

Mapping the Scholarly Landscape of Religious Education: A Quarterly Bibliometric Overview of 21st Century

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This paper intends to highlights the trends of religious education research between 2000 and 2024 by employing bibliometric analysis. There are total 1115 articles were collected from the Scopus database and advanced bibliometric tools were used for analysis. The findings revealed that UK (United Kingdom) and USA (United States of America) are the most influential countries in religious education research. Notably, author Jackson R has been identified as a prominent figure in this field. While examine the articles, it was also observed that keywords such as religious education, religion, spirituality, faith schools, education, pedagogy, and catholic schools hold significance within the domain. The findings from this analysis provide researchers with valuable strategic insights, helping them to conduct future studies in religious education.

Keywords: religious education, religion, religious schools, faith schools

INTRODUCTION

Etymologically, religion is defined as something that binds people together (Ministry of Education Government of India, 1964). There are different types of religions existing in the world; people who are following similar faith are bind under same religion. Religion has been constructed differently throughout centuries and in different places of the world (King, 2010). Further, religion was not seen as distinct from culture. Religion may be defined as a cultural, ethnic, or regional phenomenon.

In 1974, UNESCO stated that education is the entire social life process through which people and social groups learn to consciously develop all of their individual capacities, attitudes, aptitudes, and knowledge

within and for the benefit of the national and international communities (Hand, 2004). Human rights must be respected when it comes to education. Religious freedom is one of the most significant human rights; it includes everyone's obligation to be tolerant of others' religious beliefs and their right to receive an education in the spirit of their own faith (Niculescu & Norel, 2012).

Religious Education is an integral part of a balanced curriculum. Religious education has been an important part of educational system across the world for centuries. It is a source of moral knowledge. The main aim of the religious education is to develop the five aspects of the learners such as spiritual, moral, social, cultural and values (Ilechukwu, 2021). Further, the goal of religious education is to preserve, conserve and transmit their social and cultural values among students. It plays an important role in the life of the students. It enables them to understand the meaning of life, faith in divine and value the humans (Garreta, Macia, & Llevot, 2019). Moreover, it promotes religious literacy, which is essential in this contemporary modern world. The knowledge of various religious belief systems enables the students to effectively think on a wide range of religious matters (Isaak, 2018).

However, there is a plethora of researches available in this area, but still there is a need to thoroughly analyzing the literature to find out the important research gaps and new trends. In this regard, the aim of the present paper is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the literature on religious education. With the help of bibliometric tools and techniques the investigators identify various patterns and trends in the research. Further, the analyzes of research education with regards to its publication outputs, collaboration networks of authors and institutions, citation patterns, most active areas of research and the most influential authors and institutions are also discussed in the paper. Further, finding the gaps in the literature and areas that require more research are other main goals of this paper. Moreover, this bibliometric analysis will describe the current status of the research on religious education in detail, emphasizing important trends, and emerging research area. This information will be useful for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to provide potential areas for further studies.

METHODOLOGY

Method

This study used bibliometric analysis, a rigorous methodology whose degree of objectivity allows for the systematization of scientific production on a particular field through the meticulous utilisation and careful evaluation of enormous amounts of raw data (Della Corte et al., 2021; Donthu et al., 2021; Hallinger & Kovacevic, 2021). It is a quantitative method that uses citation and publishing data along with statistics and econometrics to build the evolutionary structure of a study area (Singh et al., 2021). The R-package bibliometrix and VOS viewer which facilitates bibliometric analysis were utilized to examine this study (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). It is a quantitative method that uses citation and publishing data along with statistics and econometrics to build the evolutionary structure of a study area (Singh et al., 2021). The bibliographic information used in this study was retrieved from the Scopus database, one of the largest in the world. The research community regards it highly reliable (Ninerola et al., 2021). The quality and scope of tremendous researches make it a valuable resource for the systematic review process (Moher et al., 2010). The use of Scopus ensures access to a reputed and comprehensive collection of research literature.

