aligns with numerous systematic reviews and bibliometric analyses that emphasize the depth and quality of sources (Rathakrishnan et al., 2025). The corpus was analyzed via Bibliometrix R-package (R v4.5.1).

Relevance was established through a screening process: studies that were included concentrated on issues of justice within higher education settings (for example, access for students, equity among faculty, and fairness in assessments); studies that were excluded pertained to unrelated areas (such as criminal justice programs). Figure 1 depicts this process (Haddaway et al., 2022).

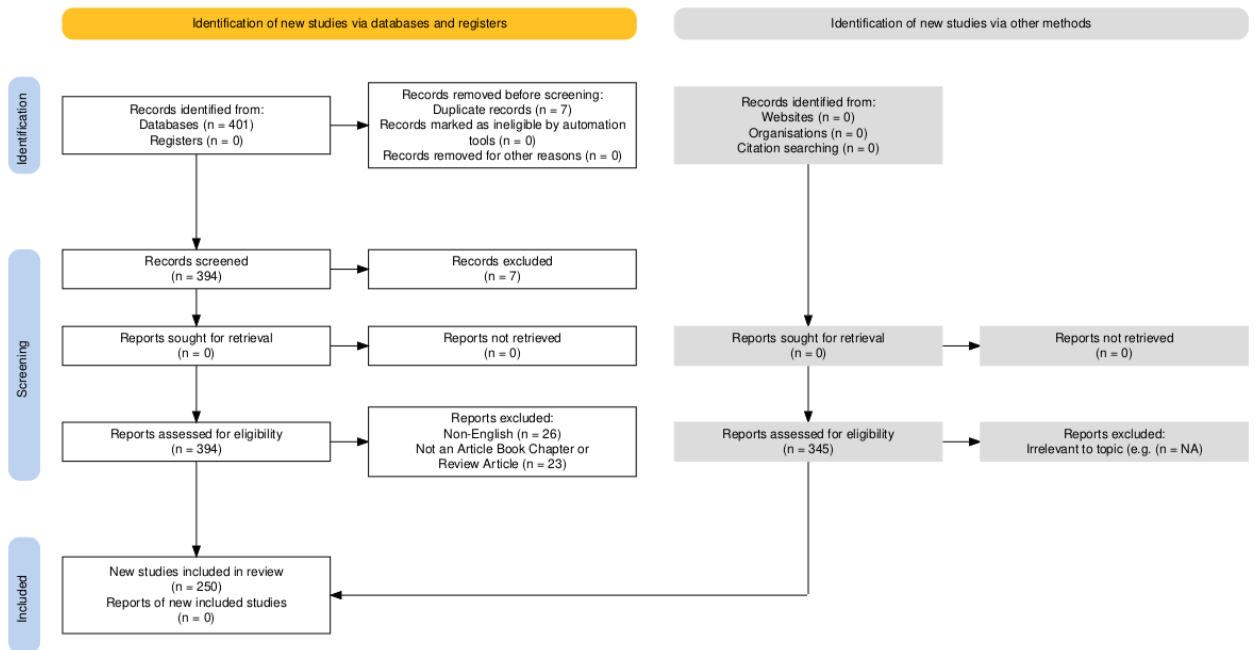


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowdiagram

Results

Publication output grew from 1 document in 1990 to 29 in 2025 (Figure 2), with average 13.82 citation per document. Average co-authorship per document was 2.98 overall, with 76% (N= 191 documents) multi-author papers. This expansion reflects rising global justice concerns.

