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Volume 26 • Number 2 • April 2026

Cilt 26 • Sayı 2 • Nisan 2026

Contents

The “Crabs in a Bucket” Phenomenon in School Organizations:

A Qualitative Research

Yasemin ÜNALAN, Faruk LEVENT 161-176 Article Type:
Research Article

Bibliometric Analysis of Clinical Leadership Studies:

Trends and Insights from the Web of Science

Biröl YETİM 177-188 Article Type:
Research Article

Perception of Organizational Sycophancy in Universities:

A Research on Academicians

Ayşen Nihan ARIBAŞ, Yusuf ESMER, Muhammet YÜKSEL 189-206 Article Type:
Research Article

Overcoming the Glass Ceiling Syndrome through

Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence in OECD Countries

Elif SAVAŞKAN 207-224 Article Type:
Research Article

Article Type:
Research Article

Article Type:
Research Article

Article Type:
Research Article

Article Type:
Research Article

Article Type:
Research Article

Article Type:
Research Article

“Crabs in a Bucket” Phenomenon in School Organizations: A Qualitative Research*

Yasemin ÜNALAN¹ , Faruk LEVENT² 

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine teachers' views on the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon in schools. The research was conducted using a phenomenological design within the qualitative research tradition. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with ten teachers working in different public middle schools in Istanbul, Turkey. A semi-structured interview form was used, and the data were analyzed through content analysis. The findings reveal that teachers who exhibit a crab mentality are often described as individuals who avoid work, discourage others from working, display excessive ambition, attempt to impose their own norms on colleagues, and engage in behaviors such as gossiping, criticizing, slandering, insulting, and obstructing others' success. The study concludes that the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon produces negative outcomes for both individuals and school organizations. Therefore, it is essential for school administrators to take preventive measures and foster a school culture based on collaboration.

Keywords: Crabs in a Bucket Phenomenon, Crab Bucket Syndrome, Teacher, School.

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INTRODUCTION

Fishermen familiar with crab trapping know that a bucket containing crabs does not require a lid to keep them inside (Spacey, 2015). When several crabs are placed together, any crab attempting to climb out is quickly pulled back down by the others that perceive it nearing escape (Aaron & Smith, 1992). As a result, each crab's efforts to climb upward are hindered by the group, and over time, the crabs cease attempting to escape and remain confined (Perry, 2013). In this sense, the crabs come to accept their captivity within the bucket (Aaron & Smith, 1992). Thus, no external barrier is needed; the crabs themselves repeatedly prevent one another from escaping, effectively becoming obstacles to each other's progress (Aaron & Smith, 1992; Perry, 2013; Sampath, 1997; Soubhari & Kumar, 2014; Spacey, 2015).

The concept of crab basket syndrome, commonly referenced in the Philippines, describes a universal and enduring form of competition (Soubhari & Kumar, 2014). At its core, the metaphor reflects situations in which individuals within a social group intentionally obstruct the progress of others in order to preserve their own position or improve it (Pegues, 2018). Interpersonal

competition emerges when members of a group become barriers to one another's professional advancement, leading those who seek success to undermine rather than support their peers (Miller, 2019). Individuals who exhibit this crab mentality subtly aim to hinder the career progression of others by engaging in behaviors such as humiliation, ridicule, exclusion, harsh criticism, discrediting their work, and spreading gossip (Miller, 2016; Özdemir & Üzümlü, 2019; Pegues, 2018).

The presence of the crab mentality within an organization has detrimental psychological, social, and economic consequences for both the targeted individuals and the institution as a whole (Aydın & Oğuzhan, 2019; Fettahlioğlu & Alkış Dedeoğlu, 2021; Miller, 2019; Özdemir & Üzümlü, 2019; Pegues, 2018; Soubhari & Kumar, 2014). These harmful effects highlight the need to address crab basket syndrome at both the individual and organizational levels. Within the context of teachers and educational institutions, competitive or jealous attempts to obstruct teachers' professional development, as well as the broader crab basket phenomenon that can reduce performance and overall school effectiveness, represent a particularly serious concern.

* This article is derived from the master's thesis of Yasemin Ünalın, conducted under the supervision of A. Faruk Levent.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective workplace communication is a key element of organizational interaction and significantly influences overall success (Casoria, Riedl, & Werner, 2020). Organizations that establish strong communication networks benefit from highly motivated individuals and achieve greater efficiency in a short time (Kuchi, 2006). Effective communication also fosters the collaboration necessary for attaining organizational objectives, reducing inequalities, and promoting a positive organizational climate (Eryılmaz Ballı & Önen, 2019; Karcioğlu et al., 2009; Wynia et al., 2010). Conversely, poor communication environments lead individuals to withhold important information, resist decisions, avoid expressing their opinions, or engage in covert opposition (Doğan & Derin, 2022), ultimately making it difficult—or requiring more effort—to reach organizational goals (Eroğlu, 2011).

From the perspective of educational organizations, communication is equally critical. In schools, it is closely tied to planning, knowledge sharing, collaboration, organizational structuring, and guidance (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2021). Organizational communication supports managerial functions such as achieving institutional goals, regulating interpersonal relationships, maintaining organizational coherence, and ensuring the smooth flow of information (Robbins & Judge, 2021; Sabuncuoğlu & Gümüş, 2008; Tutar, 2021; Uzun et al., 2019). An atmosphere of effective communication enhances individuals' psychological well-being, builds trust in the organization, and encourages teachers and students to express their needs without hesitation (Doğan & Derin, 2022; Ekici, 2020). In turn, this contributes to more effective performance by administrators and teachers and supports the improvement of educational quality (Ekici, 2020).

Problems in the communication processes related to school administrators, teachers, or organizational structures can create unfavorable conditions that negatively affect all stakeholders—teachers, students, and parents (Ekici, 2020; Üstün & Balci, 2023). These communication-related challenges can be further intensified by issues such as gossip, jealousy, mobbing, narcissism, and similar behaviors, all of which damage individual and organizational communication (Elçi et al., 2021; Erat, 2021; Levent & Türkmenoğlu, 2019; Miller, 2019; Özdemir & Üzümlü, 2019; Soubhari & Kumar, 2014; Usta et al., 2018; Yavuz & Levent, 2021). Among these negative behaviors, one particularly detrimental pattern observed in organizations is the presence of individuals with a crab

mentality, which further undermines communication (Aydın & Oğuzhan, 2019). Crab bucket syndrome refers to individuals who intentionally obstruct others' progress to protect or enhance their own position (Pegues, 2018). In such environments, individuals attempt to pull down colleagues who perform or succeed at higher levels, preventing them from advancing toward their goals (Erat, 2021; Özdemir & Üzümlü, 2019; Soubhari & Kumar, 2014; Spacey, 2015).

The crab bucket syndrome, characterized by the mindset of *"If I can't have it, neither can you"* involves behaviors in which individuals attempt to undermine others' success to protect or advance their own position (Miller, 2019; Soubhari & Kumar, 2014). In competitive organizational environments, this mentality may manifest as ostracism, gossip, mockery, belittling, negative criticism, or devaluing others' efforts and achievements (Bulloch, 2017; McPhail, 2010; Miller, 2019; Özdemir & Üzümlü, 2019; Pegues, 2018). Those subjected to such behaviors may experience negative emotions, including anger, sadness, disappointment, and insecurity, which can lead to physical and mental health problems, emotional exhaustion, reduced performance, and diminished motivation for achievement (Duffy et al., 2002; Miller, 2019; Sayğan Tunçay & Çıraklar, 2020; Soubhari & Kumar, 2014; Ülbeği et al., 2019).

Teachers who continuously engage in professional development acquire higher levels of competence, which in turn contributes to improving the overall quality of educational organizations (Altun, 2020; Demir & Demir, 2021; Eroğlu & Özbek, 2020). However, teachers with a crab mentality—perceiving their colleagues as competitors and resisting others' superior performance—may attempt to hinder the professional growth and achievements of their peers (Miller, 2019; Özdemir & Üzümlü, 2019). The presence of such individuals within a school organization negatively affects organizational norms, school culture, collaboration, team motivation, and overall organizational efficiency (Aydın & Oğuzhan, 2019; Miller, 2019; Özdemir & Üzümlü, 2019). Although some research within the field of organizational behavior has examined the crab bucket syndrome in relation to concepts such as job stress, motivation, and absenteeism (Aydın & Oğuzhan, 2019; Miller, 2019; Pegues, 2018; Soubhari & Kumar, 2014), studies specifically addressing this phenomenon in educational settings remain limited. In this context, the present study, which aims to explore teachers' opinions regarding the "crabs in a bucket" phenomenon in schools, is considered an original contribution to the literature.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this research, phenomenology design was employed. Phenomenology focuses on exploring phenomena that manifest in everyday life, such as experiences, events, or situations, yet remain insufficiently understood (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

Study Group

The study group was selected using the maximum variation sampling method, which was chosen to include participants with diverse characteristics capable of offering a wide range of perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation. Each participant was assigned a code, such as P1, P2, and so forth. Demographic information of the participants is given in Table 1.

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, with all participants providing consent for audio recording. The interviews lasted between 29 and 87 minutes.

Data Analysis

In this study, the data were analyzed using content analysis. This technique involves systematically generating codes based on a thorough conceptual understanding of the phenomenon (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Following the interviews with the participating teachers, the coding process was conducted using concepts that emerged directly from the collected data. Through this process, multiple themes, categories, and subcategories were identified.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Code	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Education Level	Professional Seniority	Branch	Length of Service at the Same School
P1	25	Female	Single	Bachelor's graduate	4 years	Science	1 year
P2	31	Male	Single	Bachelor's graduate	7 years	Turkish	7 years
P3	30	Female	Married	Bachelor's graduate	7 years	Mathematics	7 years
P4	48	Female	Married	Bachelor's graduate	22 years	Technology and Design	5 years
P5	39	Male	Married	Bachelor's graduate	18 years	Religious	7 years
P6	31	Female	Single	Postgraduate	9 years	Mathematics	5 years
P7	50	Male	Married	Bachelor's graduate	27 years	Gym	6 years
P8	50	Female	Married	Bachelor's graduate	27 years	Social studies	4 years
P9	46	Female	Single	Postgraduate	22 years	Mathematics	4 years
P10	33	Female	Married	Postgraduate	7 years	English	7 years

Data Collection Tools and Process

In this study, the researchers developed a semi-structured interview form based on a review of the literature. The form comprised two sections and was initially pilot-tested with three teachers, after which necessary revisions were made according to their feedback. An expert review was subsequently conducted, and the final version of the interview form was prepared based on the expert's recommendations.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure credibility in the research, in interviews with participants, a trusting interview environment was established, and expert opinions from a specialist in educational management and an educational assessment expert were obtained regarding various aspects of data collection and analysis. In addition, individuals with diverse characteristics were included in the study group

to enhance the variety of data sources (Erlandson et al., 1993), and both thematic and numerical diversification strategies were employed during data analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). To support transferability, purposive sampling—specifically the maximum variation sampling method—was used. Triangulation was ensured through a systematic research process in which participants were involved in the stages of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. To ensure confirmability was strengthened by seeking verification from participants. Finally, to enhance auditability, the research process—including data collection, and coding procedures—was presented in detail.

FINDINGS

In accordance with the research, the themes, categories, and sub-categories obtained through the content analysis of the data collected from the interviews with the teachers in the study are presented in Figure 1.

and “organizational causes”. The “individual causes” category includes the sub-categories “characteristics of teachers experiencing crab behavior” and “characteristics of teachers with a crab mentality”. Table 2 presents the codes found in these sub-categories and their frequencies.

The participants have stated that teachers exposed to crab behaviors are individuals who love working and being productive, self-sacrificing, perfectionists, rule-oriented, shy, have difficulty in setting boundaries, dislike being in the spotlight, continue to work beyond regular hours, aspire to be well-rounded individuals and are committed to fostering the comprehensive development of their students, all while genuinely loving their profession. The relevant statement of P4—who exposed to crab behaviors and described herself as someone who tries to create, strives for self-efficacy, and is productive—is as follows:

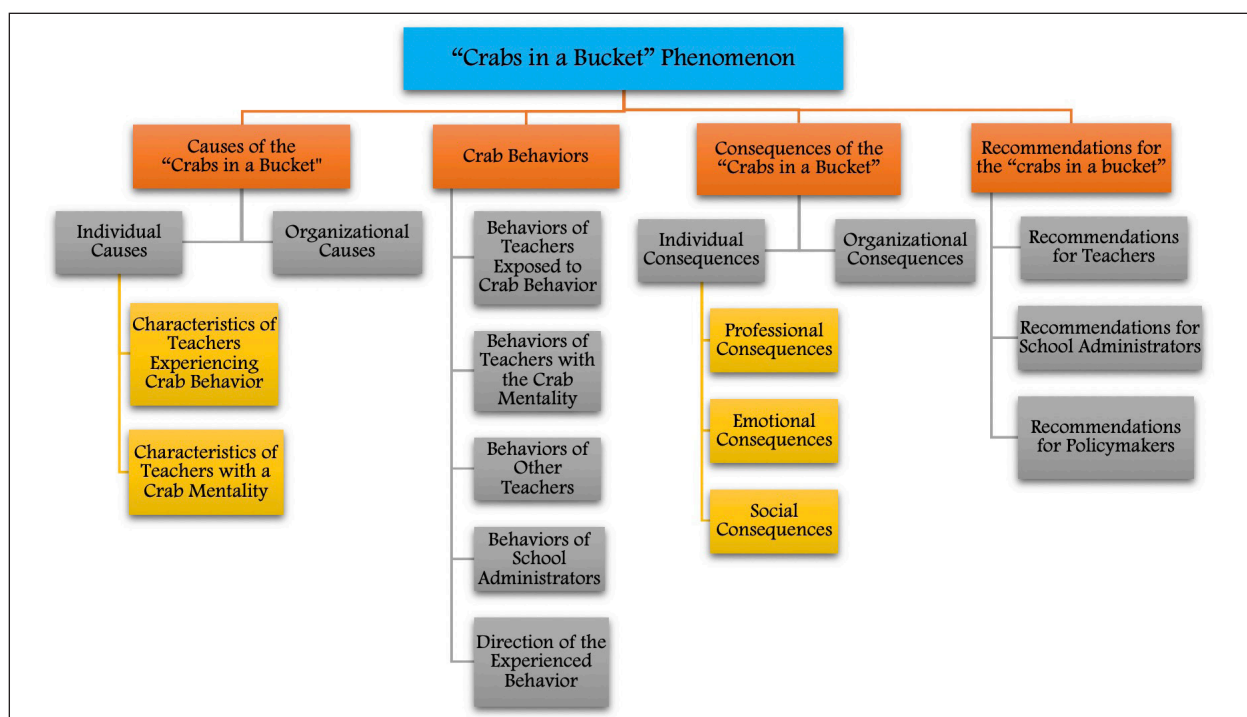


Figure 1. Themes, Categories and Sub-Categories Obtained through Content Analysis

As seen in Figure 1, four themes related to the causes, behaviors, consequences, and recommendations for the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon have been identified, with various subcategories emerging in the “individual causes” and “individual consequences” categories.

Causes of the “Crabs in a Bucket”

The theme “causes of the crabs in a bucket” encompasses the categories “individual causes”

“Believe me, I can’t just sit around doing nothing. You know, like when I have seven hours of classes on Mondays and Tuesdays. How can I just sit there for seven hours? I need to do something, be productive. I mean, I must contribute something to these kids. That’s my goal. It’s not about stepping on your or anyone else’s toes. Everyone should do something with

Table 2. Codes and Frequencies for the Individual Causes Category

Category	Sub-Category	Codes	f	Codes	f
Individual Causes	Characteristics of Teachers Experiencing Crab Behavior	Hardworking/Productive	6/10	Rule-Bound	2/10
		Selfless/Well-Intentioned	5/10	Inquisitive	1/10
		Committed to Developing Students in A Well-Rounded Way	2/10	Reserved/Sensitive	1/10
		Unrestricted by Working Hours	2/10	Unable To Set Boundaries	1/10
		Striving to be a Versatile Individual	1/10	Not Fond of Being in the Spotlight	2/10
		Perfectionist	2/10	Passionate about the Profession	2/10
	Characteristics of Teachers with a Crab Mentality	Unproductive	4/10	Lacking Self-Confidence	1/10
		Neglectful of Professional Responsibilities	2/10	Disrespectful	1/10
		Do Not Want Others to Work	6/10	Nourished By Unhappiness	1/10
		Arrogant	3/10	Desire to be in the Spot-light	4/10
		Experiencing Professional Burnout	1/10	Ambitious	3/10
		Inclined to Stereotype People	3/10	Restless	2/10
		Self-Centered/Selfish	4/10	Self-Loathing	2/10
		Merciless	1/10	Narrow-Minded	2/10

their talents and abilities. I'm never concerned about competing with others. I always have the mentality of let's all come together, let's do everything together... My door is always closed; I work on my own inside the classroom. I go home looking like a mess. I'm someone who tries to put something out there. You're not doing it; it's not my fault." (P4)(G: Female, P.S: 22 years, B: Technology and Design)

The participants stated that teachers with the crab mentality are individuals who do not enjoy working and experience professional burnout. They possess various negative traits such as arrogance, ambition, and selfishness. P2 emphasized that teachers with the crab mentality do not want others to work:

"There is an opinion like 'If a teacher at the school does these extra tasks, then the same behavior is

expected from us. That's why we should hinder it.' We should hinder it; we should all be the same type of teacher so that they don't have to deal with tasks they consider burdensome." (P2) (G: Male, P.S: 7 years, B: Turkish)

The codes and their frequencies reached in the "organizational causes" category is presented in Table 3.

The participants stated that the negative attitude of the school principal, the lack of fair task distribution in the school, the inability to manage problems, the failure to develop a common understanding, the competitive environment, organizational factionalism, and the existence of unwanted boundaries between branches constitute the organizational causes of the "crabs in a bucket" phenomenon. The opinion of P8 regarding the impact of organizational factionalism is as follows:

Table 3. Codes and Frequencies for the Organizational Causes Category

Category	Codes	f	Codes	f
Organizational Causes	School Principal's Attitude/Toxic Leadership	4/10	Inability to Manage Issues	1/10
	Sharp Boundaries between Branches	1/10	Competitive Environment	6/10
	Lack of Fair Task Distribution	2/10	Organizational Factionalism	5/10
	Failure to Develop a Common Understanding	1/10		

"... They are forming groups. You know, you end up alone. When I say forming groups, it's like this. For instance, you want to stand out, but they don't want to stand out. If they are not going to stand out, it's like they are collectively holding you back a bit. It's like they are organizing. Maybe they are not doing it intentionally, maybe they are not saying, 'Let's do this,' but it's like they are doing such things unconsciously." (P8) (G: Female, P.S: 27 years, B: Social studies)

"I chose to fight. I conducted my struggle with this group. Then, I highlighted my achievements... In terms of the profession, what are you doing? You're working to be successful. Let me give you an example: I have never been coached to Badminton at this school. I taught to badminton, even though I didn't receive any training... I learned badminton lessons from YouTube... You are striving to prove yourself. You work harder." (P7) (G: Male, P.S: 27 years, B: Gym)

Crab Behaviors

The theme "crab behaviors" consist of five categories, and Table 4 presents the frequency of codes obtained within these categories.

The participants mentioned that teachers exposed to crab behavior exhibit behaviors such as maintaining their composure, working harder to combat crab behavior, trying to distance themselves from individuals with a crab mentality, or attempting to stay close to them, and resorting to making complaints. P7 expressed their choice to confront teachers with a crab mentality by working harder, as follows:

The participants have pointed out that teachers with crab mentality tend to exhibit behaviors such as attempting to downplay professional work conducted at the school, engaging in gossip, insulting and using offensive language, making slander, giving negative criticism, and attempting to hinder others from achieving success. The relevant statement from P7, who said that she was subjected to crab behavior in the form of being blocked when she attempted a work that could have achieved success, is as follows:

"I found kids from the eights. They do things like this to these kids: I'm not the one teaching

Table 4. Codes and Frequencies for the Crab Behaviors Theme

Category	Codes	f	Codes	f
Behaviors of Teachers Exposed to Crab Behavior	Maintaining Composure	2/10	Distancing	3/10
	Reacting	4/10	Staying Close to the Individual with A Crab Mentality	1/10
	Working More	2/10	Complaint	2/10
Behaviors of Teachers with the Crab Mentality	Discrediting Professional Work	4/10	Trying To Make Others Appear Different from What They Are	3/10
	Gossip	9/10	Slander	2/10
	Negative Criticism	3/10	Insult/Swear	3/10
	Statements not to Go Beyond the Boundaries of the Branch	2/10	Desiring Others to Work Like Oneself	2/10
	Reporting To Superiors	3/10	Keeping A Distance	2/10
	Creating A Competitive Environment	1/10	Sabotage/Obstruction	2/10
	Claiming Credit for Someone Else's Effort/Success	3/10	Making Sarcastic Remarks/Speaking Ironically	4/10
Behaviors of Other Teachers	Giving Different Advice to Different Sides	2/10	Non-Reactivity	2/10
	Supporting the Victim	3/10		
Behaviors of School Administrators	Giving Advice to the Parties Involved	1/10	Non-Responsiveness	3/10
	Providing Support	2/10	Calming the Parties Down	1/10
Direction of the Experienced Behavior	Horizontal	6/10	Horizontal and Vertical	4/10

them; someone else is. When they ask, 'Can we have a badminton racket, sir?' they don't give the kid a badminton racket, saying, 'What is that?' and 'Leave that badminton stuff' even though it is known that I'm coaching it. This is actually an obstruction. It obstructs you professionally." (P7) (G: Male, P.S: 27 years, B: Gym)

The participants mentioned that in response to the "crabs in bucket" behaviors displayed at school, school administrators and other teachers exhibited behaviors such as providing advice to the parties involved, supporting the victimized party, and refraining from reacting. The relevant statements of P2, who stated that he was complained about to the school administration because he tried to improve himself and his students by doing extra work, are as follows:

"Of course, assigning a mission to other teachers to confront the two parties directly would not be right. However, as I mentioned, I sensed, observed that they still listened to both sides and provided separate advice and comments to both sides, adopting an approach where they treated both parties separately." (P2) (G: Male, P.S: 7 years, B: Turkish)

Some of the participants stated that they were exposed to the "crabs in a bucket" phenomenon by teachers (horizontally), while others mentioned that they were exposed by school administrators and teachers (horizontally and vertically). The statements of P2, who was determined to be exposed to crab behaviors in both horizontal and vertical directions, are as follows:

"As I mentioned, there are teachers who believe that I'm encroaching on their territory. As we mentioned earlier, there are sharp boundaries between branches. Some teachers may think that these boundaries are being crossed. Besides, there are times when administrators do the same. A project or collaboration with one administrator can be undermined by another. We've encountered that too. There's a lack of harmony among administrators as well." (P2) (G: Male, P.S: 7 years, B: Turkish)

Consequences of the "Crabs in a bucket"

The theme of "consequences of the crabs in a bucket" consists of two categories: "Individual consequences" and "organizational consequences". Additionally, the "individual consequences" category includes sub-categories such as "professional consequences",

"emotional consequences" and "social consequences" each with their respective codes and code frequencies. Table 5 presents the details of these codes and their frequencies.

