

Global Trends in Women's Leadership in Schools: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>This study addresses a critical gap in educational leadership scholarship by conducting the first comprehensive bibliometric analysis of global research trends on women's school leadership. By systematically analyzing 66 Scopus-indexed articles published between 1995 and 2024, this research maps the structural and thematic evolution of the field. The findings reveal a critical twelve-year publication void (1995–2007) followed by a significant scholarly surge post-2020. However, the literature remains severely fragmented and disproportionately concentrated in Western contexts (predominantly the United States, Australia, and the UK), highlighting an urgent need for cross-cultural perspectives. Thematically, scholarship has transitioned from foundational discussions on gender biases to nuanced explorations of leadership identity, roles, and educational impact. To synthesize</i></p>	<p>Article History: Received: June 30, 2025 Accepted: June 8, 2026</p> <p>Keywords: women's school leadership, bibliometric analysis, global research trends.</p>

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these trends, this study proposes a holistic conceptual model illustrating the interplay between external socio-cultural pressures and internal leadership identity development. Furthermore, aligning with the strategic imperatives of the 2025 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, this study offers actionable, policy-driven practical implications to repair the educational leadership pipeline through systemic interventions. Ultimately, this research establishes a foundational roadmap for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to champion inclusivity and sustainable gender equity in global educational leadership.

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Introduction

Educational leadership is one of the keys to the quality of learning, good school culture, and the effectiveness of a more positive education policy (Kultsum et al., 2022). In addition, strong leadership can drive the progress of the overall well-being of the educational community, including improvements in student learning outcomes (Devos et al., 2013). For schools, the conduciveness of an environment that supports the learning process, develops teachers to be more professional, and provides space for policy-making to improve the quality of education can be created from effective leadership (Massouti et al., 2024; Svanbjörnsdóttir et al., 2016). In the context of leadership, the existence

of leadership by women can bring different views that can increase the dynamics in the organization and how the decision-making process is carried out, which can increase effectiveness and innovation in educational organizations such as schools (Komariah et al., 2020). These different views are often embodied in more relational, inclusive, and transformational leadership styles, which are grounded in a 'caring ethic' (ethic of care) that puts well-being and empathy at the center of leadership practice, especially in the face of crises (Baptiste et al., 2024; Lee, 2023). However, despite exhibiting these highly effective and collaborative leadership styles, women remain heavily underrepresented in school leadership positions globally (Msila, 2022; Slater, Gorosave, Silva, Torres, Romero, & Antunez, 2017).

Although various studies have explored pathways to empower female educational leaders (Akbar et al., 2023; Madsen et al., 2012; Palupi et al., 2019; Showunmi, 2021), the persistent underrepresentation of women in these roles is largely driven by entrenched structural and cultural challenges (Adamu, 2023; A. S. Alshdiefat et al., 2024; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Dahlvig & Longman, 2020). These challenges manifest in various forms, ranging from the 'glass ceiling' that hinders promotion (Shahzad et al., 2024), to a disproportionate conflict between work and personal life (Bush, 2022; Shahzad et al., 2024; Wolle, 2024). The 2025 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report emphasizes this 'double burden', revealing that globally, women spend nearly three times as much of their day on unpaid care and domestic work (17.8%) compared to men (6.5%), which severely impedes their professional advancement and networking opportunities (UNESCO, 2025). Furthermore, women face systemic bias rooted in the 'think leaders, think men' paradigm (Wolle, 2024). Recently, there have been greater opportunities for women to take on



leadership roles due to the inspiration of the Sustainable Development Goals (Merma-Molina et al., 2022; Pandit & Paul, 2023). However, cultural constraints and gender stereotypes remain formidable obstacles (Akinola & Naidoo, 2024; Koburtay et al., 2023; Koburtay & Abuhussein, 2021; Madsen et al., 2012; Shah, 2023). These stereotypes create a "double bind," where women leaders are often criticized for being too "masculine" when they are assertive, yet perceived as too "feminine" and incompetent when they demonstrate a caring approach (Shahzad et al., 2024). Ultimately, these compounding external pressures give rise to internal barriers, such as imposter syndrome, which further inhibit women's broader contribution to educational innovation (Watterston & Ehrich, 2024).

The literature on women's leadership has grown, yet global research specifically addressing women's leadership in primary and secondary schools remains heavily fragmented. As highlighted by the 2025 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, despite women comprising 57% of secondary school teachers globally, there remains a staggering 20-percentage point gap in secondary school leadership positions across 70 countries (UNESCO, 2025). While research exploring women's leadership in specific regions like Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan exists (Wang & Gao, 2022), comprehensive global studies are lacking. Many existing studies use qualitative methods or local case studies, which provide valuable, in-depth empirical insights into the lived experiences of female leaders, but do not offer a macro, longitudinal worldwide perspective. For instance, current literature predominantly consists of research that focuses on women's leadership in specific countries (J. Mbepera, 2023; Moorosi, 2020; Moyo, 2024; Mythili, 2019; Sinyosi & Potokri, 2021; Whitehead et al., 2018), or in-depth case studies from specific contexts such as the

Philippines (Esguerra-Escarez, 2024), Pakistan (Shahzad et al., 2024), Ethiopia (Wolle, 2024), and Australia (Baptiste et al., 2024; Watterston & Ehrich, 2024). There is also research exploring women's leadership through the lens of race and culture (Alyami & Floyd, 2019; Iverson et al., 2024; Moorosi et al., 2018; Msila, 2022; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015; Quader & Oplatka, 2008; Sharma et al., 2024; Williams, 2021; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008) and their specific roles in schools (Campos-García & Zúñiga-Vicente, 2019; Khalil & DeCuir, 2018; Komariah et al., 2020; Lawson, 2008; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2022; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015; Slater, Gorosave, Silva, Torres, Romero, & Antúnez, 2017).

Currently, there are few figures and studies on how cross-border cooperation, publication patterns, and activities linked to women's leadership in schools interact, making it difficult to comprehend emerging global trends. This study provides a more in-depth examination to fill this gap. We use a bibliometric approach to map and structure the literature using co-citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence, and co-authorship. By doing so, this research goes beyond localized qualitative findings to present a comprehensive, longitudinal, and macro-level understanding of the dynamics of women's leadership in the school environment globally.

This research formulates several important questions for discussion to reach this purpose:

RQ1: What are the research trends on women's leadership in schools globally?

RQ2: What is the pattern of research themes on women's leadership in schools globally?

RQ3: What are the theoretical and practical implications for future research?



Ultimately, this research addresses the critical need for comprehensive bibliometric mapping—rather than fragmented insights—to help policymakers, researchers, and practitioners improve methods and policies that support women school leaders. This research will add to the literature on women's leadership in schools and provide strategic directions on how to increase women's representation as leaders while strengthening their global context capacity.

