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From Ethical Principles to Practice: the Growing Importance of Moral Leadership in Education

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Abstract

This study delves into the increasingly recognized role of moral leadership in education, a pivotal force driving societal change and innovation. It explores the impact and intricacies of moral leadership, using bibliometric analysis to examine trends and developments in this field. The research highlights the shift towards ethical principles and commitment in educational leadership, emphasizing the profound effects of moral leadership in creating nurturing, innovative, and growth-oriented environments. Despite these positive impacts, challenges exist, including leaders who may compromise ethical foundations for power. The study employs bibliometric analysis to assess scholarly articles on moral leadership, utilizing the Scopus database to create a dataset of 258 articles published between 1912 and 2021. This method facilitates the examination of patterns, relationships, and structures across the literature. Analysis reveals a significant rise in publications on moral leadership, particularly since the 2000s, indicating growing academic interest and diversification in research outcomes. Key findings include the identification of trends and collaborations in moral leadership research, with the United States leading in contributions. The research spans various dimensions, from ethical challenges in crises to its role in governance, healthcare, and education. The study also uncovers five thematic clusters in moral leadership literature, ranging from paternalistic leadership to the role of moral leadership in business ethics. Implications of this study are far-reaching, extending beyond academia to practical applications in education, business, sports, and governance. It underscores the importance of moral leadership in shaping educational curriculums, influencing policy-making, and fostering ethical organizational climates.

Keywords: moral leadership, bibliometric, research trends, educational leadership.

1. Introduction

In the ever-evolving tapestry of society, education stands as a pivotal force, driving change and innovation as we navigate through the currents of time. The increasing recognition of moral

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leadership's vital role within the educational landscape marks a significant shift in contemporary discourse, positioning it as an indispensable pillar in fostering resilient and effective educational institutions (Bafadal et al., 2021; Greenfield, 2004). This approach to leadership, which is rooted in strong ethical values and steadfast dedication, serves as a guiding light in the expansive field of educational theory and practice. It inspires teachers and school leaders to set a positive example and make influential choices based on a foundation of moral principles (Arjanto et al., 2023; Bafadal et al., 2021; Bao, Li, 2019).

The advent of globalization and a heightened focus on transparency and accountability have thrust moral leadership into the spotlight, highlighting its critical importance in the educational sector. Leaders are now expected to exemplify actions and decisions rooted in ethical values, contributing to the collective progress of their institutions (Cherkowski, Brown, 2013; Davidson, Hughes, 2020; Kartini et al., 2023). While the positive effects of moral leadership are profound, creating nurturing environments that foster growth, creativity, and a commitment to societal betterment, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all leaders uphold these ideals. Some may succumb to the allure of power, engaging in practices that erode the ethical foundation of their institutions (Buka et al., 2018).

Moral leadership not only shapes the ethical climate of educational institutions but also acts as a catalyst for positive change, fostering environments rich in virtue, motivation, and innovation (Bafadal et al., 2023; Gu et al., 2020; Maqsoom et al., 2022). Educational communities under the influence of moral leadership are empowered and motivated, displaying heightened efficacy and a renewed commitment to learning and growth (Dedahanov et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2021). In response to the increasing relevance and complexity of moral leadership in education, there has been a surge in empirical research exploring this phenomenon. Innovative tools like bibliometric analysis and applications such as VOS Viewer have emerged, providing researchers with the means to objectively assess trends and developments within the field (van Eck, Waltman, 2010). These tools enable the visualization of intricate networks of ideas and progress, offering valuable insights into the evolution of moral leadership studies over time.

This study seeks to delve deeper into the intricacies of moral leadership within educational settings, exploring its impacts, challenges, and the nuances that define its role in shaping positive educational outcomes. By harnessing the latest research technologies and conducting extensive analyses, our objective is to offer a detailed and fluid comprehension of the existing condition of moral leadership in the educational context. This involves detecting current trends, identifying shortcomings in the existing body of literature, and suggesting potential paths for forthcoming academic research. Through the application of sophisticated research techniques and in-depth analysis, we strive to provide a profound and continuously updated perspective on moral leadership's role in education, focusing on identifying ongoing trends, exposing gaps in current studies, and outlining future research possibilities. Our ultimate goal is to contribute to the ongoing discourse on moral leadership, enhancing our collective knowledge and capacity to cultivate ethical, resilient, and effective educational institutions for the future.