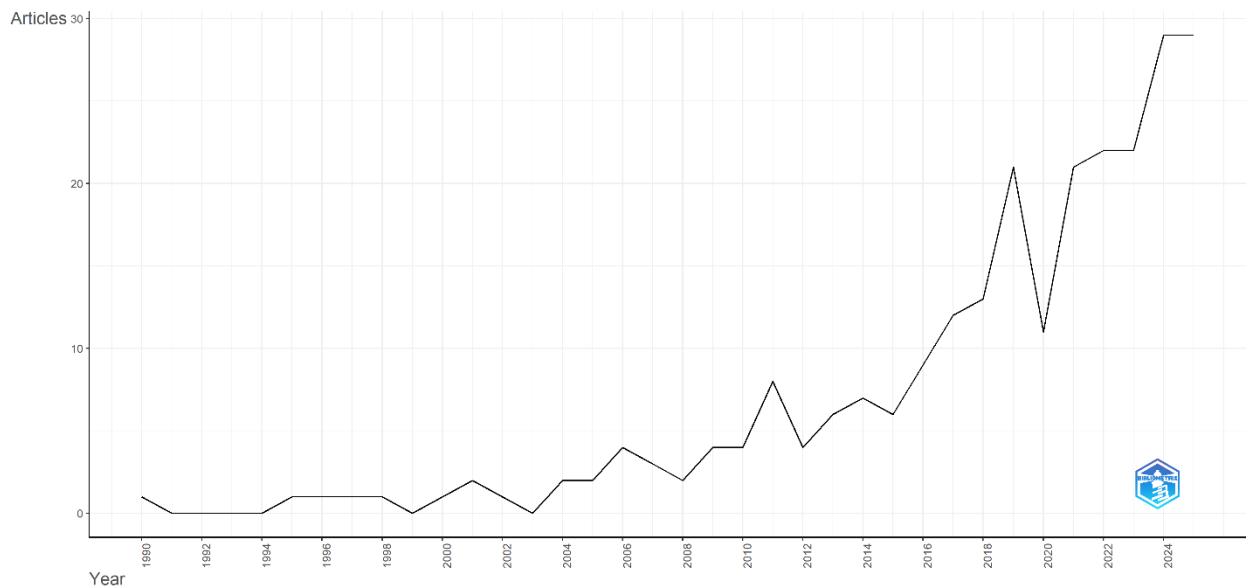


Figure 2. Annual Scientific Production



Colloquium

Top Contributors (RQ1: Journals, Authors, Institutions, Countries)

Journals

The field is led by education-focused outlets. *Higher Education* topped with 8 articles (share: 0.64%), tied with *Teaching in Higher Education* (8 articles), emphasizing pedagogical justice. *Social Justice Research* followed (7 articles), focusing on distributive equity. Other key journals include *Frontiers in Psychology* (6), and *BMC Medical Education* (5), respectively (Table 1). These represent 42% of output, with impact factors 2.5–4.2, indicating concentration in interdisciplinary social sciences.

Table 1.
Top Journals

| Rank | Journal | Articles | Share (%) |
|------|------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| 1 | Higher Education | 8 | 0.64 |
| 1 | Teaching in Higher Education | 8 | 0.64 |
| 3 | Social Justice Research | 7 | 0.56 |
| 4 | Frontiers in Psychology | 6 | 0.48 |
| 5 | BMC Medical Education | 5 | 0.40 |

Authors

S. Burdziej led with 3 articles, specializing in procedural justice in academia. M. Glowczewski matched this output, focusing on cultural equity. H.J. Smith followed (3 articles), exploring student perceptions of fairness (Table 2). Other contributors include X. Wu (3 articles) and P.O. Bello (2 articles). Less productive but influential authors are J.B. Bernerth, C. Berti, D.R. Bobocel, R.M. Chory, A. Cook-Sather, M. Estaji, and K. Zhale, each contributing 2 articles.

Table 2.
Top Authors

| Rank | Author | Articles | Articles Fractionalized |
|------|----------------|----------|-------------------------|
| 1 | S. Burdziej | 3 | 1.33 |
| 1 | M. Glowczewski | 3 | 1.33 |
| 3 | H.J. Smith | 3 | 0.78 |
| 4 | X. Wu | 3 | 1.17 |
| 5 | P.O. Bello | 2 | 1.00 |

Banitalebi, Z.

Institutions

While specific institutional data were aggregated by country (Figure 3), U.S. dominance implies leadership from institutions like the Michigan State University (11) and University of Illinois (10).