Search Strategy

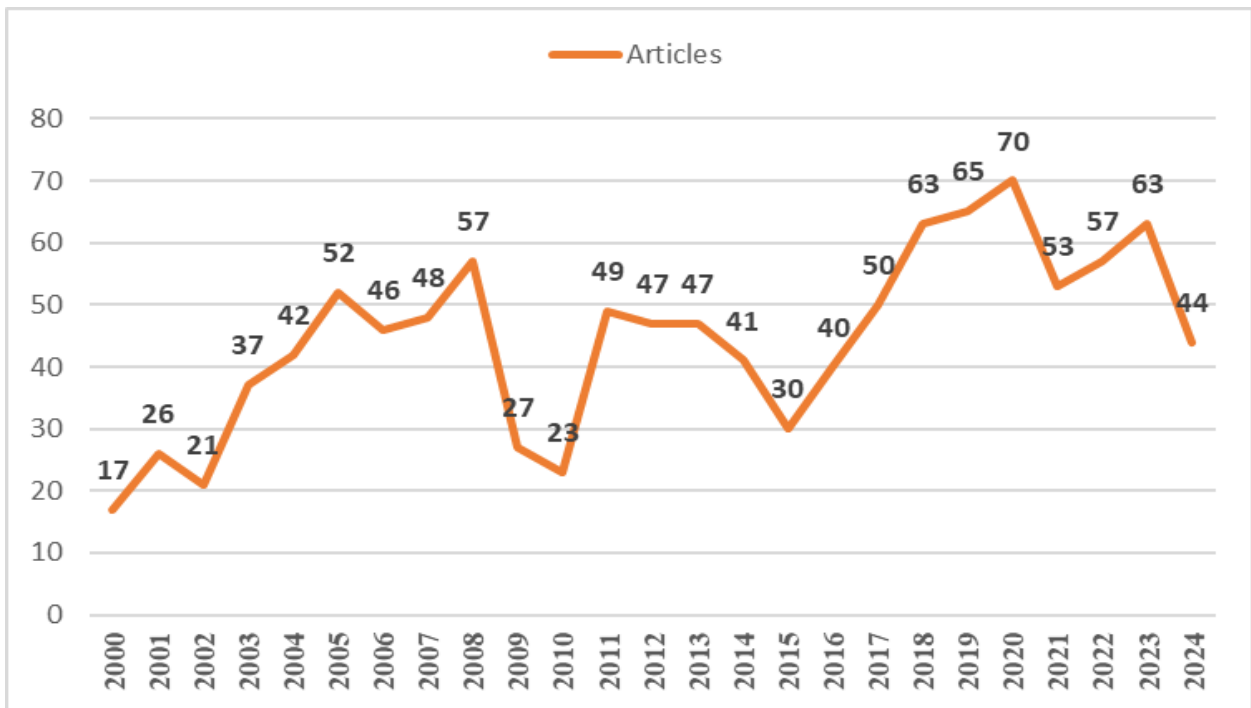
The authors utilized an advanced search on the Scopus database, employing keywords such as (“religious education AND religion” OR “religious schools” OR “faith schools,”) to obtain relevant results. This initial search yielded a total of 7,571 records. To refine the search, the authors further narrowed down the results by restricting the time frame from 2000 to 2024, focusing on journals publishing articles in the English language within the social science and arts and humanities subject areas. Consequently, this refinement resulted in 1147 scholarly published articles eligible for bibliometric analysis. Through an extensive screening process based on the relevance of titles, abstracts, and keywords related to, study area a final selection of 1,115 articles was made. This systematic approach ensured a rigorous focus on scholarly research within the field, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

FINDINGS

Annual Scientific Production of Publication

In order to shed light on the overall scientific advancement of religious education, Figure 1 shows the precise distribution of scientific publications year by year, covering the years 2000 to 2024. 1,115 articles were published in total over this long period of time. The growth rate of publications showed consistency increase between the years 2000 and 2005. However, in the beginning of the year 2006, there was a decrease in the pace of publications but it increase in the next two years. It reflects that religious education becomes an interesting research area for the researchers from the year 2000 to 2008. The period between 2019 and 2015 showed inconsistency and the rate of publication fluctuated. Further, the time period between the years 2016 to 2023 emerged as the most productive year in religious education research, accounting 41% percent of the total publications. This indicates an increased attention on comprehending and improving religious education within the academic world. It also demonstrates a notable upsurge in scholarly work and developments during this time. With 70 articles published in 2020 alone, it is noteworthy that this study domain has never produced a more productive year. This denotes a pinnacle of academic productivity, demonstrating the intense work devoted to religious education research in that specific year. 2019 is not far behind, having produced 65 papers, indicating the ongoing growth in the sector.

