Bibliometric Analysis of Religious Education Systems in Schools: Trends, Themes, and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of research on "Religious Education Systems in Schools" to identify trends, themes, and future directions. Data was sourced from the Scopus database covering 1915–2024, with 723 relevant documents analyzed using tools such as R, RStudio, VOSviewer, and Microsoft Excel. A systematic three-stage process was employed to assess publication trends, thematic clusters, and relationships among research elements. The results indicate a steady growth in publications, particularly after 2000, with a peak in 2023. Key themes include integrating religious values into curricula, the role of religious education in shaping national identity, and emerging topics on gender and diversity. Dominant keywords such as "education," "curriculum," and "multiculturalism" emphasize the focus on inclusivity and innovation. Countries like the USA, UK, and Israel lead in research output, while Indonesia emerges as a significant contributor from the Global South. The study highlights opportunities for future research, including integrating technology in religious education, fostering interreligious dialogue, and addressing social equity through inclusive frameworks. This bibliometric analysis provides a roadmap for educators, researchers, and policymakers to enhance the relevance, inclusivity, and global impact of religious education in schools amidst evolving societal challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The study of religious education systems in schools has gained increasing attention over the decades, reflecting the vital role of education in shaping moral, spiritual, and social values in diverse cultural and religious contexts [1]. As schools serve as critical environments for knowledge transmission and character building, religious education has become a significant subject of inquiry, especially in societies grappling with religious pluralism, multiculturalism, and secularization [2]. The evolving nature of education policies, curricula, and pedagogical approaches highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how religious education adapts to contemporary challenges, including globalization, technological advancements, and shifting societal values [3].

Previous studies have explored various aspects of religious education, such as its integration within national curricula, the challenges of maintaining neutrality in religiously diverse classrooms, and its impact on students' moral and spiritual development [4]. Researchers have also examined the intersection of religious education with issues like gender equity, cultural diversity, and policy implementation [5]. However, despite the growing body of literature, there is limited research that systematically maps the intellectual structure and research trends in this field [6]. Bibliometric analysis offers an opportunity to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive overview of the publication patterns, influential authors, institutions, and key themes that have shaped the discourse on religious education in schools.

The urgency of this study lies in the increasing complexity of global educational systems, where religious education often serves as a tool for fostering inclusivity, tolerance, and mutual understanding in increasingly diverse societies [7]. Understanding the historical and contemporary trajectories of research in this area is critical for policymakers,

educators, and researchers to address the growing need for inclusive, context-sensitive educational frameworks [8]. Furthermore, as global issues such as religious extremism and social polarization continue to challenge educational systems, insights from bibliometric analyses can inform evidence-based policies and practices [9].

Religious education is also deeply intertwined with national identity and cultural preservation, often acting as a mediator between traditional values and modern educational goals. In contexts where religion plays a central role in public life, such as in Indonesia, Turkey, and various European countries, religious education systems face the dual challenge of addressing local traditions while fostering global competencies [10]. This creates a need for research that not only addresses pedagogical approaches but also examines the broader sociopolitical implications of religious education, including its role in shaping citizenship, ethics, and cross-cultural understanding [11].

While much of the current discourse emphasizes theoretical and contextual analyses, there is a growing need for evidence-based insights into how religious education systems evolve over time and adapt to emerging educational demands [12]. With the rapid growth in scholarly output on religious education, bibliometric analysis serves as a valuable tool to identify dominant trends, influential research networks, and underexplored areas within the field [13]. Such insights can provide a roadmap for aligning educational practices with societal needs while ensuring that religious education remains both relevant and impactful [14].

This study is uniquely positioned to contribute to the academic and practical understanding of religious education in schools by utilizing bibliometric analysis to analyze research output from global sources [15]. By mapping key themes, identifying influential contributors, and exploring thematic trends, this article not only fills existing gaps in the literature but also lays the groundwork for future research [4], [16], [17], [18], [19]. The findings aim to provide actionable recommendations for educators, researchers, and policymakers to strengthen the role of religious education as a vital component of inclusive and context-sensitive educational systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

RE is generally categorized into confessional and non-confessional models. Confessional RE, practiced in countries with an official religion, aims to strengthen adherence to a specific faith tradition. Non-confessional models, as found in secular or pluralistic societies like the UK and Sweden, focus on developing religious literacy and understanding across multiple traditions [5]. Educational theorists argue for a move from dogmatic teaching to inclusive education. Cush notes that this shift reflects a broader societal transition toward pluralism and democratic values.

In multicultural societies, RE must be inclusive and culturally sensitive. Gearon warns that RE can be politicized, often reflecting national ideologies rather than balanced representation of beliefs [11]. Dialogic and inquiry-based approaches have gained attention for fostering mutual understanding and interfaith respect among students. However, Hannam points out that the success of such pedagogies depends heavily on teacher preparedness and institutional support [3]. RE plays a significant role in shaping individual and collective identities. As Astley and Francis argue, RE can enhance moral reasoning, empathy, and civic engagement, provided it supports critical reflection rather than indoctrination. In contrast, where RE reinforces dominant cultural narratives, it may marginalize students from minority or secular backgrounds.

