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Analysis of Publications Related to Social Work Education Using Bibliometric Analysis Method

Bibliyometrik Analiz Yöntemi Kullanılarak Sosyal Hizmet Eğitimiyle İlgili Yayınların Analizi

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine academic publications on social work (SW) education between 1970 and 2024 using the bibliometric analysis method, revealing trends in the academic literature and the impact of different themes on SW education. A total of 920 academic publications on SW education, published between January 1, 1970, and May 18, 2024, were analyzed through the Web of Science (WOS) database. The publications were evaluated using the “global collaboration network,” “thematic map,” “word cloud technique,” “Lotka’s Law,” and “three-field plot” techniques, and the most studied themes, countries, journals, authors, collaborations, and keywords were analyzed. One of the most significant findings of the study is the dominant role of the United States (US) in the field of SW education. The US is followed by the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. It was found that the US has the highest level of international collaboration in SW education, followed by the UK and Germany. According to thematic mapping analysis, themes such as “MSW students,” “self-identification,” and “values” were the most frequently studied topics in SW education. Less frequently studied but more in-depth topics included “access,” “barriers,” and “self-efficacy”. Regarding keywords, “students” emerged as the most prominent. An analysis based on Lotka’s Law found that approximately 87% of authors contributed to the literature with only a single article. In this bibliometric analysis of publications on SW education in WOS from 1970 to 2024, a more student-centered approach is evident. Additionally, themes such as health, social justice, and cultural competence play a critical role in the literature. The US contributes the most to SW education literature, followed by countries with Anglo-Saxon traditions and social welfare systems. Regions such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are underrepresented in the literature, with limited academic contributions.

Keywords: Social work, social work education, bibliometrix, bibliometric analysis

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, 1970-2024 yılları arasında sosyal hizmet eğitimi konusunda yayınlanan akademik çalışmaların bibliyometrik analiz yöntemiyle incelenerek, bu alandaki akademik literatürün eğilimleri ve farklı temaların sosyal hizmet eğitimine etkisini ortaya koymaktır. Web Of Science veri tabanı üzerinden 01.01.1970-18.05.2024 tarihleri arasındaki sosyal hizmet eğitimi ile ilgili 920 akademik yayın incelenmiştir. Yayınlar, “global collaboration network”, “thematic map”, “kelime bulutları tekniği”, “lotka yasası” ve “three-field plot” teknikleri ile değerlendirilerek bu alanda en fazla çalışma yapılan temalar, ülkeler, dergiler, yazarlar, iş birlikleri ve anahtar kelimeler analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmada öne çıkan en önemli bulgulardan biri sosyal hizmet eğitimi alanında ABD’nin baskın rolüdür. ABD’yi İngiltere, Kanada, Avustralya izlemektedir. Sosyal hizmet eğitimi alanında ülkeler arasında en fazla iş birliğinin ABD ile yapıldığı tespit edilmiştir. Bu ülkeyi İngiltere ve Almanya izlemektedir. Tematik haritalama analizine göre sosyal hizmet eğitimini ele alan çalışmalarda sosyal hizmet “yüksek lisans öğrencileri”, “öz kimlik tanımı” ve “değerler” gibi temaların en fazla çalışılan konular olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Daha az ve derinlemesine çalışılan konular ise “erişim”, “engeller” ve “öz-yeterlik” gibi konulardır. Lotka Yasası tekniğine göre yapılan analizde tek bir makale ile yazına katkı sağlamış yazarların oranı yaklaşık %87’dir. 1970-2024 yılları arasında WOS’ta yayınlanan “sosyal hizmet eğitimi” konularını inceleyen bu bibliyometrik analiz çalışmasında, daha çok öğrenci merkezli bir yaklaşımın öne çıktığı, bununla birlikte sağlık, sosyal adalet, kültürel yeterlilik gibi temaların literatürde kritik bir rol oynadığı görülmektedir. Sosyal hizmet eğitimi literatürüne en fazla katkıda bulunan ülke ABD olurken sonraki beş ülke Anglo-Sakson gelenek ve sosyal refah sistemine sahip ülkelerdir. Asya, Afrika ve Orta Doğu gibi bölgelerin literatürde daha az temsil edildiği ve bu bölgelerden gelen akademik katkıların sınırlı olduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal hizmet, sosyal hizmet eğitimi, bibliometrix, bibliyometrik analiz.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social work is a practice-based academic profession that promotes social change and development, social harmony, and the empowerment and liberation of individuals. The principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are at the core of social work (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). Social work practices combine these principles with data-driven research to achieve social change, empowerment and human liberation (Reisch & Jani, 2012).

When different social welfare systems are examined, it is seen that the roots of social work are based on the philanthropic and reformist movements of the 17th century, but social work as a profession and discipline found its place in industrialized countries in the early 20th century (Urhan, 2021). In the early period, pioneers such as Mary Richmond and Edith Abbott contributed to the shaping of social work in terms of both individual case studies and policy research by developing two important approaches. While Mary Richmond emphasized the social case study aimed at helping individuals and families, Edith Abbott advocated scientific research of social welfare policies and suggested that social work education should be university-based (Hossain & Ahmad, 2020).