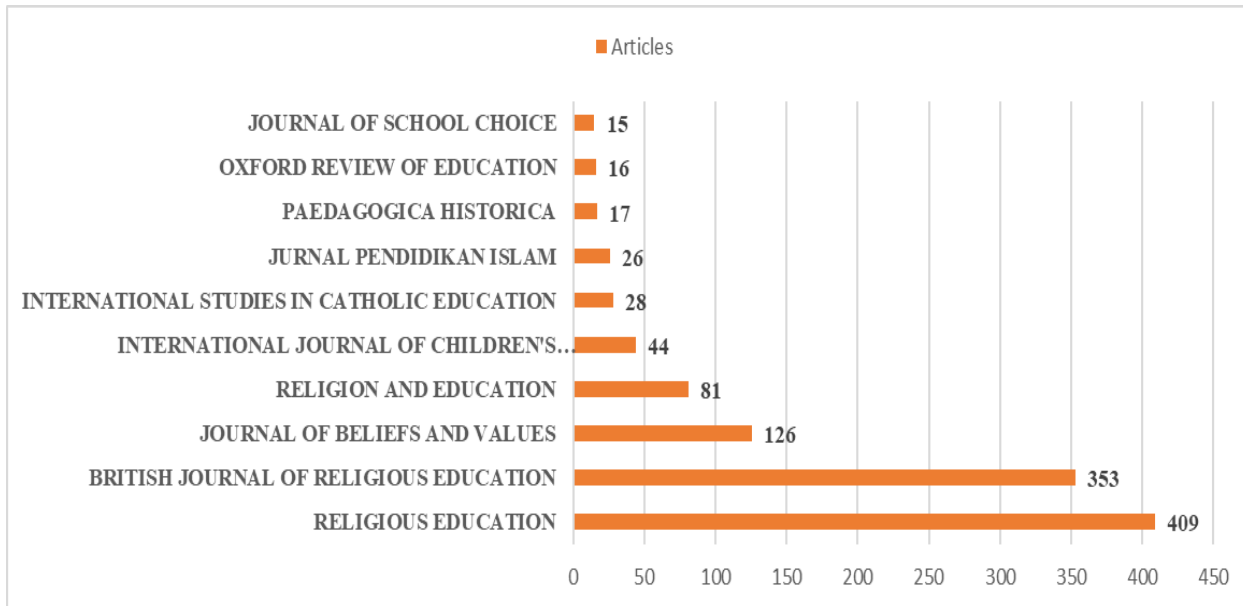
FIGURE 1
ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION OF PUBLICATIONS



Publication Trends of Journals

The top 10 publications that have released ground-breaking research articles on religious education are comprehensively compiled in Figure 2. Notably, Religious Education has grabbed the first position with an impressive count of 409 scientific papers. This accomplishment demonstrates the journal's vital significance in furthering scholarly work and research in this area. The British Journal of Religious Education, Journal of Beliefs and Values, and Religion and Education are some of the more illustrious journals in the list; they have published 353, 126, and 81 research articles, respectively. Their noteworthy contributions demonstrate how they have shaped the field of academic study on religious education.

FIGURE 2
PUBLICATION TRENDS OF JOURNALS



Author's Keywords and Trends Analysis

The author's selected terms from the researches between the time periods 2000–2024 are represented by the word cloud in Figure 3. A total of 1719 occurrences of 72 different keywords were used. Interestingly, the most often occurring keywords were “religious education,” “religion,” “spirituality,” “faith schools,” “education,” “pedagogy,” and “catholic schools”. But the word cloud by itself doesn't provide much context; rather, it just shows how these terms gradually accumulated. To gain a greater understanding of the evolution of ideas in published works, a trend theme analysis was utilized to assess the varied degrees of popularity over different periods. Various terms from across the articles were given logarithmic frequencies for this analysis. A detailed review of the trendiest themes is shown in Figure 4. The terms “religious education (318),” “religion (38),” “spirituality (31),” “faith schools (25),” “education (30),” “pedagogy (22),” and catholic schools (19)” are among those that are frequently used when examining the data. This comprehensive review, in its whole, illuminates the dominant concepts in the published works and highlights the terminology that have become remarkably popular throughout time period.

spiritual development
interpretive approach
worldviews religious studies secularisation
neutrality islamic religious education adolescence
germany citizenship faith schools religious literacy
islamic education teachers knowledge
human rights school children education hermeneutics
teaching policy islam religion catholic schools
finland bible faith higher education

religious education

worldview curriculum spirituality dialogue ethnography
religiosity diversity pedagogy teacher education leadership
identity catholic religious education (re) christianity
action research religious schools religious diversity
citizenship education
multiculturalism