Methodology

This research employs a bibliometric approach combined with qualitative and quantitative analyses to comprehensively map the existing literature on women's leadership in schools. A bibliometric study allows for the systematic summarization and structural analysis of large volumes of publications, identifying underlying patterns, trends, and collaboration networks (Donthu et al., 2020). The data was retrieved from the Scopus database, which was selected due to its extensive global coverage, rigorous curation, and high reliability in academic research (Baas et al., 2020).

The data retrieval was conducted in early 2024 to encompass publications spanning a 30-year period from 1995 to 2024. The starting year of 1995 was deliberately chosen as it aligns with the global baseline established by the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which has since been utilized by international organizations such as UNESCO to monitor global progress in women's representation and gender equality in leadership (UNESCO, 2025).

A deductive approach was used for keyword selection. The metadata search was executed using the following query in the titles, abstracts, and keywords: ("female leader" OR "women leader") AND "school". This initial search yielded 273 documents.

Following the initial search, a rigorous screening process was conducted by evaluating the title, abstract, and full text of each publication for relevance. To ensure the study maintained a strict focus on primary and secondary educational environments, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

- Included: Peer-reviewed journal articles written in English, focusing specifically on women's leadership (such as principalship or headship) in general primary and secondary education.
- Excluded: Articles focusing on women's leadership in higher education, medical education, military leadership, general corporate environments, and programs solely focused on the training of future women leaders without empirical leadership practice.

After applying these criteria and conducting several stages of screening, a final sample of 66 highly relevant documents was selected for the bibliometric analysis.

The selected 66 articles were exported from Scopus in .RIS and CSV formats. Subsequently, the data was imported into the VOSviewer application (version 1.6.20) to perform the bibliometric analysis. VOSviewer is a powerful tool that facilitates the visualization of bibliometric networks, making it easier to map relationships between entities such as co-citation networks, keyword co-occurrences, and international co-authorship patterns, thereby enabling a deep interpretation of the research landscape (Ferasso et al., 2020; van Eck & Waltman, 2017).

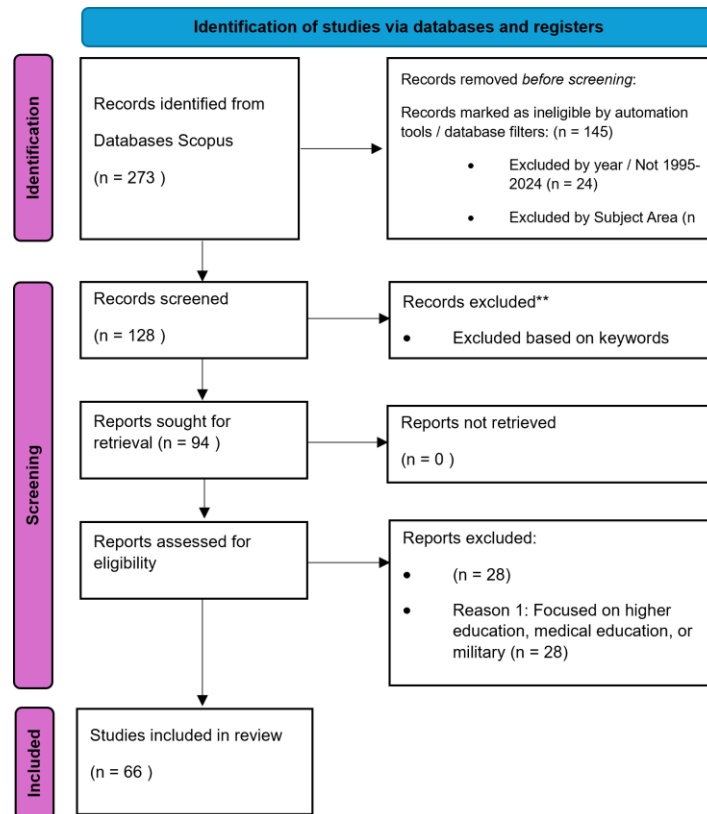


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for the selection of studies.

Source: Adapted from Page et al. (2021).

Result and Discussion

RQ1: What are the current research trends on women's leadership in schools globally?

The number of papers, authors, affiliations, publisher journals, and nations are indicators of research trends on women's leadership in schools. Based on the Scopus database of 66 articles, there is still very little research on women's leadership in schools (Figure 2), but there has been an increase in the last two years. A study of the last 30 years

shows no Scopus research on women’s leadership in schools between 1995 and 2004. The second decade, 2005–2014, only occurred in 2008 with 9 publications. A boom of 57 publications occurred between 2015 and 2024. With 14 publications, 2024 will have the most.

Documents by year

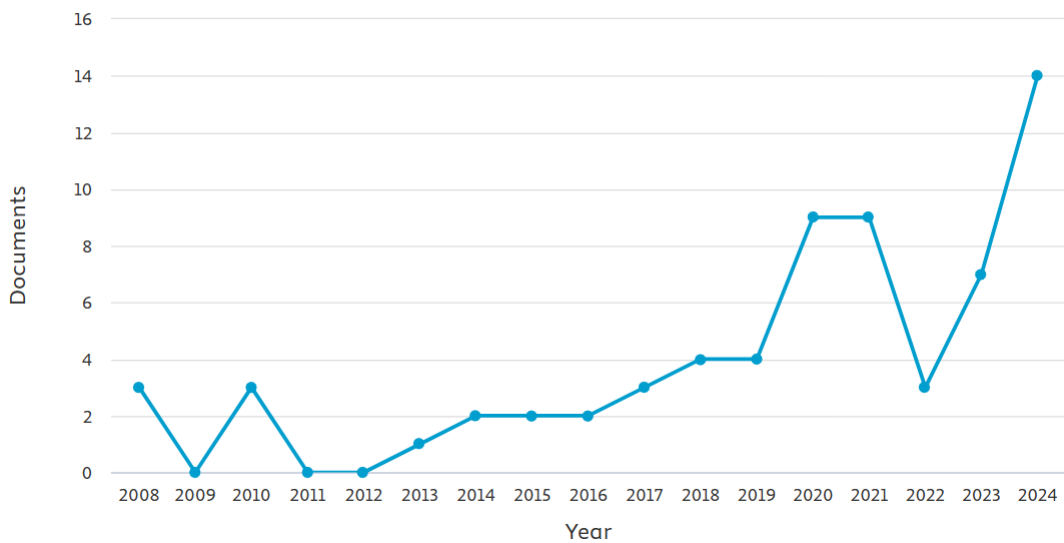


Figure 2. Number of studies on women's leadership in schools by year of publication.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Scopus analysis.

According to the authors, research on women's leadership in schools is almost evenly distributed (figure 3). Of the top 15 people analyzed at Scopus, either as first authors or co-authors, 8 have published their research in as many as two publications (Baptiste et al., 2024; Cardozo et al., 2022; Cruz-González et al., 2020, 2021; Lopes Cardozo & Srimulyani, 2021; Moorosi, 2020; Moorosi et al., 2018; Shapira et al., 2010; Sum, 2023, 2024). Some individuals (Abu-Tineh, 2013; Akinola &

Naidoo, 2024; Al-Jaradat, 2014; Aldrich & Lotito, 2020; Alemu, 2024; A. S. A. S. Alshdiefat et al., 2024) have only released a single publication.