2. Method

Researchers employ bibliometric analysis as a quantitative method for generating maps based on bibliographic databases (Su et al., 2019). This study combines methods from statistics, mathematics, and other disciplines to scrutinize the differences in patterns, numerical connections, and organizational layouts across a range of literature categories. The scope of bibliometric analysis covers a broad spectrum of data from publications, including elements like keywords, frequency of words, authorship, publication dates, affiliating institutions, titles, thematic terms, instances of co-occurrence, mutual citations, referenced sources, details of citations, links between citations, publishing details, collaborative authors, language of the article, and the country of origin. Using the Scopus database, researchers applied the search formula TITLE-ABS-KEY ("moral* leader*") to identify articles on moral leadership published between 1912 and 2021. They utilized filters to select only journal articles in English. The collected papers were then imported into an Excel spreadsheet (CSV). Additionally, researchers manually verified the suitability of each publication based on year, title, language, and article type, excluding unrelated topics or non-English publications. As shown in Figure 1, a search strategy flow was employed. Ultimately, a dataset of 258 articles was compiled (Figure 1).
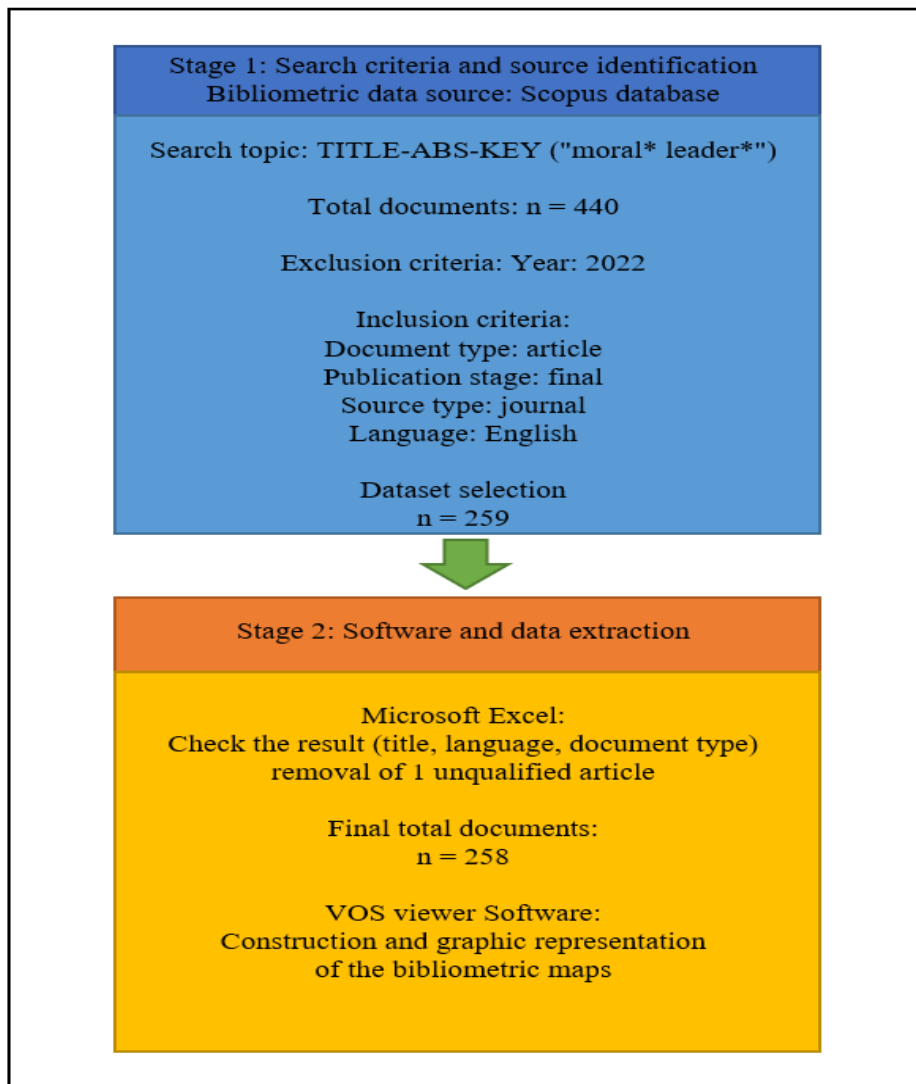
Fig. 1 Methodological process of the bibliometric analysis

The application VOS Viewer was utilized to create network maps, which facilitated the visualization of connections between chosen elements, thereby making their interpretation more straightforward (Phoong et al., 2022). VOS Viewer software can map bibliographic data, including author keywords and shared citations (Navarro-Lopez et al., 2022). The collected data were then imported into the VOS Viewer for bibliometric analysis. Each label and line is represented by a node, with larger circles denoting higher importance. Additionally, the same color signifies that objects belong to the same cluster. The study's node types include author, country, keywords, and articles.