Trend Topics

Term

Term frequency

100
200
300

2007 2009 2011 2013 2015 2017 2019 2021 2023

Year

Most Impactful Articles

This section included the most influential articles that have been published in a variety of academic journals; this is one of the primary metrics that classify publications based on the number of citations they have received. Citations are a potent indicator of the influence, acknowledgement, and interest that the scientific community has shown in religious education research. Table 2 shows a comprehensive overview of the 10 most influential publications. An overview of the 10 most influential publications is shown in Table 2. The research paper by Van Der Kooij JC, (2013) was the most cited, with 87 citations, on this list. The concept of "worldview" in religious education is examined in this article. A distinction is introduced between organized worldviews, more or less established systems with a group of believers, and personal worldviews, individuals' views on life and humanity. The article emphasized on the incorporation of the concept of worldview in educational curriculum. Smith A (2001) published a second highly cited article, which received 71 citations. The article highlighted the emergence of Integrated School in Northern Ireland where the catholic and protestant children learn together. Gearon L, (2013) published an article that attained 62 citations and occupied third ranked in the list. The article concluded that the intervention of political and security domains has shifted the aim and purpose of religious education.

TABLE 1
MOST IMPACTFUL ARTICLES

Articles	Authors	Journals	Total Citations	TC per Year
"Worldview": The Meaning of the Concept and the Impact on Religious Education.	Kooij et al. (2013)	Religious Education	87	7.25
Religious Segregation and the Emergence of Integrated Schools in Northern Ireland	Smith(2001)	Oxford Review of Education	71	2.96
The Counter Terrorist Classroom: Religion, Education, and Security	Gearon (2013)	Religious Education	62	5.17
Is it learning about and from religions, religion or religious education? And is it any wonder some teachers don't get it?	Teece (2010)	British Journal of Religious Education	62	4.13
Should religious education be a compulsory school subject?	White, (2004)	British Journal of Religious Education	55	2.62
Learning 'about' and 'from' religion: phenomenography, the Variation Theory of Learning and	Hella E, & Wright, A.(2009)	British Journal of Religious Education	53	3.31

religious education in Finland and the UK				
Giving voice to 'the silent minority': The experience of religious students in secondary school religious education lessons	Moulin, (2011)	British Journal of Religious Education	48	3.43
Religious schools in London: School admissions, religious composition and selectivity	Allen&West (2009)	Oxford Review of Education	47	2.94
What is Wrong with Phenomenological Approach to Religious Education	Barnes, (2001)	Religious Education	45	1.88
Discussing terrorism: a pupil-inspired guide to UK counter-terrorism policy implementation in religious education classrooms in England	Quartermaine (2014)	British Journal of Religious Education	44	4.89

Most Impactful Authors, Institutes and Countries

The most significant authors, institutions, and countries in the field of cruise religious education research domain are thoroughly summarized in Table 1. In bibliometric analysis, these measures are considered key indicators that help academics and practitioners to identify and promote a collaborative and productive environment for scholarly interaction in a particular area of study. After analyzing the complete dataset, 1133 authors were found. Miedema Sranks first in terms of publications, citations, h-index, and g-index. Wright A and Barnes LP holds the second and third rank respectively in the same criteria. Most impactful country which published largest number of publication in the domain of religious education is United Kingdom with 289 articles followed by United States with 215 articles. Furthermore, in terms of most productive institutions in cruise of religious education Boston College and University of Helsinki occupies a top position with publication of 9 articles. The above mentioned authors, countries and institutions played a prominent role for advancing research in the domain of religious schools.

TABLE 2
MOST IMPACTFUL AUTHORS, INSTITUTIONS AND COUNTRIES

Author TC	h index	G index	m index	TC	NP	PY_start
Miedema S	9	13	0.36	260	13	2000
Wright A	8	11	0.333	260	11	2001
Barnes LP	6	9	0.25	143	9	2001
Everington J	6	6	0.25	131	6	2001
Freathy R	6	9	0.353	92	9	2008
Gearon L	6	7	0.25	147	7	2001
Hyde B	6	9	0.286	92	10	2004
Jackson R	6	9	0.3	131	9	2005
O'Grady K	6	8	0.273	118	8	2003
Rymarz R	6	8	0.25	82	10	2001

Institutions	Articles
Boston College	9
Department of Education, University of Oxford	5
Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki	9
Emory University	7
Fordham University	5
Garrett-Evangelical Theology Seminary	6
Protestant Theology University	5
Graduate School of Education University of Exeter	5
University of Worcester	6