RE policies are shaped by legal frameworks, including those related to freedom of religion and parental rights. European human rights jurisprudence, for example, has influenced RE standards in member states, often pushing for greater neutrality and inclusivity [16]. Curriculum development in RE remains contested. ter Avest et al. advocate for dialogical curriculum design that accommodates local contexts and promotes meaningful engagement. Meanwhile, global pressures such as standardized testing can undermine the reflective and participatory character of quality RE.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs the bibliometric analysis method, with data obtained from the Scopus database covering the period from 1915 to 2024 [20], [21], [22], [23], [24]. The data was retrieved on January 4, 2024, at 2:37 PM, using a Boolean search strategy. Analytical tools, including R, RStudio, VOSviewer, and Microsoft Excel, were utilized to examine citations, document content, and interrelations within the dataset. The analysis followed a systematic three-stage process to interpret the collected data.

In the first stage of the research, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken to evaluate the relevance and significance of the chosen topic within the broader context of bibliometric studies. This process was essential to ensure that the research focus was aligned with existing scholarly discourse and thematic trends in the field. Additionally, the literature review played a crucial role in identifying and selecting suitable keywords that accurately and comprehensively represent the core concepts and scope of the research area. This foundational step helped establish a clear direction for the subsequent phases of the study.

In the second stage, a detailed search of the Scopus database was performed using the Boolean operator TITLE-ABS-KEY (school AND religious AND education AND system), yielding 1,570 documents. The results were further refined using Boolean operators to filter only journal articles written in English within the subject areas of social sciences and arts and humanities. The filtering process applied the following criteria: TITLE-ABS-KEY (school AND religious AND education AND system) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "soci") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "arts")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "english")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")). After this refinement, 723 relevant documents were identified

In the third and final stage of the research process, the selected documents underwent an in-depth and systematic analysis. A variety of tools and software applications were utilized to ensure a thorough examination of the data. Scopus Analyzer, R, and RStudio were employed to explore and evaluate publication trends across different time periods, detect patterns in document distribution, and extract key metadata, including information about contributing authors, their institutional affiliations, and the countries from which the research originated. This stage also involved an examination of the interrelationships between documents, such as co-authorship networks and citation linkages, which were visualized through network mapping using VOSviewer. These visualizations offered insights into the structure and dynamics of the research landscape. The processed data was subsequently organized, categorized, and subjected to further quantitative analysis using Microsoft Excel to support interpretation and draw meaningful conclusions.

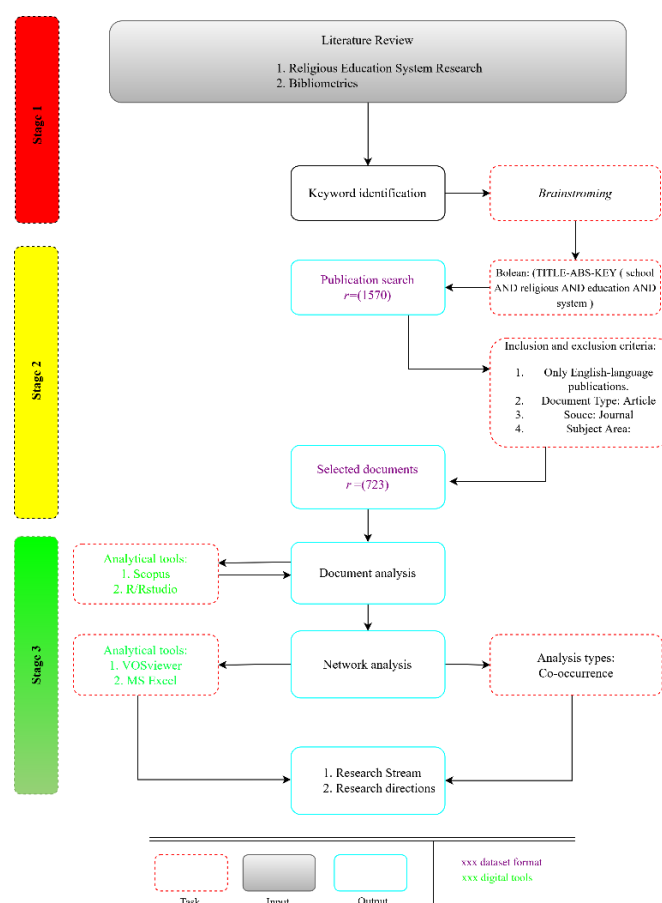These steps are summarized visually in the accompanying image below:

Figure 1. Research Workflow

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Main Data Information

Based on the main data table about publications themed "Religious Education Systems in Schools," the data spans a very long period—from 1915 to 2024—with a total of 723 documents published from 384 sources, including journals, books, and others. An annual growth rate of 3.65% indicates a steady, though not rapid, increase in the number of publications. The average document age is 10.7 years, reflecting that research on this theme has a long history and long-term relevance. An average of 8.578 citations per document suggests significant academic impact, indicating considerable attention from the research community to this theme.