3. Results and discussion
3.1. Publication analysis

A continuous rise in the volume of academic papers on a particular topic typically reflects a widening in the range of research findings during that period. This notion is based on the "information society" theory, which argues that an increase in information generation enhances the breadth of understanding and variety of perspectives within a specific field (Webster, 2014). Therefore, the ongoing growth in the number of publications addressing moral leadership not only signals an escalating academic focus but also implies an enrichment in the diversity of research findings in this domain. This trend underscores the need for comprehensive analysis to chart the future direction of research on moral leadership, focusing on its changing dynamics, emerging trends, and overall progression.
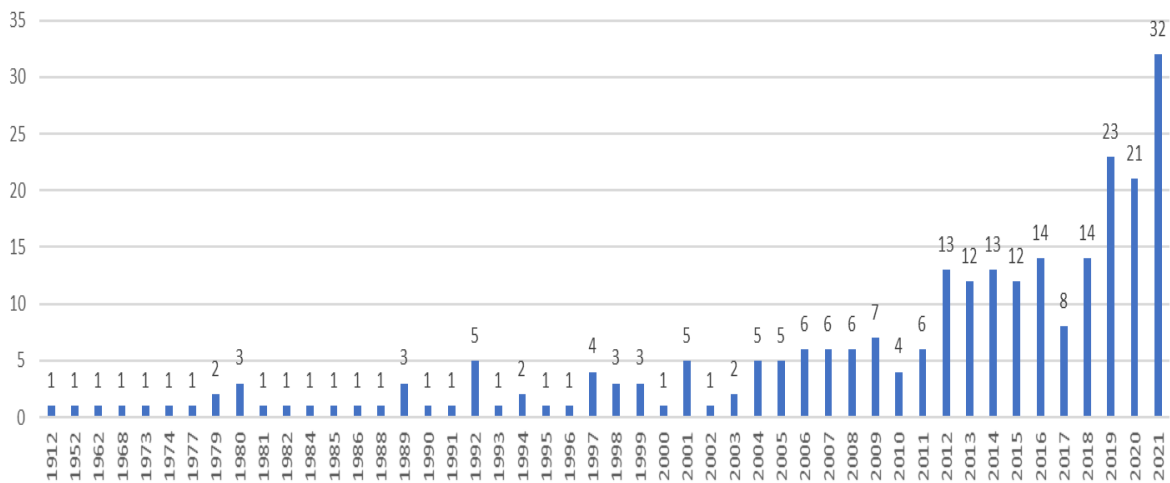
Fig. 2. Number of published articles on moral leadership (1912–2021)

The trend in the number of published articles and the significant fluctuations in the research scope of moral leadership over the entire study period are visually represented in Figure 2. This graphical depiction provides a clear picture of the progressive journey of moral leadership research, encapsulating the periodic highs and lows in research output, thus offering a chronological mapping of the field's evolution. The scientific inquiry into moral leadership began as early as 1912, as evidenced by the pioneering article "Moral Leadership through Teachers and Officers" authored by Milton S. Littlefield. This article, published in the journal "Religious Education" by Taylor and Francis (Littlefield, 1912), laid the groundwork for future research by delving into the aspects of moral leadership in the context of educational institutions, and particularly in the roles of teachers and officers. Subsequently, there has been a consistent annual increase in the number of publications within the field, indicating a steady augmentation of knowledge and intellectual discourse on moral leadership. This growth has been especially prominent in the 2000s, echoing the shift towards moral and ethical considerations in leadership research witnessed in this period (Ciulla, 2004). Indeed, the highest productivity in the domain of moral leadership was recorded in 2021, with an unprecedented count of 32 papers. This indicates an increasing recognition of the significance of moral leadership in both academic and practical spheres and its burgeoning relevance in addressing contemporary leadership challenges (Treviño et al., 2014). It's important to note that the continually evolving field of moral leadership research, underscored by its increasing volume and diversity, necessitates periodic reviews. These reviews would facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the changing research landscape, thereby enabling researchers to better anticipate and respond to emergent trends and developments in moral leadership studies (Avey et al., 2012).

3.2. Article network analysis
### 3.2.1. Co-authorship analysis by authors

Between 1912 and 2021, 461 authors wrote about moral leadership. Figure 3 presents the visual mapping analysis results, using a minimum threshold of 1 article published per author and a minimum of 11 citations, resulting in the identification of 209 authors. However, only 17 authors were included in the visual mapping, as some authors were not related to each other. Citations are the most frequently used method to measure an author's or paper's influence, as they can easily identify existing scientific articles (Rashid, 1991; Zupic, Čater, 2015). Table 1 displays the top 10 authors by citation: N. Greenberg, N.T. Fear, S. Wessely, M. Earnshaw, A. Ehlers, J. Hacker Hughes, M. Hotopf, I. Hull, AC Iversen, and R. Rona.