Based on the Vosviewer, 130 first- or second-author publications on women's leadership in schools were found, but only 8 have connections to other authors. As visualized in Figure 4 using VOSviewer, the size of each node represents the number of publications by an author, while the connecting lines denote co-authorship relationships. The scarcity of connecting lines among the nodes visually confirms the severe fragmentation of the research landscape, indicating that most scholars in this field are working independently or in isolated local groups without extensive international collaboration networks.

Documents by author

Compare the document counts for up to 15 authors.

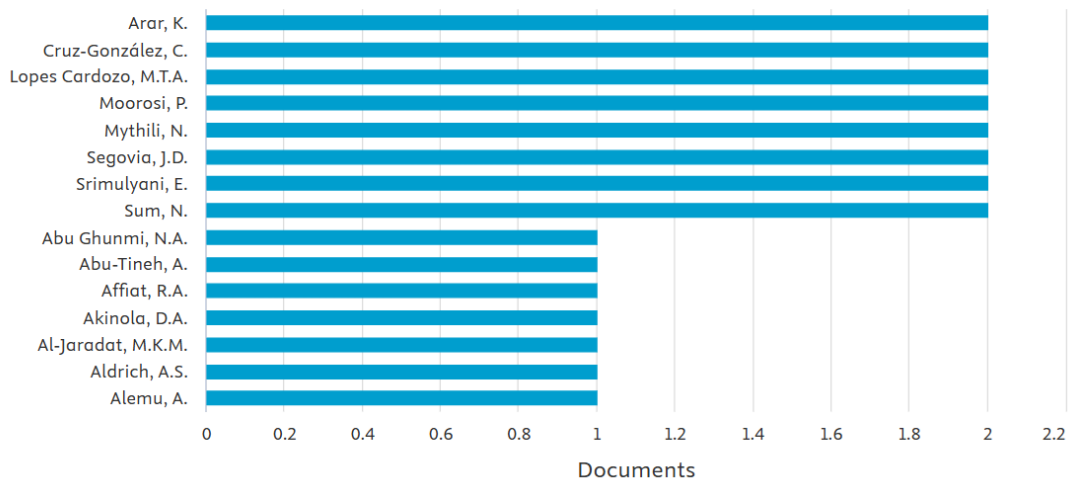


Figure 3. Researchers on women's leadership in schools based on the number of studies.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Scopus analysis.

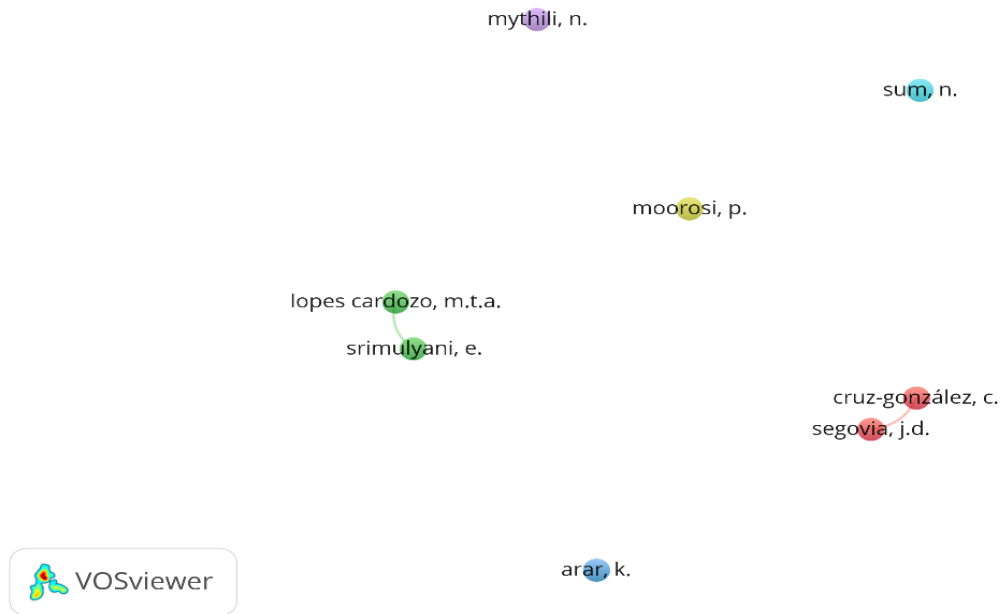


Figure 4. Researchers' relevance to women's leadership in schools.
 Source: Author's elaboration based on Vosviewer analysis.

The University of Johannesburg has 4 publications on women's leadership in schools, the University of South Africa and Monash University have 3 publications, and the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, Virginia Commonwealth University, Universiteit van Amsterdam, and Uni Phillips Academy published one. For information, see figure 5.

Documents by affiliation

Compare the document counts for up to 15 affiliations.

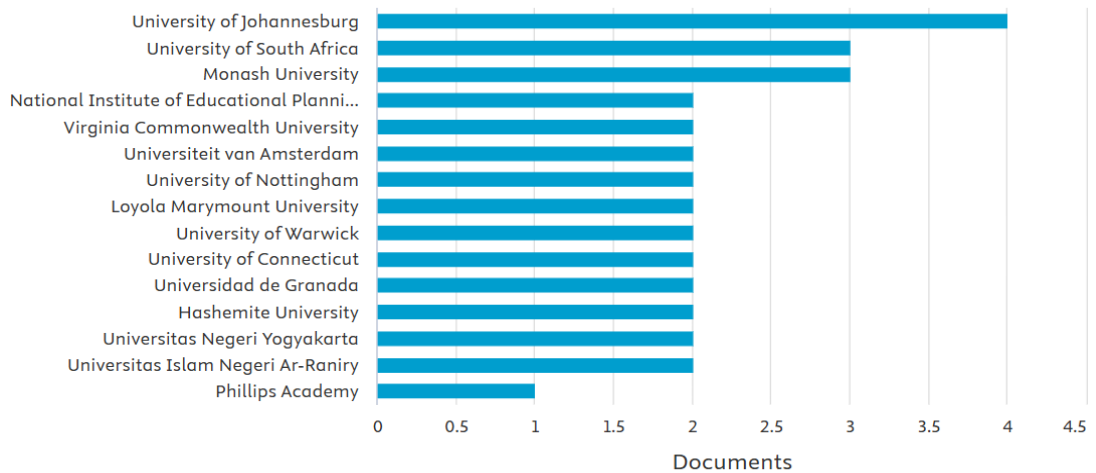


Figure 5. Research affiliation on women's leadership in schools.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Scopus analysis.

The analysis conducted with VOSviewer revealed that among the 109 existent affiliations, only 5 clusters and 10 connections were identified in the research on women's leadership in educational institutions, with a minimum of 1 publication per affiliate. As visualized in Figure 6, the nodes represent different university affiliations, while the connecting lines indicate collaborative research ties between these institutions. The sparse network visually reinforces the finding that institutional collaboration remains highly isolated globally.