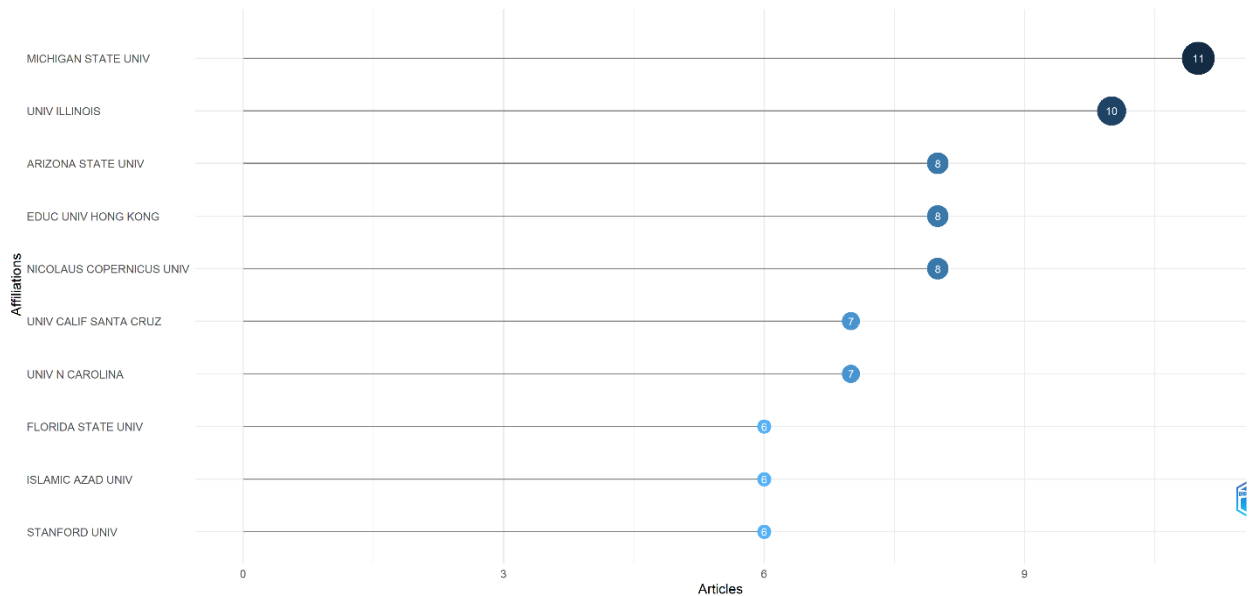


Figure 3. Top Institutions

Countries

The USA produced 371 articles (29.8%), followed by China and UK (46 each, 3.7%), Canada (34, 2.7%), Iran (33, 2.6%), Australia (25, 2.0%), Germany (25, 2.0%), South Africa (22, 1.8%), Spain (14, 1.1%), and Pakistan (13, 1.0%) (Table 3). It should be noted that the frequency for USA exceeds the total number of articles because authors' affiliated countries were taken into account, and a single publication can have authors from multiple countries.

Table 3.

Top Countries by Production

| Rank | Country | Frequency |
|------|---------|-----------|
| 1 | USA | 371 |
| 2 | China | 46 |
| 2 | UK | 46 |
| 4 | Canada | 34 |
| 5 | Iran | 33 |

Collaboration Patterns (RQ2: Authors, Countries)

Author Networks

Smith, Berti, di Battista, and Agronick co-authored 2 papers on sense of justice. Burdziej and Glowczewski co-authored 3 papers on procedural fairness. Chory, Estaji, and Zhale worked on classroom justice. Other collaborators include Bello and Matshaba; Kelly, O'flynn, and Andrew; al Salhi, Annamalai, and Arulsevi; Akhmadi and Ami; Lucas and Trelan. Figure 4 demonstrates the density of collaboration networks.

Colloquium



Figure 4. Density of Collaboration Networks

Countries Networks

The strongest collaborative relationships occurred between USA and New Zealand (171.48), UK and New Zealand (171.48), USA and Japan (138.03), USA and Australia (134.49), Canada and Australia (134.49), UK and Australia (134.49).

Table 4.
Countries' Collaboration Networks

| From | To | Frequency |
|----------------|-------------|---------------|
| United Kingdom | New Zealand | 171.484923466 |
| USA | New Zealand | 171.484923466 |
| USA | Japan | 138.030895577 |
| Canada | Australia | 134.491000082 |
| United Kingdom | Australia | 134.491000082 |
| USA | Australia | 134.491000082 |

Co-citation Analysis (RQ3: Most Co-cited/cited documents and Theoretical Foundations)

Co-cited documents

As Figure 5 demonstrates, there are four clusters. Cluster 1 contains the most-cited documents. J.A. Colquitt (2001), having the highest score (PageRank: 0.071), is foundational in organizational justice. J. Thibaut (1975) and J.S. Adams (1965) followed, emphasizing procedural and equity theories. Highest betweenness score for the three mentioned papers also indicate that they strongly act as bridges to other clusters. Chory-Assad multiple papers constitute Cluster 2, applying organizational justice theory to the classroom and student-instructor relationships. Cluster 3 with T.R. Tyler (multiple papers), Cohen (1988), Van den Bos (2002), and Folger (1989) connects core justice concepts to broader themes like authority, legitimacy, social identity, and rule-breaking. Cluster 4, having Freire (1974) and Hooks (1994) indicates low betweenness and high closeness. This cluster

Banitalebi, Z.

represents a critical theory perspective on justice, power, and education. The zero betweenness implies that they come from a very different philosophical tradition.