The participants have indicated that, in terms of the professional consequences of this phenomenon, the victim eventually transforms into an individual with a crab mentality, and the crab behaviors negatively affect teachers' professional motivation and development. They expressed a desire for reassignment and a reluctance to come to school. P3 emphasized the crab mentality is contagious in schools as follows:

"After a while, that person will also be defeated and eventually give up and become one of them... Those who experience crab syndrome. I mean, let's say a teacher wants to do something, a project, and thinks that the project will not only benefit themselves but also elevate the institution. But it is so much pressed upon by the others who try to hinder it, and with statements like 'You can't do it anyway. Even if you do, what's the use? What have you done so far?' they finally make that person give up... Afterward, that person becomes one of them, one of the crabs." (P3) (G: Female, P.S: 7 years, B: Mathematics)

The participants have indicated that they experience emotional consequences of the crabs in a bucket phenomenon, such as unhappiness, loneliness, disappointment, and guilt. P8 mentioned that as a result of the crab behaviors they were subjected to, they felt guilty because of their dedicated work:

"I mean, I feel like I'm doing something wrong by working so much, as if it's a shame to think about working. I feel guilty for working hard... It's as if I've dragged the other teachers down" (P8) (G: Female, P.S: 27 years, B: Social studies)

The participants have also mentioned the social consequences of the crabs in a bucket phenomenon, indicating that the negative experiences have had adverse effects on their social relationships within the organization and in their personal lives. P4 expressed how the negative experiences with crab behaviors affected their family, as follows:

"The situation also reflected on my family, even though I didn't explain the whole situation to them. I can't do housework, can't cook. I'm always on edge. I just sit in a corner. My husband noticed it: 'Is there a problem that you haven't told me about,

Table 5. Codes and Frequencies for the Individual Consequences Category

Category	Sub-Category	Codes	f	Codes	f
Individual Consequences	Professional Consequences	Transformation of the victim into a crab mentality individual	4/10	Negative effect on professional development	3/10
		Decrease in professional motivation	6/10	Restricting oneself to a branch	1/10
		Unwillingness to come to school	2/10	Request for transfer	5/10
		Turning to individual work	1/10		
	Emotional Consequences	Sadness/unhappiness	7/10	Hatred towards teachers with crab mentality	2/10
		Loneliness	6/10	Guilt	3/10
		Fear	1/10	Hopelessness	1/10
		Shame	1/10	Feeling of worthlessness	2/10
		Guilt	1/10	Panic attack	1/10
		Disappointment	3/10		
	Social Consequences	Negative impact on intra-organizational social relationships	7/10	Reflection on personal life	2/10

that you're hiding?' he asked. 'No,' I said. I had to explain it a little bit. It has affected my whole life." (P4) (G: Female, P.S: 22 years, B: Technology and Design)

The codes and their frequencies reached in the "organizational consequences" category are presented in Table 6.

As seen in Table 6, participants have indicated that the organizational consequences of the "crabs in a bucket" phenomenon include effects such as a decrease in

school performance, a negative impact on the school's reputation, and the development of negative attitudes by organizational stakeholders towards the school. P1 emphasized that the frequent change of teachers in the school negatively affects the academic success of the students, as follows:

"Certainly, a teacher who initially wants to work there begins to not want to work there. There's a constant desire for reassignment, a constant desire to change locations, and that

Table 6. Codes and Frequencies for the Organizational Consequences Category

Category	Codes	f	Codes	f
Organizational Consequences	Negative School Reputation	3/10	Forming Power Alliances	1/10
	Decreasing in School Performance	7/10	Hindering the Formation of School Culture	3/10
	Weak Internal Organizational Communication	6/10	Negative Attitude Towards the School	5/10
	Teacher Turnover	1/10		

actually causes problems for the students. Just imagine, you're teaching 5th graders, and then suddenly you leave, another teacher takes your place, the students get used to that teacher, and then he leaves, and another teacher comes in. This worsens the students' performance automatically. So, it's all interconnected." (P1) (G: Female, P.S: 4 years, B: Science)

Recommendations for the "Crabs in a Bucket"

The theme "recommendations for the crabs in a bucket" consists of three categories, and the codes reached in these categories and their frequencies are presented in Table 7.

As seen in Table 7, the participants have provided recommendations for teachers, school administrators,

and policymakers. The recommendations of P7 for school administrators are as follows:

"...Emphasizing social activities is necessary. In other words, the principals can organize events that teachers together. Not necessarily elaborate celebrations, but something like dining together, going on a trip. I believe that these types of activities can help teachers overcome. I am sure because I served as an administrator. Teachers who may have never exchanged greetings can meet at such an event. They can sit together at the same table. This breaks the ice between them and fosters acquaintance and camaraderie." (P7) (G: Male, P.S: 27 years, B: Gym)

Table 7. Codes and Frequencies of Mentions for the "Recommendations for the Crabs in a Bucket" Theme

Category	Codes	f	Codes	f
Recommendations for Teachers	Not Giving Up	3/10	Maintaining A Work-Life Balance	1/10
	Staying Calm	1/10	Showing Understanding	3/10
	Avoiding Competition	1/10	Verbal Warning	3/10
	Offering Collaboration	2/10	Making Complaints	2/10
	Self-Improvement	4/10	Supporting Young Teachers	1/10
Recommendations for School Administrators	Supporting Teachers	4/10	Implementing Sanctions	3/10
	Appreciation of Effort/Reward	6/10	Preventing Groupings	2/10
	Fair Task Distribution	3/10	Reducing Parental Influence	1/10
	Enhancing School Culture	3/10		
Recommendations for Policymakers	Elimination of Branch Boundaries	1/10	Teacher Qualification Criteria	2/10
	Providing In-Service Training	4/10	Awareness-Raising Activities	2/10
	Financial and Moral Support	4/10	Taking Complaints into Account	1/10
	High-Quality Teacher Training Faculties	1/10	Lack of Job Stability	1/10

DISCUSSION

This study examined the opinions of teachers working in middle schools regarding the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon. In the research, within the category of individual causes of the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon, it was stated that teachers subjected to crab behavior are individuals who love working and producing, are self-sacrificing, perfectionist, rule-oriented, and reserved, have difficulty setting boundaries, do not like to be in the foreground, and are trying to develop themselves and their students in multiple ways and love their profession. Since there were no studies examining the characteristics of individuals subjected to crab behavior in relation to this phenomenon, the results of studies related to the concept of bullying, which is thought to be related to this phenomenon, were examined, and it was observed that they were consistent with the results of this study (Çelebi & Taşçı Kaya, 2014; Koçak, 2018; Yaman et al., 2010). Workaholic and productive teachers standing out in the school, leading to other teachers exhibiting crab behaviors, and participants indicating that teachers exposed to crab behaviors prefer to stay in the background is noteworthy. This finding is supported by Spacey (2015) in his study, where students who received grades higher than the class average in an environment where crab behaviors and bullying occurred lowered their performance to try and get a grade close to the class average in order not to stand out. It has been concluded that teachers with a crab mentality are individuals who do not like to work and do not want other teachers to work, are professionally exhausted, try to fit individuals into molds, want to be in the foreground, and have many negative qualities such as arrogance, ambition, and selfishness. Similarly, Aydın and Oğuzhan (2019) found that individuals with a crab mentality possess self-centeredness, ambition, and envy. Çavuş (2021) identified them as lazy, resistant to change, responsibility-avoidant, and ambitious individuals. Pegues (2018) and the studies by Soubhari and Kumar (2014) have also arrived at similar results regarding the crabs in a bucket phenomenon.

In the category of organizational factors contributing to the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon, it has been determined that this syndrome’s organizational causes include negative attitudes held by school administrators, an unfair distribution of tasks within the school, the inability to effectively manage issues, a lack of a common understanding, a competitive atmosphere, organizational factionalism, and unwanted boundaries between different branches. Miller (2019) noted that conflicts and competition within the organization, where individuals

attempt to devalue each other’s work, can contribute to this phenomenon. Pegues (2018) emphasized the role of internal competition within the organization, while Aydın and Oğuzhan (2019) highlighted factors such as injustice and communication deficiencies within the organization as potential contributors to the development of the crabs in a bucket phenomenon. Çavuş (2021) has suggested that teachers’ membership in different unions and competition among them may also influence the emergence of the crabs in a bucket phenomenon. Similar results have been found in studies conducted by Konan and Umur Erkuş (2019), Coşkun (2019), Köse and Uzun (2020), Yurdunkulu and Oktay (2020), Zembat (2012), Çiçek and Söylemez (2020), and Zengin and Bayar (2022) regarding related concepts like bullying, workplace aggression, and conflicts associated with the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon.

The interviews revealed that teachers exposed to crab behavior adopted various strategies, including remaining calm, intensifying their work as a means of resistance, and submitting official complaints. Çavuş (2021) found that individuals tend to distance themselves, remain calm, and give verbal warnings or file complaints in response to crab behaviors. Aydın and Oğuzhan (2019) found that the behavior of cutting off communication or limiting official communication is preferred. Similar results have been obtained in other studies related to this phenomenon (Çelebi & Taşçı Kaya, 2014; Ertürk, 2011; Konan & Umur Erkuş, 2019; Özdemir, 2015; Peler Şahoğlu & Yaman Lesinger, 2022; Uğurlu et al., 2012; Yaman & Türker, 2011; Zembat, 2012). Additionally, it was found that in the early stages of the process, teachers couldn’t make sense of the crab behaviors they were exposed to, and later, they preferred to distance themselves from these individuals. Miller (2019) and Pegues (2018) also found that individuals experienced confusion in response to crab behaviors. Based on these findings, it can be considered that individuals having awareness of crab behaviors could contribute to understanding and coping with this process. On the other hand, teachers with a crab mentality exhibited behaviors in schools such as belittling professional work, engaging in gossip, criticism, insults, swear, slander, and obstructing others from achieving success. Çavuş (2021) found that individuals with a crab mentality most frequently engage in destructive criticism. Pegues (2018) observed behaviors such as discouraging dreams and initiatives, gaining competitive advantage, drawing attention to one’s mistakes, and providing false information in individuals with this mindset. Similarly, studies conducted by Özdemir and Erdem (2020), Akbaşlı and colleagues (2020), Kayış (2019), Ertürk (2011), Uğurlu

and colleagues (2012), Toker Gökçe (2012), Çelebi and Taşçı Kaya (2014), Evcen Temelli and Güven (2021), Ekinci (2012), and Yaman and colleagues (2010) have reported similar results regarding related concepts. Moreover, school administrators and other teachers were found to engage in behaviors such as offering advice to the parties involved, providing support to the victim, and refraining from reacting. Çavuş (2021) also identified that other teachers and school administrators exhibited behaviors of supporting teachers exposed to crab behavior or holding a crab mentality, behaving according to group membership, and engaging in double-dealing behavior. Çelebi and Taşçı Kaya (2014), Özkuşçu and İhtiyaroğlu (2021), and Ertürk (2011) also reached similar conclusions regarding the behaviors of school administrators and teachers in response to bullying.

Some of the participants reported being subjected to such behaviors by teachers (horizontally), while some teachers indicated that they were exposed to these behaviors by school administrators and teachers (both horizontally and vertically). Furthermore, some participants mentioned the presence of the crabs in a bucket phenomenon among assistant principals, where one assistant principal would attempt to undermine a project conducted with another assistant principal. Pegues (2018) also concluded in their study that the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon can develop horizontally, vertically, or in both directions.

Under the category of individual consequences of the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon, it has been observed that teachers’ professional motivation and development are negatively affected, they desire to be transferred, the victim may eventually adopt the crab mentality, and they may not want to come to school. The studies by Aydın and Oğuzhan (2019) and Miller (2019) confirm that this phenomenon reduces motivation and can lead to resignations, aligning with the results of this research. Research on concepts related to this phenomenon, such as bullying, alienation from work, conflict, has shown that such behaviors decrease teachers’ motivation and performance, reduce their commitment to the school, and lead to inefficiency (Akbaşlı et al., 2020; Evcen Temelli & Güven, 2021; Yaman et al., 2010). It has also been found to lead teachers to request transfers and to take sick leave or refuse to come to school (Duran, 2022; Konan & Umur Erkuş, 2019; Özkuşçu & İhtiyaroğlu, 2021; Peler Şahoğlu & Yaman Lesinger, 2022; Uslukaya & Demirtaş, 2020). In light of the result that victims tend to transform into individuals with a crab mentality over time, it can be argued that this transformation may negatively impact the development,

performance, and communication of individuals who aspire to improve and advance in their profession, both on an individual and organizational level. The study by Köse and Uzun (2020) also found that productive and hardworking teachers are unable to focus on their work when they have colleagues who do not perform their duties, are unenthusiastic, and lack dedication. The “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon is associated with emotional consequences such as unhappiness, loneliness, disappointment, guilt, feelings of worthlessness, hatred towards individuals with a crab mentality, and hopelessness. Aydın and Oğuzhan (2019) and Miller (2019) have also reported similar emotional consequences of this phenomenon. In a study by Soubhari and Kumar (2014) that examined the impact of this phenomenon on job stress, they found that such stressful processes can lead to the development of physiological and psychological disorders. Pegues (2018) also concluded that in addition to these emotional consequences, it creates a need for self-isolation and a desire for self-justification. Under the social consequences sub-category of the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon, it has been determined that this phenomenon adversely affects individuals’ social relationships within the organization and spills over into their personal lives. It can be argued that the negative experiences during this process, affecting the victims’ relationships with their families and friends adversely, may lead the victim to be significantly affected by this process and develop more negative emotions. Aydın and Oğuzhan (2019) also found that individuals subjected to crab behavior prefer to distance themselves from others. In a study on jealousy by Özdemir and Erdem (2020), it was revealed that jealousy in organizations can lead to the breakdown of social relationships, estrangements, and the end of friendships.

In the category of organizational consequences of the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon, it was determined that it can lead to a decrease in school performance, a negative impact on the school’s reputation, adverse effects on communication within the organization, weakening of the organization’s relationships with its stakeholders, and an acceleration of teacher turnover. Miller (2019) also found in their study that the crabs in a bucket phenomenon can delay the progress of the organization and hinder individuals from coming together in harmony. In research related to concepts such as workplace exclusion, organizational jealousy, and bullying, it has been observed that such behaviors lead to a decrease in organizational performance, harm the institutional prestige, damage the organizational culture and team spirit, reduce motivation and organizational

belonging (Evcen Temelli & Güven, 2021; Özdemir & Erdem, 2020; Özküçü & İhtiyaroğlu, 2021; Uslukaya & Demirtaş, 2020).

The participants teachers provided recommendations for teachers, including not succumbing to this phenomenon, continuously improving themselves in various aspects, advising individuals with a crab mentality, filing complaints, and encouraging older teachers to support younger ones. Çavuş's (2021) study suggested cooperation, enjoying the profession, and experienced teachers guiding others. In Pegues's (2018) research, recommendations included distancing oneself from individuals with a crab mentality, seeking social support, staying calm, not giving up and continuing the struggle, and redirecting attention toward a greater goal. Participants also had recommendations for school administrators, such as acknowledging and rewarding effort, supporting teachers, preventing grouping, ensuring fair task distribution, improving school culture, and implementing sanctions. Soubhari and Kumar (2014) recommended providing individuals with opportunities to obtain certificates and rewarding them for their work. Çavuş (2021) suggested that school administrators should be fair and impartial, support continuous learning, enhance teachers' sense of belonging to the school, and reward high-achieving teachers. Aydın and Oğuzhan (2019) proposed supporting individuals' development, motivating them, creating a trusting atmosphere within the organization, and restructuring communication. As for policymakers, the participants recommended providing in-service training on topics like tolerance and communication skills for teachers, offering both financial and moral support, establishing criteria for becoming a teacher, and conducting awareness campaigns. Çavuş (2021) suggested to educational policymakers that appointments of administrators should be based on merit, the criteria for teacher appointments should be regulated, and the performance evaluation system should be effectively utilized. Aydın and Oğuzhan (2019) recommended actions such as the dismissal of individuals with a crab mentality, conducting awareness campaigns about this phenomenon, supporting the development and motivation of individuals, among others.

As a result of the interviews, it has been concluded that the support of school administrators for collaboration among teachers may prevent the development of the crabs in a bucket phenomenon within the organization or may have no effect on it. It could contribute to the creation of a collaborative working environment, although teachers with a crab mentality may try to hinder this support. In

Cansoy's (2019) study, participants mentioned that the guidance for collaboration by school administrators contributed to teachers working together. In Zembat's (2012) research, team collaboration is recommended to eliminate conflicts among teachers. Yılmaz's (2022) study also found that teacher collaboration fosters development in significant areas such as organizational climate, communication, belonging, and performance, but factors like competition, the desire for fame, and differences in perspectives can hinder collaboration. Özdoğru (2021) also found that teachers recognize the need for collaboration, but the selfish, arrogant, and ambitious attitudes of some teachers, along with competition and cliques, hinder cooperation. The results obtained by Yılmaz (2022) and Özdoğru (2021) align with the viewpoint of some participants that the development of the "crabs in a bucket" phenomenon is related to the characteristics of individuals with a crab mentality, and therefore, support for collaboration may not have an impact on this phenomenon. It can be argued that school administrators not supporting collaboration among teachers will encourage crab behaviors in the organization, increase competition among teachers, and emphasize individualism. Köse and Uzun (2020) also identified in their research that the failure to establish collaboration by school administrators leads to teachers not being fully engaged in their work.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that teachers are more likely to experience "crab basket syndrome" when they engage in activities or projects that lie outside their routine responsibilities or disciplinary boundaries. In other words, teachers often display negative attitudes toward colleagues who assume additional duties or initiate distinctive projects. These results suggest that existing groupings within schools and competitive organizational climates may facilitate the emergence of such behaviors. Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools promote interdisciplinary collaboration by supporting activities and projects involving teachers from different subject areas and encouraging the participation of all staff in these initiatives. Additionally, organizing social events—such as communal dinners or group excursions—may help strengthen positive communication among teachers. Fostering a sense of team spirit and cooperation, rather than competition, is also essential. Finally, efforts should be made to cultivate a positive organizational climate that is embraced by all members of the school community and that values individual differences among teachers.

Limitations and Dimensions for Future Research

This study has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted with a limited number of teachers working in particular school contexts, which restricts the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the phenomenon was examined only through teachers' self-reports, which may not fully capture the organizational dynamics that shape crabs behaviors. In light of these limitations, several areas for future research are suggested. The findings revealed indications of the "crabs in a bucket" phenomenon among assistant principals; however, the existing literature lacks studies that focus specifically on this group. Therefore, future research could explore how this phenomenon manifests among assistant principals in various school settings. Similarly, the literature offers limited evidence regarding teachers' vertical exposure to this behavior. Further studies could investigate how hierarchical relationships within schools influence experiences of the "crabs in a bucket" phenomenon. Expanding the scope of samples and incorporating mixed-method or longitudinal designs may also contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in educational organizations.

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Bibliometric Analysis of Clinical Leadership Studies: Trends and Insights from the Web of Science

Biröl YETİM¹ 

ABSTRACT

Clinical leaders play a significant role in fostering collaboration among health professionals, effective communication and developing strategies for improving patient care. As a result, the number of studies related to clinical leadership has been increasing over time. However, the themes addressed in these studies and their temporal changes are not clear. Therefore, this study aims to examine the topics discussed in clinical leadership literature and the changes in these topics over time. To achieve the objectives of the study, research studies in the Web of Science were subjected to bibliometric analysis. The analyses were conducted using the bibliometrix in RStudio. The study revealed that research on clinical leadership has accelerated and increased since 2000s, and the countries contributing the most to literature are the United States, China, the United Kingdom and Australia. It was also found that some concepts such as autonomy were mostly discussed up until the 1980s, while recently clinical leadership has been more associated with engagement and improvement. The group most frequently involved in such studies were nurses. It is believed that the findings of this study provide a comprehensive summary of clinical leadership literature and offer detailed information on the subject to stakeholders.

Keywords: Clinical Leadership, Healthcare Services, Bibliometric Analysis, Science Mapping, Text Mining.

JEL Classification Codes: Yazar tarafından gönderilmeli

Referencing Style: APA 7

INTRODUCTION

Clinical leadership is a dynamic field in healthcare in which clinical expertise and leadership skills together support the success of healthcare systems and the delivery of high-quality patient care. It is defined as the ability of healthcare professionals to influence, guide, and motivate their peers, while fostering a collaborative environment that enhances teamwork and communication. This enables the implementation of best practices, improves patient care, and supports a positive organizational culture (Wilson et al., 2020; Hill & Brocklehurst, 2015). Its significance lies in integrating clinical proficiency with leadership capabilities, which affect both operational and interpersonal aspects of healthcare delivery. Effective clinical leadership has a multi-faceted impact, extending beyond clinical outcomes to improvements in staff satisfaction, motivation, job performance, and organizational effectiveness (Duignan et al., 2020; Ennis et al., 2014). Research has shown that healthcare environments that prioritize strong clinical leadership tend to see higher levels of job satisfaction, better communication across teams and greater organizational commitment. Effective clinical leaders play a critical role in mitigating stress, reducing burnout, and promoting resilience among

healthcare professionals, which ultimately contributes to better retention rates and a healthier workforce.