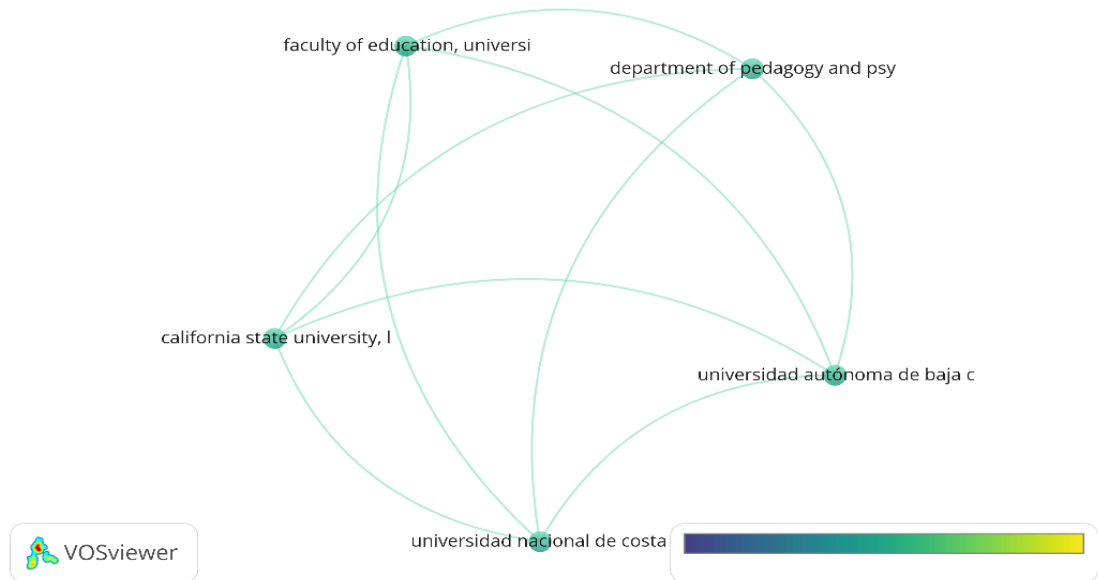


Figure 6. Linkage research affiliation on women's leadership in schools.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Scopus analysis.

The United States leads in research on women's leadership in educational institutions, as indicated by the Scopus study, with 17 publications. Australia follows with 11 publications, the United Kingdom with 8, South Africa with 7, Indonesia and Spain with 4, Israel with 3, and Chile, Ethiopia, India, Jordan, the Netherlands, and Tanzania with 2 each, while Canada and Costa Rica have 1 publication (figure 7). According to Scopus' analysis, 28 nations have produced articles concerning women's leadership in educational institutions.

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

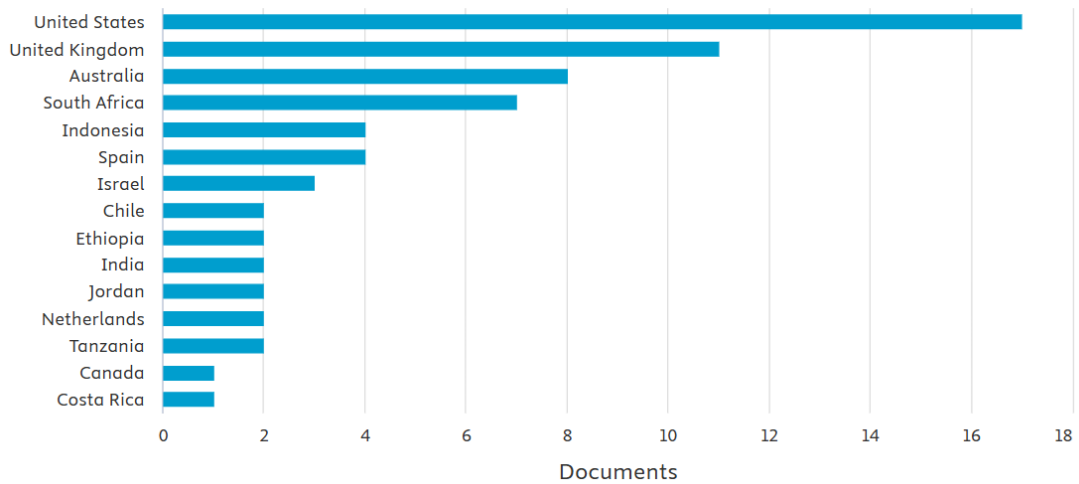


Figure 7. State of research on women's leadership in schools.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Scopus analysis.

The study using VOSviewer indicates that nine clusters, each including at least one publication, link 13 nations. As depicted in Figure 8, the nodes represent individual countries, while the connecting lines illustrate collaborative research publications between authors from these nations. The limited number of links (only fifteen connectivity networks) visually underscores the lack of robust, cross-border international collaboration in this field.

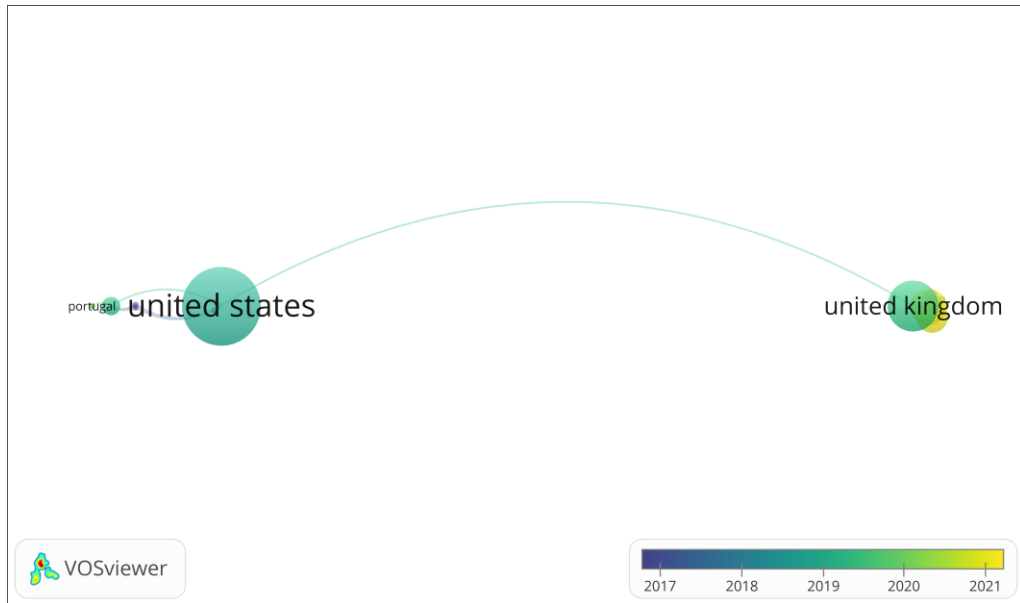


Figure 8. State connectivity research on women's leadership in schools.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Scopus analysis.