Table 1. Top 10 authors of moral leadership scientific analysis (ranking by citations)

Rank	Author	Citation	Documents	Total Link Strength
1	Greenberg N.	362	3	19
2	Fear NT	351	2	14
3	Wessely S.	351	2	14
4	Earnshaw M.	228	1	9
5	Ehlers A.	228	1	9
6	Hacker Hughes J.	228	1	9
7	Hotopf M.	228	1	9
8	Hull I.	228	1	9
9	Iversen AC	228	1	9
10	Rona R.	228	1	9

Source: Scopus Database

In Figure 3, the connecting lines among authors visually depict their collaborative ties, illustrating the ways in which they have jointly contributed to research in the field of moral leadership (van Eck, Waltman, 2010). These connections can be thought of as relational ties that occur due to the joint authorship of research publications, making it a useful tool for illustrating co-authorship networks (Newman, 2004). The clusters of authors are color-coded to denote separate collaborative groups.
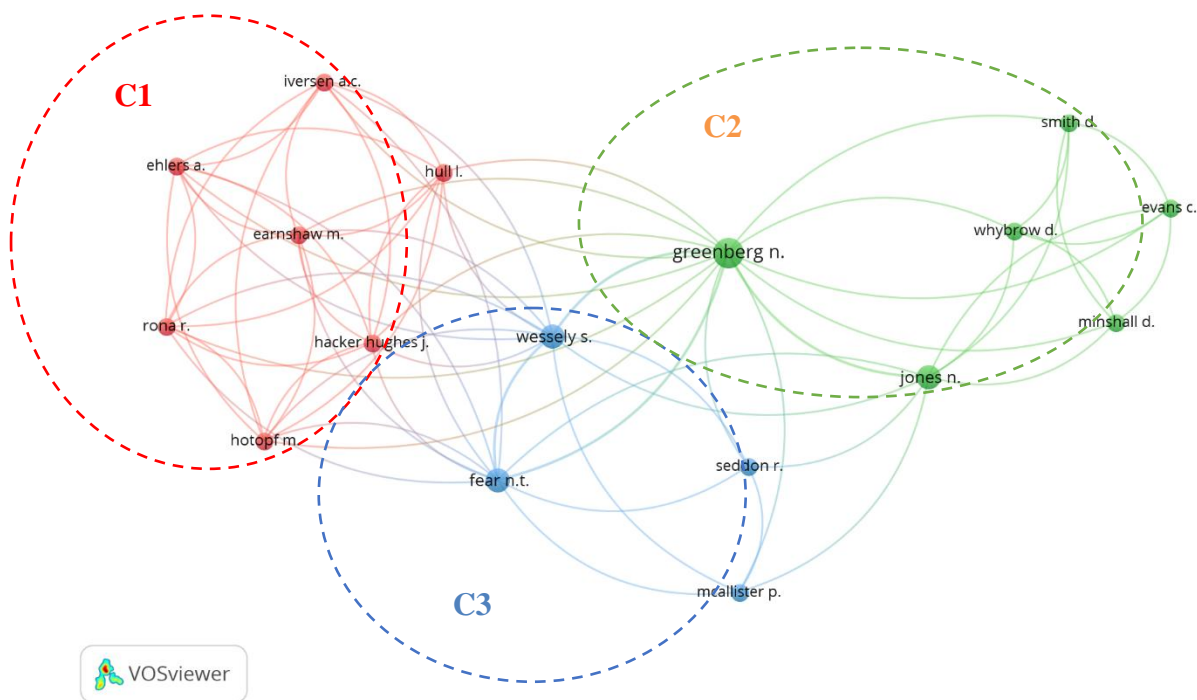
Fig. 3. Co-authorship network by the author of moral leadership

This visual mapping allows for a clear understanding of the interconnections and collaborations within and across these groups. Greenberg N., for example, is part of cluster 2 (C2), signifying his primary affiliation and collaboration with authors within this group. However, he also has a cross-border collaborative relationship with authors from cluster 1 (C1) and cluster 3 (C3). This implies that, although N. Greenberg has contributed significantly to the publications within his cluster, he has also co-authored with authors from other clusters, thus bridging different research groups. This ability to straddle clusters and bring diverse perspectives together can often lead to innovative research (Burt, 2004). These cross-border collaborations foster a more

comprehensive understanding of the research topic as they encompass varied perspectives and approaches to moral leadership. It reflects Greenberg N.'s adaptability in aligning with different research foci and an openness to diverse research methodologies and perspectives (Lee, Bozeman, 2005). This mapping also underlines the complex interconnections that exist in academic networks and the significant role these relationships play in driving research forward. By analyzing the collaborations between authors, we can gain insights into how knowledge is developed and disseminated in the field of moral leadership (Wuchty et al., 2007).