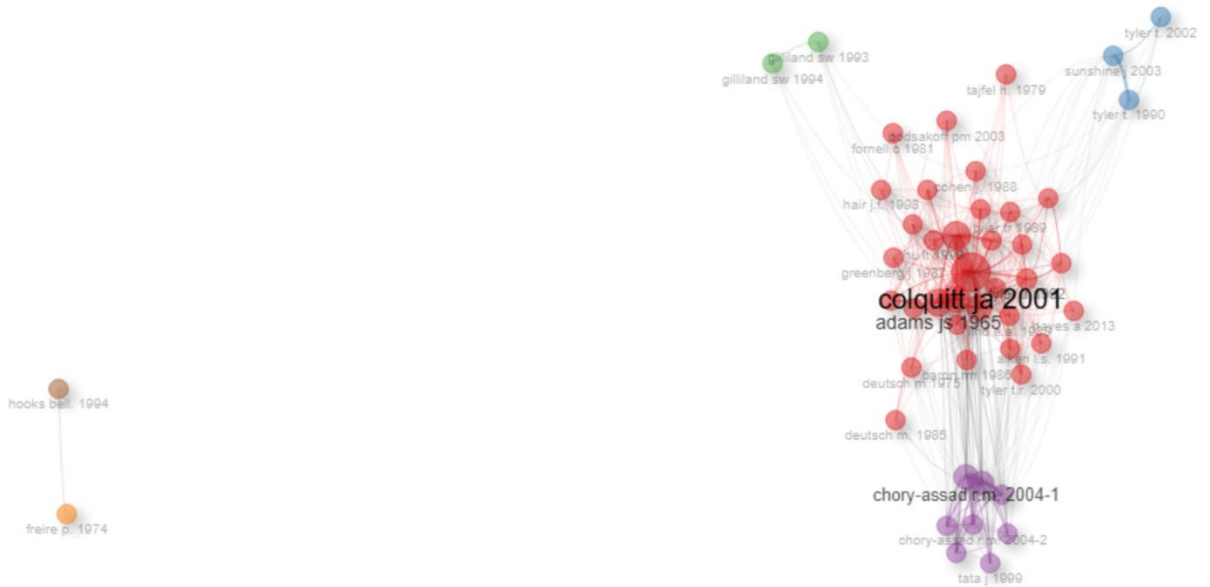


Figure 5. Co-Cited Documents

Cited Documents

R.C. Liden (2015, 438 citations) topped, on leadership justice. H. Min (2015, 163 citations) and J. Tankebe (2016, 163 citations) focused on procedural justice and legitimacy, respectively. B.B. Caza (2007, 125 citations), and A. Liu (2011, 108 citations) addressed meritocracy (Table 5).

Table 5.
Top Cited Documents

| Rank | Authors (Year) | DOI | Citations | TC/Year |
|------|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Liden et al. (2015) | 10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.12.002 | 438 | 39.82 |
| 2 | Min (2015) | 10.1177/1938965514560014 | 163 | 14.82 |
| 3 | Tankebe (2016) | 10.1037/lhb0000153 | 163 | 16.30 |
| 4 | Caza (2007) | 10.1080/01973530701665108 | 125 | 6.58 |
| 5 | Liu (2011) | 10.1007/s10734-010-9394-7 | 108 | 7.20 |

Keyword Analysis and Thematic Clustering (RQ4: Frequent Keywords and Clusters)

From 2,456 normalized keywords, top terms included "procedural justice" (73 occurrences), "higher education" (38), "perceptions" (35), "organizational justice" (34), "fairness" (33), and "distributive justice" (29). Thematic map (Figure 6) illustrates 4 types of themes. The motor themes of "procedural" and "organizational justice" represent the core themes driving the field. Basic themes, such as "identity" are of central importance but require further development. The presence of "equity" as a niche theme indicates a specialized but sub-domain of the field, while emerging or fading themes were "service-learning" and "neoliberalism".