VOSviewer’s analysis indicates that while 28 countries cite articles on women's leadership in schools, only 16 are interconnected, resulting in 10 clusters and 28 links. In this visualization (Figure 9), the lines between country nodes demonstrate how frequently researchers from these nations cite each other's work. The sparse connections reveal that knowledge sharing remains largely regionalized rather than forming a cohesive global discourse.

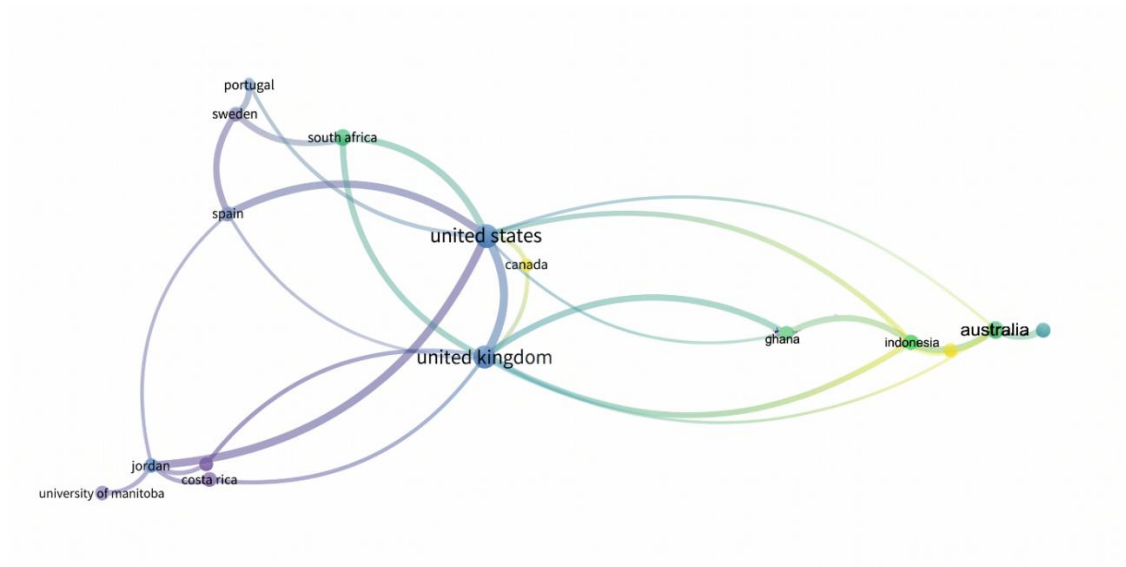


Figure 9. Countries that cite the Scopus article on women's leadership in schools.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Scopus analysis.

According to published journals, papers concerning women's leadership in educational institutions from 1995 to 2024 have appeared in 45 journals; the leading 10, as determined by Scopus analysis, are illustrated in Figure 10.

Documents per year by source

Compare the document counts for up to 10 sources.

[Compare sources and view CiteScore, SJR, and SNIP data](#)

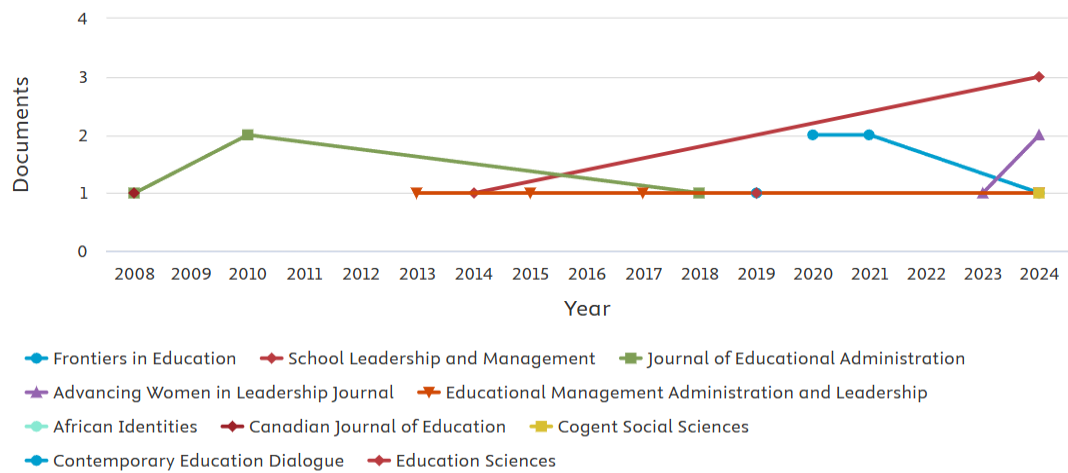


Figure 10. Journal of publication about women's leadership in schools.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Scopus analysis.

A critical finding of this study is the complete absence of Scopus-indexed publications on women's school leadership between 1995 and 2007. This twelve-year void highlights a significant lag between global policy agendas and academic research. Although 1995 marked a critical global baseline for women's empowerment, this political momentum did not immediately translate into scholarly output. As illuminated by the 2025 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, this historical research gap can be attributed to a lack of international interest in gender balance specifically within education leadership during that era. Furthermore, school leaders were historically viewed simply as teachers rather than distinct



professionals, reflecting a relative lack of policy emphasis on educational leaders until more recently. Consequently, it was not until 2008 that academic awareness began to materialize in Scopus-indexed literature, with early studies primarily focusing on uncovering the profound obstacles, challenges, and lived experiences of female school leaders in specific socio-cultural contexts (Lawson, 2008; Quader & Oplatka, 2008; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

In terms of publication venues, the VOSviewer analysis presented in Figure 11 illustrates the clustering and relevance of the journals where these articles are published. In this visualization, node size corresponds to the volume of relevant articles published by a journal, and the links indicate citation or relatedness between journals. The clustering (indicated by different colors) visually reveals how specific educational and management journals dominate and shape the distinct academic sub-discourses on women's school leadership.



Table 1. Annual research theme on women's leadership in schools from 2014 to 2024

Source: The author's elaboration is based on the Scopus database.

Reference	Year	Theme
No publications	1995-2007	-
(Lawson, 2008; Quader & Oplatka, 2008; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008)	2008	Obstacles and challenges of women school leaders, experiences of women school leaders
No publications	2009	-
(Coleman, 2010; Shapira et al., 2010; Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010)	2010	experience of women school leaders, identity of women's leadership in schools, women's leadership style in schools.
No publications	2011	-
No publications	2012	-
(Abu-Tineh, 2013)	2013	recognition of women school leaders
(Al-Jaradat, 2014; Mills & Niesche, 2014)	2014	women school leaders face obstacles and challenges, and they adopt different leadership approaches.