In terms of content, there are 559 Keywords Plus and 1,879 author-supplied keywords, showing the broad scope of research in this area, covering various approaches and related issues [35]–[40]. Regarding authorship, the data shows involvement from 1,394 authors, with 349 documents written by single authors. Additionally, the average of 2.07 authors per document indicates a moderate level of collaboration. However, the international co-authorship rate of 10.24% suggests that cross-country collaboration is still relatively low, possibly due to the localized nature of religious education, which tends to be rooted in the cultural and national policy context of each country.

Table 1. Main Information About Data

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	1915:2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	384

Documents	723
Annual Growth Rate %	3,65
Document Average Age	10,7
Average citations per doc	8,578
References	31172
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	559
Author's Keywords (DE)	1879
AUTHORS	
Authors	1394
Authors of single-authored docs	349
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	365
Co-Authors per Doc	2,07
International co-authorships %	10,24
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	723

Documents By Year

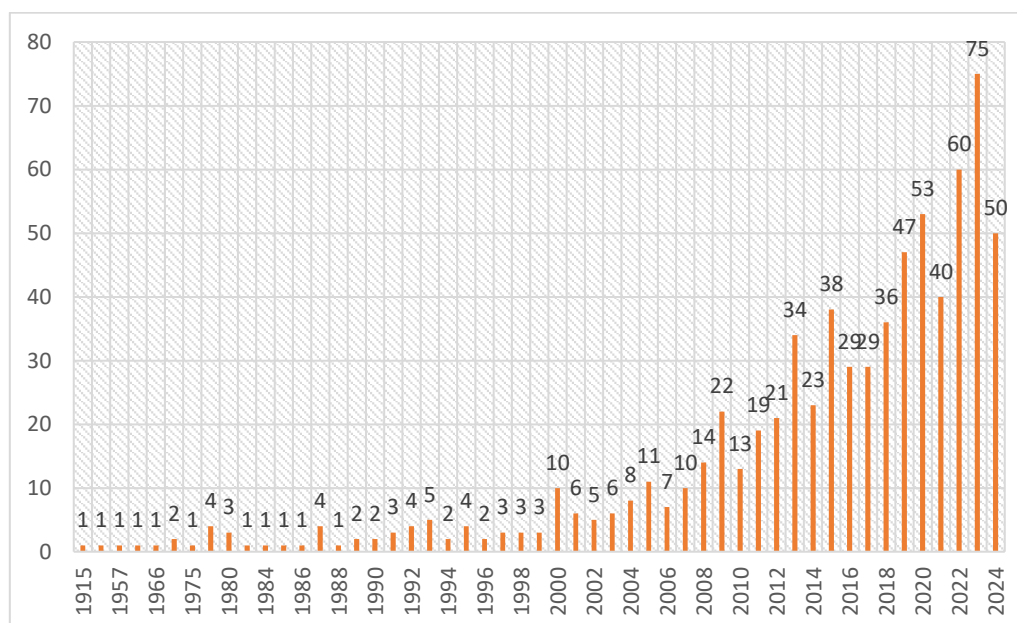**Figure 2.** Document publication chart by year

Figure 2 illustrates the number of publications per year on the theme "Religious Education Systems in Schools." The graph shows a significant growth trend from 1915 to 2024. In the early period, from 1915 to 2000, the number of publications remained stagnant at very low levels, often only reaching single digits per year. This reflects the limited

academic attention to this theme at the time, likely due to restricted access to information, minimal innovation in religious education, and the perception that religious education was a traditional field not requiring further research. However, after the year 2000—and especially post-2010—a significant surge is evident, with growth becoming increasingly exponential. This rise can be attributed to advancements in educational technology, such as the use of e-learning and mobile technology, as well as national education policies that began placing more emphasis on value-based and religious education.

The peak in publication volume occurred in 2023, with a total of 75 publications—the highest number across the entire period analyzed. This surge was likely influenced by major shifts in the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced innovation in online learning, including within religious education. Additionally, the moral crisis in modern society has driven scholars to explore the role of religious education in shaping the character of younger generations. However, in 2024, the number of publications dropped to 50, potentially indicating a saturation of the research theme or a shift in academic priorities toward more post-pandemic-relevant topics such as sustainability or social change.

Overall, this graph highlights an interesting evolution in academic attention to the theme of "Religious Education Systems in Schools." From a stagnant early period to a sharp rise in the last two decades, the theme has gained increasing relevance in global discussions—particularly in integrating religious education with technological innovation and moral values in the modern era. However, the decline in publications in 2024 signals a need for new approaches or the development of interdisciplinary themes to maintain the relevance and sustainability of research in this field.

Most Relevant Authors

Based on Table 2, several insights can be drawn regarding the performance of authors in the theme "Religious Education Systems in Schools." Hughes J ranks highest in total citations, with 74 citations. Although his h-index (3) and g-index (4) are not significantly different from other authors, Hughes J has a few highly cited publications, setting him apart in terms of impact. Meanwhile, Franken L stands out for productivity, with the highest number of publications (5) and a top g-index of 5, although his impact does not surpass that of Hughes J.

The author with the highest annual consistency is Mamadaliev Am, who holds the top m-index score of 0.333. Having started publishing in 2017, he has demonstrated stable productivity and impact year after year, making him one of the most promising contributors in the field. On the other hand, senior authors such as Anderson Pm and Addi-Raccah A, who began publishing in 2003 and 2005 respectively, show low m-index values—0.087 for Anderson Pm and 0.095 for Addi-Raccah A—indicating a lack of consistent publication activity throughout their careers. In contrast, a younger author like Arvisais O, who began publishing in 2021, already has an h-index and g-index comparable to some senior authors. Although their citation impact is still relatively low, this suggests strong potential for future contributions.

Additionally, authors such as Abdullah I are noteworthy; despite having only 3 publications, he has received 34 citations and holds an m-index of 0.286. This indicates his work is highly relevant within the field. Overall, most authors have similar or closely matched h-index and g-index scores, suggesting that citations are fairly evenly distributed across their publications, with no single paper dominating. From these findings, it can be concluded that authors like Hughes J, Franken L, and Mamadaliev Am are key figures in this field. At the same time, emerging authors such as Arvisais O show promising potential for future contributions.

Table 2. Most Relevant Authors

Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
Berglund J	3	3	0,2	30	3	2011
Franken L	3	5	0,231	46	5	2013
Hughes J	3	4	0,214	74	4	2012
Mamadaliev Am	3	3	0,333	37	3	2017
Abdullah I	2	3	0,286	34	3	2019
Addi-Raccah A	2	2	0,095	21	2	2005
Anderson Pm	2	2	0,087	25	2	2003
Andreassen B-O	2	3	0,154	39	3	2013
Arvisais O	2	2	0,4	13	2	2021
Asadullah Mn	2	2	0,118	35	2	2009

Table 3 contains data related to publications on the theme "Religious Education Systems in Schools," revealing several interesting insights that highlight variations in local and global relevance. An article written by Smith A in 2001, published in the Oxford Review of Education, holds the highest number of global citations with 71. However, it has only 4 local citations, resulting in a local-to-global citation ratio of 5.63%. This indicates that while the article is highly influential globally, its relevance within the local research community is relatively low.

In contrast, an article by Zilliacus H published in 2013 in the journal Intercultural Education shows a more balanced citation profile. With 3 local citations out of 11 total global citations, it has a local-to-global ratio of 27.27%, suggesting the article is both locally relevant and internationally recognized. Another notable example is the article by Yablon YB, published in 2009 in the International Journal of Inclusive Education, which has the highest local-to-global citation ratio at 33.33%. With 2 local citations out of 6 global citations, it demonstrates greater impact within the local community compared to the international level.

The article written by Hughes J in 2012, published in Policy Futures in Education, has a relatively high number of global citations (42), but its local-to-global ratio is only 7.14%. This suggests that the article is more appreciated internationally than locally. Another article, authored by Euchner E-M in 2018 and published in Z VGL Polit Wiss, has a local-to-global ratio of 20%, with 2 local citations out of 10 global citations. This indicates that the article has a reasonable level of relevance both locally and globally.

Table 3. Most Global Cite Documents

Document	Local Citations	Global Citations	LC/GC Ratio (%)
Zilliacus H, (2013)	4	25	16,00
Smith A, (2001)	4	71	5,63
Zilliacus H, (2013)	3	11	27,27
Hughes J, (2012)	3	42	7,14
Sabbagh C, (2019)	2	13	15,38
Natolochnaya Ov, (2019)	2	29	6,90
Euchner E-M, (2018)	2	10	20,00
Franken L, (2013)	2	24	8,33
Yablon Yb, (2009)	2	6	33,33

| Hogan C, (2011) | 2 | 14 | 14,29 |

Documents Based on Affiliantions

Based on Figure 3, which presents a graph of publications by author affiliation on the theme "Religious Education Systems in Schools," it is evident that Tel Aviv University and Bar-Ilan University lead with 12 publications each, making them the top contributing institutions. They are followed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam with 11 publications and Queen's University Belfast with 10, highlighting the significant role these institutions play in research related to religious education. Other institutions such as Cherkas Global University, Helsingin Yliopisto, University College Dublin, Universiteit Antwerpen, Ulster University, the University of Oxford, and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev each contributed 8 publications.

These findings indicate that higher education institutions in Israel—particularly Tel Aviv University and Bar-Ilan University—play a major role in research on this theme. This may be influenced by Israel's social, cultural, and religious context, where religious education holds a strategic position in shaping moral and spiritual values. The contribution from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is also noteworthy, as the institution is known for its interdisciplinary approach, which likely supports broader exploration of religious education from theological, philosophical, and pedagogical perspectives.

Furthermore, the involvement of European universities such as Queen's University Belfast and the University of Oxford reflects Western interest in religious education, although the focus in these contexts may lean more toward interfaith studies or secular approaches. The presence of universities from other regions, such as Helsingin Yliopisto in Finland and University College Dublin in Ireland, underscores the global relevance of the theme, even though research contributions tend to be concentrated in a few key institutions.

Figure 3. Chart of publications by affiliation
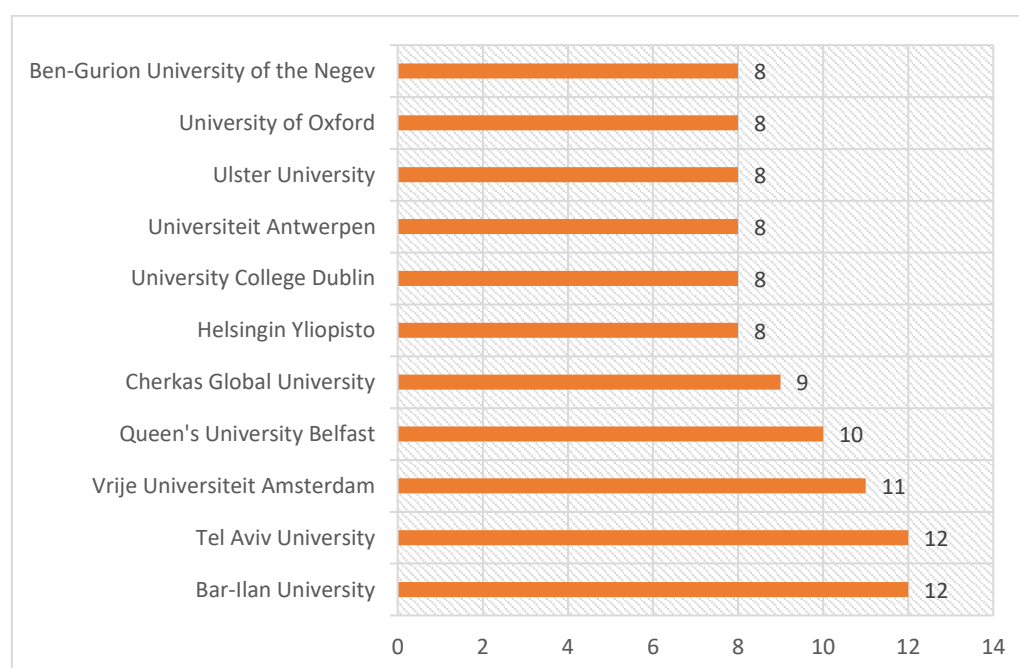
Documents By Country

Based on Figure 4, which displays a graph of publications by the authors' countries of origin on the theme "Religious Education Systems in Schools" (as in Figure 3), it is evident that the United States leads with a total of 113 publications, followed by the United Kingdom with 99. Israel ranks third with 53 publications, while Indonesia is in fourth place with

52 publications—highlighting the country's significant contribution to research on religious education. Other countries such as Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, and Turkey have lower publication counts, ranging from 22 to 32 articles.

These findings indicate that the United States and the United Kingdom serve as global research hubs for this theme, reflecting strong interest in religious education issues in the Western world. Israel's notable contribution can be attributed to the strong presence of religious traditions and values in its educational system. On the other hand, Indonesia's position in fourth place is particularly noteworthy, as it shows that a Muslim-majority country is actively engaged in academic discussions on religious education—likely influenced by the central role of religion in the country's social and cultural life.

Furthermore, the involvement of various countries such as Australia, Canada, and several European nations—including the Netherlands, Sweden, and Russia—demonstrates that religious education is a globally relevant topic. However, the concentration of publications in a few countries like the U.S., the U.K., and Israel suggests that research in this area is still geographically concentrated, possibly due to differences in educational traditions, policies, and the significance of religion within national education systems.
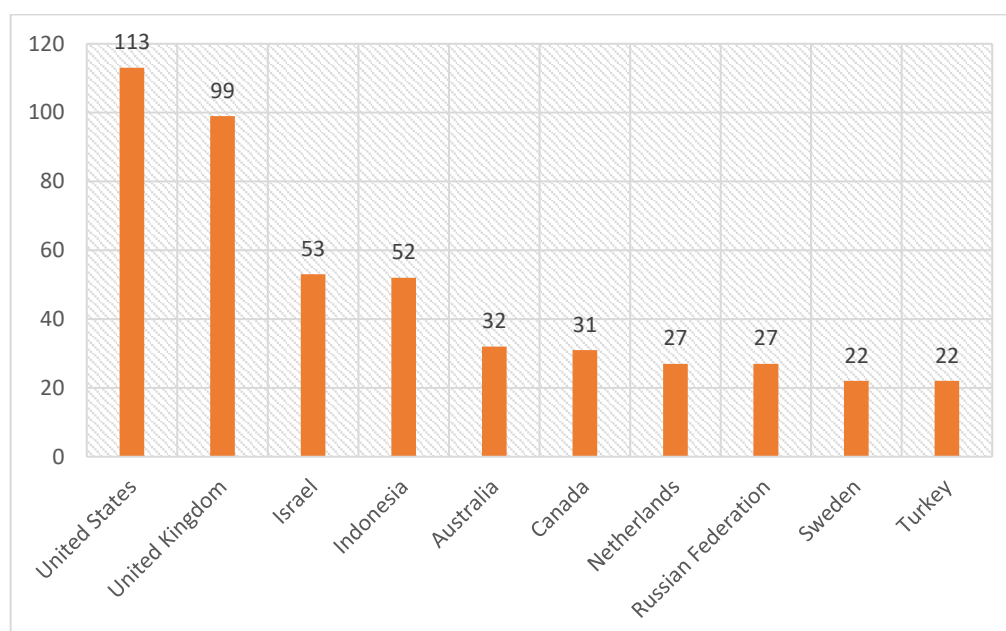

Figure 4. Chart of publications by country

Thematic Map

Based on the analysis of the thematic map in Figure 5 regarding the theme *"Religious Education Systems in Schools,"* several interesting findings emerged, which can be categorized according to theme type: Motor themes, located in the upper-right quadrant, represent topics that are both highly relevant and well-developed. Themes such as *"human,"* *"female,"* and *"article"* reflect significant attention to gender-related issues, particularly the role of women in the context of religious education. With a high level of development and strong relevance, these themes are currently central to academic discourse. They also indicate a mature body of research that can be further expanded into topics such as gender equality, cultural dynamics, or community-based approaches in religious education.

In the emerging or declining themes quadrant, themes such as *"educational attainment,"* *"ethnic group,"* and *"socioeconomic conditions"* were identified. These topics are still underdeveloped and show relatively low relevance, suggesting they may be in the early stages of development or possibly declining in research popularity. These themes explore the relationship between religious education and educational outcomes, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic

factors. Although currently limited in impact, they hold potential for further research—especially in examining how religious education may influence social justice, cultural integration, and academic success among specific ethnic groups.

Meanwhile, basic themes, located in the lower-right quadrant, include topics like *"education," "religion,"* and *"curriculum."* These themes are highly relevant as foundational elements of research but are still lacking in structured development. They reflect a central focus on how religious education is designed, implemented, and integrated into educational curricula. Research on these themes can serve as a basis for the development of more complex topics, such as the influence of religious values on teaching methods or the role of curricula in shaping students' religious identity.

In contrast to other categories, the thematic map revealed no themes in the niche themes quadrant. This indicates that there are no topics that are highly specialized and well-structured yet have limited relevance to the broader research field. Thus, no specific subfields are functioning merely as isolated subjects within a larger framework. The absence of niche themes suggests that all identified topics are either broadly relevant or still in the early stages of development. Researchers are encouraged to either build upon mature themes or explore developing ones to fill existing research gaps.
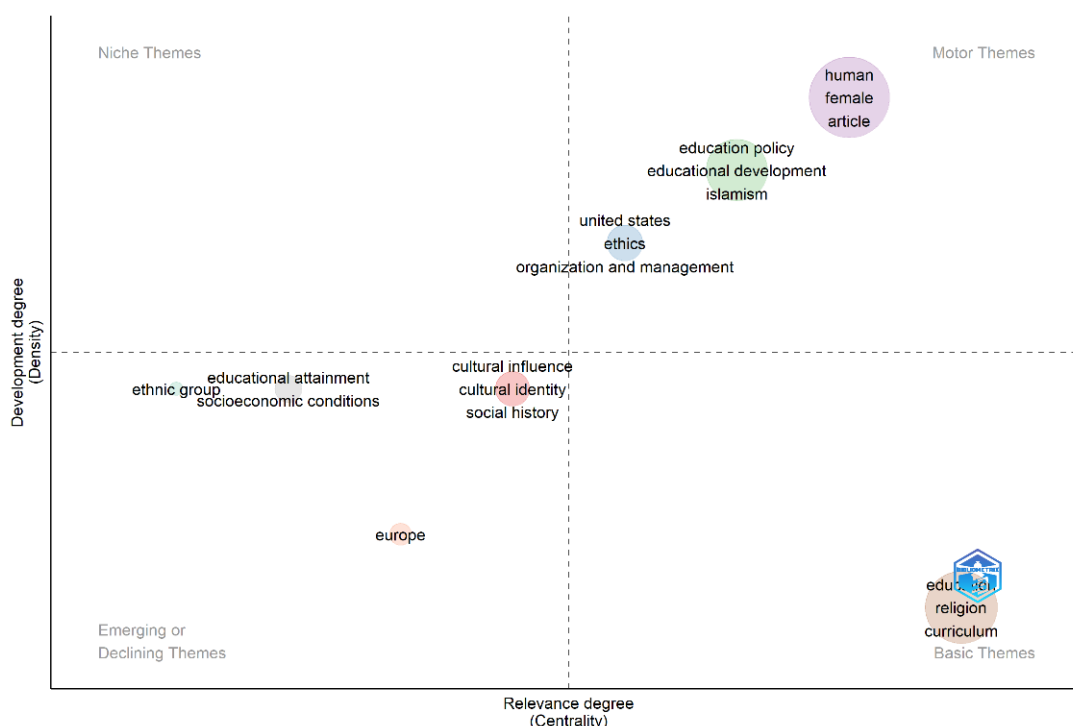

Figure 5. Chart of publications by affiliation

Network Analysis

Based on Figure 6, which presents a network visualization analysis of co-occurrences using VOSviewer for the theme *"Religious Education Systems in Schools,"* four main clusters were identified: The red cluster (29 items) focuses on social issues such as gender, age groups (adolescent, child, adult), and human dynamics within the school environment. Topics like morality and ethics also feature prominently, reflecting key concerns in the social dimension of religious education. The green cluster (27 items) highlights structural aspects of education, such as curriculum, education policy, and the integration of religious values into the education system, with particular attention to cultural and religious diversity (e.g., multiculturalism and integration). The blue cluster (21 items) centers on religious themes, particularly Islam, with keywords such as *religious diversity*, *Islamic education*, and *national identity formation*. This
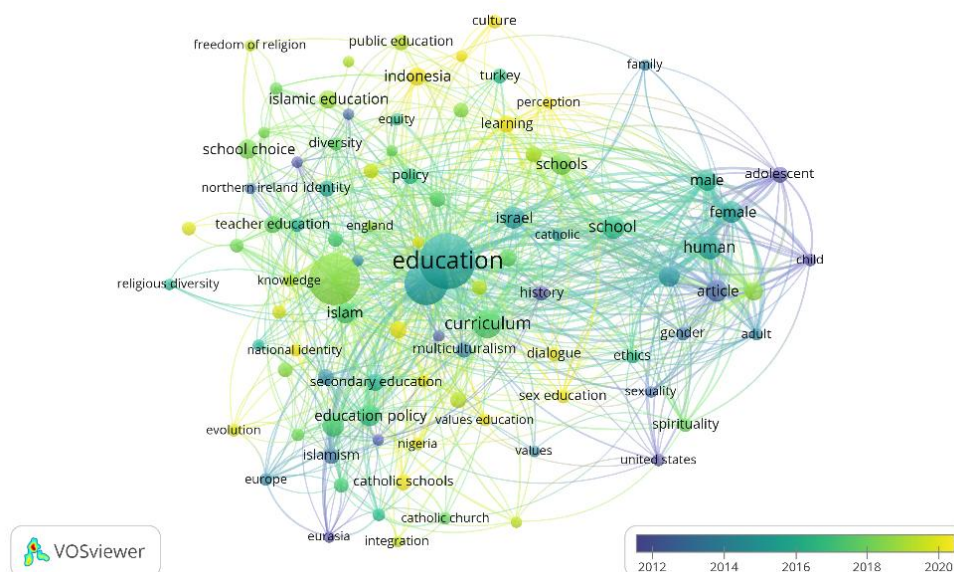
cluster also emphasizes the role of religious freedom and teacher training in shaping religious education. The yellow cluster (15 items) explores the relationship between religious education, culture, and family, with a geographical focus on countries like Indonesia and Turkey.

The keyword *education* dominates the network with a total link strength of 260 and 107 occurrences, indicating that education is at the core of this thematic landscape. Overall, the research spans social, structural, religious, and cultural issues, offering significant opportunities for developing religious education that is relevant, inclusive, and rooted in social and cultural values.

Figure 6. Keyword Network Distribution Based on Occurrence

Based on the overlay visualization analysis in Figure 7, the development of research is seen to move from basic issues towards more specific and contextual topics. The keyword "education" becomes the central focus, closely related to "curriculum," "school," "Islam," and "human." In the early years (2012–2015), the research focused on fundamental topics such as "religious diversity," "freedom of religion," and "teacher education," which laid the foundation for theory and practice. The middle period (2016–2018) shows a shift towards more complex topics such as "Islam," "multiculturalism," "education policy," and "values education," signaling attention to the integration of religious values and multicultural education. The latest trends (2019–2020) highlight local and cultural contexts, such as "Indonesia," "Turkey," "family," and "learning," as well as interactive approaches through "dialogue" and "perception."

The research also includes issues of gender and morality, seen in the connections between "gender," "ethics," and "human," with a focus on diversity through "multiculturalism" and "religious diversity." This visualization shows a shift from general issues to more specific applications, such as culture-based religious education, cross-country studies, and the role of religious education in supporting social justice and tolerance.

Figure 7. Keyword Network Distribution Based on Overlay

The density visualization in Figure 8 provides additional insight into the intensity and main focus of the research network on "Religious Education Systems in Schools." The keyword "education" remains the central focus with the highest density, indicating that research continues to center on education issues as the core of this theme. Other keywords like "curriculum," "school," and "Islam" also have high density, reinforcing the role of the curriculum, school institutions, and the influence of religion, particularly Islam, in shaping religious education systems.

Social issues already identified in the overlay analysis, such as gender and morality, also show significant density. Keywords like "human," "male," "female," and "gender" indicate sustained attention to the role of individuals and social dynamics in religious education. Additionally, religious diversity, which was an early trend, remains relevant, with keywords like "religious diversity" and "national identity" emerging as important areas in this research network.
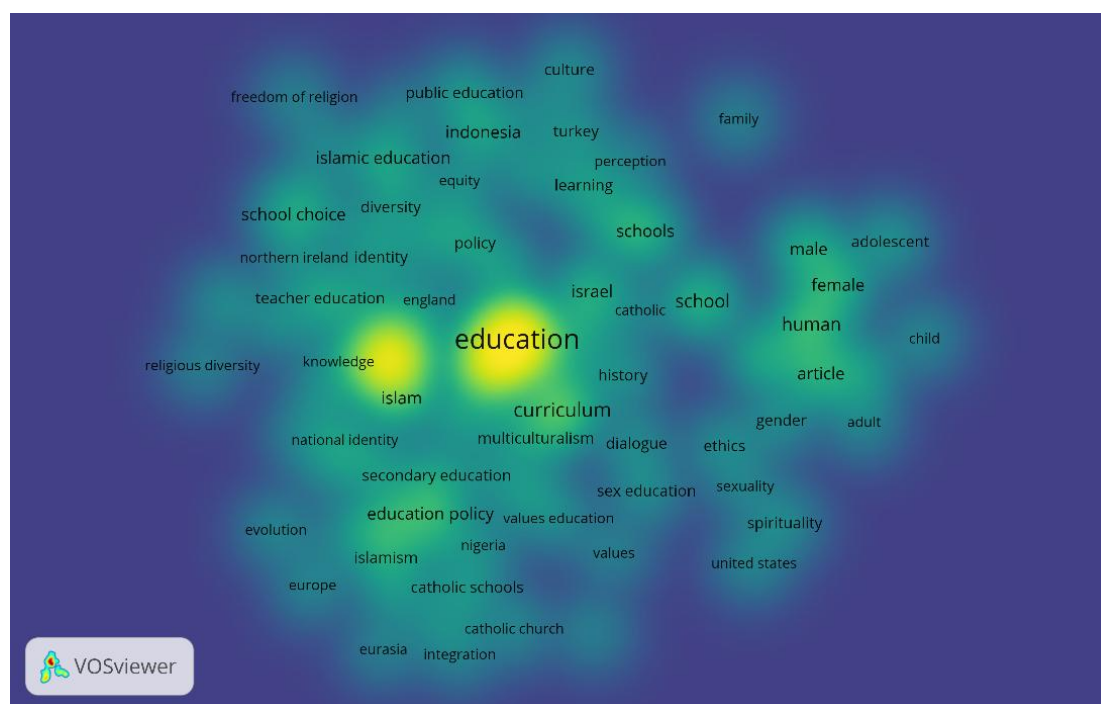

Figure 8. Keyword Network Distribution Based on Density

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study demonstrates that scholarly interest in "Religious Education Systems in Schools" has grown substantially over the last two decades. The analysis of 723 documents reveals major thematic focuses, such as the integration of religious values into curricula, the promotion of multicultural education, and the role of religious instruction in shaping national identity. Issues related to gender, morality, and inclusivity have also gained traction, reflecting the evolving priorities of global educational systems. Countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, and Indonesia emerge as leading contributors, highlighting both Western and Global South perspectives in this field.

Looking ahead, there is considerable opportunity for future research to investigate the use of educational technologies in religious education, including digital learning platforms and gamified instruction. Moreover, advancing studies on interreligious dialogue, social equity, and cross-cultural dynamics will be crucial in enhancing the impact of religious education in increasingly diverse societies. Policymakers and educators are encouraged to develop value-based, inclusive curricula that not only preserve religious traditions but also respond to contemporary societal challenges.

This research is limited to documents indexed in the Scopus database, which may exclude relevant studies published in local or non-indexed journals. Additionally, the focus on English-language publications might have led to the underrepresentation of significant research contributions written in other languages. These limitations suggest the need for broader data inclusion in future bibliometric analyses to capture a more comprehensive global perspective..

Acknowledgements

Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the main contributor to this paper, some are as chairman, member, financier, article translator, and final editor. All authors read and approved the final paper.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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