One of the most vital functions of clinical leadership is its influence on healthcare quality. Studies show that clinical leaders who use clear communication, sound decision-making, and mentorship are more successful in implementing evidence-based practices and clinical guidelines, improving healthcare outcomes (Boamah, 2017; Sarto & Veronesi, 2016). By providing direction and ensuring that clinical staff adhere to established protocols and guidelines, clinical leaders help reduce variation in care delivery and improve patient safety. Clinical leaders also drive continuous improvement by identifying weaknesses, supporting problem-solving, and inspiring innovation within teams. Another critical role of clinical leadership is the promotion of accountability and transparency within healthcare organizations. They establish a culture of responsibility that holds healthcare professionals accountable for their actions and outcomes, supporting higher care standards and safer work environments. Leaders who foster transparency within healthcare teams are more likely to promote open communication, ethical behavior, and a strong commitment to patient-centered care (Mrayyan, 2022). This openness is particularly vital in

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complex and high-stakes health environments, where clear communication and adherence to safety protocols can make a significant difference in patient outcomes. Furthermore, clinical leaders serve as key facilitators of professional development and lifelong learning for healthcare staff. They ensure that employees have access to the training, resources, and support needed to enhance their clinical skills, stay up to date with the latest medical advancements, and progress in their careers. Through mentoring, supporting continuing education, and encouraging leadership development, clinical leaders contribute to the growth of healthcare professionals and the sector. In this way, clinical leadership fosters a culture of continuous improvement and professional excellence, which benefits not only the healthcare workers but also the patients they serve.

A review of the relevant literature on clinical leadership reveals effective clinical leadership significantly contributes to the improvement of the quality of work life, particularly for nurses, physicians, and other professionals involved in healthcare service delivery. Research highlights the importance of clinical leadership not only in improving staff satisfaction but also in fostering an environment that benefits patient care. In a study conducted by Li et al. (2021), it was found that the development of clinical leadership skills, along with the promotion of active coping strategies among healthcare workers, enhanced the quality of work life. This improvement in work life was subsequently reflected in the quality of healthcare services, demonstrating the interconnectedness of employee well-being and patient outcomes. Similarly, Boamah (2018) demonstrated that effective clinical leadership in nursing had a direct association with higher job satisfaction and the delivery of higher-quality care. This research underscores the critical role that leadership plays in influencing not only the internal work environment but also the external service outcomes. Beyond individual satisfaction, clinical leadership also influences hospital performance and service quality at an organizational level. Sarto and Veronesi (2016) conducted a study linked clinical leadership to various positive healthcare outcomes, showing that effective leadership enhances overall hospital performance, patient care quality and staff coordination. Their findings suggest clinical leaders play a pivotal role in driving improvements across all facets of hospital operations. In addition, Veronesi et al. (2014) argued that clinical leadership improves the efficiency of resource utilization, which is critical for enhancing operational performance and ultimately contributing to the financial health of hospitals. This demonstrates that

strong leadership not only has a direct impact on service delivery but also on the strategic use of resources. On the other hand, Stanley and Stanley (2017) highlighted that clinical leadership influences various dimensions of health, including value-based practices, innovation and organizational change. According to their research, effective clinical leadership facilitates the adoption of innovative practices, encourages necessary changes in healthcare settings and ensures that services align with contemporary healthcare values.

Although clinical leadership has been widely studied, a comprehensive understanding of its trends, thematic developments, and temporal changes remains limited. This gap highlights the need for a systematic examination of how clinical leadership research has evolved over time and which themes have emerged, declined, or remained central. Given the critical role of clinical leadership in healthcare, it is essential to explore the concepts, challenges and innovations that have shaped the field, providing valuable insights into its progression. For addressing this need, the present study conducts a bibliometric analysis of clinical leadership research systematically mapping the landscape of academic contributions. By analyzing publication patterns, key research areas, and shifts in focus, the study offers a structured overview of how the field has developed. This bibliometric approach highlights dominant themes and influential contributions, while also identifying emerging areas that require further investigation. Furthermore, the study provides a comprehensive synthesis of clinical leadership literature, summarizing trends, influential research directions and critical findings. Thus, it serves as a valuable resource for researchers, healthcare professionals, and policymakers seeking to understand the evolution of clinical leadership and its implications for practice. By identifying research gaps and opportunities, the findings contribute to shaping future studies, fostering further advancements, and supporting the development of effective leadership strategies within healthcare organizations. Ultimately, this study enhances the academic discourse on clinical leadership by providing a detailed and systematic exploration of its trajectory, reinforcing its importance in addressing contemporary healthcare challenges.

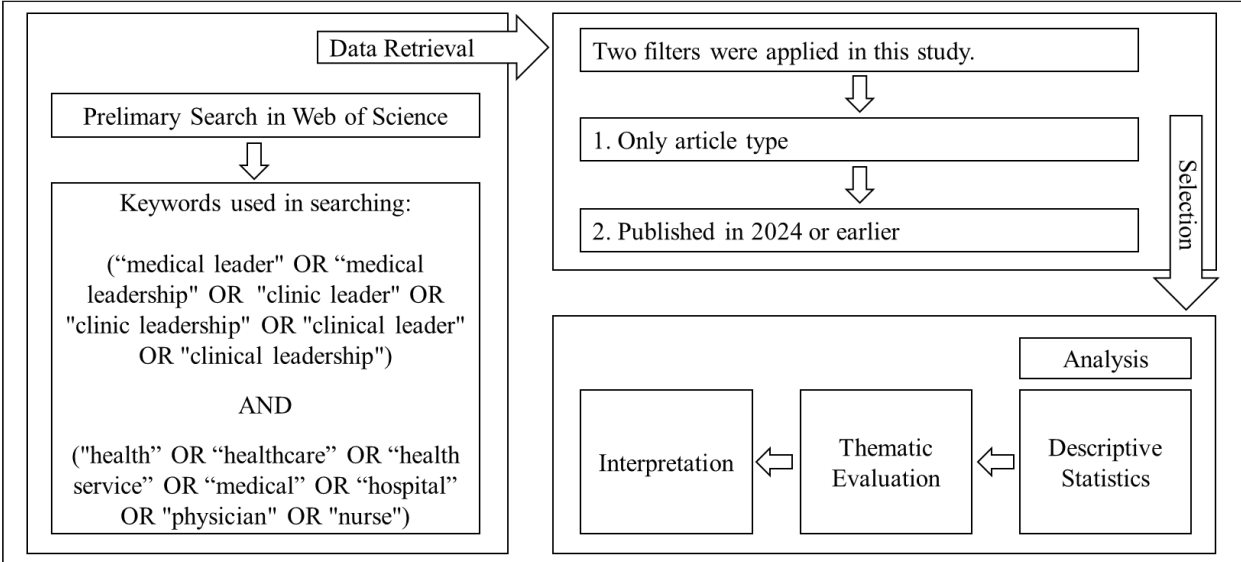


Figure 1. Research strategy and flowchart of the study

METHOD

The primary objective of this study is to analyze overall trends, key thematic areas, and the temporal evolution of clinical leadership research. Specifically, it seeks to identify publication patterns, emerging themes, and shifts in scholarly focus, providing a structured overview of how the field has developed. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for both researchers and practitioners, as it enables the identification of gaps in existing knowledge, facilitates the recognition of underexplored areas, and informs future research directions. To achieve these objectives, a bibliometric analysis was conducted using publications indexed in the Web of Science database, a widely recognized source for high-impact research. The dataset included only peer-reviewed journal articles to ensure research quality and consistency, while conference papers, theses, and books were excluded. The analysis was limited to studies published up to 2024, and publications from 2025 were excluded to avoid inconsistencies due to incomplete indexing. The methodology involved a systematic keyword-based search strategy using selected search terms and Boolean operators, as shown in Figure 1. These keywords were selected to capture a broad range of clinical leadership studies while minimizing irrelevant results. The retrieved dataset was analyzed using bibliometric techniques to extract insights on publication trends, influential authors and institutions, citation patterns, and thematic developments. Through this rigorous approach, the study provides a robust and data-driven examination of how clinical leadership research has evolved, offering valuable contributions to both academic discourse and practical applications in

healthcare leadership.

The keywords in Figure 1 were used to search the ‘topics’ section of Web of Science, which includes titles, abstracts, and author keywords. This approach ensured a broad yet relevant dataset by capturing studies focused on clinical leadership and minimizing irrelevant results. As a result of this rigorous search process, a total of 1,635 studies related to clinical leadership were identified, reflecting the academic interest and growing body of research in this field. To enable accurate bibliometric analysis, the metadata were downloaded in BibTeX format for seamless integration with tools for citation mapping, co-authorship analysis, and thematic clustering. During the extraction process, all 29 available metadata fields under the “custom selection” tab were carefully selected to obtain a comprehensive dataset. These fields included the title, abstract, authors, affiliations, publication year, journal name, DOI, keywords, citation count, references, and funding information. This extensive metadata selection enabled a more in-depth exploration of various dimensions of clinical leadership research, such as publication trends over time, key contributing authors and institutions, citation impact and evolving thematic areas. By incorporating a meticulous and data-driven approach, this study provides a valuable insight into the scholarly landscape of clinical leadership, offering a foundation for future research and practical applications.

The data analysis was conducted using the bibliometrix package in RStudio, which is widely utilized for performing bibliometric analyses. Before analysis, the dataset was cleaned to ensure accuracy and relevance. Specifically, studies published in 2025, and non-article publications

(conference proceedings, book chapters and theses) were excluded from the dataset. After applying these criteria, the final dataset included 1,205 articles. The bibliometric analysis encompassed various descriptive statistics, including the annual distribution of publications, allowing for an examination of the growth trends in clinical leadership research over time. Furthermore, the scientific contributions of different countries to the field were analyzed by evaluating publication output and international collaboration networks. In addition to descriptive metrics, the study also explored the evolution of key themes within literature. Changes in these themes were evaluated using keyword co-occurrence analysis and thematic mapping, which helped identify research hotspots and emerging topics. These insights provide a deeper understanding of the intellectual structure and future directions of the field. All analyses used Web of Science's Keyword Plus feature, which generates keywords from the titles of cited references.

FINDINGS

As a result of the bibliometric analysis conducted in this study, the descriptive statistics of the analyzed publications are summarized in Table 1. Table 1 shows that the first clinical leadership study was published in 1982, marking the beginning of scholarly interest in the field. Between 1982 and 2024, 1,205 research articles on clinical leadership were published across 474 academic sources.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Studies Included in The Bibliometric Analysis

Description	Results
Timespan	1982:2024
Sources (journals, books, etc.)	474
Number of articles (documents)	1205
Annual growth rate	12.29%
Document's average age	7.86
Average citations per document	12.16
Total number of references used in the documents	31656
Number of keywords plus by Web of Science	1379
Number of author's keywords	2299
Number of authors	4964
Number of authors of the single-authored docs	137
Number of single-authored docs	151
Number of the co-authors per document	4.72
International co-authorships	16.76%

These studies collectively involved contributions from 4,964 authors, reflecting a diverse and widespread scholarly engagement with the topic. Among these publications, 151 articles were single authored, written by a total of 137 different authors, indicating that while independent research on clinical leadership exists, collaborative efforts remain predominant. The average number of authors per article is about five, indicating a strong tendency toward multi-authored studies consistent with the collaborative nature of clinical leadership research. International collaborations account for 16.7% of all publications, indicating growing global interest and cross-country cooperation in clinical leadership research.

Figure 2 shows the number of publications related to clinical leadership in the Web of Science database. Figure 2 shows that the first study was published in 1982 and that annual output remained below five until the early 2000s. After 2005, the number of clinical leadership studies increased exponentially. Specifically, the number of studies, which was below 5 in the 1980s, rose to 16 in 2006, 32 in 2010, and 81 in 2020. By 2024, the total number of studies related to clinical leadership worldwide had reached 130.

Figure 3 shows the contribution of different countries to clinical leadership research. The map shows that the United States (n=1561) has produced the highest number of studies. The United Kingdom (n: 1350) and Australia (n: 720) follow the United States in terms of the number of publications. Turkey (n=10) produces a similar number of studies to other European countries and ranks 34th globally.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of corresponding authors by country. Figure 4 confirms that most studies are conducted in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and Canada. Turkey, however, is not among the top 20 countries. Only 8% of U.S. studies involve international collaboration, compared to 14% in the United Kingdom. The Netherlands has the highest rate of international collaboration at 45.5%. In Turkey, five researchers have contributed as corresponding authors, but all collaborated only with researchers within Turkey.

Figure 5 illustrates the evolving research focus in clinical leadership studies over the years. Figure 5 reveals that certain topics have gained increasing scholarly attention since 2010, reflecting a growing recognition of the significance of clinical leadership in healthcare settings. In the early years, a limited number of themes were prominent, indicating a relatively narrow scope

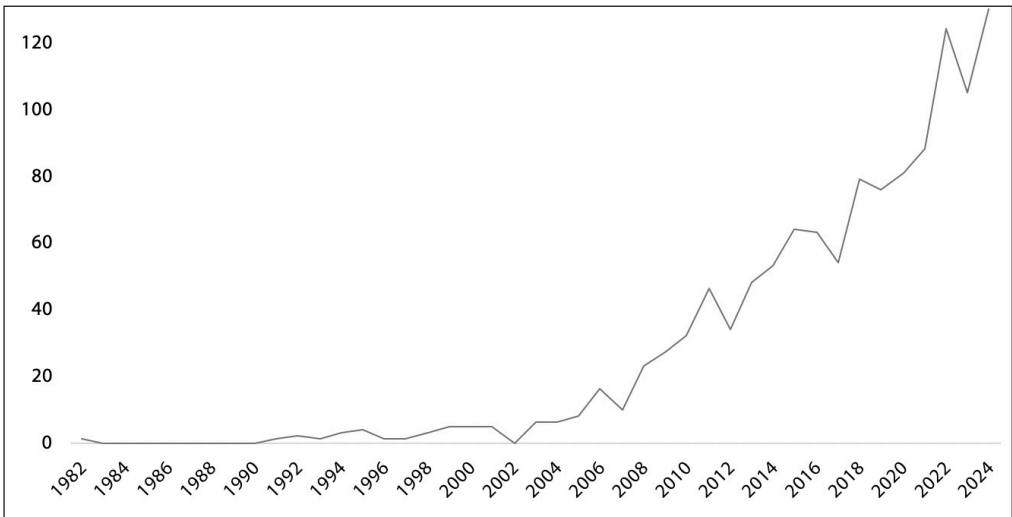


Figure 2: Number of Studies Conducted via Clinical Leadership in Healthcare by Years

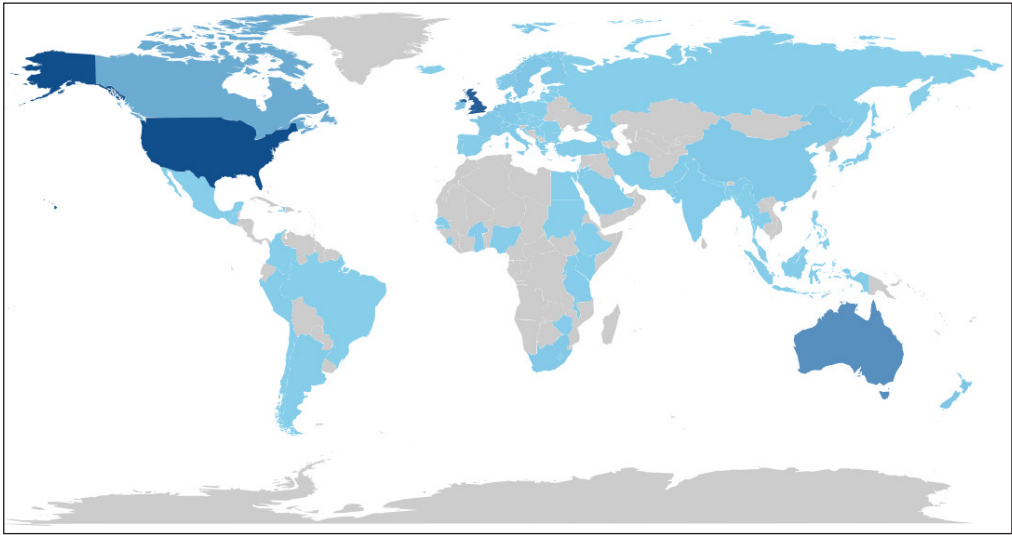


Figure 3: Countries' Scientific Production

of research. However, from 2016 onward, there was a notable expansion in research areas, accompanied by a diversification of topics, suggesting an increasing interest in various dimensions of clinical leadership. In the early period, studies focused on topics such as *randomized controlled trials*, *pain management*, and *autonomy* in clinical decision-making. These early themes reflected a focus on the fundamental aspects of medical leadership and patient-centered care. Over time, but the thematic landscape evolved and research attention shifted toward broader healthcare-related issues.

By the mid-2010s, emerging topics such as *healthcare engagement*, *physician leadership*, *clinical interventions*, *patient safety* and *burnout* became more prominent. This shift indicated an increasing awareness of the organizational and systemic factors influencing leadership effectiveness in healthcare environments. In the post-2020 period, there has been a substantial rise in

studies exploring issues related to *diversity*, *disparities* and *barriers* in health, particularly in the context of inequality and burnout among healthcare professionals. This trend underscores a growing emphasis on equity in leadership roles, the challenges faced by underrepresented groups, and the need for policies that promote inclusivity and well-being within healthcare organizations. Additionally, the heightened focus on burnout highlights the pressing concerns regarding healthcare professionals' mental health and work-related stress, reinforcing the importance of leadership strategies that foster resilience and well-being in clinical settings. Overall, the findings suggest a dynamic and evolving research landscape, with contemporary studies increasingly addressing complex, systemic challenges in clinical leadership.

Figure 6 presents the thematic map of studies in the field of clinical leadership, illustrating how topics are positioned based on their degree of development

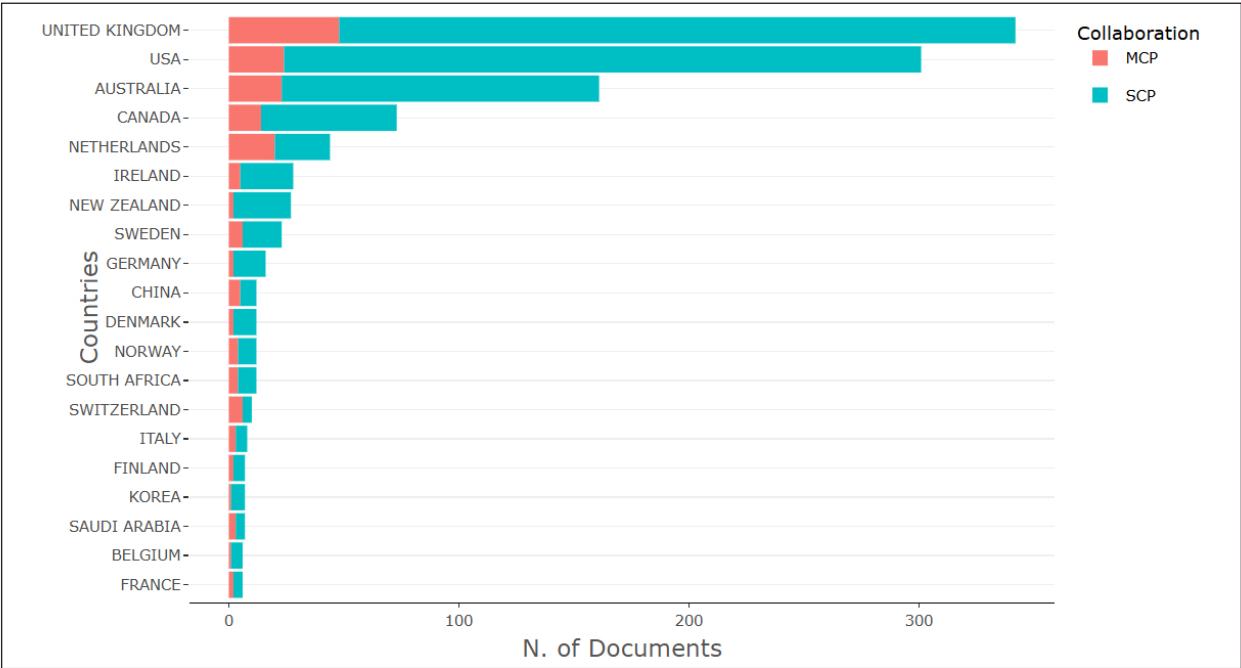


Figure 4: Corresponding Author’s Countries

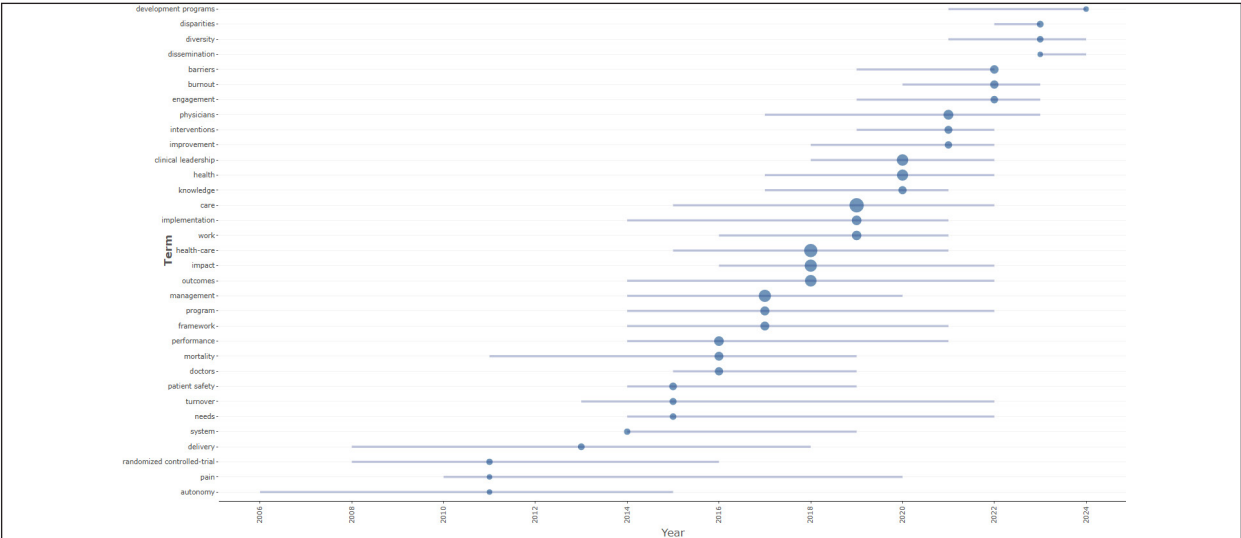


Figure 5: Trend Topics in Clinical Leadership Studies by Years Based on Keyword Plus

and centrality within the research landscape. This visualization provides insight into the evolution of research themes, highlighting their relative significance, interconnectedness, and potential trajectories in future studies. Motor themes, which represent the most significant and actively researched topics in the relevant literature, include *healthcare management* and *education*. These themes are well-developed and strongly connected to various aspects of clinical leadership, indicating their fundamental role in shaping leadership practices, policies and training frameworks within healthcare settings. Research in this area often explores leadership competencies, decision-making processes, organizational structures, and the impact of leadership on healthcare service efficiency.