Social work education aims to produce solutions to complex social problems faced by individuals and societies by bringing together theoretical knowledge and practical training (Acar & Polat, 2023). Social work education aims not only to provide social workers with the skills to find solutions to individual and community problems but also to increase the welfare of individuals through approaches based on social justice and equality. Therefore, social work education should not be considered separately from social work practice and general social policy arrangements. Educational processes are directly linked to the development of practices and social policy arrangements.

Political, economic and religious systems in the general society strongly affect the social welfare system and social work practices (Katz, 1982). For example, economic crises, demographic changes and social problems (poverty, migration, climate change, etc.) lead to significant changes in the content of educational programs as well as in social work practices. In this context, during the education process, students are encouraged to learn not only micro-level individual and family-oriented social work practices but also macro-level policy-making processes (Kallio et al., 2023).

Social work education programs generally aim to define the meaning of social work, create a knowledge base that will enable its development, influence public perception of social work, and train professional leaders who advance social justice (Acar & Polat, 2023). However, as in the past, social work schools today are affected by the current political, cultural, and intellectual climate (Reisch & Jani, 2012). In addition, the needs of service users; the expectations of other professional groups and the general public, and media pressures also guide professional and educational developments (Littlechild & Lyons, 2014).

In the early 20th century, the Tufts report in 1921 made a significant contribution to the discussions on whether educational programs should be associated with universities or institutions. The report advocated that social work education should be provided by professional schools within universities or colleges instead of institutions or degree programs (Gillin, 1923). In its studies, Tufts argued that the purpose of social work education was both to train individual social workers and to develop the field through scientific research and publications. This shows that social work has gone beyond being a field of practice focused solely on working with individuals and has become part of a broad social policy and service network based on scientific foundations. During this period, the social work profession evolved into an educational model in which multiple service delivery and scientific research-based systems played a role (Dunlap, 1993).

If we accept that the main purpose of social work education is to contribute to the ability of social work as a profession to fulfill its basic goals (Cox, 1995), it can be said that education contributes to the training of professionals who are capable of fulfilling different goals in different periods. In the 1970s, the focus of social work was on social functioning. For example, Carol Meyer defined social work as the implementation arm of social welfare programs, the activity that organizes the services provided to the citizen-consumer-client-patient through social policies (Meyer, 1976, cited in Cox, 1995). While social work has shed its charitable guise, it has generally been seen as “part of the official mechanism of welfare, justice and control of state systems” (Jordan, 1984, p. 161, cited in Cox, 1995). In this period, the main application of social work was to increase the capacity of individuals to cope with the difficulties arising from their interactions with their personal and social environments. These practices have largely been implemented through public social services designed and financed by welfare states.

However, towards the end of the 1970s, the function and education of social work were reshaped by economic, demographic and political changes. For example, neoliberal policies directly affected the financing and provision of social work, leading to greater privatization of services for individuals. During this period, it became necessary to restructure social work education to respond to changing social needs (Cox, 1995). Therefore, it can be said that social work education has been shaped by changing social needs and academic research trends over time.

Currently, social work education and related research are being transformed by factors such as the increasing complexity of social issues, globalization, technological advancements, and growing cultural diversity. These dynamics necessitate a deeper understanding of how social work education has evolved and which areas have become more prominent. Although many countries face similar social challenges, the diverse historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts in which social work is practiced significantly influence the development of social work education and its standards (Ioakimidis & Sookraj, 2021). Consequently, it is crucial to examine the global trends in social work education research and how these trends have shifted over time to inform the future direction of the field.

Bibliometric analysis serves as a powerful method for identifying patterns within social work education literature, highlighting the topics that have gained prominence, and uncovering under-researched areas. Through such analyses, scholars can gain a clearer understanding of the field's development, identify potential avenues for academic collaboration, and strategically plan future research initiatives. Additionally, bibliometric analysis provides insights into which countries and researchers contribute most significantly to the field and which themes attract the most global attention, thereby facilitating a better understanding of the international trends shaping social work education.

The purpose of this study is to examine academic articles on social work education since 1970 using bibliometric analysis to reveal the trends in academic literature in this field and the impact of different topics on social work education. In line with this purpose, the following sub-objectives have been determined:

- To examine the distribution of academic publications on social work education by year.
- To determine the most cited articles in the field of social work education, their authors, sources and countries.
- To analyze the most frequently used keywords related to social work education and the changes in these keywords over time.
- To determine which topics are prominent in the field of social work education and how these topics have evolved over time.

2. METHODS

In this study, the data obtained from the Web of Science (WOS) database on 18/05/2024 using the bibliometric analysis method between 01.01.1970- 18.05.2024 were analyzed in the following order:

- First, the phrase “Social Work Education” was typed into the WOS search engine and searched as “Title” and 1802 publications were reached.
- Then, the publications were filtered by selecting “Article” and “Review Article” from the publication type section and 1484 publications were reached.
- Finally, the “Social Work” category was selected from the “Web of Science Categories” filtering tool and 920 publications were reached.
- The study data were analyzed over 920 publications.
- 920 scientific publications were evaluated with the techniques of “Global Collaboration Network”, “Bibliometric Analysis”, “Thematic Map”, “Word Cloud Technique”, “Lotka’s Law”, and “Three-field Plot”.