(Faulkner, 2015; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015)	2015	Leadership Practices of women School Leaders, Experience of women School Leaders.
(Kim, 2016)	2016	The leadership style of women in schools is noteworthy.
(J. G. Mbepera, 2017; Murakami & Törnsten, 2017; Slater, Gorosave, Silva, Torres, Romero, & Antúnez, 2017)	2017	This policy addresses the appointment of women leaders in schools, their roles, and the identity associated with women leadership in educational institutions.
(Arar, 2018; Khalil & DeCuir, 2018; Moorosi et al., 2018; Whitehead et al., 2018)	2018	The experience of women school leaders and the construction of women's leadership in schools are discussed. The obstacles and challenges faced by women school leaders are also discussed.
(Alyami & Floyd, 2019; Campos-García & Zúñiga-Vicente, 2019; Mythili, 2019)	2019	The study examines the legitimacy of women's leadership in schools, the perspectives of these leaders, and the factors that influence women's leadership in schools.
(Cook, 2020; Cruz-González et al., 2020; Komariah et al., 2020;	2020	The concept of women's leadership in schools encompasses the identity,

Makgoka & Netshitangani, 2020; McGrath, 2020; Miles Nash & L. Peters, 2020; Moorosi, 2020)	2021	recognition, proposition, experience, leadership models, and strength of women school leaders.
(Brion & Ampah-Mensah, 2021; Cruz-González et al., 2021; Lopes Cardozo & Srimulyani, 2021; Showunmi, 2021; Sinyosi & Potokri, 2021; Weiner et al., 2021)	2021	experience of women school leaders, obstacles and challenges of women school leaders, identity of women leadership in schools, and leadership practices of women school leaders.
(Cardozo et al., 2022; Cunningham et al., 2022; Msila, 2022; Wang & Gao, 2022)	2022	The role of women school leaders, their obstacles and challenges, and opinions about them are all discussed.
(Cai, 2023; Lee, 2023; J. Mbepera, 2023; Shah, 2023; Sum, 2023; Torres Zamora & Villagra Bravo, 2023; Weir et al., 2023)	2023	The article discusses the obstacles and challenges faced by women school leaders, their perspectives on them, their leadership strategies, and the leadership models they exemplify.

(Akinola & Naidoo, 2024; 2024 The study inquires about the obstacles
 Alemu, 2024; Iverson et al., and challenges faced by women school
 2024; Maharromiyati et al., leaders, their experiences, their impact,
 2024; Massouti et al., 2024; their role, and their leadership
 Moyo, 2024; Washington & approaches.
 Gounko, 2024; Watterston &
 Ehrich, 2024; Wolle, 2024)

The themes presented from 1995 to 2024 are as follows:

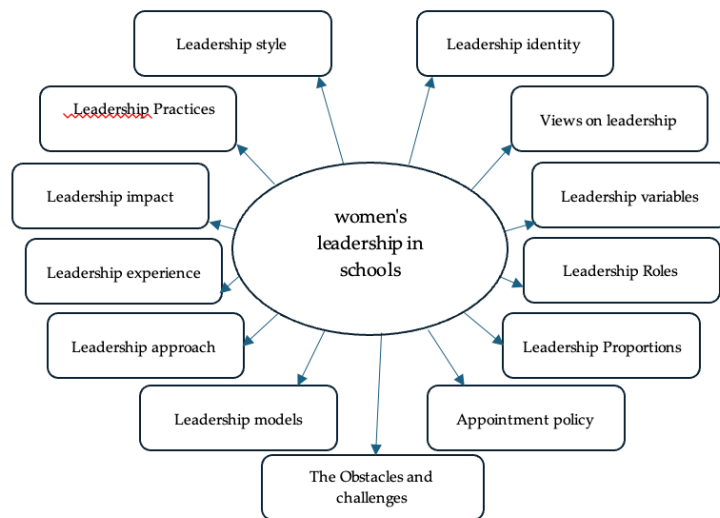


Figure 12. Research theme on women's leadership in schools from 1995 to 2024

Source: Author's elaboration based on the Scopus database.



Research on women's leadership in educational institutions from 1995 to 2024 commenced in 2008 with the publication titled *Women Leaders in High-Poverty Community Schools: Work-Related Stress and Family Impact* (Lawson, 2008), Publications titled "The Power of Femininity: Exploring the Gender and Ethnic Experiences of Muslim Women in Supervisory Roles within a Bedouin Society" (Quader & Oplatka, 2008); and *Women Secondary School Principals: Multicultural Voices from the Field* (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008) were also published. These three studies examine the experiences of women leaders in educational institutions and women's leadership inside schools in particular locations. Recently, research on women's leadership in schools has been heavily associated with student achievement and culture (Maharromiyati et al., 2024; Massouti et al., 2024), and women's experiences as leaders in overcoming gender barriers and stereotypes in various regions (Akinola & Naidoo, 2024; Baptiste et al., 2024; Iverson et al., 2024; Moyo, 2024; Washington & Gounko, 2024; Watterston & Ehrich, 2024; Wolle, 2024).

These bibliometric findings regarding the 'leadership impact' theme are empirically validated by recent global data. The 2025 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report confirms that women school leaders significantly enhance student outcomes and foster inclusive, collaborative cultures. For instance, the 2019 PASEC survey across francophone African countries revealed that primary schools led by women in Benin, Madagascar, Senegal, and Togo achieved substantially higher learning outcomes in reading and mathematics—equivalent to an additional year of schooling—compared to those led by men (UNESCO, 2025). Furthermore, data from the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) and the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) consistently indicate that female



principals dedicate more time to instructional leadership, curriculum development, and fostering collaborative environments, thereby reducing teacher absenteeism and improving overall school effectiveness (UNESCO, 2025).

Overall, despite the growing diversity of research themes, most Scopus-indexed studies remain confined to particular geographic locations, socio-cultural contexts, or specific educational levels. While recent comprehensive reports by international organizations like UNESCO provide global monitoring data, macro-level academic mapping of the literature remains scarce. This underscores the significance of this current study, which successfully fills this academic void by providing a worldwide bibliometric perspective on women's leadership in educational institutions, thereby laying a foundational roadmap for future researchers.

RQ3: What are the theoretical and practical implications for future research?

The research on women's leadership in schools entails analyzing 66 articles sourced from Scopus, utilizing Vosviewer software to examine both theoretical and practical consequences. From an academic standpoint, researchers may utilize keyword trends, whether frequently or infrequently examined in Vosviewer analysis, as a reference for subsequent investigations (van Eck & Waltman, 2017). Practitioners can use Vosviewer's analysis to improve women's leadership in schools.