Additionally, education in clinical leadership has gained prominence, focusing on leadership training programs, curriculum development, mentorship and skill acquisition for healthcare professionals to enhance leadership capabilities. In contrast, basic themes such as *care*, *impact*, *outcomes* and *quality* hold a central place in clinical leadership research but exhibit a stable developmental structure. These themes form the foundation of studies, as they address essential aspects of healthcare delivery, including patient-centered health care, the effectiveness of leadership interventions and quality improvement initiatives. Studies in this domain typically examine how leadership influences patient safety, treatment effectiveness, and overall healthcare system performance. On the other hand, niche themes,

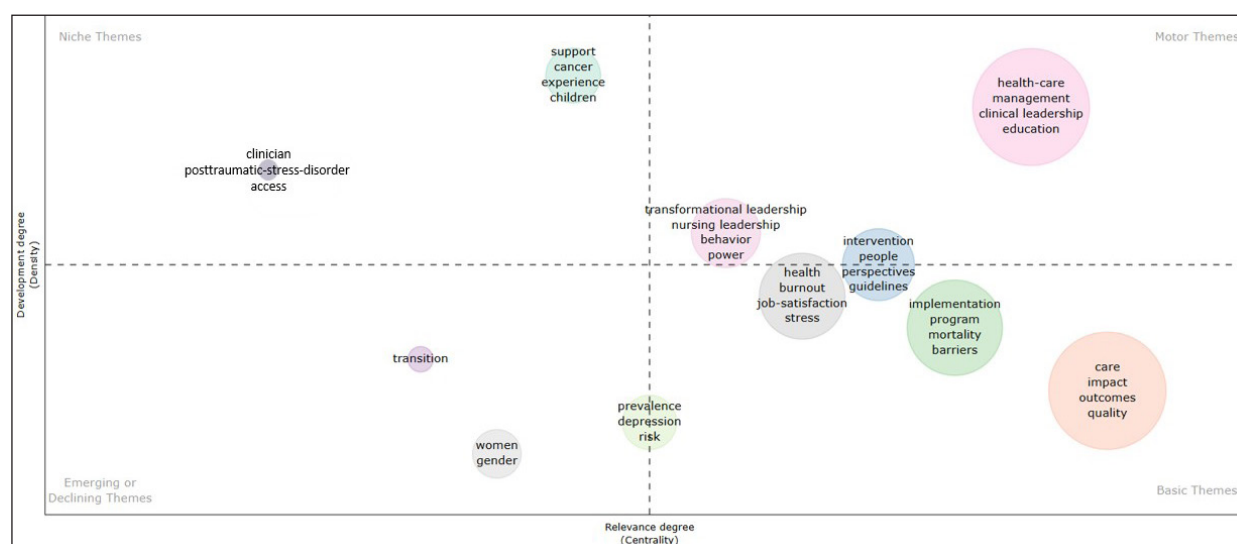


Figure 6. Thematic Map of Clinical Leadership Studies Based on Keyword Plus

including *support*, *cancer*, *experience* and *children*, represent studies focus on specific populations or specialized healthcare contexts. These topics are less widely explored in the broader field of clinical leadership but play a crucial role in understanding leadership dynamics in particular settings. For instance, research on support investigates the role of leadership in fostering workplace support systems, while studies on cancer explore leadership approaches in oncology care and multidisciplinary teams. Similarly, research on experience emphasizes patient and healthcare professionals' lived experiences with leadership, while studies on children delve into pediatric healthcare leadership, addressing challenges unique to child healthcare services. Emerging or declining themes, such as *transition*, *women* and *gender*, appear less frequently in the ongoing research but hold potential for future development. These themes highlight evolving discussions about leadership transitions in healthcare, gender-based disparities in leadership roles, and the representation of women in clinical leadership positions. Although these topics may not be as dominant as motor themes, their relevance may grow as healthcare organizations focus on inclusivity, gender equity, and leadership succession planning. Additionally, concepts like *transformational leadership*, *nursing* and *power* constitute critical themes are both developing and central to clinical leadership research. Transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, motivation, and positive change, is increasingly recognized as an effective leadership model in healthcare. Nursing leadership remains a vital research area, reflecting the significant role of nurses in patient care and healthcare team coordination. Meanwhile, the theme of power examines hierarchical structures,

authority dynamics, and leadership influence in clinical settings, providing deeper insights into how leadership is exercised and perceived within healthcare organizations. Furthermore, topics like *burnout*, *job satisfaction* and *stress* highlight notable areas of research concerning the well-being of healthcare workers. These themes reflect growing concerns about occupational stress, mental health challenges, and workforce retention in the healthcare sector. Studies within this category often explore how leadership styles, workplace culture, and organizational policies impact healthcare professionals' job satisfaction, motivation, and overall well-being. Addressing these challenges through effective clinical leadership is crucial for maintaining a resilient and high-performing healthcare workforce.

The thematic evaluation results illustrating which themes have emerged over time and how they have evolved in studies on clinical leadership are presented in Figure 7. When examining Figure 7, it is observed that during the period of 1982-2014, fundamental concepts such as *care*, *nurses* and *physicians* were prominent, while topics like *women* and *health* were also considered significant. During this period, studies primarily focused on the core components of clinical leadership, the roles and responsibilities of healthcare workers and dynamics between different professional groups within the health system. Additionally, there was an emphasis on leadership practices in patient care and the influence of professional identity on leadership approaches.

In the period of 2015-2019, the research diversified, highlighting topics such as *challenges*, *access*, *gender* and *mental health*. This period saw an increase in studies on healthcare access, gender-based differences

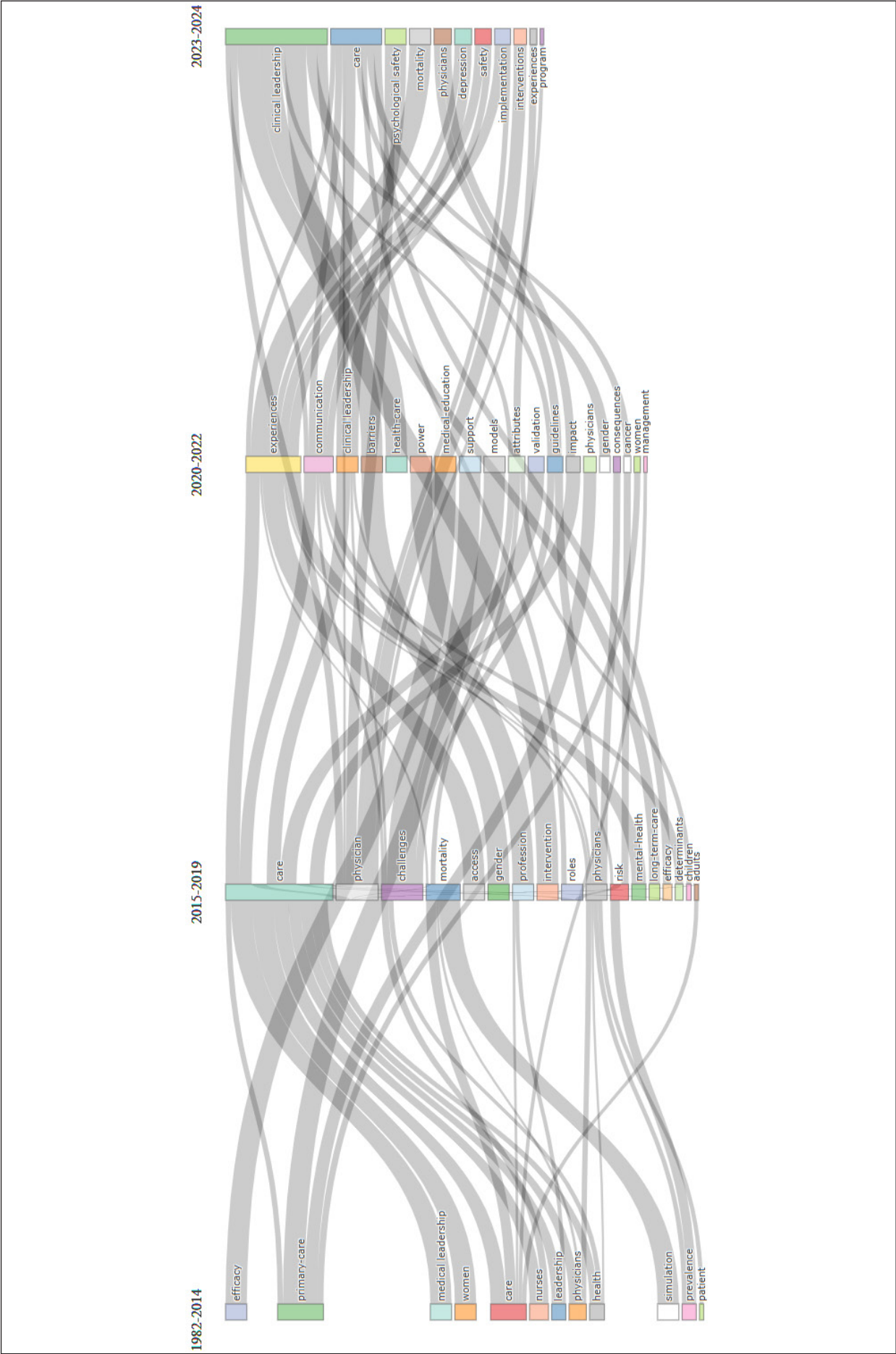


Figure 7. Thematic Evaluation of Clinical Leadership Studies by Periods Based on Keyword Plus

in leadership roles, and mental health issues affecting both healthcare providers and patients as well. The discussion on leadership challenges expanded to include organizational and systemic barriers, such as inequalities in access to leadership positions and the impact of stress and burnout on leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, this period witnessed a growing interest in the intersection between clinical leadership and public health concerns, such as mental health service provision and equity in healthcare leadership.

In the period of 2020-2022, clinical leadership researches emphasized different themes like *experience*, *communication*, *barriers*, *healthcare services* and *power*. The increased focus on experience highlighted the role of professional expertise and lived experiences in shaping effective leadership. Communication became a crucial theme, emphasizing the significance of interpersonal and organizational communication in the leadership effectiveness. Studies also examined the barriers to leadership, such as institutional constraints, hierarchical structures and power dynamics within health organizations. The emergence of themes like *medical education*, *support*, *attributes* and *guidelines* indicated a growing focus on training, the development of leadership competencies and the establishment of guidelines to enhance leadership practices. The role of mentorship, peer support and leadership development programs in strengthening clinical leadership also gained attention.

In 2023-2024, themes such as *safety*, *mortality*, *depression*, *implementation*, *interventions*, *care*, *experiences*, and *programs* gained prominence, indicating increased interest in psychological safety and well-being. Research in this period shows greater awareness of the mental health challenges faced by healthcare leaders and the need for safe, supportive environments. The inclusion of themes such as implementation and interventions highlights the growing emphasis on evidence-based leadership practices and the practical application of leadership strategies to improve healthcare outcomes. Moreover, the increasing focus on mortality and patient safety underscores the critical role of clinical leadership in ensuring high-quality and safe healthcare delivery. Studies also examined leadership-driven programs and policies, showing how structured leadership interventions can improve patient care and organizational performance.

In studies conducted in Turkey, it is observed that research on clinical leadership focuses on its effects on health professionals and their perceptions. For example, in a study conducted by Budak and Özer (2018) at a

university hospital, the clinical leadership characteristics of doctors and nurses were examined, and factors such as age, gender, and education were investigated in terms of their impact on these characteristics. The study found that participants generally had high clinical leadership qualities, education level influenced personal attributes and teamwork skills and those who received management training had more advanced skills in improving and directing services. Similarly, in a different study by Kılınç, Kurt, and Ozturk (2022), the clinical leadership levels of nurse managers and the factors affecting these levels were examined. The study emphasized that nurses who received management and leadership training were more successful. Furthermore, it was determined that female nurse managers were more skilled in improving services. On the other hand, in a study conducted by Budakoğlu et al. (2021), the importance of leadership and teamwork courses in the medical school curriculum and students' feedback on these courses were analyzed. The study revealed that a significant portion of the students (62.9%) opted for these courses and were aware of the need to develop their leadership competencies. The students emphasized the importance of enhancing leadership and teamwork skills. Finally, in a study conducted by Ozyurt, Avci and Cizmeci Senel (2021), the importance of clinical leadership in quality and accreditation efforts within health services was highlighted. It was stated that clinical leaders improve collaboration, support best practices, and enhance the satisfaction of health professionals. Furthermore, clinical leadership training was emphasized as a factor that increases healthcare workers' job satisfaction, performance, and commitment to their institutions.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze the evolution of clinical leadership research through a bibliometric analysis of peer-reviewed articles indexed in the Web of Science. Because clinical leadership plays a vital role in healthcare systems, understanding its thematic developments, research trends, and scholarly contributions is essential. Examining the progression of clinical leadership studies over time allows for the identification of key focus areas, emerging topics, and shifts in research priorities. Using bibliometric analysis, this study systematically examines how clinical leadership has been studied, mapping its intellectual structure and identifying influential works, themes, and research directions. The findings provide valuable insights into the development of clinical leadership discourse, shedding light on underexplored areas and potential future research opportunities.

Additionally, this study contributes to clinical leadership literature by offering a comprehensive review of the temporal and thematic transformations within clinical leadership research, thereby addressing gaps and guiding future academic and professional inquiries in the field.

The initial search identified 1,635 studies in the Web of Science database. 9 of them were, however, published in 2025 and 421 were not articles. Therefore, these 430 studies were excluded from this study before conducting bibliometric analysis. The analysis showed a significant increase in clinical leadership studies, especially since the 2000s, with the United States, United Kingdom, China, and Australia as the main contributors. The first of these studies was published by Joly in 1982, and it examined the importance of clinical leadership in establishing laboratory costs on a rational basis. On the other hand, it was also found that while early studies focused primarily on autonomy and professional roles (Spitzer & Neely, 1993; Berwick, 1994; Christian & Norman, 1998; Atkins & Ersser, 2000; Furlong & Smith, 2005), recent research has shifted to themes such as participation (Hampel et al, 2010; Blanchard & Kriebs, 2012; Dyson et al., 2014), quality of healthcare and well-being (Minvielle et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2009; Cardiff et al., 2018). Nurses emerged as the most frequently studied group, highlighting their central role in clinical leadership. In addition, the analysis suggests that concepts such as burnout, mental health and health inequalities have risen to prominence in the recent years, reflecting broader concerns in healthcare systems worldwide.

These empirical findings are believed to provide valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners by shedding light on the evolving landscape of clinical leadership. Identifying emerging issues in clinical leadership research can guide future scholarly endeavors by highlighting key themes that require further exploration and deeper investigation. Understanding these evolving topics helps researchers address gaps, refine theoretical frameworks, and develop stronger methodologies for studying clinical leadership.

For healthcare decision-makers and managers, the study underscores the critical role of leadership development programs in enhancing both patient care quality and organizational efficiency. Investing in leadership training for nurses and other frontline professionals can help build a more resilient workforce and improve healthcare delivery. The study also emphasizes the need to integrate leadership development into healthcare policies and institutional frameworks. By highlighting new trends and

challenges, the study provides a foundation for future research and supports the development of more effective leadership strategies. The findings offer a roadmap for policymakers, educators, and healthcare institutions to refine leadership education and training programs, thereby fostering a more proactive and evidence-based approach to clinical leadership development.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the bibliometric analysis was conducted using publications indexed exclusively in the Web of Science database, which may have led to the exclusion of relevant studies available in other academic databases, such as Scopus, PubMed, or Google Scholar. As a result, the study's findings may not fully capture the breadth of research conducted in the field. Second, while bibliometric analysis provides valuable quantitative insights into publication trends, citation networks, and thematic developments, it does not capture the qualitative depth and nuanced discussions surrounding clinical leadership. Bibliometric methods primarily focus on research output and impact rather than the interpretative aspects of leadership theories, experiences, and contextual variations.

Future research could address these limitations by including multiple databases, conducting systematic reviews, or integrating qualitative methods such as content analysis, interviews, or case studies. Additionally, examining the impact of clinical leadership within diverse healthcare systems and cultural contexts would further enrich the literature, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its global significance. Investigating cross-cultural differences in leadership styles, challenges, and best practices could offer valuable insights into how clinical leadership can be adapted to various healthcare environments, ultimately contributing to the advancement of leadership effectiveness across different regions and healthcare settings. Based on these findings, healthcare organizations are encouraged to integrate structured leadership development programs into routine professional training, particularly for nurses and frontline staff. Establishing clear competency frameworks and mentorship mechanisms may support the translation of clinical leadership principles into daily practice. Additionally, incorporating leadership assessment tools into institutional quality improvement processes can help monitor progress and strengthen leadership capacity across healthcare teams.

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Perception of Organizational Sycophancy in Universities: A Research on Academicians

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ABSTRACT

Today, it is seen that unethical behaviors are diversifying in universities, which are accepted as value-based organizations. Sycophancy, which is an unethical behavior in universities where the hierarchical structure is evident, emerges as an important issue in academic circles. The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of organizational sycophancy in universities. In the study, 36 academicians were interviewed within the scope of qualitative research method. The answers given by the academics were processed in depth within the scope of the themes determined in accordance with the content analysis technique. The results of the study showed that sycophantic behavior is quite common in universities, that it leads to various negative consequences in the academic environment, and that there are many factors that lead to sycophantic behavior. In conclusion, organizational sycophancy is a phenomenon intertwined with academic success, cooperation and organizational culture in universities. The role of sycophantic behaviors, the attitudes of academics towards managers and the place of these attitudes in organizational structures is a topic that requires more research in academic circles. In this context, studies on sycophancy in universities provide important information for academic success and improvement of the work environment.

Keywords: Ethics, Organizational Sycophancy, Academic Sycophancy, University, Academician.

JEL Classification Codes: D23, M10, M12

Referencing Style: APA 7

INTRODUCTION

Organizational life is an integral part of employees' daily lives. Employees should not only strive to achieve their individual goals but also take responsibility for contributing to organizational objectives. In this context, there is a psychological contract between the organization and the employee based on mutual expectations. Maintaining this contract on the basis of loyalty contributes to reducing organizational problems (Özdevecioğlu & Aksoy, 2005, p. 96).

Every organization needs the support and active participation of its employees to achieve its goals. The adaptation of employees to the organization enables increased efficiency and productivity (Köse, Tetik & Ercan, 2001, p. 222). In this process, the role of employees in the formation of organizational culture should not be overlooked. Individuals with different cultural backgrounds are not only influenced by the culture of the institutions they work for, but also play an effective role in shaping this culture (Kaynak, 2020, p. 137). Organizational culture encompasses the values, norms,

and concepts that emerge within an institution. In other words, it is the totality of abstract and concrete elements constructed within the organization (Gül & Gökçe, 2008, p. 385).

A dynamic organizational behavior structure that views employees as the fundamental resource of organizations and corporate ethical practices lay the groundwork for the establishment of ethical rules (Agbim, Ayatse & Oriarewo, 2013, p. 79). Ethical behavior has been a social concern since ancient times; it has evolved over time and has become a decisive factor in the success of organizations today (Geeta, Pooja & PN, 2016, p. 1). In this context, it is of great importance for organizational managers to clearly distinguish between ethical and unethical behavior and to build an organizational culture that prevents employees from making decisions based solely on their personal intuition. In such structures, where ethical boundaries are clearly defined, the risk of both managers and employees unknowingly engaging in unethical behavior is significantly reduced. Furthermore, this clarity emphasizes the importance of ethical standards

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at the corporate level, thereby reducing the likelihood of such standards being violated (Kaptein, 2011, p. 847). The management of unethical behavior in organizations can be achieved by explaining elements such as what these behaviors are, which types are considered unethical, how often they occur in organizations, whether their frequency varies according to the type of organization, sector, and country, their causes and consequences, and what effective interventions and actions are (Kaptein, 2008, p. 979).

One of the most common unethical behaviors seen in organizations is sycophancy. Some employees aim to gain personal advantage by excessively praising their managers. This attitude can disrupt organizational balance and lead to condescending behavior toward lower-status employees. Even if sycophants reach positions of power, they struggle to earn the genuine respect of their colleagues (Dalton, 2008, p. 360).