In this study, the “Bibliometrics Analysis” method was used to determine the trends and influencing factors of academic literature on social work education. In scientific research, bibliometric analysis is used as an important tool to understand the scope and impact of published literature. Bibliometrics aims to evaluate interdisciplinary interactions and scientific trends by examining various features of scientific publications (Cooper, 2015; Ölmez et al., 2023; Torun & Aslan, 2022). Various software is available to perform such

analyses, and Bibliometrix, a package developed in the R programming language, holds an important place in this field. Bibliometrix is an R package used to perform various bibliometric analyses on scientific publications. This package allows researchers to analyze literature and visualize the results. For example, using Bibliometrix, the most cited articles on a given topic can be identified and the publication trends of a particular journal can be monitored. A significant advantage of bibliometric analysis is the ability for users to customize their analysis (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Researchers can adjust various parameters according to their needs and visualize the analysis results in any way they want. Bibliometrix is a user-friendly tool for scientific analysis. Using this package, researchers can better understand trends and interactions in the literature and create a valuable roadmap for future research (Büyükkıdık, 2022; Dalkıran & Uysal, 2023).

This study also used thematic maps, a visualization tool widely used in bibliometric analyses. These maps are used to show the relationships and groups of key concepts in the literature. The bibliometrix program uses techniques such as cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling to create thematic maps. Interpreting thematic maps is important for understanding the relationships and trends of key concepts in the literature. While the clusters on these maps group concepts with similar themes, the distance relationship between words shows how related these themes are to each other. By examining these relationships, researchers can determine the main themes and emerging trends in the literature (Pessin et al., 2002).

Thematic Map is an important visualization tool in bibliometric analysis, providing researchers with a valuable way to understand major trends and developments in the literature. Thematic Map Components are summarized below (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Lamhour et al., 2023; Koçyigit et al., 2023):

Niche: Represents lesser-known or less-studied special topics in the research field. This section is usually focused on a particular area of expertise or subtopic.

Emerging: Represents new trends or topics that are rapidly developing and gaining importance in the field of research. This section usually reflects new discoveries or notable changes in the literature.

Main: Represents the fundamental topics or key themes of the field of research. This area usually contains the most frequently encountered or most studied topics.

Motor: Represents the important factors that drive or influence developments in the field of research. This section contains the powerful drivers that shape trends and changes in the literature.

In this study, while performing the “thematic map” analysis, the analysis was done using the Web of Science feature “keywords plus” instead of “author keywords”. The reason for this is that the “author keywords” data is at the limit in terms of data quality.

In addition, this study used the “word cloud technique” to determine which themes in the literature social work education focuses on. Word clouds are graphics that visually represent the frequency and importance of words in a text. In these graphics, more frequently used words are shown larger and more prominently, while less frequently used words are shown smaller and less prominently. In bibliometric analyses, word clouds are often used to highlight key concepts and themes in texts. Word clouds provide visual representations of data in bibliometric analyses. In this way, researchers can quickly identify major themes and trends in the literature. In addition, word clouds are a useful tool for summarizing and understanding large amounts of data. By using word clouds, researchers can identify key concepts in the literature, easily identify related studies, and create a basis for future research (Patil et al., 2023).

This bibliometric study also investigated which authors have done more work in the field of education. The “Lotka’s Law” technique was used to determine this data. Lotka’s Law states that the number of publications of authors in the field of scientific publishing shows a certain distribution (Lotka, 1926). One of its basic principles is the principle “the rich get richer, the poor get poorer”, which is that the majority of authors who publish have a small number of publications and a small number of authors have a large number of publications. Lotka’s Law has various applications. In particular, it is widely used to evaluate the publication performance of scientists and researchers. It can also be used by academic institutions and research organizations to evaluate academic success and distribute scientific research funds (Lotka, 1926; Egghe & Rousseau, 1990).

In this study, the “Three-Field Plot” technique was used to examine the relationship between social work education in the literature based on sources, countries, years, and keywords. The “Three-Field Plot” is typically used to visualize bibliometric analysis involving three interrelated variables (e.g., countries, years, disciplines, etc.). This graph provides a visual area where points come together to show the

relationships between these three variables (Koo, 2021). Each point represents a specific combination of the three variables. This type of graph is often used to understand national contributions to a particular research field and the development of this field over time (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

The literature collaboration network between countries in the field of social work education was investigated with the Global Collaboration Network. The analysis was made according to the intensity of the collaboration. Therefore the use of tools such as the 'Global Collaboration Network' and the 'Three-field Plot' helps visualize international collaborations, key research areas, and thematic trends in social work education literature. Specifically, the 'Global Collaboration Network' enables the analysis of collaboration patterns between countries and researchers in social work education, while the 'Three-field Plot' illustrates the relationships between authors, keywords, and sources. These tools were chosen because they are particularly suitable for understanding the global perspective and thematic focus areas in social work education.