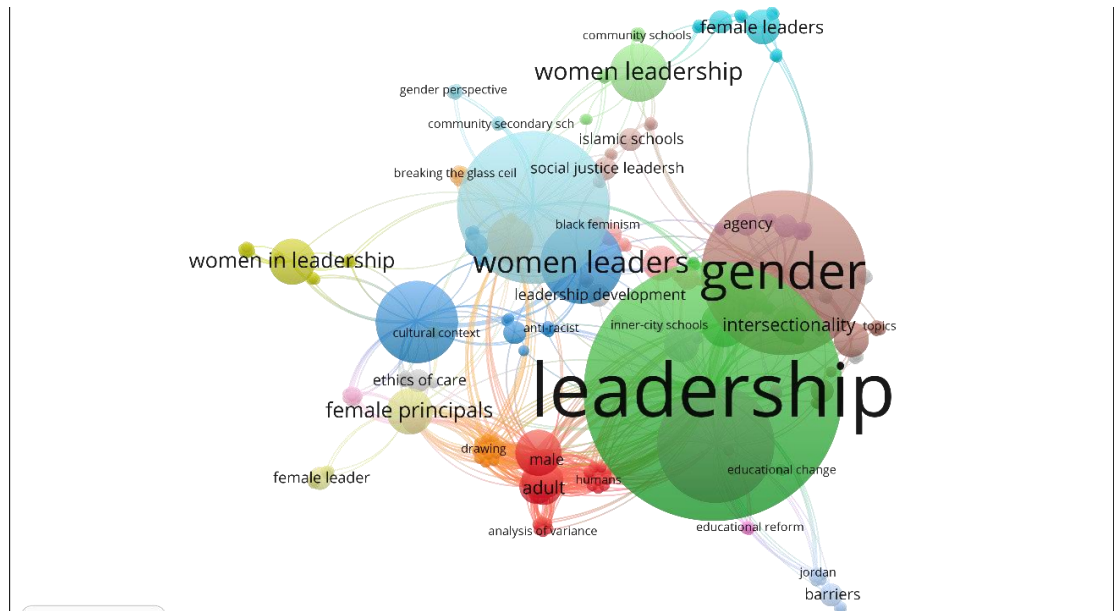


Figure 13. Relevance of research keywords on women's leadership in schools from 1995 to 2024.

Source: Author's elaboration based on the Scopus database.

The analysis done with VOSviewer on 66 articles about women's leadership in schools, which required each keyword to appear at least once, showed that the author started with 257 keywords but later cut it down to 254, resulting in 24 clusters, 1220 links, and a total strength of 1290 relationships. Figure 13 illustrates this keyword co-occurrence network. The size of the circular nodes reflects the frequency of specific keywords in the literature, while the lines connecting them indicate how often these concepts are researched together in the same articles. The color-coded clusters represent distinct thematic focus areas, demonstrating visually how foundational concepts like 'gender' and



'leadership' branch out into interconnected sub-themes. Table 2 presents the primary keywords.

Table 2. Keyword patterns of women's leadership research in schools from 1995 to 2024.

Source: Author's elaboration based on VOSviewer analysis.

No	Keywords	Cluster	Link	Occurrences	Link strength
1	Leadership	2	94	22	125
2	Gender	8	52	14	61
3	School Leadership	15	58	13	59
4	Women	9	52	10	57
5	Female	1	43	4	56
6	Adult	1	41	3	53
7	Article	1	41	3	53
8	High School	1	41	3	53
9	Human	1	41	3	53
10	Male	1	35	2	42

Theoretical implications: Historically, despite a rising tendency in the quantity of women leaders globally (McGrath, 2020), research on women's leadership in educational institutions has predominantly addressed the challenges and barriers faced by women leaders. However, the thematic evolution identified in this bibliometric study suggests a critical need for a more holistic approach. Consequently, we propose a comprehensive conceptual framework for future studies

(Figure 14) that examines the interplay between external pressures—such as cultural norms (Faulkner, 2015; Moyo, 2024; Msila, 2022), systemic biases or racism (Arar, 2018; Iverson et al., 2024), public perceptions (Lee, 2023; Makgoka & Netshitangani, 2020), and policy environments (J. G. Mbepera, 2017)—and the internal development of women's leadership identities. This model posits that these external factors directly influence leadership styles (Kim, 2016; Weir et al., 2023), roles (Alemu, 2024; Cardozo et al., 2022), practices (Brion & Ampah-Mensah, 2021; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015; Showunmi, 2021), and ultimately, leadership impact (Maharromiyati et al., 2024). Future research should prioritize empirical and quantitative testing of this model across diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts to transcend the current Western-centric bias in the literature.

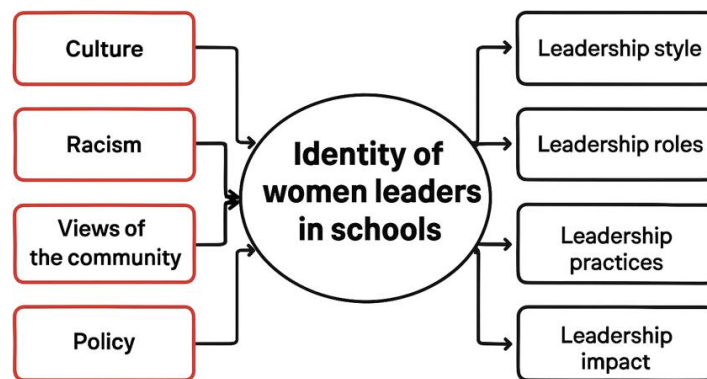


Figure 14. Research concept on women's leadership in schools in the future.

Source: Author's elaboration based on previous research.

Practical implications: An analysis of papers addressing women's leadership reveals that numerous hurdles hinder their advancement in leadership roles inside schools (Al-Jaradat, 2014; Whitehead et al.,



2018). The bibliometric findings show that these obstacles stem from gender bias, cultural stereotypes, and insufficient familial and institutional support (Brion & Ampah-Mensah, 2021; J. Mbepera, 2023; J. G. Mbepera, 2017; Shah, 2023; Showunmi, 2021; Sinyosi & Potokri, 2021; Wang & Gao, 2022). To overcome these emotional and professional challenges (Cruz-González et al., 2020), developing a strong professional identity—encompassing leadership style, performance, and leadership development (Figure 15)—is crucial (Cruz-González et al., 2021; Moorosi, 2020; Murakami & Törnsten, 2017). Women's collaborative-relational styles (Weir et al., 2023) align effectively with contemporary school reform (Kim, 2016) and are characterized by empathy, adaptability, and social equity (Slater, Gorosave, Silva, Torres, Romero, & Antúnez, 2017; Watterston & Ehrich, 2024). By focusing on students' emotional well-being (Massouti et al., 2024) and expanding feminist perspectives on empowerment (Makgoka & Netshitangani, 2020; Msila, 2022; Mythili, 2019), women leaders foster inclusivity and enhance educational quality (Akinola & Naidoo, 2024).