Colloquium

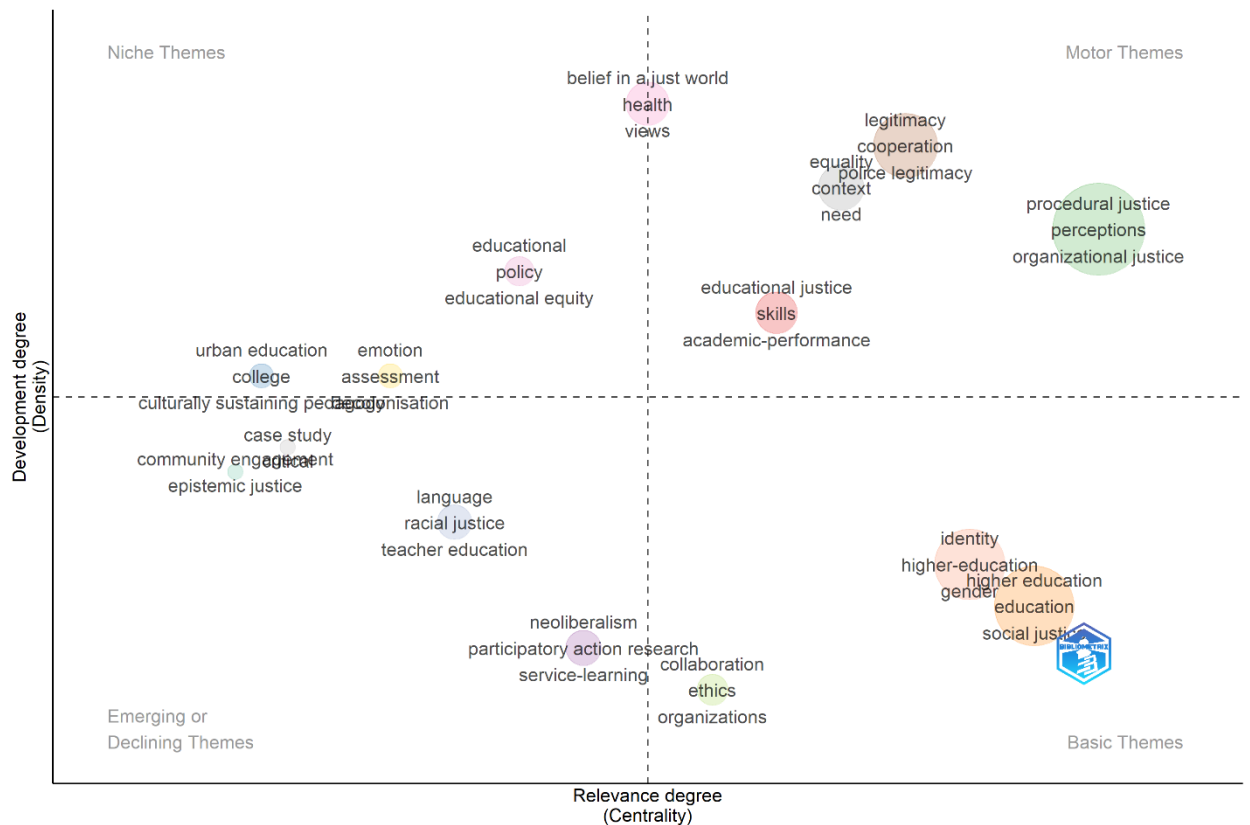


Figure 6. Thematic Map

Discussion and Conclusion

This review illustrates a field undergoing a shift, transitioning from a traditional organizational-justice framework to a broader, socially grounded, and increasingly critical understanding of justice. The annual scientific output reaches its highest peak from 2021 to 2025, reflecting the post-COVID social justice research (Lawrence et al., 2024) and recent work focused on social justice (Cock et al., 2025). The findings indicate a connection to well-established theoretical foundations while also expanding into new domains that address social justice by analyzing leading authors, countries, institutions, and journals, as well as exploring citation patterns, co-citation networks, trending topics, and keyword frequencies.

The collaboration clusters among the US, the UK, and their affiliated academic networks imply a deepening integration of social justice discourse within Western neoliberal societies (Cock et al., 2025). The prominence of Liden et al. (2015) as the most cited work, followed by Min (2015) and Tankebe (2016), highlights the historical roots of the field in organizational behavior and leadership dynamics. This observation aligns with previous bibliometric findings that underscore Social Exchange Theory as the most influential framework in organizational justice research (Cock et al., 2025). Although these findings show that the field still relies heavily on traditional justice frameworks, particularly procedural justice, emerging topics reveal a shift is underway.