3. RESULTS

In this study, 920 articles were analyzed under the title of “social work education”. Figure 1 shows the distribution of citations and publications of 920 studies by year. Although there has been a decrease in the number of publications in some years, it is understood that the interest in the subject and the citations made generally tend to increase. In this context, it was determined that the highest number of publications was made in 2019 (n=87) and the highest number of citations was made in 2021 (n=1042).

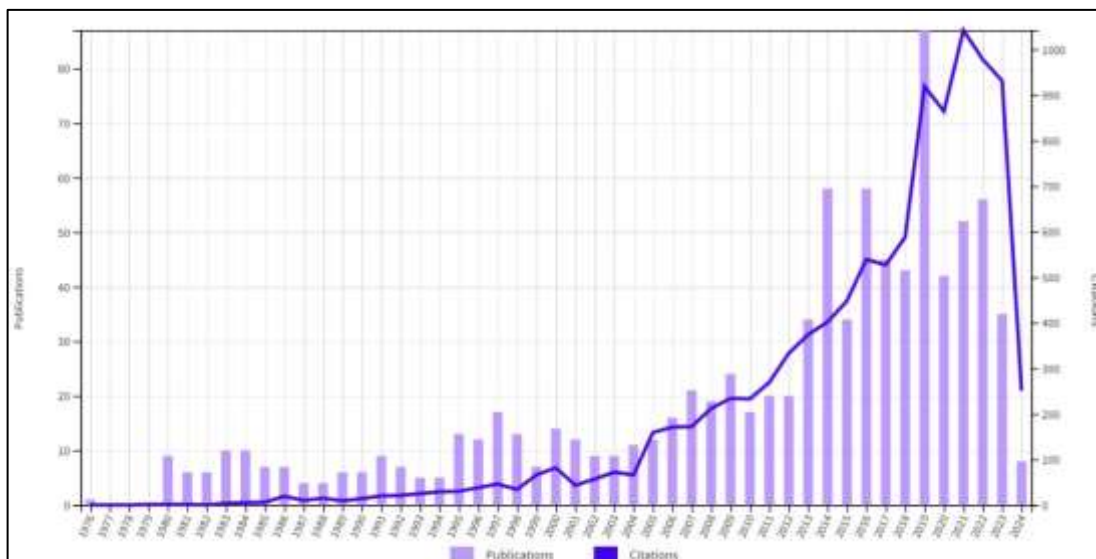


Figure 1: Publications and Citations Related to Social Work Education Between 1970-2024 **Source:** Data of Web of Science

When the first five most cited publications were examined, it was seen that all of them were addressed by US social work researchers. The themes addressed were cultural competence, racial and ethnic diversity, critical theoretical approaches, social work education and pedagogy (Table 1).

Table 1: Top 5 Most Cited Publications

Publication	Total Citations	Mean/Year (Citations)
Abrams, Laura S., & Jené A. Moio. "Critical race theory and the cultural competence dilemma in social work education." <i>Journal of social work education</i> 45.2 (2009): 245-261.	278	17.38
Howard, Matthew O., Curtis J. McMillen, & David E. Pollio. "Teaching evidence-based practice: Toward a new paradigm for social work education." <i>Research on Social Work Practice</i> 13.2 (2003): 234-259.	199	9.05
Wayne, Julianne, Marion Bogo, & Miriam Raskin. "Field education as the signature pedagogy of social work education." <i>Journal of social work education</i> 46.3 (2010): 327-339.	176	11.73
Van Den Bergh, Nan, & Catherine Crisp. "Defining culturally competent practice with sexual minorities: Implications for social work education and practice." <i>Journal of Social Work Education</i> 40.2 (2004): 221-238.	117	5.57
Holden, Gary, et al. "Outcomes of social work education: The case for social work self-efficacy." <i>Journal of Social Work Education</i> 38.1 (2002): 115-133.	107	4.65

Source: Data of Web of Science

Figure 2 shows the literature collaboration network between countries in the field of social work education. The analysis was done according to the intensity of the collaboration. In this analysis, it is understood that

the most collaboration between countries is with the US. This country is followed by England and Germany. In addition to the US, countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Finland, South Africa, India, and China are also seen to have made significant contributions to the literature. Apart from these countries, countries such as Jamaica, Japan, Barbados, Bangladesh, and Zimbabwe are seen to have played a role in the development of the field, although they have made fewer contributions to the literature of social work education. (Figure 2)