Universities are institutions that promote academic freedom, transparency, autonomy, and critical thinking, and are at the center of knowledge production (Kadioğulları & Ensari, 2020, p. 410). Their assumption of broad responsibilities through education, teaching, and social interaction is an important feature that distinguishes them from other institutions (Gülcemal, 2020, p. 3). However, unethical behaviors such as sycophancy can sometimes be observed in this ideal structure. Therefore, research on the causes, consequences, and prevention of sycophancy in universities is of great importance.

This study is carried out to examine sycophancy behavior, which is an unethical behavior in organizations and negatively affects employee performance, productivity, job satisfaction, the relationships between employees and their managers, and causes a loss of trust, on academics serving in universities. Another purpose of the research is to determine the prevalence of sycophancy perception in universities, the determinants of this perception, and the effects of this perception on job performance and job satisfaction. In line with these objectives, a qualitative research was conducted on academics using the interview technique, and based on the findings, evaluations were made on whether academics and academic administrators show sycophantic behavior. Since there are limited studies on sycophancy in the literature, it is predicted that this study will contribute to the related literature. In addition, it is thought that the research findings will contribute to the development of a more transparent and fair management approach in universities.

This study consists of four sections. The first section provides the theoretical background on organizational sycophancy, the second section describes the methodology, the third section presents the results and discussion, and the final section presents the conclusions and recommendations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, ethics, organizational sycophancy and organizational sycophancy in universities are explained.

Ethics

Ethics is an interdisciplinary field that evaluates interpersonal relationships and social behavior in accordance with moral principles. The concept of ethics, which has developed hand in hand with philosophy and economics throughout history, has gained importance in the context of value conflicts and decision-making processes encountered in business life. In this regard, business ethics has been institutionalized as an academic discipline since the 1980s and has taken its place in organizational behavior literature (Monis, Çalışkan & Köroğlu, 2024, pp. 69-70). When examining the history of ethics and its current applications, it is evident that those working in this field primarily focus on moral dichotomies such as good-bad, right-wrong, and fair-unfair. This situation shows that ethical principles not only govern individual behavior but also serve the function of investigating the source of moral attitudes deemed necessary for the construction of social order (Gül & Gökçe, 2008, p. 278). Therefore, ethics can be defined as a way of thinking that enables individuals and institutions to make value-based distinctions in their decision-making processes (Agbim, Ayatse & Oriarewo, 2013, p. 79).

If organizational managers expect high productivity, job satisfaction, and loyalty from their employees, they must understand the importance of ethical behavior. In this regard, adhering to ethical principles increases employee loyalty, performance, and satisfaction, making the organization more attractive to both customers and employees and providing a competitive advantage. The prerequisite for encouraging ethical behavior is that information about fundamental ethical principles and the factors influencing such behavior is shared openly and accessibly with all managers and employees (Strazovska & Sulikova, 2019, pp. 335-336).

In order to create an ethical culture within the organization, managers have great duties. These duties include serving as an ethical role model for employees,

establishing corporate ethical rules to clearly define expectations, organizing training programs to raise ethical awareness throughout the organization, determining the level of compliance with rules by encouraging ethical behavior and warning against unethical attitudes, and developing protective mechanisms where employees can share their ethical concerns and confidently report ethical violations (Sivakci, 2016, p. 45).

Unethical behaviors are an expression of a disease that needs to be treated in organizations. However, organizations acting alone on the issue cannot create a solution (Gül, 2006, pp. 68-69). If there is no effective communication between the employees, management and the organization, it is difficult to prevent unethical practices and therefore it is not successful in revealing ethical violations and unethical behaviors (Tonus & Oruç, 2012, pp. 154-155). In an organizational context, unethical behavior is defined as actions that violate moral principles or ethical standards and often harm individuals, groups, or the organization itself. Such behavior can take many forms and can be exhibited by anyone in the organization, including both employees and managers (Ayal & Kahveci, 2023, p. 273).

Identifying unethical behavior that occurs or is likely to occur in organizations is critical to the effective implementation of the management ethics process. Such behaviors can be observed in the relationships between employees and the organization, as well as in the organization's relationships with customers, suppliers, competitors, shareholders, the government, society, and the natural environment (Tepe Küçükoğlu, 2012, p. 183). The behaviors of organizational members are not only a reflection of environmental interactions but also of personal characteristics. Unethical attitudes such as aggression, violence, avoidance of responsibility, gossip, interference in private life, complaining, lying, selfishness, jealousy, exclusion, and flattery exhibited by managers and employees negatively affect the organizational climate (Kiral & Karaman Kepenekci, 2021, p. 21).

In universities, ethical violations are serious problems that threaten the reliability of academic activities and the healthy development of organizational culture. These violations reflect not only a lack of individual responsibility but also the inadequacy of institutional control mechanisms. Academic ethical violations are defined in the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Guidelines (Council of Higher Education, 2015, p.2-3):

- *Plagiarism*: Using someone else's ideas or work without citing the source. Quoting without citing the source, etc.
- *Falsification*: Producing false data or distorting results. Publishing the results of an experiment that was never conducted, etc.
- *Duplication*: Publishing the same work in multiple places. Presenting a previously published article as new, etc.
- *Unfair authorship*: Adding individuals who did not contribute to the work as authors. Listing an academic who did not contribute to the article as an author, etc.
- *Ethics committee violation*: Conducting research without obtaining ethics committee approval. Not obtaining ethical approval for studies involving human subjects, etc.
- *Publishing in predatory journals*: Publishing in journals that do not meet scientific standards. Publishing articles in journals that do not have a peer review process and charge fees for publication, etc.

Organizational Sycophancy

The word "sycophant" comes from the Classical Greek word "sykophantia" and entered English in the 16th century with the meaning 'informer'; over time, it has acquired meanings such as "flatterer, sycophant, parasite." Sycophancy refers to the practice of exhibiting excessively obsequious and flattering behavior toward someone in order to gain personal advantage. Employees who engage in such behavior often display exaggerated respect toward managers, believing it will grant them an advantage within the organization. Sycophantic individuals are typically characterized by traits such as obedience, subservience, spinelessness, and sycophancy (Poonam & Chahal, 2019, pp. 118-119).

In general, people with high economic power or authority are more exposed to sycophancy. In organizations, managers can reduce sycophancy by basing their decisions on merit rather than personal preferences and by working with employees who are confident, competent, honest, and sincere. In Türkiye, sycophancy has become a significant problem in the last quarter century; it has been observed that inadequate employees are promoted to higher positions in this way (Kiral & Dilmaç, 2021, p. 107). Opportunism, power inequalities, income polarization, and the re-

legitimization of traditional notions of obedience form the economic, social, and political basis of the culture of sycophancy. Although this transformation has become particularly evident in the public sector, it is not unique to Türkiye (Özbilgin, Küçükaltan & Açar, 2019, p. 2831). Sycophancy reflects the desire to gain status by getting close to authority, so it is often preferred by individuals who seek power and are dependent on authority (Taş, 2023, p. 89).

Organizational sycophancy refers to the sycophantic behavior exhibited by employees to achieve their goals within the organization. This behavior is no different from traditional sycophancy; however, it is more pronounced in an organizational context and is directed toward strategic goals (Business NLP Academy, 2019, p. 1). Organizational sycophancy is examined in two dimensions: manager-focused and coworker-focused. In both cases, the main goal is to gain the trust of managers or coworkers and make them like oneself in order to achieve personal gain (Konay & Kırıl, 2023, p. 300). Being popular within an organization not only makes individuals feel better psychologically, but can also positively influence the views of upper management. This situation can provide individuals with material gains as well as intangible benefits such as access to social opportunities, acceptance, and respect (Gülcemal, 2020, p. 47).

Organizational sycophancy can lead to a decline in the quality of education, weakening of communication between employees, and a decrease in the efficiency of the academic environment (Özbilgin, Küçükaltan & Açar, 2019, p. 2832). Ignoring such behaviors and rewarding sycophantic employees, especially in performance evaluation processes, can create unrest, anger, and a tendency toward silent resignation among other employees. This situation can reduce employee performance, cause them to question their contribution to the job and the organization, and lead them to stop working efficiently by viewing their work as meaningless and worthless (Taş, 2023, p. 92).

Sycophancy undermines honesty, one of the fundamental principles of organizations; it disrupts a fair working environment and shakes employees' trust in the organization (Esmer & Yüksel, 2019, p. 899). Such behaviors reduce workplace productivity, create tension among employees, and prevent the development of a merit-based management approach. Although it may seem to encourage positive communication at first, the spread of sycophancy creates a negative working atmosphere in the long run (Ayal & Kahveci, 2023, p. 275).

The existing literature reveals that the phenomenon of organizational sycophancy has been examined in different sectors and contexts, but it also shows that comprehensive and comparative analyses of this behavior are still limited. Ferris et al. (2007) examined the effects of excessive conformity behavior toward managers in the private sector on individuals' career development, revealing how sycophancy is related to the pursuit of individual benefits. Özkalp and Kirel (2010) evaluated the effects of sycophantic behavior in public bureaucracy on organizational commitment and decision-making processes, demonstrating how this behavior can weaken decision quality in public administration. Kartolo and Kwantes (2019) have stated that organizational culture shapes employees' perceptions of organizational discrimination and that individuals' attitudes and beliefs in a social context are carried over into the workplace. They suggest that in organizations where cultural norms based on individual security needs prevail, behaviors such as organizational discrimination and sycophancy may be more prevalent. Chong (2022) states that organizational justice has a significant effect on employee commitment, and that in environments where the perception of justice is weak, employees develop different strategies. One of these strategies is to engage in sycophantic behavior in order to establish good relationships with managers and protect themselves from possible negativity. Ayal and Kahveci (2023) examined the relationship between organizational sycophancy and favoritism through teacher perceptions in the education sector, revealing how these two unethical behaviors can reinforce each other. The common point of these studies is that sycophancy behavior is considered an unethical strategy that negatively affects the functioning of organizational structures. However, the gaps in the literature are also noteworthy. In this context, Esmer and Yüksel (2019) focus on the historical origins and cultural context of sycophancy, discussing how this behavior has evolved from the Ottoman Empire to the present day and how it has become intertwined with organizational cultures. This historical perspective shows that sycophancy is not only an individual but also a systemic problem.

Sycophancy in Universities

Universities are institutions that aim to serve society and contribute to the development of younger generations by bringing together different disciplines and perspectives. In today's information age, the primary function of universities is to produce knowledge. It is of great importance that this knowledge is accurate, impartial, and reliable, and that it is produced in a

manner appropriate to the needs of the age. For this reason, universities must adhere to ethical principles in the knowledge production process.

Academics, administrators, and other staff members must perform their duties within the framework of ethical rules. Ethical principles are fundamental rules that regulate social life, and failure to comply with these rules can lead to various problems. In this context, it is critically important for academics to fulfill their scientific and social responsibilities in accordance with ethical principles for the reliability of scientific studies and the health of the academic environment (Demir, 2023, pp. 404–411).

Universities are institutions based on scientific and human values. Scientific values such as valuing knowledge and striving to produce knowledge, and human values such as respecting students and valuing their personalities are at the forefront of university culture. In addition, universities, which undertake the tasks of education, research, and community service, are expected to adhere to ethical values such as honesty, accuracy, and trust (Erdem, 2003, p. 59). However, research shows that behavior contrary to ethical principles is increasing in universities. One of these negative behaviors is sycophancy.

According to Özbilgin, Küçükaltan, and Açar (2019), there are three types of sycophancy in academic institutions: individual, institutional, and environmental. Sycophancy, which is often seen at the individual level, becomes widespread and institutionalized over time. In this process, behaviors that begin at the micro level become systematic at the macro level. Institutionalized sycophancy is presented to new academics as a legitimate culture, and expectations at the top shape individuals' behavior.

Gülcemal (2020) stated that there are five reasons for sycophantic behavior in academic organizations: academic, economic, personal, social and institutional. Academic reasons are manifested in issues such as tenure expectation, administrative task expectation, advancement, thesis and publication. Economic reasons include academic incentives, exam task fees, course fees, travel fees, project fees, revolving funds, congress support and earning income outside the university. Personal reasons include personality traits, protecting or consolidating one's current position, achieving status, psychological satisfaction, ambition, desire to stand out, desire to be close to power, academic incompetence and comfort. Social reasons include cultural codes, providing job opportunities for relatives and looking good to a

group. Institutional reasons are the existing order and disregard for the principle of merit.

Sycophancy can cause serious ethical problems in merit-based institutions such as universities. Sycophancy can render unethical behavior invisible. This is because sycophants suppress critical thinking by behaving in ways that please senior management. This situation paves the way for the restriction of academic freedom, the exclusion of critical voices, and institutional corruption. In particular, sycophantic relationships in academic promotion, task distribution, and decision-making processes undermine organizational justice and academic ethics. Ethical violations related to sycophancy in universities include the following (Gönülaçar, 2022, p.26-58):

- *Unqualified appointment:* Appointing someone based on personal connections rather than knowledge, experience, and academic achievement. For example, appointing someone who does not fully meet academic criteria as department chair.
- *Unfair academic promotion:* Promoting someone based on personal loyalty rather than scientific production. For example, promoting someone who is inadequate in terms of publications to the rank of professor.
- *Favoritism in advisory relationships:* Students or researchers gaining advantages through sycophancy. Obtaining privileges in thesis defense by constantly praising one's advisor, etc.
- *Influence in decision-making mechanisms:* Making decisions based on personal loyalty rather than scientific merit. Giving priority to flatterers in project or budget distribution, etc.
- *Inequity in representation on scientific committees:* Gaining representation rights through sycophancy rather than scientific merit. Selecting unqualified but influential flatterers for membership on ethics committees, etc.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of organizational sycophancy, which is an unethical behavior in universities. In this context, how academics define organizational sycophancy, how they react to sycophantic behavior, what they think about the consequences of sycophancy, and how sycophantic behavior affects their job satisfaction and performance

were investigated. Qualitative research method was used in the study. Qualitative research is a form of knowledge generation that is shaped by the researcher's own efforts and developed to explore the basis and structure of social systems. The aim of this method is to reveal the closed and hidden content of the discourse instead of the content that is easily determined and identified in the first stage (Özdemir, 2010, p. 326; Bilgin, 2014, p. 1). In this context, interview was preferred as the data collection technique in the study and the data were collected with a semi-structured interview form prepared based on the relevant literature. The researches of Gülcemal (2020) and Ayal (2022) were utilized in the development of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of a total of 15 questions, including 7 questions about the demographic characteristics of academics such as age, gender, marital status, title, union membership, administrative duty, professional experience, and 8 questions to determine the perception of sycophancy of academics such as the characteristics of sycophancy behaviors, the effects of sycophancy behaviors on job performance and job satisfaction, the causes and consequences of sycophancy (Table 1).

it can be said that this number is sufficient in terms of sample size and data saturation for in-depth interviews and represents the universe (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022, p. 1; Başkale, 2016, p. 27). The main reason for choosing the population is the assumption that sycophantic behaviors are encountered in universities. Information regarding appointment processes was compiled based on participants' statements and supported by institutional guidelines. This diversity enhances the contextual validity of the study and provides a multidimensional perspective on academic appointment processes. During the interview process, information about the research was given and academics were asked to convey their perceptions about sycophancy. The research was conducted in March 2025 and each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Content analysis technique was used to analyze the data. The responses given by the academics were processed in depth within the scope of the themes determined in accordance with the content analysis technique and the perception of organizational sycophancy in universities was tried to be determined (Table 2) (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 89).

In order to conduct this study, approval was obtained

Table 1. Organizational sycophancy scale questions

Order No	Questions
1	What do you understand by the term 'sycophancy' when you think about your communication with other employees and administrators at your university?
2	What are the general characteristics of behaviors that you can call sycophancy?
3	Why do you think people sycophantic?
4	Which behaviors do you perceive as sycophancy at your university?
5	How do you react when you encounter so-called sycophantic behavior at your university?
6	What do you think are the effects of so-called sycophantic behaviors on job performance and job satisfaction?
7	What would you say about managers' reactions to sycophants?
8	What are your thoughts on the consequences of sycophancy?

The study population consists of academics working as professors, associate professors, doctors, and lecturers in the fields of health, engineering, social sciences, humanities, and administrative sciences at state and foundation universities in the Marmara, Black Sea, Aegean, Central Anatolia, and Mediterranean regions of Türkiye. The sample of the study consists of 36 individuals who agreed to participate in the research and were selected using convenience sampling. According to the literature,

from "Ondokuz Mayıs University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee" (Decision Date: February 28, 2025, Decision No: 2025-16). Ethical principles were fully adhered to during the research process. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. The consent process was conducted by providing participants with clear information about the purpose, duration, data usage, and confidentiality principles of the study. Participant

Table 2. Themes of analysis

Order No	Theme Name
Theme 1	Meaning of sycophancy
Theme 2	Characteristics of sycophantic behavior
Theme 3	Causes of sycophancy
Theme 4	Types of sycophantic behavior
Theme 5	Academics' reactions to sycophancy
Theme 6	Effect of sycophancy on job performance and job satisfaction
Theme 7	Managers' reactions to sycophancy
Theme 8	Consequences of sycophancy

information was anonymized, and personal data was not shared with third parties in any way. The data was used solely for research purposes. Interviews were recorded in audio/written format, and these recordings were securely stored in encrypted digital environments. All data was protected in a manner accessible only to researchers and processed in accordance with ethical guidelines.

In this study, the phenomenon of sycophancy is examined solely in the context of universities. Assessments of how this concept emerges in different organizational structures, such as public institutions and the private sector, are excluded from the scope of this study. This may limit the generalizability of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, results on demographic characteristics of academics and content analysis results are presented.

Demographic Results

The results regarding the demographic characteristics of the 36 academicians whose data were collected through the interview technique within the scope of the research are given in Table 3.

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that 41.7% of the participants are female, 58.3% are male, 80.6% are married and 19.4% are single. This result shows that more male academics and married academics participated

Table 3. Demographic results

Variables		Frequency	%
Gender	Man	15	41.7
	Woman	21	58.3
Marital Status	Married	29	80.6
	Single	7	19.4
Age	30-49	9	25
	40-49	22	61.1
	50-59	5	13.9
Title	Prof. Dr.	4	11.1
	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	13	36.1
	Asst. Prof. Dr.	7	19.5
	Lec. Dr.	3	8.3
	Lec	9	25
Professional Experience (Years)	1-5	6	16.7
	6-10	4	11.1
	11-15	15	41.6
	16-20	4	11.1
	21-25	3	8.3
	25+	4	11.1
Administrative Duty	Yes	14	38.9
	No	22	61.1
Union Membership	Yes	16	44.4
	No	20	55.6

Table 4. Meaning of sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes	
Meaning of sycophancy	Positive	Effort to look good, showing more attention than necessary, exaggerated praise, trying to be close to the management.
	Negative	Flattery, favoritism, unrealistic admiration, behaving as the managers want for self-interest, ignoring misbehavior, not expressing personal opinions, false sincerity, appearing different from what you are.

in the study. It is also understood that 61.1% of the participants are between the ages of 40-49, 36.1% have the title of Assoc. Prof. Dr., 41.6% have professional experience in the range of 11-15 years, 61.1% do not have administrative duties, and 55.6% are not union members. These results show that the sample is suitable in terms of scientific and objective data on sycophancy. The research sample represents mid-career academics in terms of age, academic title, and professional experience, which allows for an objective examination of the phenomenon of sycophancy in an institutional context. The fact that the majority of participants are male, married, and not in administrative positions contributes to a more balanced and professional assessment of power dynamics in organizational relationships.

managers, in line with the individual goals of employees in the workplace."

P11: "Sycophancy is called an effort to show oneself and to be liked and it is a behavior that should not be in professional communication."

P20: "It is the insincere behavior of subordinates towards their superiors and the unrealistic statements they say."

P33: "A sycophant is a person who can do anything to gain favor with the manager. Sycophancy is the situation where managers and employees prioritize their own interests instead of corrupt relationships and the requirements of the job." It is seen that they gave answers as follows.

Table 5. Characteristics of sycophantic behavior

Theme Name	Codes	
Characteristics of sycophantic behavior	Opportunistic-manipulative	Supporting every behavior and discourse without objection, lying, hypocrisy, making oneself appear different from oneself, unnecessary and exaggerated praise, acting like a chameleon, hiding true thoughts, glorifying managers, exaggerated obedience, behaving as the manager wants.
	Personal weaknesses-toxic traits	Being too sincere, busybody, inconsistency, linguistic rudeness, cowardice, lack of self-confidence, mistreating subordinates.

Content Analysis Results

The codes that form the analysis themes determined based on the participants' responses and scale questions, excerpts from the participants' responses, and the evaluations made are presented below in order. Codes that appear at least 5 times have been added to the tables.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P3: "Sycophancy is the attitude and behavior of people in the work environment by prioritizing their interests."

P9: "It is a conscious effort to look cute, sometimes overdoing it, in order to influence others, especially

Based on the participants' responses, many positive and negative definitions of the concept of sycophancy can be made. For example, while an employee's efforts to impress or inspire admiration in their manager are positive, insincere behavior and unrealistic statements displayed by employees toward their managers, as well as unethical and artificial attitudes and behaviors displayed by employees in order to influence their managers to achieve their own interests, are negative. According to Esmem and Yüksel (2019), similar to these results, sycophancy is a situation in which an individual shows false respect and admiration for certain authorities, such as managers and politicians, in order to benefit themselves in an organization or work environment. This is positive for the individual but negative for the organization.

Table 6. Causes of sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes
Causes of sycophancy	Individual To secure oneself and one's job, to avoid responsibility, to be promoted quickly/easily, to obtain office and position, to do one's job freely and without supervision, to protect one's own interests in the political environment of the workplace, to benefit from organizational rewards, to escape from organizational punishments, to cover up shortcomings and failures, to achieve goals in an easy way, fear of losing one's job.
	Social To be constantly in the public eye, to be adopted (by others or the organization), to gain power and advantage, to give the appearance of working hard.