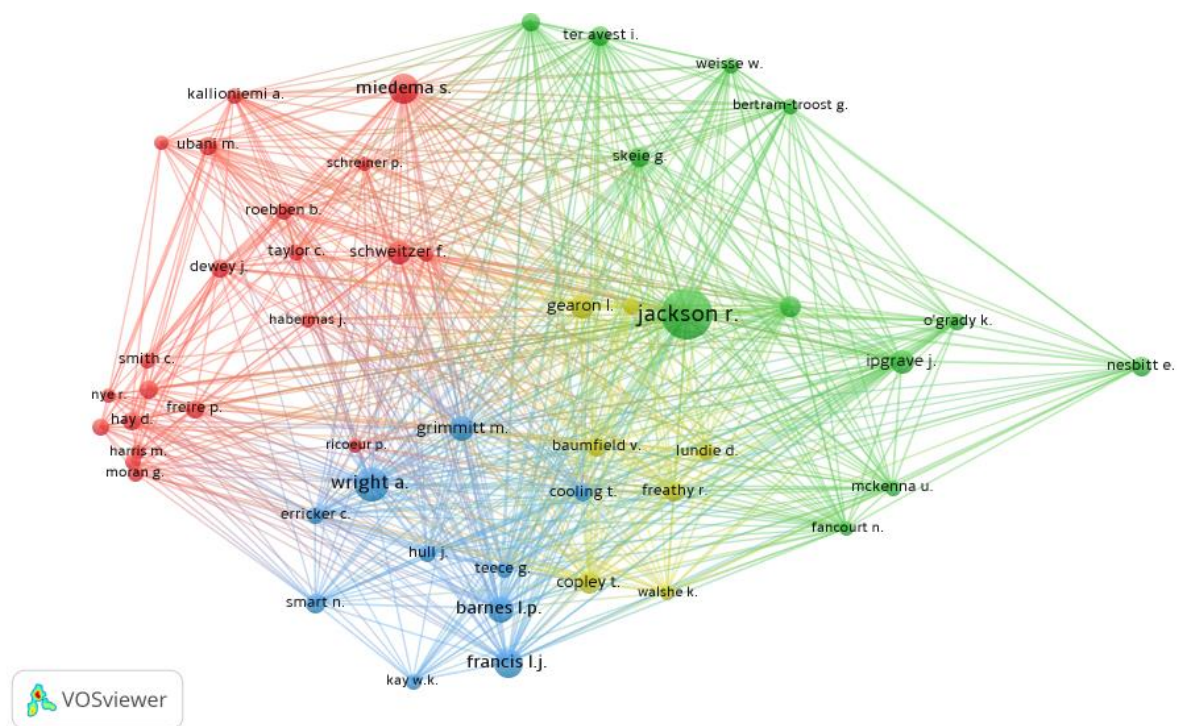
Country	Articles
United Kingdom	289
United States	215
Sweden	33
Netherland	42
Finland	37
Germany	50
Israel	43
South Africa	16
Australia	73
Indonesia	34

INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE

Understanding the influence of authors' work within the scientific community requires evaluating the conceptual structure of knowledge (Sharma, et al., 2021). A prevalent technique in bibliometric for identifying intellectual connections is co-citation analysis (Small, 1999). This technique helps to find out document pairs that are commonly cited together in a third document (Donthu et al., 2021). According to the basic premise, articles that are referenced together frequently have related themes (Surwase et al., 2011), which causes them to cluster in visualization maps (Mas-Tur et al., 2021). This study as shown in Figure 5, shows the existence of 4 clusters with 50 authors. The top ten co-cited authors are Jackson R. (591 citations, 7338 link strength), Wright a. (272 citations, 2524 link strength), Ipgrave J. (131 citations, 2480 link

strength), Barnes L.P. (165 citations, 2066), Grimmitt M. (152 citations, 1811 link strength), Everington J. (106 citations, 1774 links), Miedema S. (206 citations, 1717 link strength), Gearon I. (129 citations, 1650 links), Freathy R. (96 citations, 1486 links), Copley T. (111 citations, 1408 links), Dewey J. (82 citations, 490 links), Erricker C. (73 citations, 731 links), Everington J. (106 citations, 1774 links, Fancourt N. (54 citations, 1072 links) and Foucault M. (68 citations, 488 links).