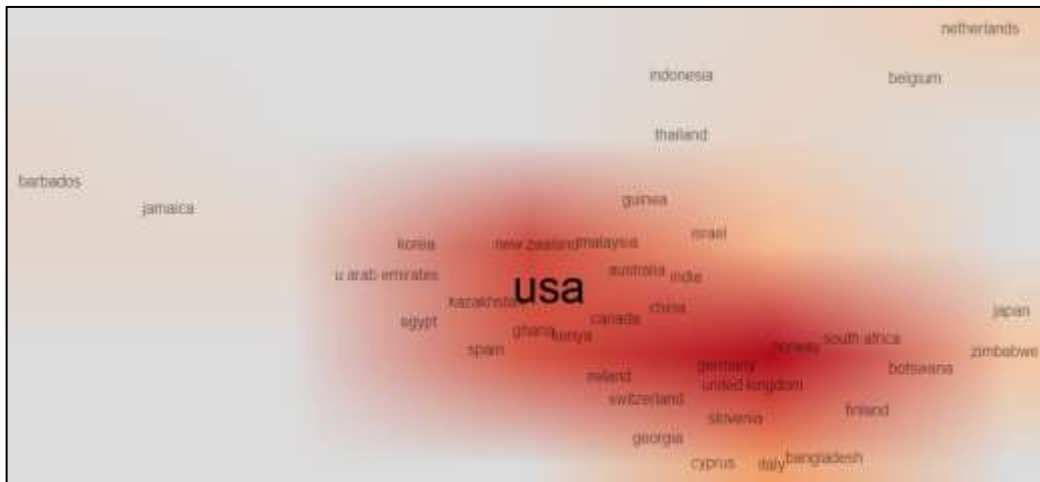


Figure 2: Global Collaboration Network in Social Work Education

This bibliometric study investigated the popularity of different terms in the academic literature in the field of social work education and how these topics have changed over time. Figure 3 presents a “KeywordsPlus” based Trend Topics analysis on the subject. The horizontal axis in the figure represents years, while the vertical axis represents terms. The horizontal line across each term indicates that this term was used in the academic literature during a certain time period. Larger dots indicate that the term was used more in that year, while smaller dots indicate that it was used less. As seen in Figure 3, studies in the field in recent years have been shaped by the terms “race”, “carer involvement”, “experience”, “justice”, and “diversity”. Topics such as “diversity”, “health”, and “students” are terms that have remained consistent over the years. Another important finding is that some terms have become more frequently used over the years. Especially since 2010, there has been a significant increase in terms such as “attitudes”, “knowledge”, “skills”, “impact”, “program”, “diversity”, and “welfare”. Less commonly used terms include “homosexuality”, “performance”, and “psychotherapy”. (Figure 3)

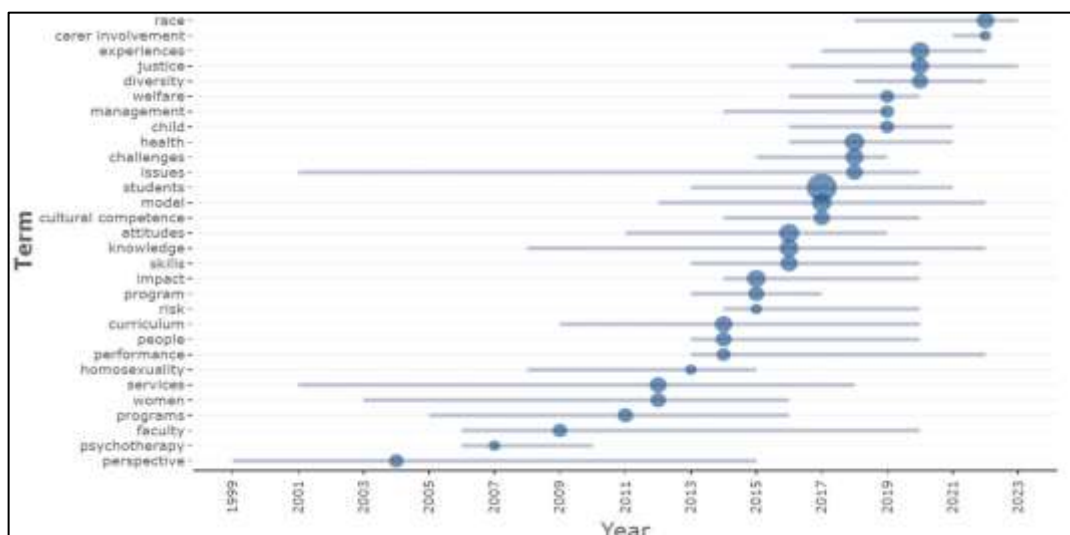


Figure 3: Distribution of Keywords Used in Articles Published in the Field of Social Work Education by Year: Trend Topics Analysis

The study also used the thematic map technique, a visualization tool commonly used in bibliometric analyses, to determine which themes social work education focuses on in the literature. Accordingly, it was determined that social work education focuses on 4 themes in the literature in different areas. (Figure 4) The themes in question and the topics examined under these themes are classified as follows:

The top 5 authors who contributed the most to publications in the field of Social Work education according to the Lotka Law technique were determined as Bogó M. (with 9 articles), Cohen E. (with 6 articles), Drabble L. (with 6 articles), Faires D. (with 6 articles) and Gray M. (with 6 articles). According to the data provided by the program, the rate of authors who contributed to a publication with a single article is approximately 87%, the rate of those who contributed with two publications is approximately 10%, and those who contributed with three publications are 2% and those who contributed with four publications are less than 1%. (Figure 6)