Table 7. Types of sycophantic behavior

Theme Name	Codes
Types of sycophantic behavior	Manager-Oriented Being closer and more sincere than they should be, buying gifts for managers, not being like oneself, undertaking tasks that are not one's duty, labeling and referring to managers, being of the view that management is always right, giving importance to obedience rather than merit.
	Colleague-Oriented Turning a blind eye to wrongdoing, ignoring injustices.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P4: "Being too sincere, supporting every behavior and discourse, praising, not criticizing and not objecting."

P12: "Not expressing the thought clearly, constantly trying to do something to stand out even if there is no responsibility, and approving and constantly praising all the behaviors of people in management."

P16: "The general characteristics of sycophantic behaviors are: insincerity, excessive praise, establishing intimacy for gain, avoiding criticism and constantly seeking approval."

P24: "Hiding one's true thoughts, acting different from one's true thoughts."

P36: "Hypocrisy, changing thoughts, fear, expectation, lack of self-confidence." It is seen that they gave answers as follows.

When the participants' answers are examined, it is seen that the characteristics of sycophantic behavior observed in organizations are opportunistic-manipulative and personal-toxic. For example, unquestioningly supporting every behavior and statement of managers is a opportunistic behavior, while being overly friendly in an inappropriate manner is a toxic behavior. In line with this result, Okutan (2005) states that the characteristics of sycophantic behavior are manipulative and deceptive, including being hypocritical, flattering, intrusive, scheming, and cunning.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P4: "To be comfortable in their jobs, to escape from responsibilities, to feel power behind them due to their insecurity, and to rise in their positions."

P8: "To get the positions they want, to do their jobs freely and without supervision, and not to disturb their comfort at work."

P19: "To gain benefits, to work less but appear to be doing more work, to gain status and authority in an easy way."

P28: "To facilitate their work, to gain benefits and to be accepted"

P35: "For self-interest, seat ambition, material, social and administrative opportunities."

When analyzing the participants' responses, it is evident that there are individual and social reasons for sycophancy. Individual reasons are shaped by the person's desire for self-protection, advancement, and psychological needs. Social reasons stem from the desire to be accepted, recognized, and influential within the organization. Similarly, Kırıl and Dilan Dilmaç (2021) stated that the reasons for sycophancy are "individual reasons" (laziness, getting one's job done, lack of self-confidence, desire for favoritism, fear, feeling powerful, ignoring one's mistakes, facilitating one's work, gaining benefits) and "social reasons" (status, acceptance).

Personal reasons may cause academics to behave opportunistically or strategically in order to secure their positions and maximize their personal interests. Social reasons, on the other hand, lead academics to develop behaviors that focus on image management, conformity, and relational advantages.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P7: *"Behaviors such as sycophancy, displaying fake behavior, not being like oneself can be perceived as sycophancy in my opinion."*

Table 8. Academics' reactions to sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes
Academics' reactions to sycophancy	Positive Stating that it is wrong and not in line with business ethics, warning, disapproving, telling to your face, expressing discomfort, complaining.
	Negative Not taking seriously, ignoring, cutting off communication, remaining silent, smiling, condemning, being disappointed, snapping, avoiding, being irritated, not responding, not reacting in any way.
	Neutral Surprised, distancing, pretending to be normal.

P10: *"Constantly establishing relations with superiors, turning a blind eye to wrongdoing, undertaking tasks that are not your duty in order to gain favor, protecting superiors without distinguishing between the right and the wrong."*

P16: *"Behaviors such as constantly praising managers at the workplace, giving unquestioning approval to every decision, ignoring injustices and showing excessive compliance just to gain benefits can be perceived as sycophancy."*

P22: *"Giving labels and references."*

P33: *"Approving every decision of superiors without looking at right and wrong, supporting them even though they know it is wrong, being unfair in promotion and advancement, not giving importance to merit."*

When the participants' responses are examined, it is seen that there are two types of sycophancy: manager-oriented and colleague-oriented. Manager-oriented behaviors reflect the compliant and often artificial attitudes that individuals display in order to obtain promotion, protection, or privileges. Such behaviors are characterized by unquestioning loyalty to authority and the suppression of personal identity. Colleague-oriented behaviors, on the other hand, manifest themselves in the form of remaining silent in the face of injustices

or turning a blind eye to wrongdoing. This situation indicates that the individual has pushed their ethical responsibilities to the background in order to avoid disrupting organizational balance. According to Esmem and Yüksel (2019), sycophants are individuals who agree with everything their managers/colleagues say in order to further their own interests. They are individuals who can say that winter is hot, summer is cold, white is black, and black is white.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P8: *"First of all, I keep my distance from people to prevent such behavior from occurring, and in case of possible sycophancy, I warn them not to engage in such behavior again."*

P11: *"I state that this is wrong and not in line with business ethics. If the sycophantic behavior continues, I show my reaction by not dealing with that person much."*

P16: *"When I encounter sycophancy, I usually distance myself from this behavior and try to evaluate the situation objectively. When necessary, I do not hesitate to express the situation in a constructive way."*

P25: *"I state that I feel uncomfortable with the attitude and then limit my relationship."*

P36: *"I stay away from those people. In our one-on-one conversations, I tell them what they did was wrong."*

When the participants' responses were examined, it was observed that academics reacted in three ways to sycophantic behavior: positive (constructive), negative (destructive/passive), and neutral (ambiguous/context-dependent). Positive reactions indicate that the individual has a conscious, open, and corrective stance against unethical behavior. These attitudes strengthen the organizational ethical culture. Negative reactions indicate

Table 9. Effects of sycophancy on job performance and job satisfaction

Theme Name	Codes
Effects of sycophancy on job performance and job satisfaction	Individual-level Decrease in work performance, decrease in motivation and job satisfaction, unwillingness to work, lack of enjoyment, not taking responsibility, low morale, decrease in perception of organizational justice, decrease in perception of organizational trust, decrease in sense of belonging, disengagement from profession/work.
	Organizational-level Restless working environment, decrease in productivity and quality, deterioration of social relations, disruption of works

that the individual has a conscious, open, and corrective stance against unethical behavior. These attitudes strengthen the organizational ethical culture. Negative reactions indicate that the individual has a conscious, open, and corrective stance against unethical behavior. These Positive responses indicate that the individual has taken a conscious, open, and corrective stance against unethical behavior. These strengthen the organizational ethical culture. Negative responses are characterized by suppression, ignoring, or emotional detachment. These undermine both the individual's ethical sensitivity and organizational trust. Neutral responses are shaped by context. In some cases, they create strategic distance, while in others, they can mean passive acceptance or indifference. According to Kiral and Dilan Dilmaç (2021), sycophancy, which is seen as a way for individuals to obtain a position or keep their jobs, is considered an unacceptable behavior by society, but it can be said that individuals who are promoted through this behavior remain silent/neutral depending on the circumstances they are in.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P3: "Motivation and job satisfaction decrease, work becomes reluctant and no one enjoys their work. Therefore, performance also decreases."

P7: "I think it is effective in the promotion of the person who flatters, but the job performance and satisfaction of others decreases because they think that they are wasting their time and working for nothing."

P18: "When the employee who thinks that their work will progress more easily receives a positive approach from their manager, they will continue to maintain this behavior. This situation can be a source of motivation for him/her. It can increase performance and satisfaction."

P28: "While those who flatter are happy and promoted in business life, the job satisfaction and performance of other employees decrease in the face of this situation."

P36: "It disrupts relations between employees. It destroys inner peace. It causes working and deserving people to get disenchanted with their profession. Since undeserving people become managers, things do not progress correctly. It sets a bad example and causes sycophancy to spread."

When participants' responses are examined, it can be predicted that sycophantic behavior may affect job performance and job satisfaction at both the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, declines in psychological and professional areas such as motivation, belonging, responsibility, and job satisfaction lead to alienation from work and loss of performance. At the organizational level, the deterioration of social relationships, the disruption of the work environment, and the decline in overall productivity directly affect organizational functioning. In this context, Özbilgin, Küçükaltan, and Açar (2019) emphasize that sycophancy causes psychological damage in organizations, negatively affecting performance and job satisfaction, and that it has organizational and environmental effects as an element that erodes meritocracy. On the other

Table 10. Managers' reactions to sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes
Managers' reactions to sycophancy	Positive Enjoying the behavior, standing by (in a supportive sense), supporting, protecting, paving the way for, tolerating, rewarding, giving authority, giving recognition, sympathizing, being satisfied, being happy, being fair, and not discriminating.
	Negative Disliking, not welcoming, being an obstacle, distancing, not allowing, hating, warning (in a critical or punitive sense), not reacting (as passive neglect), keeping silent (as avoidance or complicity), and standing by (in a passive or indifferent manner).

Table 11. Consequences of sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes
Consequences of sycophancy	Individual-level Dissatisfaction, organizational exclusion, organizational loneliness, insecurity, low motivation, low performance, disrepute.
	Organizational-level Organizational injustice, organizational failure, organizational conflict, inefficiency, poor quality, unhealthy relationships, unrest, meritlessness, negative organizational culture, corruption.
	Managerial-level Managerial failure and incapacity.

hand, participants' responses indicated that sycophancy may have a positive effect on job performance and job satisfaction for those who engage in flattering behavior, but may have a negative effect on other employees.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P1: "It may vary depending on the characteristics of the managers. Some of them like it very much and can keep those who behave in this way with them all the time. So the situation can change according to individual differences. If it is a behavior that should not be for some managers, they may not keep such people close to them."

P6: "It varies from manager to manager, while managers who continue their existence with sycophants are satisfied with this situation, managers who have merit and attach importance to merit in other employees will be uncomfortable with sycophants."

P16: "Managers' reactions to sycophants may vary; some may notice sycophancy and keep their distance, while others may not notice such behaviors and reward them."

P20: "Every manager has different styles and reactions. Some like it and some hate it."

P32: "They act in a supportive way."

According to the participants' responses, managers' reactions to sycophancy vary (positively or negatively) from manager to manager. Some managers, especially those who do not value merit, respond positively to this situation by welcoming and supporting sycophants, giving them positions and rewarding them. Some managers, on the other hand, are uncomfortable with this situation and respond negatively by distancing themselves from sycophants, not allowing such behavior, and trying to be fair. In parallel with this result, according to Gülcemal (2020), the reactions of managers to sycophancy are rejection, approval and unawareness. Rejecting reactions are warning, scolding, distancing, not including in decision-making mechanism, not

taking seriously and blocking. Approving reactions are pleasing, making concessions for the functioning of the organization and turning a blind eye. Unawareness is not being aware of the sycophantic behavior while in a managerial position. These reactions clearly reveal whether the attitude of individuals or organizations towards a behavior is supportive or obstructive. Negative (rejection) reactions strengthen relationships and increase psychological security, while positive reactions (acceptance) can lead to exclusion, conflict, and loss of motivation.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P4: "It causes injustice in the workplace, conflicts may occur between employees, productivity decreases, and as a result, success and quality decrease."

P13: "An unfair working environment, a management style without merit, and dissatisfaction may result."

P16: "Sycophancy leads to loss of trust in the workplace, conflicts within the team and a sense of injustice. In the long run, it decreases work performance, negatively affects employee motivation and can lead to a negative culture in the workplace."

P27: "Covering up the facts, a virtual state of well-being postpones the inevitable."

P36: "Managers cannot see their mistakes, after a while managers believe that they are perfect. They become unable to take criticism. As sycophants occupy positions, the quality of work decreases rapidly. Efficiency cannot be achieved."

Based on the participants' responses, it can be said that sycophancy has many negative consequences at the individual, organizational, and management levels. At the individual level, outcomes such as injustice, exclusion, and insecurity weaken employee motivation and performance, while insincere behavior and loneliness seriously erode organizational commitment. At the organizational level, structural

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational institutions, one of the most important institutions that ensure social integration, vary from basic education to higher education. Higher education institutions in Türkiye, where academic and vocational skills acquisition activities are carried out, carry out education and training activities with units such as faculties, colleges, conservatories and institutes within universities (Mengi, 2019, p. 150). It is important to carry out activities in an ethical working environment in these institutions, and it is seen that unethical behaviors have diversified and increased in universities in recent years. In this context, sycophancy, which is an unethical behavior in universities where the hierarchical structure is evident, emerges as an important issue in academic circles. In the university context, sycophancy can be defined as excessively positive behaviors exhibited by academic or administrative staff towards managers or people in higher positions. Research on how such behaviors are perceived and their effects in the academic environment is important for understanding the internal dynamics of universities. In this study, the characteristics, types, causes, effects, consequences of sycophantic behaviors in universities and the reactions of administrators and academics to such behaviors are examined.

Research results show that sycophancy leads to various negative consequences in the academic environment. It has been determined that sycophantic behaviors negatively affect academic performance and cooperation and damage the perception of organizational justice. This situation creates pressure on academic achievement and personal development and negatively affects organizational culture in universities in the long term. Akbay and Delibalta (2020) stated that factors such as academic procrastination, locus of control and perfectionism affect risk-taking behaviors in universities. In this context, the effects of sycophantic behaviors on academic risk-taking and achievement can be considered as an important factor shaping the academic culture in universities. Konay and Kırıl (2023) found that sycophancy behaviors did not vary according to demographic factors such as gender, age and marital status. This situation suggests that sycophancy is more of a reflection of an organizational culture, independent of individual characteristics. It can be said that the sycophantic behaviors exhibited by academics in universities towards administrators are directly related to organizational culture and work environment. Therefore, considering the impact of sycophantic behavior on academic achievement and organizational culture,

merit-based, transparent, and ethical regulations should be implemented within the organization. For example, when certain individuals in an academic institution obtain promotions or project support by excessively praising and conforming to managers, this both overshadows real success and reinforces the perception of injustice in the organizational culture. When such behavior becomes widespread, manipulation replaces competition among employees, and individual self-interest replaces cooperation. This undermines both academic productivity and institutional reputation.

Research results show that sycophantic behaviors are quite common in universities. In particular, factors such as academic appointment processes and benefiting from organizational rewards lead academics to sycophantic behavior. Eisenberger et al. (1986)'s result that the perception of organizational injustice can trigger sycophantic behaviors supports this situation. Oyal and Kahveci (2023) found a positive relationship between manager-oriented sycophancy and general favoritism. Sycophancy is not only about the behaviors of individuals towards managers, but also about how these behaviors are shaped within institutional structures. However, it can be said that some administrators reward sycophantic behaviors. In this context, higher education institutions and university administrators should consider how behavioral patterns such as internal sycophancy, incompetence, and injustice affect academic achievement and institutional culture. In academic appointment, promotion, and reward processes, criteria based not only on quantitative outputs but also on ethical stance, original contribution, and scientific responsibility should be adopted. For example, the quality, originality, and contribution to the academic community of an academic's publications should be integrated into the evaluation process, as well as the number of publications. It is believed that this will bring true merit to the forefront, replacing artificial achievements obtained through sycophancy.

In the study, many factors that lead to sycophantic behavior were identified. Among these, fast/easy promotion, gaining status and authority, gaining power and advantage can be counted. In addition, it is seen that sycophantic behaviors in universities are also related to social dynamics in the work environment. Bourdieu (1977) emphasized that social capital is a value that individuals obtain from their relationship networks. In this context, Özbilgin, Küçükaltan, and Açar (2019) stated that sycophancy can be an important strategy for individual career development in a university environment where

systematic and institutionalized sycophancy is not punished, is taken for granted, and has become a cultural necessity. In addition, Kiral and Dilan Dilmaç (2021) stated that individuals may use sycophancy as a tool or a way to gain benefits, gain a position, or maintain their position. However, systematic measures must be taken to combat sycophantic behavior in order to protect academic merit and strengthen institutional trust in universities. To this end, transparent evaluation criteria, ethical oversight mechanisms, and regulations that increase managerial accountability must be implemented.

Universities, both as an academic and a social structure, provide a suitable environment for the emergence of organizational sycophancy. Academics who want to climb the academic career ladder face factors such as access to limited resources, pressure to publish, and the need to prove themselves in a competitive environment. This situation may lead some individuals to engage in behaviors such as sycophancy, even if it may have undesirable consequences. At this point, as Confucius stated, it can be said that ruling by punishment and coercion will dull people's sense of honor and shame, and instead, people should be ruled by virtue and ethical rules so that they will have a sense of honor and shame and will behave correctly and avoid such behaviors. This situation can also be possible by creating an ethical climate in universities. Aydın (2016) stated that in order to create an ethical climate, university administrators should exhibit an ethical management approach at every stage of academic life. Esmer and Yüksel (2023), on the other hand, suggested ethical leadership (leadership that adopts ethical principles and values) as an important solution to transform the current climate in universities into an ethical climate and to ensure that employees engage in positive behaviors. Therefore, it is important for all university administrators, especially rectors, to pay attention to being ethical both in their private and professional lives. On the other hand, it is possible to say that sycophancy is a poison that affects the entire university organization. In this regard, it is observed that individuals who have made sycophancy a way of life in the university environment not only undermine their own ethical stance but also set a bad example for other employees by negatively affecting the organizational culture. The spread of such behavior erodes the merit system, artificializes academic competition, and leads to a chain of consequences such as injustice, distrust, and loss of motivation within the organization. Therefore, it is believed that the application of clear and deterrent sanctions based on ethical codes against such individuals will both create a mechanism to prevent sycophancy and

provide a normative framework that encourages ethical behavior within the organization.

As a result, it can be said that sycophancy in universities is a phenomenon intertwined with academic success, cooperation and organizational culture. Sycophantic behaviors, the attitudes of academics towards managers and the place of these attitudes in organizational structures is a subject that requires more research in academic circles, and it is thought that studies on sycophancy in universities provide important information for academic success and improvement of the work environment. In this context, future research should examine in depth the interaction between sycophantic behavior and academic leadership styles, as well as the effects of this interaction on the organizational ethical climate.

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Overcoming the Glass Ceiling Syndrome through Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence in OECD Countries

Elif SAVAŞKAN¹ 

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies on the invisible barriers affecting women's access to senior management positions within the framework of the glass ceiling syndrome in OECD countries. Sweden, Germany, South Korea, Canada, and Turkey were selected as case studies, each evaluated through in-depth analysis of the public sector, private sector, and the activity reports of relevant institutions. The study applies a comparative assessment based on gender equality indices, digitalization strategies, and artificial intelligence applications, focusing on the relationship between women's representation in digital leadership and the perception of the glass ceiling. The findings reveal that digitalization alone does not ensure gender equality; on the contrary, in countries where artificial intelligence technologies lack gender sensitivity, existing inequalities are likely to persist or deepen. While Sweden and Canada appear to have largely overcome the glass ceiling syndrome, the examples from South Korea and Turkey suggest that cultural and structural barriers continue to reinforce it. Ultimately, this study underscores the necessity of integrating gender-sensitive artificial intelligence technologies into institutional transformation efforts to overcome the glass ceiling in the digital age.

Keywords: Digitalization, Artificial Intelligence, Glass Ceiling Syndrome, Gender Equality, OECD Countries.