FIGURE 5
INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE



SOCIAL STRUCTURE

An analysis of a topic's cooperation network is required to ascertain its social structure. Structures such as regular study groups, academic organisations, and prominent authors have been identified through the examination of collaborative networks (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The research groups are indicative of the various social groups that could exist in the studied area. The author's collaboration network, which consists of ten different clusters, is depicted in Figure 6. The dearth of comprehensive social structure connections among the study groups suggests that collaboration amongst the different research groups is not very strong. It was found that the authors who contributed to the clusters collaborated on multi-publications. For instance, Freathy R, Francis LJ, and Parker S G have strong collaboration due to the publishing frequency within their network of colleagues. It can be observed that writers Freathy R, Francis LJ, and Parker S G are actively participating in their social structure.

FIGURE 6
AUTHOR COLLOBORATION NETWORK

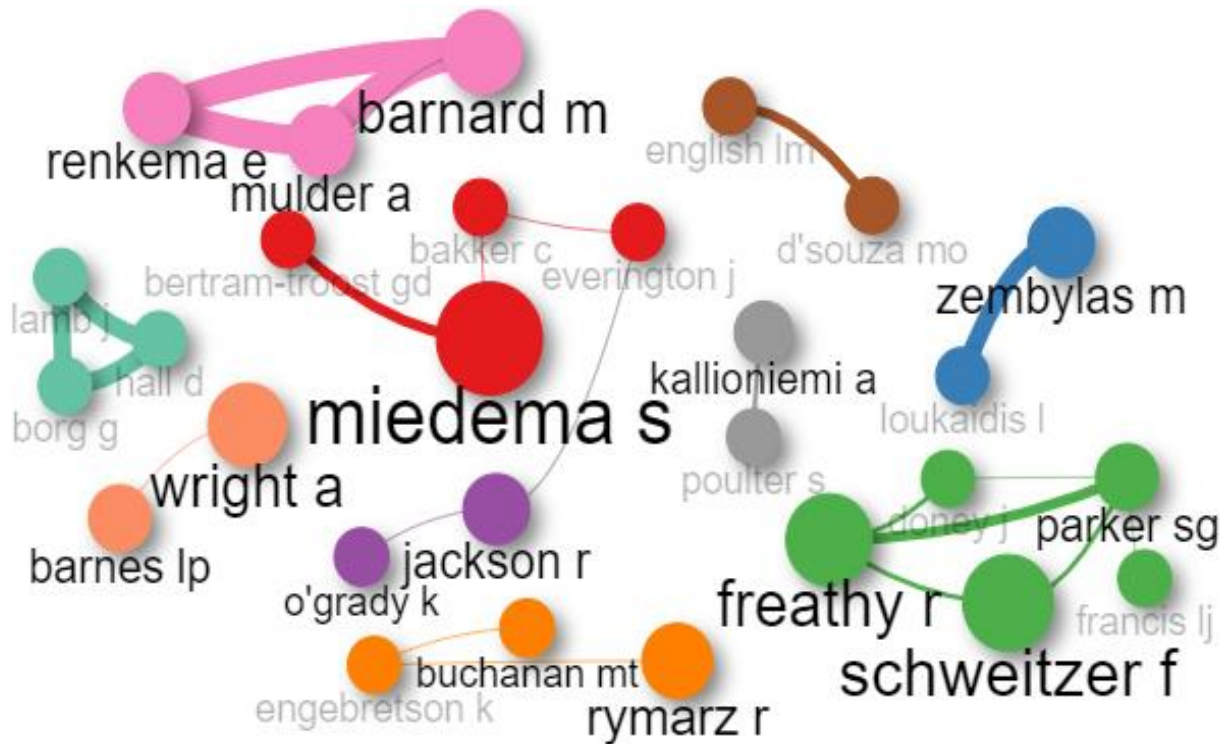
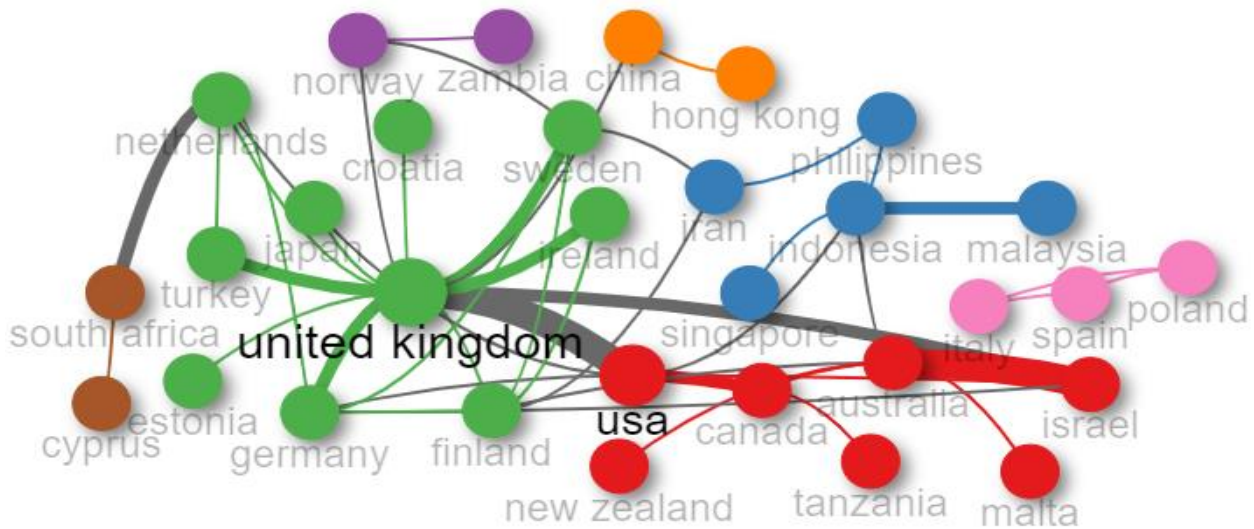