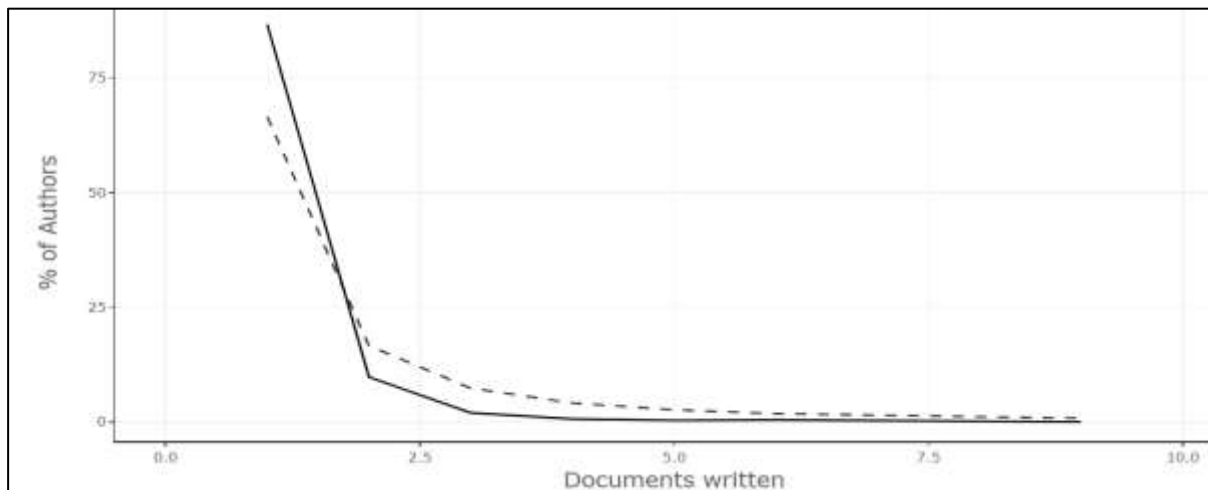


Figure 6: Lotka's Law in Social Work Education

In this study, the “Three-field Plot” technique was used to investigate the status of social work education in the literature according to countries, years and disciplines. The figure below shows the Three-field Plot created within the framework of “Source”, “Countries” and “KeywordPlus”. As can be seen, the “Journal of Social Work Education” journal is dominant in studies on the subject. In terms of countries, the US, England and Australia are in the top three places. The words in the top three places are “students”, “attitudes” and “health”. Of the 920 articles included in the analysis, 280 were published in the “Journal of Social Work Education”, 73 in the “International Social Work” and 68 in the “British Journal of Social Work”. In addition, according to the information obtained from Bibliometrix, regardless of the form, the top 5 institutions producing the most publications on the subject are, respectively, San Jose State University, University of Toronto, School Social Work, Florida State University and University of Kansas. (Figure 7)

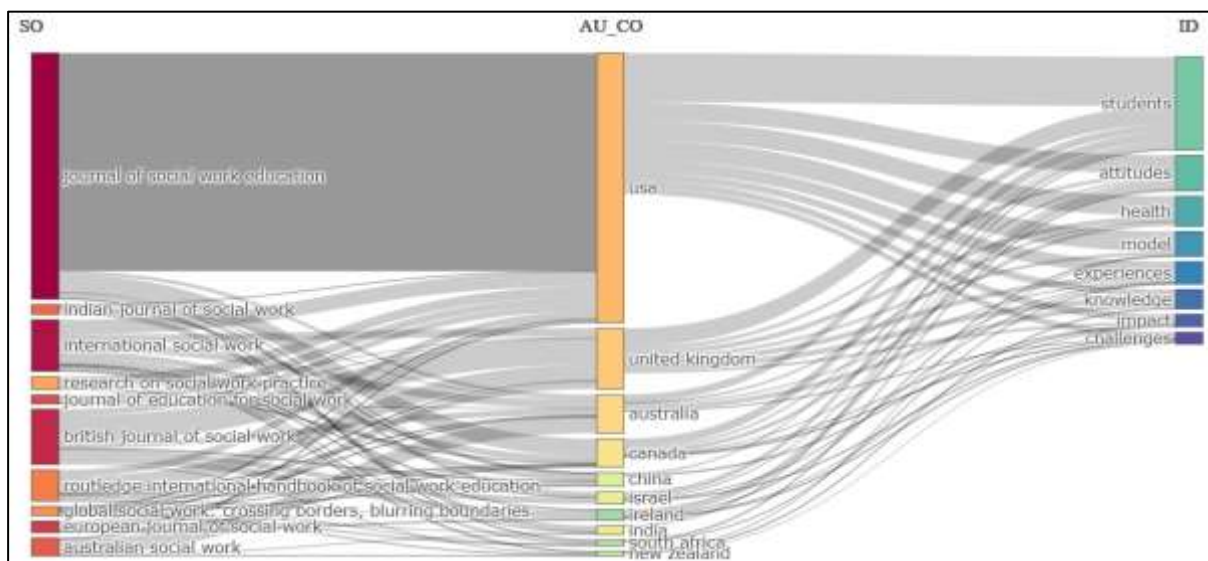


Figure 7: Three-Field Plot of Social Work Education Literature

4. DISCUSSION

In this study, a comprehensive bibliometric analysis was conducted on social work education literature. In the study, 920 scientific publications were evaluated with the techniques of “global collaboration network”, “bibliometric analysis”, “thematic map”, “word cloud technique”, “lotka’s law”, “three-field plot”.