JEL Classification Codes: J16, O33, M14

Referencing Style: APA 7

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality has become one of the fundamental indicators in determining the political, economic, and cultural development levels of contemporary societies. In this regard, the underrepresentation of women in senior executive positions indicates the presence of a social issue referred to in the literature as the "glass ceiling syndrome." The glass ceiling is defined as the invisible but effective barriers that prevent women from reaching upper-level management positions. Although women possess equal qualifications to men in terms of merit, education, and experience, they face institutional or cultural barriers that limit their advancement. The concept of the glass ceiling first emerged in the mid-1980s in the United States. It was introduced in an article published by *The Wall Street Journal* and has since been widely adopted in the literature, becoming a subject of analysis in various disciplines such as organizational behavior, human resource management, and gender studies (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The "glass" nature of the term symbolizes the invisibility of the barrier, while the "ceiling" refers to the restriction of

women's advancement beyond a certain level within institutions. Institutional-level glass ceiling barriers may involve discrimination in recruitment, promotion, performance evaluation, and leadership development policies. These barriers, often described as discrimination, include lack of support for women in advancing to managerial roles, women's exclusion from decision-making processes, or lack of transparency in promotion procedures (Cotter et al., 2001). On the cultural level, gender roles, patriarchal norms, and beliefs that women should prioritize family responsibilities form additional layers of the glass ceiling. The traditional conceptualization of leadership and management as inherently "masculine" attributes leads to the exclusion of women from upper-level roles. According to Hofstede (2001), in societies with high masculinity scores, it is significantly more challenging for women to attain senior leadership positions. Furthermore, individual-level factors such as women's self-doubt, lack of confidence, and risk aversion contribute to the internalization of the syndrome. Social perceptions that portray ambitious women negatively also discourage them from actively pursuing leadership. As such, "internalized discrimination" and the

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“syndromization” of inequality highlight the psychological dimension of the glass ceiling (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Recent studies in OECD countries reveal that women remain significantly underrepresented in top-level leadership positions. For example, the OECD’s 2023 *Women in Public Life* report shows that the average proportion of women in CEO roles in member countries is below 12%. This suggests that despite improvements in education and employment rates, women still face challenges in ascending the organizational hierarchy. Moreover, institutional indicators such as the lack of female presence in decision-making processes, gender pay gaps, and inflexible working hours further demonstrate the persistence of the glass ceiling. In this context, the impact of digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies on women’s access to senior roles has increasingly become a subject of research. While digitalization creates opportunities for women through flexible working models, transparent performance metrics, and remote leadership options, it also creates new forms of digital glass ceilings, including gender-based biases and discriminatory practices. Therefore, technology is not eliminating the glass ceiling syndrome; on the contrary, it is reshaping and redefining it (Criado-Perez, 2019). The glass ceiling remains a powerful metaphor and an analytical tool that exposes the institutional manifestations of gender inequality. In many OECD countries, the barriers preventing women from attaining top leadership positions persist through both cultural norms and institutional structures. Although digitalization has the potential to transform these barriers, the realization of this potential depends on the development of gender-sensitive digital policies and the inclusive design of technological processes. According to OECD’s *Gender Data Portal* (2023), while women in OECD countries participate in the labor force at rates similar to men, they remain significantly underrepresented in senior management. The average parliamentary representation of women in these countries is around 32%, while their share in senior executive roles is only approximately 21% (OECD, 2023). However, these protective measures should be periodically reviewed to ensure that they do not unintentionally reinforce gender segregation or restrict women’s economic empowerment. Modern labour policies increasingly emphasize the need to balance protection with equality, focusing on removing outdated restrictions that no longer correspond to current occupational standards or technological progress (ILO, 2019). Adapting protective legislation to evolving workplace realities is essential for achieving genuine gender equality and fostering inclusive labour

markets where both women and men can fully realize their potential (ILO, 2022; Kabeer, 2020). Therefore, gender inequality not only limits economic development but also undermines democratic representation, social justice, and institutional efficiency (WEF, 2024). Addressing gender-based disparities is essential for the achievement of sustainable development goals in OECD countries. Digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies are creating profound changes in institutions, especially in decision-making, leadership, and human resources policies, thereby ushering in new management paradigms. These technologies enable faster, data-driven, and more effective decision-making through tools such as robotic process automation (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017). This transformation also reshapes traditional hierarchical structures, favoring more flexible, horizontal, and network-based governance models (Bughin et al., 2018). However, this digital transformation must also be assessed in terms of its social implications, particularly gender equality. While digitalization offers women advantages such as remote work and time-space flexibility, it also poses risks through biases, gender-based discrimination, and the underrepresentation of women in technology sectors (Criado-Perez, 2019). For instance, Amazon’s artificial intelligence recruitment tool was found to systematically eliminate female candidates for leadership roles (Dastin, 2018). The integration of artificial intelligence into management processes may therefore reproduce existing inequalities. Thus, the digital transformation in institutions must be designed with transparency, ethics, and inclusivity in mind (UNESCO, 2022). Despite the widespread influence of digital technologies on organizational structures, the effects of this transformation on women’s access to senior leadership remain underexplored. Particularly in OECD countries, although women exhibit high levels of education, professional competence, and labor force participation, the glass ceiling syndrome continues to restrict their advancement. Within this scope, the central research question of this study is defined as follows: *“Do digital transformation and artificial intelligence processes help eliminate the glass ceiling syndrome?”* Despite policy reforms, digital inclusion initiatives, and increasing numbers of female leaders, the persistence of gender inequality and the role of artificial intelligence in shaping this inequality in OECD countries points to a significant gap in the literature (EIGE, 2021). Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine the effects of digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies on the glass ceiling syndrome, particularly regarding

women's access to senior management roles in OECD countries. This study aims to address the following questions:

- How do digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies influence women's access to senior leadership roles in OECD countries?
- Through which barriers does the glass ceiling syndrome persist in these countries?
- Does digitalization have the potential to mitigate the glass ceiling syndrome?
- How can artificial intelligence technologies contribute to gender equality in human resource management policies?
- Where does Turkey stand among OECD countries in this process?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Glass Ceiling Syndrome

The glass ceiling syndrome has become a significant area of discussion in the field of management science, particularly since the 1980s. The concept was first introduced by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) in *The Wall Street Journal*. The term "glass ceiling" refers to the invisible yet effective barriers that prevent women from advancing beyond a certain level within hierarchical management structures (Oakley, 2000). Eagly and Carli (2007) argued that the path to upper-level leadership for women is not obstructed by a single obstacle but rather by a complex and multifaceted set of barriers, resembling a labyrinth. This perspective emphasizes that the glass ceiling is reinforced by both cultural and individual dimensions. Oakley (2000) emphasized that the glass ceiling is shaped by gender discrimination and uncertainties in government policies, as well as social networks and subjective evaluation criteria for women. Recent studies have gone beyond the metaphor of the glass ceiling, introducing concepts such as the "glass cliff" and "sticky floor," which highlight risks such as appointing women to precarious leadership roles where failure is more likely (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Maume, 2011). The glass ceiling syndrome not only affects women's career development but also has broader implications for productivity and economic sustainability. This issue persists even in highly developed countries like those in the OECD, where institutionalized gender equality policies have not fully translated into equal access to top management positions (OECD, 2023). This situation reveals that core principles of governance, such as equal

pay for equal work, merit-based promotion, and objective evaluation of leadership potential, do not function effectively in favor of women. The underrepresentation of women in executive roles cannot be solely explained by individual or cultural factors; it is also shaped by institutional gender policies and the impact of technological transformation (UN Women, 2023). Although digitalization and artificial intelligence-based technologies are expected to offer fairer opportunities to women in the workplace, these technologies often embed societal biases (Perez, 2019). The manifestation of the glass ceiling syndrome in OECD countries is reinforced by various institutional and cultural factors. For instance, in countries such as Germany, Switzerland, and Japan, women's labor force participation is relatively high, yet their representation in senior roles such as CEOs or board members remains low. As of 2024, the average proportion of women on corporate boards in OECD countries is approximately 29%, while only about 12% of CEOs are women (OECD, 2024). Consequently, one of the modern-day manifestations of the glass ceiling is referred to as the "digital glass ceiling," which describes the barriers women face in digitalization processes in terms of representation and access (EIGE, 2022). For example, women's employment rates and representation in senior management in the technology sector remain notably low. According to OECD data, women's employment rate in digital sectors is below 22% (OECD, 2023). This demonstrates that the opportunities offered by digitalization are not equally distributed across genders and that technological transformation itself may reinforce the glass ceiling effect. Recent research shows that the impact of digital transformation on women's access to senior leadership positions varies by country, sector, and institutional culture. For instance, in Northern European countries (Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), digitalization has led to an increase in women's representation in high-level public and private sector roles. In contrast, in countries like South Korea, Japan, and Turkey, digital transformation processes continue to be dominated by male-centered structures (WEF, 2024). Therefore, overcoming the glass ceiling through digital transformation requires the simultaneous implementation of technological, cultural, and administrative reforms. In conclusion, the glass ceiling syndrome persists in various forms in the digital age. Overcoming these invisible barriers requires both individual strategies and institutional transformation. While digitalization and artificial intelligence can offer methods to unlock women's leadership potential, institutions must implement these tools in a fair,

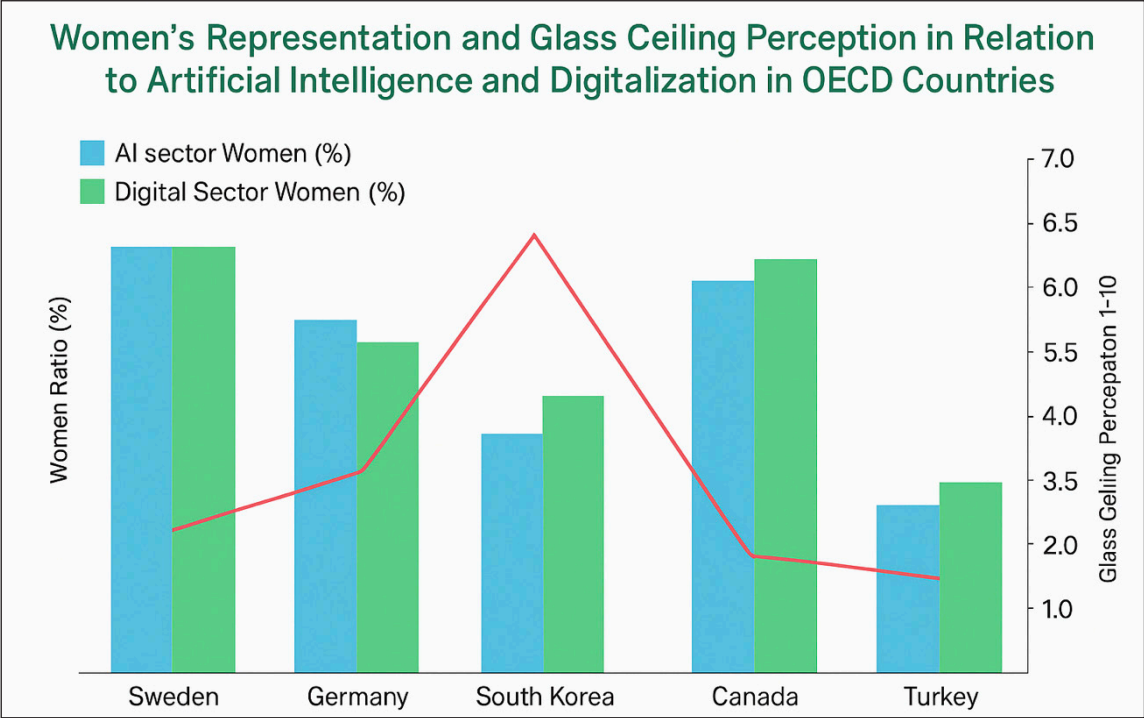


Figure 1. Women’s Representation and the Perception of the Glass Ceiling in the Context of Artificial Intelligence and Digitalization in OECD Countries

Source: (OECD, 2024; WIN & Barem, 2023; UN Women, 2023).

transparent, and inclusive manner. In this context, Figure 1 illustrates women’s representation and the perception of the glass ceiling in the context of artificial intelligence and digitalization in OECD countries. According to the data presented in Figure 1, the relationship between women’s representation in the artificial intelligence and digitalization sectors and the perception of the glass ceiling is examined on a country-by-country basis within OECD nations. In Sweden, the proportion of women in the field of artificial intelligence is 35 percent, and approximately 40 percent in the digital sector. Despite this high level of representation, the perceived glass ceiling is notably low (around 3.5), reflecting Sweden’s inclusive work environments and equality-oriented policies. In Germany, women make up 30 percent in artificial intelligence and 42 percent in the digital sector. Although representation is slightly lower than in Sweden, the glass ceiling perception is higher (around 5.0), suggesting that women may encounter invisible barriers in career advancement. South Korea lags behind in terms of women’s representation, with 25 percent in artificial intelligence and 33 percent in the digital sector, accompanied by a high perception of the glass ceiling (approximately 6.5). These figures indicate that patriarchal remnants in societal norms and institutional culture continue to hinder women’s access to top management roles.

Canada, on the other hand, stands out as one of the most successful OECD countries in female representation, with over 40 percent in artificial intelligence and 45 percent in the digital sector, and the lowest perceived glass ceiling (around 3.0). These statistics suggest that Canada’s governance structure supports gender equality through technological advancement. Turkey ranks lowest among OECD countries in terms of women’s representation (22 percent in artificial intelligence and 28 percent in the digital sector) while having the highest glass ceiling perception (around 6.8). This reveals that in Turkey, women face both visible and invisible obstacles in accessing decision-making and executive positions. In conclusion, countries with high levels of female representation tend to have a lower perception of the glass ceiling, indicating that gender equality policies are effective not only in employment but also in access to leadership roles.

Gender Equality in the Digitalization Process in OECD Countries

Economic growth, productivity, and transformations related to artificial intelligence during the digitalization process in OECD countries have produced varying outcomes regarding the understanding of gender roles. Particularly in the digital age, gender equality has become a growing topic of discussion, and gender

inequalities have been shown to evolve into more invisible barriers in digital environments. OECD countries are leveraging this aspect of digitalization to develop gender-based equality strategies (OECD, 2023a). As a result, noticeable differences have emerged both in terms of implementation and impact. In this context, women's active participation in institutions during the digitalization process is directly linked to issues such as acquiring digital skills, employment in the technology sector, and representation in senior management positions. According to OECD data, the average employment rate of women in the information and communication technologies sector is approximately 22%, and in many countries, this figure is below 15% (OECD, 2024). This severely restricts women's access to high-level positions in technology-based fields. In fact, women hold less than 10% of senior management positions in technology sectors (ILO, 2023). Therefore, gender role stereotypes continue to influence all areas of digitalization. For instance, the proportion of women pursuing education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields is significantly lower than that of men. According to UNESCO (2023), only 35% of undergraduate students in STEM programs in European universities are women. This disparity is also associated with gender-biased curriculum designs and teacher attitudes (Robinson et al., 2020). Furthermore, the lack of gender-sensitive digital competencies in education systems reduces women's motivation to pursue technology-oriented careers (De Palma & Benassi, 2022). Another critical dimension of digitalization involves the proliferation of flexible and remote working conditions. These models theoretically offer greater opportunities for women by enabling more accessible labor force participation. However, in practice, they may reinforce invisible barriers such as the glass ceiling syndrome, reduce professional visibility, and limit opportunities for career advancement (Chung & van der Horst, 2021). In countries like Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, the alignment of flexible work models with effective social policies has led to increased female employment. In contrast, in countries that fail to support these models with adequate social measures, new forms of gender inequality have emerged (Craig & Churchill, 2021). One of the most significant factors limiting the impact of digitalization on gender equality is gender-based differences in access to digital platforms. The European Commission (2022) highlights the funding challenges and lack of network access faced by women in the field of digital entrepreneurship. These barriers restrict women from becoming entrepreneurs and participating in the power structures of the digital economy. Consequently,

in most OECD countries, female entrepreneurs do not have equal access to technology investments compared to their male counterparts (Ferrant & Kolev, 2022). In conclusion, OECD countries have internalized gender equality in the digitalization process to varying degrees. These differences are clearly observable in both policy development and implementation. A holistic strategy is needed across OECD countries to ensure gender equality within digital transformation. Achieving inclusivity and equity in digitalization requires socio-cultural policies that treat gender equality not only as a goal but as a guiding principle of digital progress.

Artificial Intelligence-Supported Management Practices

The widespread adoption of artificial intelligence-supported management practices in both public and private sectors has raised new research questions regarding how gender equality can be ensured in decision-making processes. The use of artificial intelligence technologies based on historical data entails risks related to gender inequality. For example, artificial intelligence technologies in recruitment processes have found that female candidates score job applications lower (Raji & Buolamwini, 2019). In order for transparency and auditability in artificial intelligence-supported decision-making processes to align with gender equality principles, OECD countries must develop applicable policies. Countries such as Canada, Finland, and the Netherlands have pioneered advanced practices in this regard (Hösl et al., 2023). Therefore, the representation of women in the digital transformation process is a crucial factor for ensuring the effectiveness of digitalization in promoting gender equality. However, the concept of the "*glass ceiling*" the invisible barriers preventing women from reaching top-level management, also manifests itself in different forms in the context of digitalization (Eagly & Carli, 2007). According to the OECD (2023b) report, the average proportion of women on the boards of major technology companies in member states is approximately 28%. However, the proportion of women serving as CEOs or CTOs is as low as 11%. This disparity is linked to institutional culture, recruitment policies, and promotion criteria that do not incorporate gender equality principles (Häusermann & Walter, 2022). Artificial intelligence-supported management applications are creating a global transformation. Especially in OECD countries, the integration of such technologies into institutional decision-making, workflow processes, human resources, and strategic planning is rapidly increasing. As such, the expanding use of artificial

intelligence in management practices is fostering the development of a new managerial paradigm focused on efficiency, effectiveness, and flexibility across both public and private sectors (Jarrahi, 2018). Turkey is currently working to align itself with both OECD's guiding policies and the global wave of digitalization through artificial intelligence-supported management applications. In this regard, administrative transformations supported by artificial intelligence are being implemented among OECD countries. For example, Estonia has become a pioneering model in the use of artificial intelligence in public administration through its digital identity systems and algorithmic decision-support technologies. The country's "*Kratt AI*" strategy ensures the automation of public services while promoting transparency and citizen participation through data-driven platforms (Cave et al., 2021). Similarly, countries like Finland and Denmark utilize artificial intelligence in the public sector to build more equitable and sustainable decision-making processes in areas such as social welfare, education planning, and healthcare services. In the private sector, artificial intelligence technologies play a critical role in areas such as human resources management, customer relations, and corporate performance evaluation. In Germany, large-scale industrial companies employ artificial intelligence-supported optimization systems on production lines, while in France, customer behavior analytics are used in banking and insurance sectors for risk scoring models (Wirtz et al., 2020). Artificial intelligence-supported management practices are not designed to entirely replace the human factor but rather to enhance the foresight of managers and support strategic thinking with data. Therefore, their impact on institutional structures is particularly significant for Turkey. Although the use of artificial intelligence in the public sector in Turkey is still relatively limited, recent pioneering initiatives have accelerated this transformation. The "*National Artificial Intelligence Strategy*" published in 2021 aims to develop decision support systems in public administration and industrial policies while increasing institutional efficiency through artificial intelligence technologies (Republic of Turkey Digital Transformation Office, 2021). This strategy adopts an OECD-aligned framework in areas such as data governance, the development of digital human capital, and ethical artificial intelligence principles. In the Turkish private sector, particularly in tech startups and the e-commerce industry, artificial intelligence-based management models are becoming increasingly prevalent. Applications such as big data analytics, customer relationship management, stock optimization, and pricing strategies have

been integrated into the management processes of many institutions in Turkey (Yalçınkaya & Öztürk, 2022). Likewise, artificial intelligence-supported applications are being increasingly used in human resources management for candidate matching and employee performance evaluations. However, the full integration of artificial intelligence technologies into institutional culture remains at an early stage. Another key issue discussed across OECD countries is the ethical dimension of decisions made by artificial intelligence-supported management systems. In public institutions, the transparency, accountability, and impartiality of such systems are frequently debated. Countries like Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands have prepared guiding reports on the ethical use of artificial intelligence and have developed audit mechanisms for public sector projects (Jobin et al., 2019). In Turkey, similar efforts are being led by TÜBİTAK to establish an ethical framework. However, the current institutionalization of artificial intelligence auditing and ethical oversight remains limited (Bıçakcı et al., 2023). Artificial intelligence-supported management practices have provided significant advantages in crisis management and strategic uncertainty, especially in OECD countries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries used artificial intelligence-based forecasting tools to plan healthcare services and monitor risks in supply chains (Lai et al., 2021). Similarly, in Turkey, the "*Hayat Eve Sığar*" mobile application developed by the Ministry of Health functioned as an artificial intelligence-supported case tracking and guidance system. This experience marked a turning point in the development of data-based decision-making processes in Turkey. One of the key differences between Turkey and other OECD countries in artificial intelligence-supported management practices lies in the influence of data quality and institutional capacity on decision-making. In OECD countries, institutional environments that host these applications are more advanced in terms of data integrity, digital infrastructure, and experience, resulting in more inclusive outcomes (Bryson & Winfield, 2017). In contrast, issues such as regional disparities in data quality and the uneven spread of digitalization limit the effective use of artificial intelligence technologies in Turkey. In conclusion, artificial intelligence-supported management practices have become central to strategic decision-making processes in OECD countries. In Turkey, this transformation is accelerating with recent developments. Enhancing policy alignment with OECD standards, institutionalizing ethical and legal regulations, developing human resource capacities, and

advancing data governance will significantly improve organizational efficiency through artificial intelligence technologies. Therefore, the transition to artificial intelligence-supported management represents not only a technological breakthrough but also the restructuring of institutional culture, transparency, and strategic management processes.

METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this study is to examine how digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies in OECD countries influence the glass ceiling syndrome faced by women in accessing senior management positions. A case study method was adopted to investigate the role of digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies in overcoming the glass ceiling in these countries. The research was designed as a qualitative study aiming to reveal the practical applications and differences across OECD countries. In this context, five OECD countries—Sweden, Germany, South Korea, Canada, and Turkey—were selected as case examples to conduct a comparative analysis of how digitalization policies hinder women's access to top executive positions. The case study method, widely used in social sciences, provides in-depth analysis opportunities (Yin, 2018). It was chosen because each country's institutional, cultural, and technological structures differ, and these differences uniquely shape the relationship between digitalization and the glass ceiling syndrome. Each country was examined individually, and institutional reports from the public sector, private sector, and various organizations were analyzed (Stake, 2005). The selection of OECD countries was based on the following criteria:

- Level of digitalization: The extent of artificial intelligence and data-driven management practices (OECD, 2023)
- Gender equality index: Women's participation rates in decision-making processes (WEF, 2024)
- Examples of institutional transformation: Presence of public or private sector projects focused on female leadership
- Availability of institutional reports: Accessibility of documents on AI strategies and gender equality

Based on these criteria, the selected OECD countries provide a representative sample for understanding the impact of AI-supported management practices on the glass ceiling syndrome. Case examples from each country were analyzed based on three types of data:

- Institutional documents: Strategic reports, annual activity reports, and gender equality reports
- Secondary data: National and international indices, academic literature
- Media and activity reports: News coverage and annual/periodic reports related to institutions

Within this scope, data were analyzed using document analysis and content analysis techniques. NVivo software was employed to code key concepts such as "*glass ceiling*," "*artificial intelligence*," "*digital equality*," and "*leadership opportunities*," enabling the development of comparative themes. Furthermore, since only secondary data and open access sources were used, certain limitations exist. However, each of the selected OECD country cases was deepened with literature and supported by three distinct types of data. Additionally, the study does not require ethical committee approval, as it relies solely on open-source materials.

FINDINGS

The findings obtained within the scope of this study reveal that the impact of digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies on the glass ceiling syndrome in OECD countries varies significantly from one country to another. In countries such as Sweden and Canada, which integrate gender equality with digitalization policies, women's leadership in artificial intelligence and their representation in the digital sector are higher, and the glass ceiling syndrome is found to be weakened (Swedish Digitalisation Agency, 2022; Dubois & McKee, 2023). Germany, on the other hand, has initiated this process at the institutional level but has remained limited in terms of gender equality in digitalization (Heinrichs & Gärtner, 2023). In countries like South Korea and Turkey, although artificial intelligence-based human resource applications are well developed, technological and cultural barriers continue to affect women's access to top management positions (Kang, 2021; Yalçınkaya & Öztürk, 2022). The findings indicate that digitalization alone does not ensure gender equality; rather, it is essential that artificial intelligence technologies are designed and implemented with a gender equality perspective in mind. Accordingly, the findings related to the OECD countries examined in this study—Sweden, Germany, South Korea, Canada, and Turkey—are presented below.