Figure 6 depicts the networks of international collaboration between nations, which are divided into seven groups. There are ten countries that make up Cluster 1 (green) are as follows: Finland, Germany, Austria, Netherland, Turkey, Croatia, Japan, Pakistan, Ireland, and Estonia. Cluster 2 (red), contains six countries such as Israel, Canada, Australia, Tanzania, Malta, and New Zealand. Cluster 3 (blue) consist of five countries each, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, and Iran. Cluster 4 (pink) contains only three counties and cluster 5 (pink), and cluster 6 (brown) and cluster 7 (orange) consist of two countries each. The United Kingdom (UK) is the most prominent nation in this clustering. The findings of this research suggest that the UK and USA (United States of America) are likely to be regarded as the most influential countries in religious education research. The most productive nations, shown in figure 6, are based on the size of cluster. It may be says that the majority of renowned universities are located in the United Kingdom and the United States of America is likely a contributing factor to this research area.

FIGURE 7
COUNTRY COLLOBORATION NETWORK



ANTICIPATED FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The bibliometric approach helps to identify the critical areas of research in to which scholars interested in religious education would need to contribute more widely and deeply. The current study explores the research trends in the area of religious education. It indicates that there is a need of additional research in these areas which is discussed below:

1. Technology plays a vital role in the present age. However, researches in the area of religious education are majorly based on literary or philosophical work. Therefore, there is a need to study the impact and relation of technology and religious education.
2. Unser (2022) studied the participation and perception of non-religious students towards religious education. However, the study did not explore the reasons regarding the less interest of non-religious students towards religious education. Therefore, there is a need to find out the reasons why non-religious students are not interested to learn religious education.
3. The debate of Schweitzer and et al. (2023) on religious and interreligious literacy focused on the researches based on how education supports the religious knowledge. However, there was a gap on this debate with regards to the holistic development of the learners through religious education. Therefore, there is a need of research on how religious knowledge helps to develop the physical, intellectual, moral, emotional and spiritual domains of the learners.
4. The researches on religious education have been primarily conducted on the literature on such as religious education as a subject, religious education as theory, administration of religious education, and religious education as social perspective. However, there is a need to conduct researches in future in the area such as administration and management of educational institutions managed by several religious groups; comparison of students' holistic development who are studying in religious school in contrast to the students who are studying in general school.
5. Moreover, studies can be explored on how religious schools develop productive citizens. Furthermore, future researchers can also be explored on how religious schools prepare the students for their livelihood.

DISCUSSION

Analyzing the array of existing research is a basic way to shed light on the present scenario of the area and provide insightful information for further studies, which promotes the field's progress. The current study finds a significant gap in fully understanding the theoretical and conceptual foundation of research on religious education. The present study addresses this vacuum by examining religious education research from a critical and interrelated standpoint with the objective to identify changing trends, underlying assumptions, and the structural core of this field. Over the studied period from 2000 to 2024, the results of the annual scientific production of publications highlight the development and growing significance of religious education. Notably, the growth rate of publications showed consistency increase between the years 2000 and 2008. It depicts that religious education become an interesting research area for the researchers during this tenure. However, the most productive year in religious education research has been observed between the years 2016 to 2023 because 41% percent of the total publications were published during this duration. However, year 2020 emerge as zenith of scholarly output. This increased focus on research and activity emphasizes the importance of religious education as a emerging topic for study and innovation.