With the help of these techniques, the most cited articles in social work education in the last 50 years (1970-2024), the authors of these articles, their sources, countries, the most frequently used keywords related to social work education and the changes in these keywords over time, which topics are prominent in the field of social work education and how these topics have evolved over time were investigated.

Analysis of different visuals, especially with the help of word clouds, Lotka’s Law, and three-field plots, allowed us to understand both thematic and geographical distributions of social work education and the main actors in the literature. The findings of the study are clustered around several important themes: countries contributing to the social work education literature, prominent themes, changes in key concepts over time, and contributions of authors to the literature.

The analyses conducted reveal how social work education is shaped both globally and thematically. Accordingly, the most striking finding is that the US is the center of academic studies on social work education. The US stands out as the country that has made the greatest contribution to the literature on social work education. When the first five most cited articles are examined, it is seen that they were produced in the US. The themes addressed are seen as cultural competence, racial and ethnic diversity, critical theoretical approaches, social work education and pedagogy. Cultural competence, as a prominent theme in social work education, aims to understand how social workers are trained to develop their ability to work with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Lum, 2019). The most cited publications also address which pedagogical methods are used in the process of gaining this competence and how these skills are developed. It is seen that these publications focus on the educational models and curricula necessary for social workers to gain cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and skills. In the analysis of the collaboration network between countries in the field of social work education, it was found that the US plays a dominant role. This leading role of the US in social work education can be attributed to the development of the social work system and the strong academic infrastructure of universities in this field. When examining the development of social work education from a historical perspective, it is evident that social work education in the US has a history spanning over a century. The first courses for individuals working with the poor were offered at the School of Social Economy in Chicago, Illinois (Abell, 2010). The fact that the first social work schools were established in the US and contributed to the development of social work education is likely related to the presence of social service systems based on the Anglo-Saxon welfare state. These systems primarily focused on social policy, integration into the welfare state, and service models in the education of social workers.

Indeed, countries such as England, Canada, Australia, and South Africa also hold significant positions in the literature. The common factor among these countries is their social service systems, which are similarly based on the Anglo-Saxon welfare state model. On the other hand, there is a noticeable imbalance in terms of contributions from Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries, which are underrepresented in the social work literature. Although countries such as Jamaica, Zimbabwe, and Bangladesh have made smaller contributions, there has been an increase in academic studies on social work education from these countries. These findings indicate that social work education is unevenly distributed globally, with certain countries being underrepresented in the literature. Turkey, for instance, is among the countries with limited representation in international publications. To develop effective solutions to social problems in regions such as Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, it is essential to conduct more research on social work education models specific to these areas. In this context, strategies to strengthen international cooperation and academic networks are needed to increase contributions from countries that are less represented in the social work education literature. Moreover, theoretical social work approaches, along with the methods, techniques, and skills developed in the Global North, should be critically evaluated for their relevance and impact before being adapted and applied to other regions standards (Ioakimidis & Sookraj, 2021) . Establishing thematic research groups based on geographical differences and expanding access to open-access resources related to social work education can further support greater contributions from underrepresented countries, ensuring a more equitable and inclusive development of the field.

When the keywords and trends in the literature examined within the scope of the study are examined, it is revealed how the terms in the social work education literature have changed and evolved over the years (Figure 3). Especially in the period after 2010, it is seen that terms such as “students”, “health”, “cultural competence” and “justice” have increasingly found a place in the literature. This trend reveals how social work education has adapted to social changes and how the transition to an educational model based on social justice has accelerated.

Although health has long been an important focus of social work, it has been observed that health-themed social work studies have increased, especially in recent years. This situation points to the critical role of social work in the fields of community health, mental health, and public health. It can be said that these efforts stem from the difficulty of social workers in expressing their roles within mental health teams and services (Bark, Dixon & Liang, 2023; Mendenhall & Frauenholtz, 2013). In addition, the increased study of concepts such as cultural competence and diversity since the 2000s shows that social work education is in an adaptation process to respond to the increasing multiculturalism of global societies. Indeed, publications addressing the subject emphasize the importance of diversity and intersectionality in social work education and the educational dimension of cultural competence (Ide & Beddoe, 2022; Azzopardi, 2020).

The increased use of student-focused terms such as “attitudes” and “experiences” emphasizes how important the personal development and professional preparation processes of students have become in social work education. The extent to which students adapt to macro-level goals such as social justice and social change is among the important research topics of social work education (Barozet, 2022). As is known, social work is constantly evolving as a profession aimed at producing solutions to social problems and providing support to disadvantaged individuals, families and communities. Over time, it can be expected that new global issues such as “digitalization”, “migration” and “climate change” will find more space in the social work education literature.

In the future, it is important to conduct more research focusing on these areas in order to contribute to the development of the knowledge and skills necessary to cope with current problems in social work education. Indeed, in the thematic map analysis, themes such as “MSW students,” “self-identification,” and “values” were determined to be the most studied topics in this field of social work education, while topics such as “technology” and “clients” were seen to be on the rise. Therefore, it can be said that digital social work practices, remote service models, and educational processes on digital platforms will be topics that have not yet been sufficiently addressed in the literature but will increasingly gain importance. In addition, the effects of the global migration crisis and climate change on social work practices, which are not sufficiently covered in the literature, also reveal that they should be integrated more into social work education programs.

The centrality of the term “students” in the word cloud visual representing key concepts in social work education literature reveals that the literature largely focuses on the education, experiences, and attitudes of social work students. This shows that social work is based on a student-centered approach in terms of education. Students’ experiences during the education process, how their professional skills develop, and their attitudes toward social work practices play a critical role in social work education.

In addition, concepts such as “health”, “cultural competence”, “justice” and “attitudes” are frequently used. This shows that social work education is not limited to case studies of individuals and families, but also deals closely with macro issues such as health problems at the community level, cultural diversity and social justice. Ensuring that students are equipped in these areas has become one of the main goals of social work education. The prominence of the concept of cultural competence in particular reveals the need for social workers to gain knowledge and skills to work with different cultural and ethnic groups. In this context, social work students should be able to integrate information from different sources when they graduate, as well as be aware of the impact of cultural differences at various stages of social work practice. Therefore, social work education offered to students should develop the ability of students to identify cultural factors related to clients’ situations and to go beyond superficial interpretations of culturally relevant phenomena to analyze their underlying meanings and implications for social work practice (Jani et al. 2016).

Another theme addressed in the study is the contribution of authors in publications related to social work education. Accordingly, while it is expected that certain authors will publish more on certain topics according to the Lotka Law technique, it has been determined that this law is not followed much in the field of social work education. When the distribution is examined, it is seen that a small number of authors

contribute to the literature on social work education to a large extent, while a large number of authors contribute with a more limited number of studies. This situation reveals that certain authors and research groups work more intensively in the field of social work education and shape the literature in this field. On the other hand, the finding that a large number of authors make small contributions to the literature shows that social work education, which is spread over a wide base, is examined in the literature through different themes, methods and geographical contexts, but that more in-depth and locally focused research is needed.

The study also examined the relationship between authors, journals and keywords by conducting a three-field plot analysis. This analysis is important in terms of showing which journals the authors in the social work education literature have published more in and which themes the keywords used in these publications are clustered around. The study findings show that certain authors are concentrated in certain journals and that these authors focus on certain themes. While the “Journal of Social Work Education” is dominant in studies on the subject, it is seen that the US, England and Australia are in the top three places. These countries are followed by Canada and China. The findings obtained as a result of this analysis support the other findings within the scope of the study. In general, it is seen that the West is dominant in social work education, but the social work education literature is developing in Asia and Africa. This situation is closely related to the contextual nature of social work practices. Social work develops within a social, cultural, economic and political context, and each society presents social work practices in different ways according to its own conditions, values and needs. In this context, there are difficulties in the universal effectiveness of Western-centered social work knowledge and values in all societies. Despite being accepted as a discipline worldwide, the field of social work has difficulty being recognized and implemented in other geographies (Hossain et al., 2024). This shows that there is a need to develop the capacity of social work education to respond to local needs and that social work is a developing field in these geographies.

5. CONCLUSION

In this bibliometric analysis study examining the topics of “social work education” published in WOS between 1970-2024, it is seen that a more student-centered approach is prominent, however, themes such as health, social justice, and cultural competence play a critical role in the literature. Student experiences, attitudes, and learning processes are among the most frequently studied topics in the literature. Social work education aims to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and ethical values that form the foundations of the profession. Considering that students need constant structuring in order to actively participate in professional life, it is expected that students will be equipped to meet the needs of today’s society. Indeed, in the study, educational topics such as social diversity, social justice, and cultural competence are shaped around the needs of today’s society.

In this study, some imbalances were identified in the distribution of global contributions and author contributions. Among the countries, the USA has a dominant role in contributing to the literature on social work education. The first five countries following the US are countries with Anglo-Saxon traditions and social welfare systems. It is seen that regions such as Asia, Africa and the Middle East are less represented in the literature and academic contributions from these regions are limited. This imbalance reveals the need to increase diversity and participation in social work education research. This effort will contribute to understanding how social problems, social work practices and education in regions with different cultural and development levels are structured in the local context and to making global social work practices more inclusive. Therefore, international cooperation should be encouraged to ensure more contributions from underrepresented regions.

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