Table 1. Sweden Case Analysis

Indicators	Value	Explanation
Women's Share in AI Leadership (%)	47	Increased women's access to leadership and reduced inequalities.
Female Employment in the Digital Sector (%)	45	Offers training and social support programs that actively encourage women's participation in the digital workforce.
Glass Ceiling Perception (1–10)	3.2	A structure where invisible barriers have been overcome socio-politically and a strong sense of equality among managers is observed.
Criterion	Evaluation	
Level of Digitalization	Highly digitalized; AI-supported applications are effectively implemented in public services.	
Gender Equality	The rate of women's participation in management exceeds 48%.	
Examples of Institutional Transformation	The <i>"Gender-Equal Digital Leadership"</i> program by Malmö Municipality is an exemplary public initiative.	
Policy Documents	The Swedish Digitalization Strategy and Gender Equality Plan are clear, up-to-date, and implementation-oriented.	

Sweden

Sweden is an OECD country that has successfully integrated gender equality into digitalization. Since 2018, the *"Gender-Equal Digital Leadership"* program implemented by the Malmö Municipality has increased women's participation in high-level decision-making processes within local digital governance (Swedish Digitalisation Agency, 2022). Within this program, women have been provided with *"digital leadership"* training, and AI-supported performance monitoring applications have been developed alongside preventive algorithms to counteract social biases (Lindholm & Sundström, 2023). In this context, Table 1 presents the Sweden Case Analysis. Table 1 above illustrates Sweden's digital transformation at the intersection of digitalization and gender equality. The 47% share of women in AI leadership positions indicates a significant reduction in gender inequality in management roles. Similarly, the 45% female employment rate in the digital sector demonstrates not only the promotion of equal opportunities but also the effectiveness of digital skills training and social support programs to increase women's participation in the technology workforce. Therefore, the perception of the glass ceiling demonstrates that invisible barriers have largely been overcome and a strong culture of equality has been established among management. This progress demonstrates the effective implementation of AI-enabled applications in public services and is closely linked to Sweden's high level of digitalization, where technological advancement is integrated with institutional equality. Furthermore, the City of Malmö's *"Gender Equal Digital Leadership"* initiative exemplifies inclusive leadership practices in the public sector. The Swedish Digitalization Strategy and Gender Equality Plan

are clear, up-to-date, and action-oriented, reinforcing the sustainability of institutional transformation. Overall, Table 1 highlights Sweden as an exemplary country in aligning digital transformation with gender equality policies and inclusive governance.

Germany

In Germany, Siemens AG launched an initiative during its Industry 4.0 transformation process to support the appointment of female engineers as project leaders while transitioning to AI-supported production technologies. Through this initiative, the internal policy titled *"Women in Tech Leadership"* aimed to ensure that gender equality is considered in AI-based recruitment processes (Heinrichs & Gärtner, 2023). In addition, the German Government's updated 2023 National Artificial Intelligence Strategy has adopted gender equality as a policy objective (BMWK, 2023). In this context, Table 2 presents the Germany Case Analysis. Table 2 above illustrates Germany's efforts to integrate gender equality into its technological policies during the Industry 4.0 transformation. Siemens AG's *"Women in Technology Leadership"* initiative is a notable corporate initiative aimed at strengthening the role of female engineers and leaders in the transition to AI-enabled manufacturing technologies. However, the 34% representation of women in AI leadership positions suggests that significant sectoral inequalities persist despite these private sector initiatives. The 38% female employment rate in the digital sector suggests that Industry 4.0 policies have begun to encourage women's participation, but their impact is not yet fully widespread. This limited progress can be attributed to the slow evolution of public regulations and the partial integration of gender equality into national strategies.

Table 2. Germany Case Analysis

Indicators	Value	Explanation
Women's Share in AI Leadership (%)	34	Although institutions like Siemens AG support the participation of female engineers and leaders in AI projects, overall sectoral inequality remains significant.
Female Employment in the Digital Sector (%)	38	While Industry 4.0 policies support women's participation, they are not yet widespread. Public regulations are progressing slowly.
Glass Ceiling Perception (1–10)	4.8	Traditional leadership norms and gendered professional networks within institutional structures continue to hinder women's advancement.
Criterion	Evaluation	
Level of Digitalization	Digitalization is at an advanced level within the scope of Industry 4.0; artificial intelligence applications are integrated into production processes.	
Gender Equality	Women's access to management positions is at approximately 36%.	
Examples of Institutional Transformation	Siemens AG's <i>"Women in Tech Leadership"</i> program is a significant example of transformation in the private sector.	
Policy Documents	The updated 2023 National Artificial Intelligence Strategy includes gender equality indirectly.	

The relatively high glass ceiling perception score suggests that traditional leadership norms and male-dominated professional networks continue to hinder women's advancement within corporate hierarchies. Thus, while Germany has demonstrated advanced digitalization, particularly through the integration of artificial intelligence into industrial production, this technological progress has not been fully matched by equivalent progress in gender equality. The 2023 National Artificial Intelligence Strategy lacks a comprehensive approach to gender equality. Thus, the German example represents a technologically advanced but socially unequal transformation in which digital advancement has outpaced the institutionalization of leadership that supports gender equality.

South Korea

In South Korea, Samsung's AI-powered human resources platform *"HR-AI"* aims to promote gender equality in candidate selection by filtering variables such as gender and age in recruitment processes. However, based on various critiques, it has been identified that the AI technologies used may carry biases within their training data, which can inadvertently reinforce the glass ceiling syndrome (Kang, 2021). This situation reveals that the use of AI technologies in digitalization remains institutionally limited in terms of addressing the glass ceiling syndrome. In this context, Table 3 below presents the South Korea Case Analysis. In South Korea, Samsung's AI-powered human resources platform, *"HR-AI"* aims to promote gender equality in candidate selection by

Table 3. South Korea Case Analysis

Indicators	Value	Explanation
Women's Share in AI Leadership (%)	22	Major tech companies like Samsung have developed AI-supported recruitment applications, but indirect gender bias has been detected in their algorithms.
Female Employment in the Digital Sector (%)	29	Female representation in the digital workforce in South Korea is low, and women are marginalized in technical leadership positions.
Glass Ceiling Perception (1–10)	6.7	Gender roles, hierarchical culture, and promotion practices within institutions continue to sustain invisible barriers for women.
Criterion	Evaluation	
Level of Digitalization	South Korea is among high-tech economies, and AI-supported human resources applications are widely used.	
Gender Equality	The proportion of women in managerial positions is below 20%. Traditional roles continue to limit equality policies.	
Examples of Institutional Transformation	Samsung's <i>"HR-AI"</i> system is a recruitment example but has been subject to bias-related criticisms.	
Policy Documents	The <i>"AI National Vision"</i> strategy document is primarily technology-focused and lacks a gender perspective.	

filtering variables such as gender and age in recruitment processes. However, various criticisms have identified that the AI technologies used may carry biases in training data, which could unintentionally reinforce the glass ceiling syndrome (Kang, 2021). This situation highlights the institutional limitations of the use of AI technologies in digitalization in addressing the glass ceiling syndrome. In this context, Table 3 below presents the South Korea Case Study. The information in Table 3 above highlights that despite South Korea being a highly digitalized and technology-driven economy, gender inequalities persist in the digital and AI sectors. Samsung, a leading technology company, is implementing AI-powered recruitment systems that increase efficiency and innovation in human resources processes. However, identifying gender bias in these applications presents new challenges for equality in the age of digital transformation. In this sense, the low representation of women (22% in AI leadership and 29% in the digital workforce) demonstrates the ongoing underrepresentation of women in technical and decision-making positions. Institutional hierarchies, deeply entrenched gender roles, and biased promotion practices continue to reinforce the glass ceiling syndrome. These findings demonstrate that despite South Korea's significant technological advancement, cultural and organizational barriers still prevent women from fully participating in the digital economy. Furthermore, despite South Korea being among the world's leading high-tech economies, its National Vision Strategy for Artificial Intelligence is largely technology-focused and places limited emphasis on gender equality. This demonstrates the gap between digital advancement and gender equality policies. In other words, technological advancement does not translate into gender equality. Therefore, the South Korean example highlights the need to integrate a gender-sensitive perspective into national

AI and digitalization strategies to achieve equitable and sustainable innovation.

Canada

In Canada, the Ontario Public Service (OPS) has established ethical oversight committees for artificial intelligence technologies to begin analyzing gender-related impacts. Through its *"Equity by Design"* program, OPS has developed an indicator system that monitors women's access to senior management positions during the digitalization process (Dubois & McKee, 2023). In the delivery of public services supported by artificial intelligence technologies, data related to gender inequality among female users is analyzed, and certain adjustments are made accordingly. In this context, Table 4 below presents the Canada Case Analysis. According to the information in Table 4 above, Ontario Public Services data demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality and digital transformation in the public sector. Women hold 41% of leadership positions in the artificial intelligence (AI) field. This reflects the effectiveness of the *"Equality by Design"* program in promoting women's participation in decision-making. This rate is significantly higher than international standards and indicates an inclusive corporate culture. Female employment in the digital sector is 42%, indicating a high representation rate. Both public and private sector initiatives create an inclusive environment for women in technical professions, providing equal opportunities. This representation rate highlights the effectiveness of Ontario's digital inclusion policies and programs. The perception of the glass ceiling indicates that barriers hindering women's career advancement have been significantly reduced. Ethics committees and transparent policies contribute to the reduction of structural and cultural barriers, further supporting gender equality in leadership. In this

Table 4. Canada Case Analysis

Indicators	Value	Explanation
Women's Share in AI Leadership (%)	41	The <i>"Equity by Design"</i> program implemented in the Ontario Public Service has supported women's participation in decision-making processes.
Female Employment in the Digital Sector (%)	42	The representation of women in digital professions is relatively high. Public and private sector programs offer equitable opportunities in these fields.
Glass Ceiling Perception (1–10)	3.9	Through ethical committees and transparent policies, barriers for women have been eliminated.
Criterion	Evaluation	
Level of Digitalization	AI systems have been institutionalized in digital public services.	
Gender Equality	The female leadership rate is 43%. Digital inclusion policies are strong.	
Examples of Institutional Transformation	The Ontario Public Service's <i>"Equity by Design"</i> policy is an exemplary public program.	
Policy Documents	The <i>"Pan-Canadian AI Strategy"</i> and the <i>"Women and Gender Equality Plan"</i> are transparent and gender-focused.	

sense, AI technologies are fully integrated into digital public services, reflecting a high level of digitalization. The 43% female leadership rate demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality in decision-making positions. Ontario's *"Equality by Design"* policy serves as a model for institutional transformation, demonstrating how targeted initiatives can advance both institutional effectiveness and social inclusion. Policy documents such as the *"Pan-Canadian Artificial Intelligence Strategy"* and the *"Women and Gender Equality Plan"* further strengthen equal participation by exemplifying transparency and gender-focused governance. Overall, Table 4 demonstrates that the Ontario public sector demonstrates a successful combination of technology adoption and gender-inclusive policies. The high female representation in leadership and digital roles and the perception of a low glass ceiling are indicators of an environment where barriers are minimized. This approach has been cited as a valuable model for other jurisdictions seeking to advance both digital transformation and gender equality.

Turkey

In Turkey, AI-supported leadership programs have been implemented in leading private sector institutions such as Koç Holding's *"KoçSistem"*. The initiative titled *"Women Leaders in Digital"* aims to enhance women employees' participation in promotion processes through performance indicators. However, AI-supported management practices of this kind have not yet been sufficiently institutionalized in the public sector in Turkey (Yalçinkaya & Öztürk, 2022). Consequently, the gender dimension is addressed only to a limited extent in Turkey's

National Artificial Intelligence Strategy published in 2021 (Digital Transformation Office of the Republic of Turkey, 2021). In this context, Table 5 below presents the Turkey Case Analysis. According to the information in Table 4 above, Ontario Public Services data demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality and digital transformation in the public sector. Women hold 41% of leadership positions in the artificial intelligence (AI) field. This reflects the effectiveness of the *"Equality by Design"* program in promoting women's participation in decision-making. This rate is significantly higher than international standards and indicates an inclusive corporate culture. Female employment in the digital sector is 42%, indicating a high representation rate. Both public and private sector initiatives create an inclusive environment for women in technical professions, providing equal opportunities. This representation rate highlights the effectiveness of Ontario's digital inclusion policies and programs. The perception of the glass ceiling indicates that barriers hindering women's career advancement have been significantly reduced. Ethics committees and transparent policies contribute to the reduction of structural and cultural barriers, further supporting gender equality in leadership. In this sense, AI technologies are fully integrated into digital public services, reflecting a high level of digitalization. The 43% female leadership rate demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality in decision-making positions. Ontario's *"Equality by Design"* policy serves as a model for institutional transformation, demonstrating how targeted initiatives can advance both institutional effectiveness and social inclusion. Policy documents such as the *"Pan-Canadian Artificial Intelligence Strategy"* and the *"Women and Gender Equality Plan"* further strengthen equal participation by exemplifying transparency

Table 5. Turkey Case Analysis

Indicators	Value	Explanation
Women's Share in AI Leadership (%)	19	Although KoçSistem has practices supporting female leadership, their prevalence and practical implementation remain limited.
Female Employment in the Digital Sector (%)	28	The proportion of women in digital employment is low, and public policies to increase women's representation in AI applications are insufficient.
Glass Ceiling Perception (1–10)	7.1	Institutional biases, invisible power relations, and gendered career evaluations hinder women's advancement to top executive levels.
Criterion	Evaluation	
Level of Digitalization	Digitalization strategies are developing, and AI applications are increasingly concentrated in the private sector.	
Gender Equality	The proportion of women in managerial positions is 17%. The perception of the glass ceiling is high.	
Examples of Institutional Transformation	KoçSistem's <i>"Women Leaders in Digital"</i> program is a significant initiative in the private sector.	
Policy Documents	The 2021 National Artificial Intelligence Strategy provides very limited attention to gender issues.	

and gender-focused governance. Overall, Table 4 demonstrates that the Ontario public sector demonstrates a successful combination of technology adoption and gender-inclusive policies. The high female representation in leadership and digital roles and the perception of a low glass ceiling are indicators of an environment where barriers are minimized. This approach has been cited as a valuable model for other jurisdictions seeking to advance both digital transformation and gender equality.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to associate the findings obtained from the case analyses of selected OECD countries; namely Sweden, Germany, South Korea, Canada, and Turkey with the glass ceiling syndrome. The findings indicate that the potential of digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies to break the glass ceiling is directly related to the level of technological advancement, institutional policies focusing on gender equality, and ethical governance dynamics. In this context, countries like Sweden and Canada demonstrate a more inclusive approach to digitalization with a clear focus on gender equality, while in South Korea and Turkey, technological progress has not eliminated gender inequalities. The Swedish case exemplifies a country that has structurally integrated gender equality into its digitalization policies. Initiatives such as Malmö Municipality's digital leadership program have enhanced women's participation in decision-making processes (Andersson & Wihlborg, 2021). However, the principle of equality should still be more robustly embedded in institutional decision-making processes using AI technologies to eliminate gender-based biases. The involvement of ethical committees composed of both technical experts and gender studies specialists is particularly crucial. In the German case, there has been limited progress in aligning industrial digital transformation with gender equality goals (Melin et al., 2022). Although institutions like Siemens have implemented notable internal programs, public policies have not been sufficiently directive. It is essential to evaluate AI technologies within the digitalization process through the lens of gender equality to effectively address the glass ceiling. The South Korean case shows that despite technological advancement in AI applications, the country faces significant challenges in terms of gender equality.

Samsung's AI-supported recruitment systems have demonstrated how algorithmic bias can contribute to reinforcing the glass ceiling for women (Shin & Park, 2021). Public policies aimed at reducing gender inequality, especially in technical professions, remain inadequate. On the other hand, Canada stands out as one of the

leading countries in developing AI-driven digitalization policies that address the glass ceiling syndrome. The "Equity by Design" approach, developed by the Ontario Public Service, has not only increased the representation of women in digital leadership but also contributed to policy implementation through data-driven monitoring systems (Trudeau & Fontaine, 2022). Canada's strengths in this area should be maintained. However, the public sector's progressive approach needs to be more closely followed in the private sector as well. Lastly, in the Turkish case, while AI technologies have begun to play a role in strategies to tackle the glass ceiling within institutions, gender equality has not been adequately incorporated into the broader transformation process (Aytaç & Güneş, 2022). Issues related to gender equality and the glass ceiling in the context of digitalization and AI are generally addressed at a superficial level. Although there are some positive AI-based initiatives such as KoçSistem's program, no similar practices have yet been developed in the public sector.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of digitalization and artificial intelligence on women's access to top management positions in OECD countries within the context of the "glass ceiling syndrome." Five countries—Sweden, Germany, South Korea, Canada, and Turkey—were selected for case analyses. Each country was assessed based on public and private sector data as well as activity reports. Comparative analyses revealed that there is no direct correlation between the level of AI development and gender equality. AI technologies are not neutral; rather, they are shaped by the socio-cultural norms, algorithmic biases, and value systems of the institutions that develop them, which can reinforce gender inequality. Sweden and Canada stand out as examples where digitalization may positively contribute to gender equality. In both countries, artificial intelligence technologies have been structured holistically by considering technical, ethical, and societal dimensions. Public policies designed with a transparent, data-driven, and gender-sensitive approach in Sweden and Canada demonstrate positive outcomes in overcoming the glass ceiling. In these countries, the representation of women in the digital sphere and their use of artificial intelligence technologies are higher compared to other OECD countries. Additionally, the perception of the glass ceiling appears to be less prevalent in these two nations. In Germany, although digitalization is advanced, the integration of gender equality into artificial intelligence technologies has been insufficient. While Industry

4.0 policies have supported women's employment in digital sectors, the role of artificial intelligence in gender equality remains indirect, with private sector practices largely dependent on voluntary initiatives. This indicates the need for public policies that regulate the relationship between technology and gender equality. South Korea possesses a highly developed digital infrastructure and uses artificial intelligence technologies extensively in human resources and recruitment processes. However, due to cultural values and a hierarchical institutional structure, women face significant barriers to accessing top management positions. This suggests the persistence of the glass ceiling in the country. The underrepresentation of women in technical roles and the existence of glass ceiling dynamics highlight the lack of gender equality in digital transformation, potentially resulting in structural gender disparities. In Turkey, strategies related to artificial intelligence technologies were published in 2021, with progress primarily driven by private sector initiatives. However, public policies have not sufficiently integrated gender equality into artificial intelligence strategies. Women's employment in digital sectors and their representation in upper management remain low, and the glass ceiling syndrome is prominent. This indicates that artificial intelligence technologies in Turkey need to be redesigned within a framework that considers both economic benefits and gender equality. In light of all these findings, it can be concluded that the glass ceiling syndrome continues to exist in a transformed manner during the digitalization process. Traditional patriarchal structures have been replaced by algorithmic biases, invisible barriers within data-driven decision-making processes, and digital exclusion. Therefore, to overcome the glass ceiling, artificial intelligence technologies must be redefined from ethical, social, and managerial perspectives. The societal impacts of artificial intelligence-based governance practices in OECD countries should be measured; digital literacy programs for women that emphasize gender equality should be expanded; and female representation in decision-making processes should be increased. Otherwise, digitalization will not break the glass ceiling but rather make it more invisible and reinforce new forms of barriers. In conclusion, this study highlights the need to transcend the glass ceiling syndrome through digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies. A new vision must be proposed for OECD countries, institutions, and policymakers one that ensures digitalization and artificial intelligence technologies contribute to a more inclusive and fair approach to gender equality and help women overcome invisible barriers in accessing top management roles. If

such a vision is implemented, it will be possible to achieve gender-sensitive artificial intelligence technologies in the context of digital transformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study offers several recommendations based on the case analyses of OECD countries (Sweden, Germany, South Korea, Canada, and Turkey). Specifically, countries like Sweden and Canada are highlighted for their successful practices in overcoming the glass ceiling syndrome, while for Germany, South Korea, and Turkey, roadmaps are proposed to address gender inequality through the integration of artificial intelligence technologies in the digitalization process. In this context, the existing technological infrastructure within institutions is not sufficient on its own to empower women in top management positions. Alongside infrastructure, institutional culture, social norms, and decision-making mechanisms play a vital role in enabling more women to participate and advance in leadership roles. Based on this framework, the recommendations of the study are listed below:

1. Institutions should establish evaluation policies regarding gender equality. Independent audit units focusing on the impact of artificial intelligence technologies on the glass ceiling syndrome should be set up for women in each country.
2. Legal regulations must be introduced to prevent potential gender biases stemming from AI technologies in institutions. HR management policies should guarantee fairness, equality, and transparency in recruitment and promotion processes involving women employees and leaders.
3. In public institutions, artificial intelligence technologies should undergo a set of preliminary gender equality assessments. All public digital services should be subject to these assessments and implemented at regular intervals.
4. Digital leadership programs for women should be expanded in both public and private sectors. Especially within public institutions and local governments, programs can be developed based on the case examples from Sweden and Canada.
5. Digital literacy programs should be introduced to girls and women from an early age. Appropriate STEM-related content should be incorporated into all levels of education, and scholarship incentives should be increased in this area.

6. Gender equality declarations should be made mandatory for all institutions. During digitalization processes, institutions should publicly report their commitments to preventing the glass ceiling syndrome.
7. Inclusive digital strategies should be developed specifically for immigrant and ethnic minority women. Preventive and egalitarian policies should be implemented to combat digital exclusion.
8. National Artificial Intelligence Strategies should be revised to explicitly include gender equality. In developing OECD countries such as Turkey, such strategies should be restructured to raise awareness of the glass ceiling syndrome.
9. Data-sharing platforms based on cooperation between academia and the business world should be established. Data-driven monitoring mechanisms and incentives that promote women's participation in top-level decision-making processes should be developed.
10. In the digital transformation process, artificial intelligence technologies must not be limited to technical applications; action should also be taken in gender equality practices. Through innovative model designs, these multifaceted technologies can help eliminate invisible barriers and prevent the glass ceiling syndrome.

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