In line with these findings, the keyword analysis further highlights the continued prominence of traditional justice concepts, with “procedural” and “organizational justice”

Banitalebi, Z.

identified as core themes. In contrast, “identity” appears as a key foundational theme that, while important, remains insufficiently explored, suggesting it may gain prominence in the future. The identification of “equity” as a specialized theme points to a growing but still niche area of research, while “service-learning” and “neoliberalism” are seen as either new or declining themes, reflecting areas that may be rising in relevance or losing traction.

Similarly, the co-citation analysis revealed that foundational justice studies, including works by Colquitt (2001), Thibaut and Walker (1975), Adams (1965), Bies and Moag (1986), Leventhal (1980), and Lind and Tyler (1988), form the structural core of the network. Their significant weights and centrality values indicate the ongoing focus on procedural, distributive, and interactional justice. This trend mirrors earlier discoveries that within theoretical models, the group-value model (Lind & Tyler, 1988) was frequently cited in organizational justice research, with a greater emphasis on procedural justice compared to distributive justice (Sheeraz et al., 2021).

This indicates that traditional justice theories continue to act as a conceptual foundation, yet scholars are increasingly incorporating wider social justice issues, particularly in educational settings and related to systemic inequalities. This evolution creates possibilities for creating multidimensional justice frameworks that connect organizational and societal realms; extending justice research beyond workplace environments into social, educational, and community contexts; and involving historically marginalized voices and groups whose experiences have been overlooked in earlier justice literature.

In conclusion, this analysis illustrates justice in higher education as an evolving field characterized by procedural justice themes, the USA scholarly contributions, and changing identity discussions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest.

Funding

There is no funding to be cited here.

Human Participants

This is a review and does not involve human participants.

Originality Note

The author confirms that the manuscript is her original work.

Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement

The author claimed that [ChatGPT] is used in this research just for the purpose of improving the language of the manuscript. No further use of these technologies are also confirmed by the author(s) to write different parts of the research.

References

- Cock, S., Coombes, P., & Swain, S. (2025). Leisure, social justice, research, praxis and scholarship: A bibliometric analysis and research agenda. *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, 8(3), 313-337. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41978-025-00187-3>
- Haddaway, N. R., Page, M. J., Pritchard, C. C., & McGuinness, L. A. (2022). PRISMA2020: An R package and Shiny app for producing PRISMA 2020-compliant flow diagrams, with interactivity for optimised digital transparency and open synthesis. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 18(2), e1230. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1230>
- Lawrence, S., Hill, J., & Mowatt, R. (2024). Sport, leisure, and social justice at the neoliberal moment: Challenges for integrity and activist scholarship. In S. Lawrence, J. Hill, & R. Mowatt (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of sport, leisure, and social justice* (pp. 3-17). Routledge.
- Machado, C. F., & Davim, J. P. (2022). Higher education for sustainability: a bibliometric approach—what, where and who is doing research in this subject? *Sustainability*, 14(8), 4482. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14084482>
- Martínez-Heredia N., Corral-Robles S., González-Gijón G., Sánchez-Martín M. (2022). Exploring inequality through service learning in higher education: A bibliometric review study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 826341. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.826341>
- Rathakrishnan, B., Khalid, K. A. T., & Daud, S. (2025). A systematic literature review on the international trends of indigenous peoples' political participation. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 3, 1601300. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1601300>
- Sharma, A., Panackal, N., Rautela, S., & Fazalbhoy, S. (2023). Tracing the four-decade journey of research in ethics and higher education-A bibliometric analysis. *MIER Journal of Educational Studies Trends and Practices*, 379-403. <http://www.mierjs.in/index.php/mjestp/article/view/2513>
- Sheeraz, M. I., Ungku Ahmad, U. N., Ishaq, M. I., Sarfraz, M., & Md. Nor, K. (2021). The research on organizational justice in Scopus indexed journals: A bibliometric analysis of seven decades. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 647845. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.647845>

Dr. Zahra Banitalebi is an assistant professor at Shahid Beheshti University. She holds a Ph.D. in Teaching English Language. Her areas of interest include language assessment and testing, research, and teacher education. She has published in numerous quality journals, including *Language Assessment Quarterly*, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Educational Technology and Society*, and *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*.



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0) which allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator.