

Research Article

The Current Trend in Educational Neuroscience Research: A Descriptive and Bibliometric Study

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Abstract

In the present study, 36 articles indexed in the Web of Science database were examined in order to reveal the current trend in scientific studies in the field of educational neuroscience. Therefore, the distribution of the articles was examined considering publication years, host journals, the most productive author(s), co-authorship, abstract keywords, collocated keywords, educational attainment of the samples, dependent variables, and the EEG devices used. The data were evaluated with descriptive and bibliometric analysis methods. The findings revealed that the publishing in the field gained an elevation in 2020; the papers were mostly published in Computers & Education; Mayer was the most productive author; Cheng, Lin, Yang, and Huang were those who produced the most collaborative studies in the field. In addition, it was found out that the keyword "cognitive load" was discussed more than the others; it was used with "attention" the most; studies were mostly carried out at university level; cognitive load and attention were the most examined dependent variables; the NeuroSky Mindwave was used in these articles the most. To sum, the present results have the potential to generate an overall perspective to educational neuroscience.



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Introduction

How students think and how learning occurs are seminal topics discussed much in education. In this regard, scholars carry out interdisciplinary research to understand the nature of learning and identify the synaptic connections during an activity, the active regions in the brain, and the relationship of these regions with each other. Ultimately, neuroscience provides a basis for such research: it serves to explain structural and functional features of the human nervous system as a branch of science examining its physiology (function), anatomy (structure), biochemistry (chemical substances in nerve cells and tissue), and biology (formation/development) (Deryakulu et al., 2019).

One may have many changes in their brain when learning, and such changes are primarily explained in the focus of cognitive or educational neuroscience. Cognitive neuroscience studies the function of the brain as a biological organ. In other words, cognitive neuroscience is concerned with which parts of the human brain work how during any problem-solving activity (Ansari et al., 2011). The relevant research focuses on examining the brain activities and various neurological patterns of individuals with typical development or various learning difficulties. In this respect, it can be asserted that cognitive neuroscience mediates neuroscience to inform the field of education and directs educational research. In fact, cognitive neuroscience research has recently started to attract the attention of educators. In particular, the topic of how to integrate the data revealed by cognitive neuroscience research with the learning process has given rise to educational neuroscience research.

In the words of Schunk (2012), the integration of knowledge on how the brain, a fascinating, central organ of learning, works and learns and the results of cognitive neuroscience research into educational settings constitutes the general framework of educational neuroscience (neuroeducation or mind-brain-education). Educational neuroscience research attempts to expound learning and development processes based on brain functioning (Ferrari, 2011). The relevant research shows that awareness of how learning occurs in the brain will contribute to directing, managing, and structuring own learning (Duman, 2015). Such potential contributions highlight the rising trend of neuroscience research in the educational context.

Educational neuroscience research is mainly interested in cutting-edge educational technologies and systems. Put another way, the research aims to directly engage in exploring brain functions instead of/as well as self-report-oriented data collection processes (Varma et al., 2008). Thus, researchers may use techniques allowing visualization of mobility in the brain, such as Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), and Magnetoencephalogram (MEG), without resorting to any surgical procedure. On the other hand, another technique is the Electroencephalogram (EEG), which is frequently preferred in educational research for its cost-effectiveness and convenience.

EEG is a test where neural activity is measured with electrodes placed on the scalp (Koçak, 2020) and attempts to examine brain functions directly (Varma et al., 2008). The studies where EEG is used consider brain waves varying by actions. Brain waves are divided by their frequencies: gamma, beta, alpha, theta, and delta (Tabakcioğlu et al., 2016). Alpha (8-

13 Hz), beta (13-30 Hz), and theta (4-7 Hz) waves are the most prevalent ones in educational neuroscience research (Yazgan & Korurek, 1996). In the tests, varying EEG devices may be used to detect signals from the brain waves (Morshad et al., 2020). In this regard, EEG-based neuroimaging devices, such as Neurosky Mindwave, Emotiv EPOC, or B-Alert, offer functional features that can be used in an educational context.

Research in educational neuroscience scrutinizes the impacts of many factors on learning and explores complex processes such as language, speech, reading, perception, thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving (Dündar, 2013; Varma et al., 2008). In this regard, the present study aimed to examine such studies by various variables and present an evaluation of the current trend in educational neuroscience. It is expected that the present findings would draw a general framework for educational neuroscience and guide further studies. Ultimately, the present research sought answers to the following questions:

1. Articles in the field of educational neuroscience
 - 1.1. How is the distribution of the articles by their publication years?
 - 1.2. How is the distribution of the articles by host journals?
2. In the field of educational neuroscience
 - 2.1. How is the distribution of the most productive researchers?
 - 2.2. How is the distribution of the researchers by co-authorship?
3. Articles in the field of educational neuroscience
 - 3.1. How is the distribution of the keywords?
 - 3.2. How is the distribution of the co-used keywords?
4. How is the distribution of the samples in these articles by their educational attainment?
5. What are the dependent variables covered in articles in the field of educational neuroscience?
6. What are the EEG technologies used to display brain waves in articles in the field of educational neuroscience?

Method

The present research aimed to review the studies in the field of educational neuroscience and to classify the data related to these studies by various variables. The research was carried out using bibliometric analysis and descriptive analysis. Utilizing these

techniques, it is was primarily attempted to create visual presentations, increase the readability and clarity of the findings, make comparisons easier, and determine the relationships between the study variables.

Selection of Manuscripts

The ISI Web of Knowledge (WOS) database was utilized to obtain original manuscripts on educational neuroscience. The keywords “electroencephalography, EEG, education” were used in the queries through the specified database. However, the research outside the field of education, unpublished studies, and closed-door articles were not considered in the analyses. Thus, a total of 36 articles matching the purpose of the research were included in the study.

Data Analysis

Both bibliometric and descriptive analyses were used in this study. The bibliometric analysis was performed using the VOSviewer software, a visualization tool for creating network graphics of the publications (Iron & Power, 2018). The software also allows the user to dig into keywords or co-authorship within the publications studied.

On the other hand, the thematic variables in the study were investigated through descriptive analysis. The relevant data were presented in tables and charts based on frequency distributions. Besides, an “article review form” was created to address the descriptive data more systematically. The form includes columns for title, year of publication, host journal, researcher information, keywords, sample, dependent variables covered, and EEG tools used.

Three researchers separately carried out the article review process. The statements by each researcher in the article review forms were also checked by other researchers, and written suggestions were given for possible contradictions. Then, the researchers came together and tried to reach a consensus on each other’s opinions. In addition, two experts with a Ph.D. degree in Computer Education and Instructional Technologies reviewed the coding, and uncertainties in the coding were discussed and settled.

Findings

This section presents the findings in order by the sub-questions above.

Findings regarding publication years and host journals of the papers

Figure 1 presents the distribution of 36 papers on brain waves in educational contexts by their publication years.

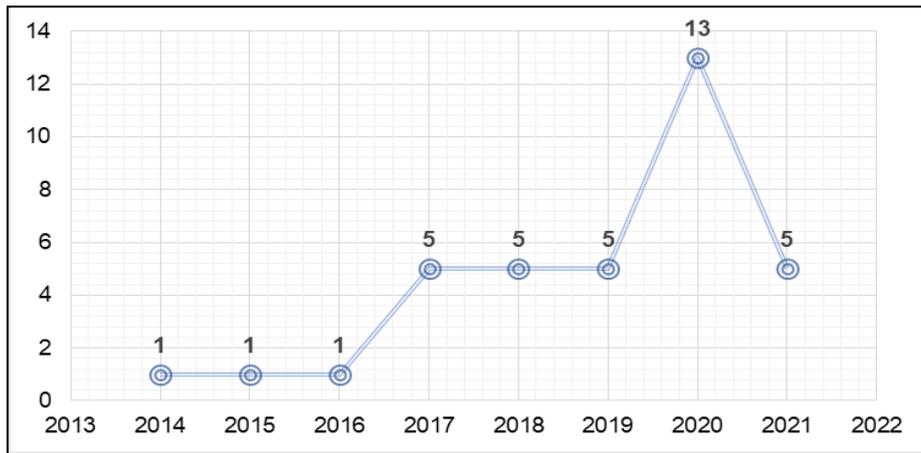


Figure 1. Distribution of the papers by publication years

The graph clearly demonstrates a linear increase in the number of studies in the relevant field over time. While 2014 is the year when the fewest papers were published (only one), 2020 witnessed a plethora of studies with 13 publications. The reason for the low rate of publications in 2021 may be because only those published in the first seven months of the year were considered in this study.

Figure 2 illustrates the frequency of 36 papers on brain waves in educational contexts by their host journals.



Figure 2. Distribution of the papers by host journals

Figure 2 shows that the related papers were mostly published in Computers & Education (4). It is followed by Educational Technology & Society (3), Educational Technology Research and Development (3), Journal of Computer Assisted Learning (3), BJET (2), Education and Information Technologies (2), and Interactive Learning Environments (2), respectively.

Findings Regarding Authors

Table 1 delivers the 10 top productive authors on brain waves in educational contexts.

Table 1. Distribution of authors by productivity

	Authors	Number of articles	Total cited	Country	Affiliate (University)
1	Mayer, R.E.	3	158	USA	University of California Santa Barbara
2	Huang Y.M.	3	42	Taiwan	National Cheng Kung University
3	Cheng, PY	3	31	China	Capital Medical University
4	Yang, X.Z.	3	31	Japan	Osaka University
5	Lin, L.	3	31	USA	University of North Texas Denton
6	Makransky, G.	2	151	Denmark	University of Copenhagen
7	Terkildsen, T.	2	151	Denmark	University of Copenhagen
8	Ren, YQ	2	31	China	East China Normal University
9	Yang, X.	2	24	USA	University of North Texas Denton
10	Parong, J.	2	9	USA	University of California Santa Barbara

It was found that the prominent authors by the number of publications are Mayer (3), Huang (3), Cheng (3), Yang (3), and Lin (3). Besides, when considering the total number of citations to their publications, Mayer (158) was discovered to be the most cited author. On the other hand, although they did fewer publications, Makransky (151) and Terkildsen (151) are among the most cited researchers following Mayer.

It was also sought which authors did collaborative works the most. The findings were examined using VOSviewer software, and Figure 3 presents the distribution of the authors by co-authorship.

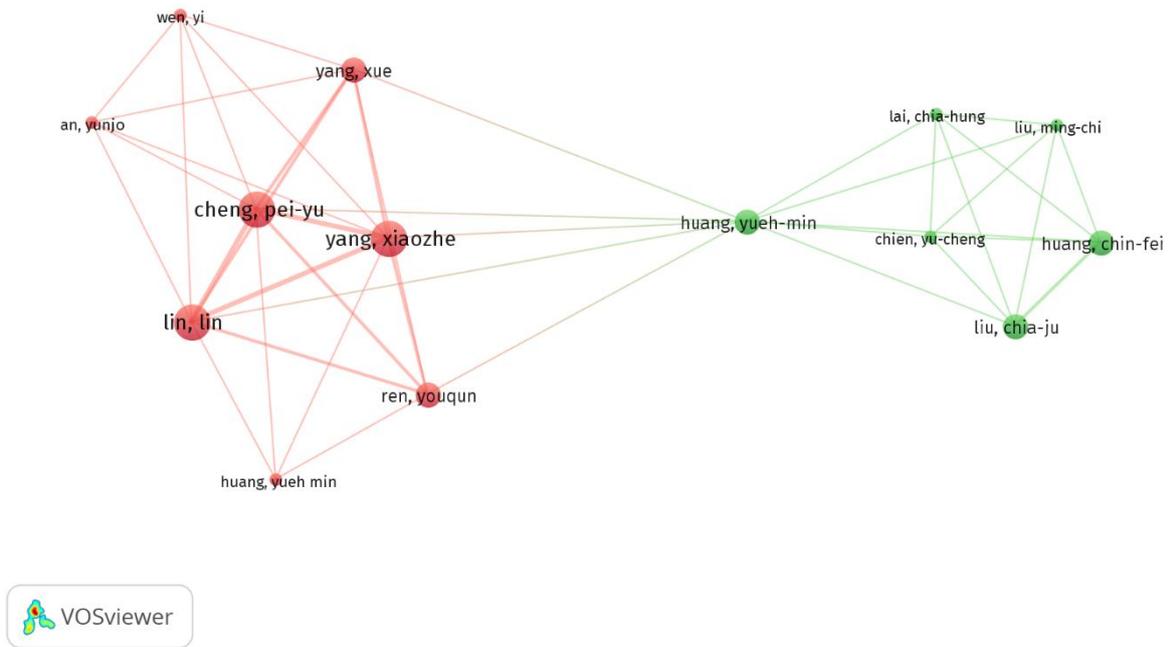


Figure 3. Distribution of authors by co-authorship

The co-authorship situation was identified considering the thinness-thickness status of the connections between the authors and the clustering density of these connections. Therefore, it was determined that the authors engaging in co-authorship the most are Cheng, Lin, Yang, and Huang. In other words, the distribution in Table 1 reveals that these researchers acted collaboratively despite being in different countries and institutions.

Findings regarding keywords

The keywords were gone through to be informed about the scopes of the articles. Figure 4 shows which keywords are used the most in the papers.

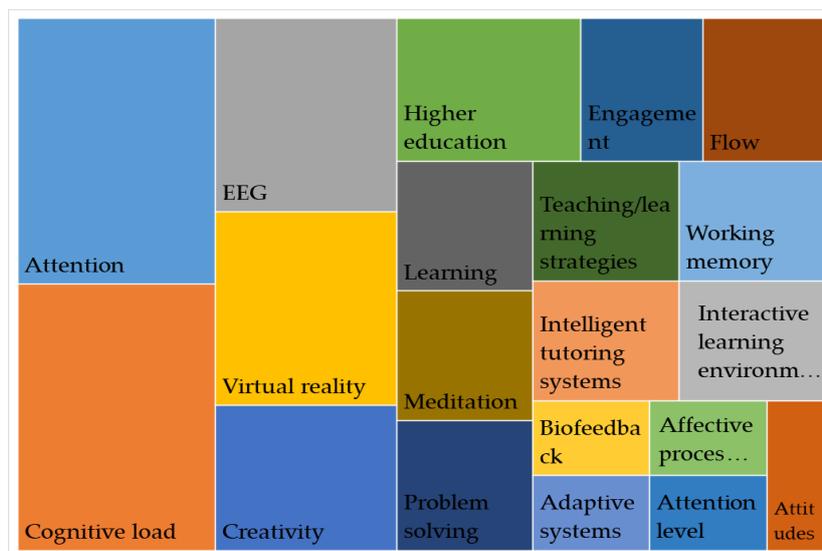


Figure 4. Distribution of the most frequent keywords

Figure 4 reveals that the most frequent keyword is cognitive load, which is followed by attention, virtual reality, EEG, higher education, interactive learning environments, intelligent tutoring systems, working memory, learning/teaching strategies, problem-solving, meditation, learning, flow, engagement, affective process, adaptive systems, and feedback.

Besides, Figure 5 demonstrates which of these keywords are collocated more.

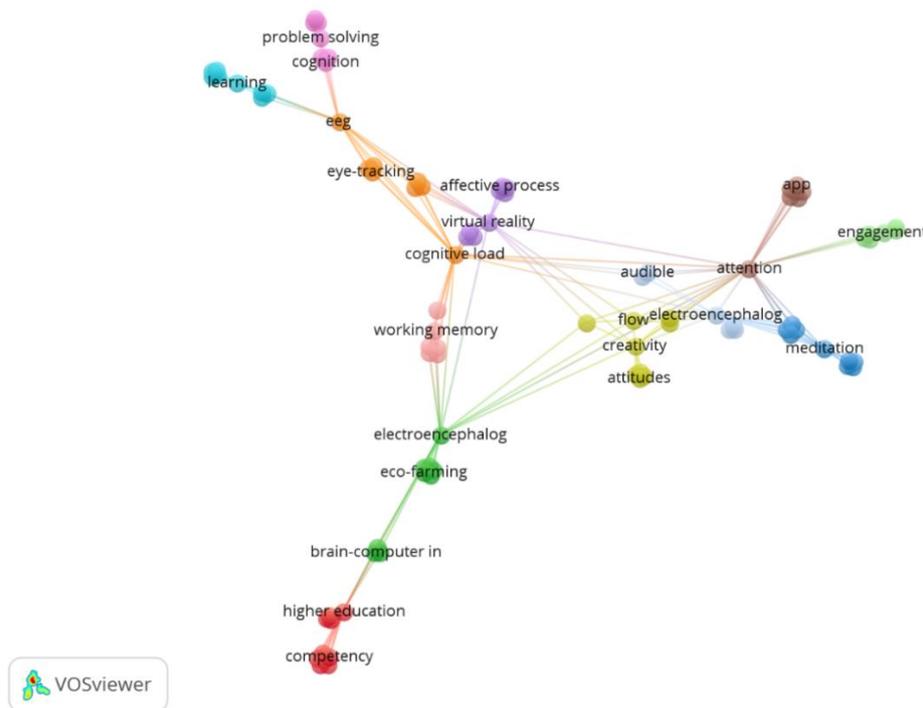


Figure 5. Distribution of collocated keywords

It was found that the most common keyword, “cognitive load,” is collocated chiefly with the words “attention, working memory, and virtual reality.” Moreover, the keyword “attention” is mostly collocated with “cognitive load, meditation, engagement, flow, and virtual reality.” When it comes to the keyword “virtual reality,” it was discovered to be frequently collocated with the keywords “cognitive load, attention, flow, creativity, and emotional processes.”

Findings Regarding Samples in the Papers

In another research question, it was enquired about the educational attainment of the samples who underwent the experimental processes in these 36 studies. Figure 6 shows the obtained findings.

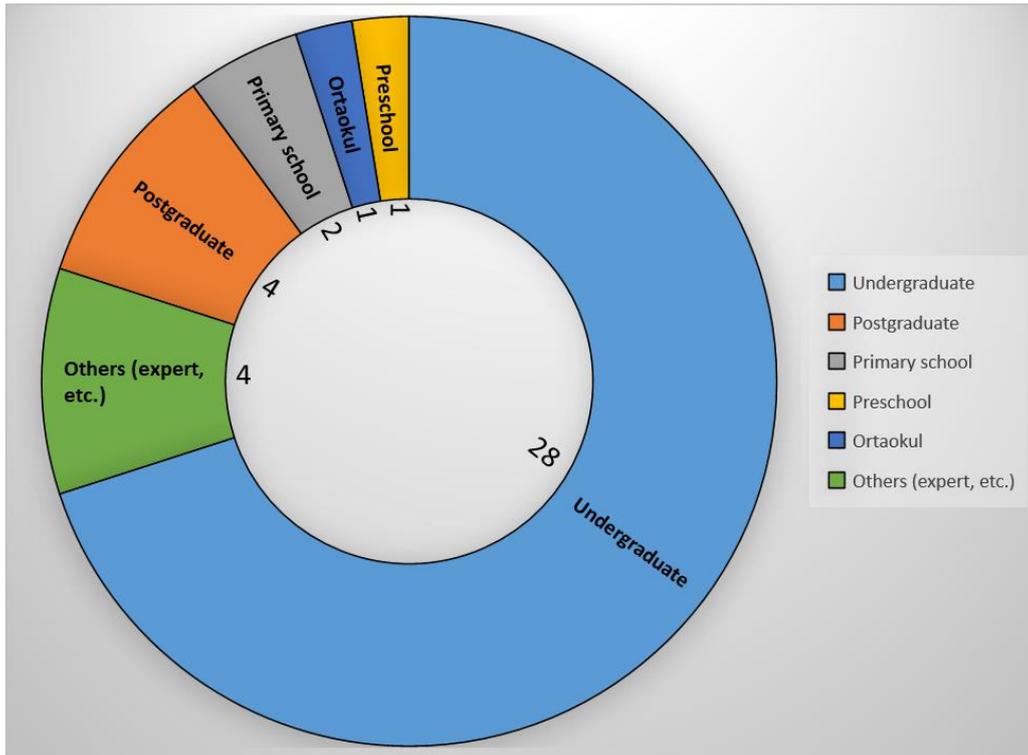


Figure 6. Distribution of samples by their educational attainment

It was noted that the authors performed the data collection processes mainly at the university level (28), which is followed by postgraduate (4), primary school (2), secondary school (1), and preschool (1) levels, respectively. Consequently, it may be implied that studies are more limited at low ages and grades.

Findings Regarding Dependent Variables in the Articles

The dependent variables discussed in the articles were also noted. Thereby, the most included dependent variables are listed in Figure 7.

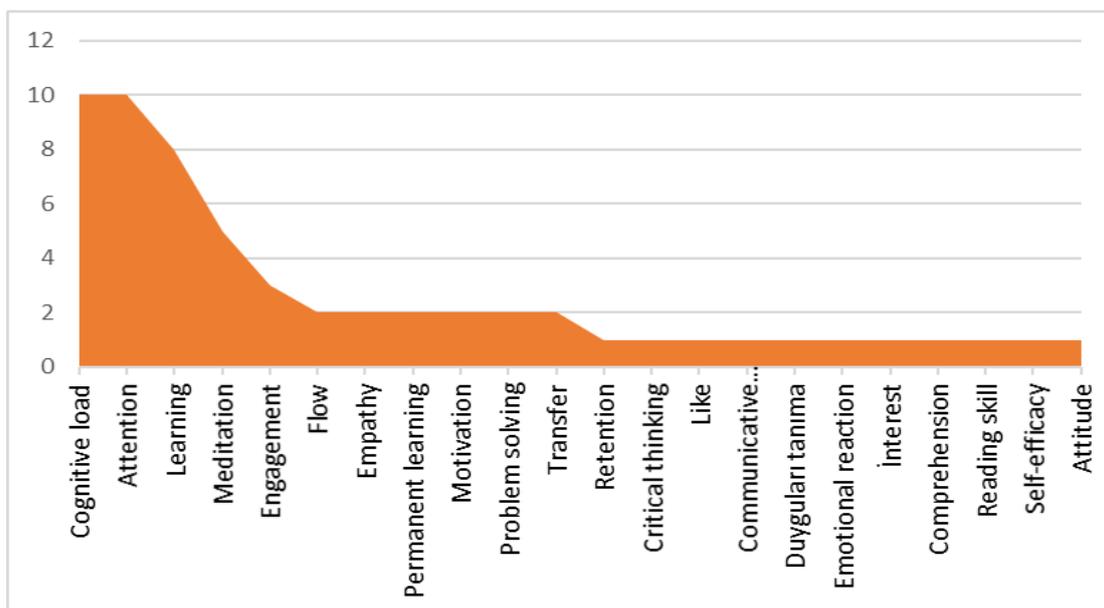


Figure 7. Distribution of dependent variables in the articles

It was found that the most investigated variables are cognitive load (10) and attention level (10), which are followed by learning (8), meditation (5), engagement level (3), and flow (2), respectively.

Findings Regarding EEG Technologies for Monitoring Brain Waves

Table 2 summarizes EEG devices for monitoring brain waves in the papers.

Table 2. EEG devices for monitoring brain waves

<i>EEG device</i>	NeuroSky Mindwave	Emotiv EPOC	B-Alert X10	Electrode cap	ActiCHamp EEG	ANT Neuro EEGO
<i>Frequency</i>	12	5	4	1	1	1
<i>Image</i>						
<i>EEG device</i>	DSI 24 EEG	Headband InteraXon Muse	EEG:G.TEC G.Nautilus	Emotiv EEG 32 kanallı	Mitsar EEG	NeuroScan SynAmps RT
<i>Frequency</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1
<i>Image</i>						
<i>EEG device</i>	NeuroSky MindBand	NeuroSky's Mindset	Other			
<i>Frequency</i>	1	1	4			
<i>Image</i>						

(From: Vouropoulos & Liarokapis (2012), Ekanayake (2010), Chew et al. (2016), Fiedler et al. (2015), Barraza et al. (2019), Causa et al. (2018), Soufneyestani et al. (2020), Sanchez-Cifo et al. (2021), Yoghourdjian et al. (2020), Emotiv (2018), Deuel et al. (2017), Mahajan et al. (2014), Ma & Wei (2016), Guomundsdoottir (2011), respectively.)

NeuroSky Mindwave was noticed to be the most frequently used EEG device in the studies (12). The device bears an apparatus attaching to the head and ear and can produce attention and meditation data through its single channel. Emotiv EPOC (5) and B-Alert (4) systems came second and third, respectively. Two other EEG tools (Mindband and Mindset) from Neurosky were the least utilized technologies in the research.

Discussion

In this study, uncovering the overall picture and trends in educational neuroscience, 36 articles were reviewed by some relevant variables. In the review, it was found out that the first publication in educational neuroscience was released in 2014, while the highest number of publications (13) belongs to 2020, which clearly informs that the field has attracted attention of authors over time. Yet, it may be assert that the relatively small number of studies in 2021 may have resulted from the inclusion of only studies published in the first seven months of 2020 and the disruptions in data collection processes due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the articles were primarily published in *Computers & Education* magazine; the fact that this journal is among the leading journals in educational technologies may indicate that educational neuroscience ranks among the timely and important topics.

Other findings were for the most productive authors in the field and those engaged in co-authorship. In this context, Richard Mayer was the author who came first with the most studies. Educational neuroscience is at the center of three pillars of psychology, education, and neuroscience (Feiler & Stabio, 2018). Thanks to his expertise in psychology, Mayer produced studies designed with his theories on cognition and learning and presented current perspectives to educational neuroscience, which may be confirmed with the number of citations to his works. On the other hand, Cheng (China), Lin (USA), Yang (Japan), and Huang (Taiwan) stand out in co-authorship. Although these authors are from different countries and institutions, they were able to produce collaborative studies successfully. Therefore, this situation may indicate that it is likely to conduct a large number of studies in educational neuroscience and examine the field in-depth in different conditions and cultures without borders.

The most frequently used and collocated keywords were also reviewed to obtain more detailed information on the scopes of the recruited articles. Findings revealed that the most frequently used keywords are cognitive load and attention, respectively. The literature suggests that cognitive load cannot be observed directly because it is linked with the internal processes of information processing (İkiz, 2021), and physiological methodologies, such as EEG, may be used for more objective measurements of cognitive load (Sweller et al., 2019). Besides, cognitive load is mostly collocated with attention; it can be asserted that one of the most noteworthy factors generating cognitive load is attention. Considering the limited

cognitive capacity of humans, if a student is forced to look at both an animation and text within a material presented, the effect of divided attention will emerge (Çakmak, 2007); therefore, divided attention is likely to elevate cognitive load (Sweller, 2004). This situation may explain why cognitive load was frequently addressed through attention in the articles.

It was realized that the authors mostly collected their data at the university level and that studies gathering data from lower graders are somewhat limited. Data collection tools in educational neuroscience may not be convenient at lower grades due to challenges in official permissions (parents, ethics, etc.) and possible difficulties in data collection (external variables, such as mobility or inability to focus, may distort data collection). Put another way, data collection and analysis may be more difficult in research with younger age groups or lower graders. However, despite such disadvantages, Wu and Kim (2019) conducted studies with preschool groups. In order to eliminate these disadvantages, they used the ActiCHamp EEG device, an EEG technology with a large number of channels and similar to the header type.

Cognitive load and attention are the dependent variables discussed more than the others; a similar result was obtained in the analysis of keywords. This situation may be related to the fact that the studies preferred NeuroSky Mindwave the most since the device can obtain data through only a single channel. One may obtain data only for attention, focus, meditation, and stress from the prefrontal cortex. Therefore, the articles may have used the data for attention and meditation to explain cognitive load.

The most commonly used EEG device in the reviewed articles was found to be NeuroSky Mindwave, which may be explained with its or similar devices' practical and easy-to-use nature. Compared to its counterparts, the device does not need to apply the gel on participants' heads or electrodes. In contrast, such a "gel" requirement may bring more limitations on parental consent, especially in younger age groups. On the other hand, why the Emotiv EPOC is less preferred compared to the NeuroSky Mindwave may be because it requires more expertise and cost in the data analysis.

Limitations

Our findings are limited to the query using relevant keywords and the articles in the WOS database. Further studies may access new articles by querying diverse keywords in larger and more comprehensive databases. On the other hand, the data were analyzed using bibliometric analysis. Before the VOSviewer software extracts the data from WoS, the process

of making some adjustments to the program and making the data suitable for analysis requires substantial attention and time, which may be considered a limitation for this and similar studies in the literature (Gürten et al., 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, 36 articles in educational neuroscience were reviewed by various variables. In the study, it was concluded that NeuroSky Mindwave technology was the most used tool within the scope of EEG research and that the studies reviewed were mostly carried out at the university level. Cognitive load, attention, learning, and meditation were found to be the most emphasized variables. With reference to these results, some suggestions for future research are made below:

- It was attempted to investigate the associations between the variables in the study, yet it remained limited with the relationship between two variables included in the model. Further studies may reach more comprehensive findings by having more variables in the model and establishing cross-relationships.
- One may recruit a much larger number of samples in bibliometric analysis studies and reveal a more apparent trend on the subject. Thus, prospective researchers may conclude more comprehensive findings using diverse databases and bibliometric analysis software.

Our findings revealed that educational neuroscience is mainly studied at the university level. The subject may need to be scrutinized at pre-university levels.

Acknowledgement

Due to the scope and method of the study, ethics committee permission was not required.

Author Contribution Statement

Şenol SAYGINER: *Data analysis, data collection, review and editing.*

Fatih BALAMAN: *Methodology, data analysis, review-writing and editing.*

Sevil HANBAY TİRYAKİ: *Writing literature, introduction, data analysis.*

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