In the context of religious education, Religious Education is the leading journal with an impressive count of 409 scientific publications, depicting its significant role in advancing scholarly research. In addition to it, The British Journal of Religious Education, Journal of Beliefs and Values, and Religion and Education significantly contribute 353, 126, and 81 research articles, respectively. These reputed journals collectively underscore the growing significance of religious education as a field of study and practice. The collection of informative research articles depicts the growing acknowledgment of the need to develop religious education. By publishing forward-thinking studies, these journals significantly influence pedagogy and curriculum, to develop religious education as discipline.

The results of the most impactful research articles shows the most cited research studies in the area of religious education. Most impactful articles highlight the remarkable progress in this field, depicting its recognition and influence within the scientific community. A paper titled ““Worldview”: The Meaning of the Concept and the Impact on Religious Education ‘is identified as a highly cited article with 87 citations in this domain. The concept of "worldview" in religious education is examined in this article. A distinction is introduced between organized worldviews, more or less established systems with a group of believers, and personal worldviews, individuals’ views on life and humanity. The article emphasized on the incorporation of the concept of worldview in educational curriculum. Similarly, the article ‘Religious Segregation and the Emergence of Integrated Schools in Northern Ireland’ secures second rank in this list with 71 citations. The article highlighted the emergence of Integrated School in Northern Ireland where the catholic and protestant children learn together. Further, an article entitled ‘The Counter Terrorist Classroom: Religion, Education, and Security’ attained 62 citations and occupied third ranked in the list. The article concluded that the intervention of political and security domains has shifted the aim and purpose of religious education.

The author’s keyword analysis results have showed the most prevalent terms in the domain of religious education research. This metric serves as a key indicator for identifying emerging research trends and areas of significant interest in the field of religious education. Notably, the keywords that have surfaced most frequently include “religious education (318),” “religion (38),” “spirituality (31),” “faith schools (25),” “education (30),” “pedagogy (22),” and catholic schools (19)” are among those that are frequently used when examining the data. This comprehensive review, in its whole, illuminates the dominant concepts in the published works and highlights the terminology that have become remarkably popular throughout time period.

Moreover, while exploring the intellectual and social frameworks of the field, this study identified some influential figures in religious education research. The intellectual structure analysis identified the top ten co-cited authors, The top ten co-cited authors are Jackson R. Wright A., Barnes L.P., Grimmitt M., Everington J., Miedema S., Gearon I., Freathy R., Copley T., Dewey J., Erricker C., Everington J., Fancourt N. , and Foucault. G has occupied prominent positions due to their substantial citation counts and link

strengths. Further, the social structure identified the cluster of Freathy R, Francis LJ, and Parker S as the prominent co-authorship network in the list. On the other hand, social structure analysis was further discussed into country collaboration networks. UK (United Kingdom) and USA (United States of America) may be regarded as the most influential countries in religious education research.

CONCLUSION

The present paper represents the bibliometric analysis of the research studies conducted in the area of the religious education within the timeline of quarter of the 21st century (from 2000 to 2024). The paper analyzed the annual scientific production of publication, publication trends of the journal, authors' keywords and trends analysis, most impactful authors, institutes and countries, intellectual and social structure. From the bibliometric analysis of the current topic it has been observed that the majority of the studies on religious education conducted as a philosophical, curriculum and administration of religious school. Further, there is negligible studies have been found on the impact of religious school or religious education in the development of the learners and future careers. Therefore, there is a need to conduct further researches in these areas also.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this paper have significant implications for scholars and professionals in the field of religious education. Further, this paper provides a novel approach for conducting researches in religious education by utilizing bibliometrix (a bibliometric analysis tool). The findings of this paper contribute valuable primary information on religious education research, further it provides insights to researchers for conducting further researches in this area. Moreover, it also helps the researcher to identify research gaps related to this area in the existing literature and provides directions for further researches.

LIMITATIONS

The present paper discussed the researches with regards to religious education in the last twenty-five years. However, it is quite important to discuss the constraints of this paper. The analysis of this paper was concluded on the basis of bibliographic data from articles and did not include other types of publications like books, conference papers, or reports. Further, with the incorporation of wider range of sources could provide a more complete picture of the research landscape in research education. Additionally, the study is purely relied on data extracted from the Scopus database, that may be not capture all relevant publications due to its limitations. In order to gather a wider and more varied dataset and gain deeper insights, future studies may utilize several databases and bibliometric tools.

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