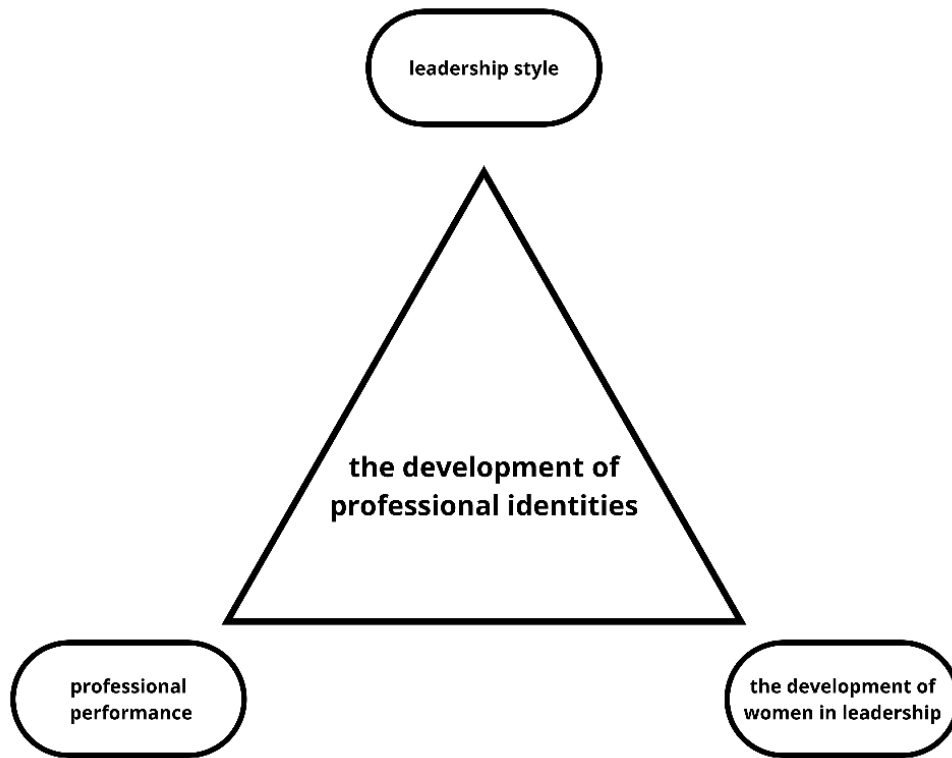


Figure 15. Development of women's leadership professional identity in schools.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Murakami & Törnsten (2017).

However, relying solely on individual resilience is insufficient; systemic policy interventions are urgently required. Aligned with the strategic recommendations of the 2025 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, actionable solutions must focus on repairing the educational leadership pipeline. Specifically, this involves three critical steps. First, policymakers must 'find where the ladder is broken' by systematically tracking women's career progression to identify specific drop-off points in educational administration. Second, systems must 'fix the broken ladder' through affirmative policy measures, such as

mandating transparent hiring processes, enforcing equal employment opportunities, and implementing anti-bias training for school boards and selection panels. Finally, stakeholders must 'offer a helping hand' by establishing robust, structured mentorship programs and professional networks that pair aspiring female principals with experienced leaders (UNESCO, 2025).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

It is essential to recognize certain intrinsic limits of this study to uphold scientific integrity and furnish appropriate context for interpreting the findings. First, exclusively depending on articles indexed in the Scopus database may exclude pertinent research published in other databases or non-indexed regional journals. Second, the bibliometric methodology, while robust in delineating macro-level patterns and global trends, is inherently limited in capturing the localized intricacies and lived experiences of women leaders. This strategy emphasizes publication and collaboration networks rather than conducting comprehensive qualitative investigations of subjective socio-cultural dynamics. Acknowledging these constraints does not diminish the study's utility, but rather contextualizes the findings and highlights the need for complementary methodologies.

Building upon these findings and recognized limitations, this study proposes several strategic directions for future research to bridge existing academic gaps:

- **Methodological Diversification:** Future research should combine quantitative bibliometric mapping with in-depth qualitative approaches, such as ethnographic research and multiple-case studies. This mixed-methods approach will



explore the localized realities of women leaders in a more nuanced and comprehensive manner.

- **Expanding Beyond Western Contexts:** There is a critical need to examine the socio-cultural aspects of women's leadership across diverse national and regional contexts. Research must pivot toward regions beyond the Western context—which presently prevails in the domain—to rectify the geographic biases highlighted in our global trend analysis.
- **Measuring Leadership Impact:** Future studies must methodically investigate the influence of women's leadership on critical elements of the school environment. Connecting leadership practices with concrete school effectiveness metrics and student learning outcomes—as advocated by global monitoring frameworks like UNESCO (2025)—will make the impact of women leaders more tangible.
- **Enhancing Global Collaboration:** There must be a concerted effort to promote cross-border and cross-cultural collaborative research initiatives. This is crucial for fostering a more interconnected global comprehension of women's leadership and tackling the severe fragmentation of research networks revealed in this study.
- **Empirical Evaluation of the Conceptual Model:** Future investigations should empirically evaluate and validate the comprehensive conceptual model proposed in this study (Figure 14). Testing this framework across various cultural and institutional contexts will refine our understanding of the interplay between external pressures and internal leadership identities.



- **Formulation and Assessment of Practical Interventions:** Researchers should formulate and assess practical interventions grounded in the framework of professional identity development (Figure 15). Evaluating the efficacy of anti-bias training, affirmative policy measures, and mentorship programs will yield essential insights for initiatives aimed at sustainably enhancing women's leadership capabilities.

By pursuing these recommendations, the scientific community can collectively build a more robust, nuanced, and globally relevant knowledge base on women's leadership in schools.

Conclusion

This study provides the first comprehensive bibliometric mapping of global research trends on women's leadership in schools spanning the last three decades (1995–2024). By systematically analyzing literature from the Scopus database, this research successfully bridges the gap between localized qualitative insights and macro-level academic mapping, offering a robust foundation for understanding the global landscape of women's educational leadership.

The findings reveal a significant surge in publications post-2020, signaling growing academic interest. However, the total volume of literature remains disproportionately small and heavily concentrated in Western contexts, predominantly the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the analysis uncovers severe fragmentation within global research networks, characterized by minimal cross-border collaboration among authors. This Western-centric bias underscores an urgent need for future research to explore the socio-cultural dynamics of women's leadership in non-Western regions to provide a truly comprehensive global perspective.



Thematically, the scholarly discourse has evolved from foundational discussions on 'obstacles and challenges' to more nuanced explorations of 'leadership identity,' 'roles,' and 'leadership impact.' To synthesize these themes, this study proposes an innovative conceptual framework (Figure 14) that illustrates how external pressures—such as cultural norms, systemic biases, and policy environments—shape the internal development and practical manifestation of women's leadership identities. This model moves beyond the traditional narrative of gender barriers, offering a holistic lens to evaluate leadership dynamics in historically male-dominated environments.

Practically, this research emphasizes that relying solely on individual resilience is insufficient to overcome entrenched gender biases. Aligning with global imperatives such as the 2025 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, stakeholders must actively repair the educational leadership pipeline through systemic interventions—such as affirmative hiring policies, anti-bias training, and structured mentorship programs. By cultivating professional identities rooted in collaboration, empathy, and social equity, educational systems can fully leverage the transformative potential of women leaders. Ultimately, this study serves as a strategic roadmap for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to champion inclusivity and sustainable gender equity in school leadership worldwide.



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