3.2.2. Co-authorship analysis by countries

Between 1912 and 2021, research on moral leadership encompassed contributions from 47 different countries. Leading in terms of publication significance were the United States (USA) with a contribution of 100 articles, followed by China with 37 articles, the United Kingdom presenting 25 articles, Canada with 13 articles, and Australia contributing 11 articles.
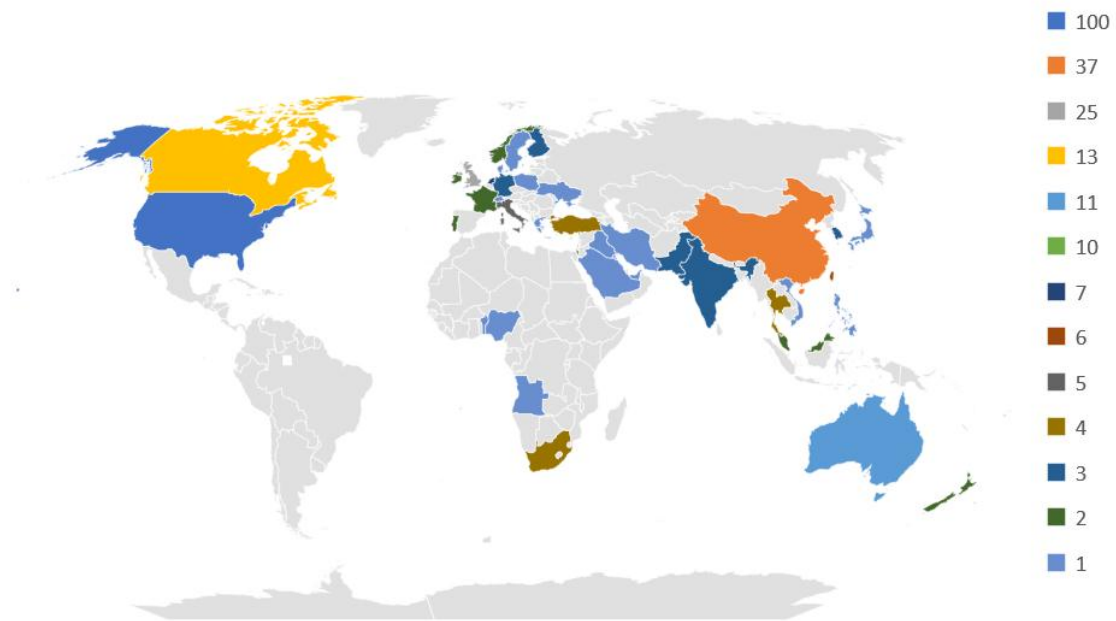

Fig. 4. Distribution of countries publishing articles on moral leadership

Table 2 displays the five leading countries based on their overall link strength, a measure that indicates the collaborative intensity of authors from these countries (Phoong et al., 2022). This link strength, represented by lines connecting the countries, highlights the extent of their collaborative efforts. In this ranking, China emerges at the forefront with a link strength score of 25, followed by the United States (USA) with 23, Canada scoring 11, Australia with 8, and the United Kingdom registering a strength of 5.

Table 2. Ranked five countries with the highest number of publications on moral leadership (ranking by total link strength)

Rank	Country	Documents	Citation	Total link strength
1	China	37	867	25
2	United States (USA)	100	1,657	23
3	Canada	13	158	11
4	Australia	11	161	8
5	United Kingdom	25	670	5

Source: Scopus Database

The researcher established a threshold of a minimum of 1 article published per country and at least 1 citation for conducting a network analysis of collaboration between countries, leading to

the selection of 39 countries. The resulting collaboration map consists of 25 links, as shown in Figure 5. Nodes represent each country based on the number of publications. Lines connecting these nodes indicate the presence of interconnections between the countries that form the cluster. There are four clusters: the first cluster (C1) includes China, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Germany, Denmark, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates; the second cluster (C2) consists of Canada, South Africa, Sweden, and Turkey; the third cluster (C3) comprises the United States (USA), Singapore, South Korea, and Angola; the fourth cluster (C4) includes the United Kingdom, Thailand, Switzerland, and Vietnam.
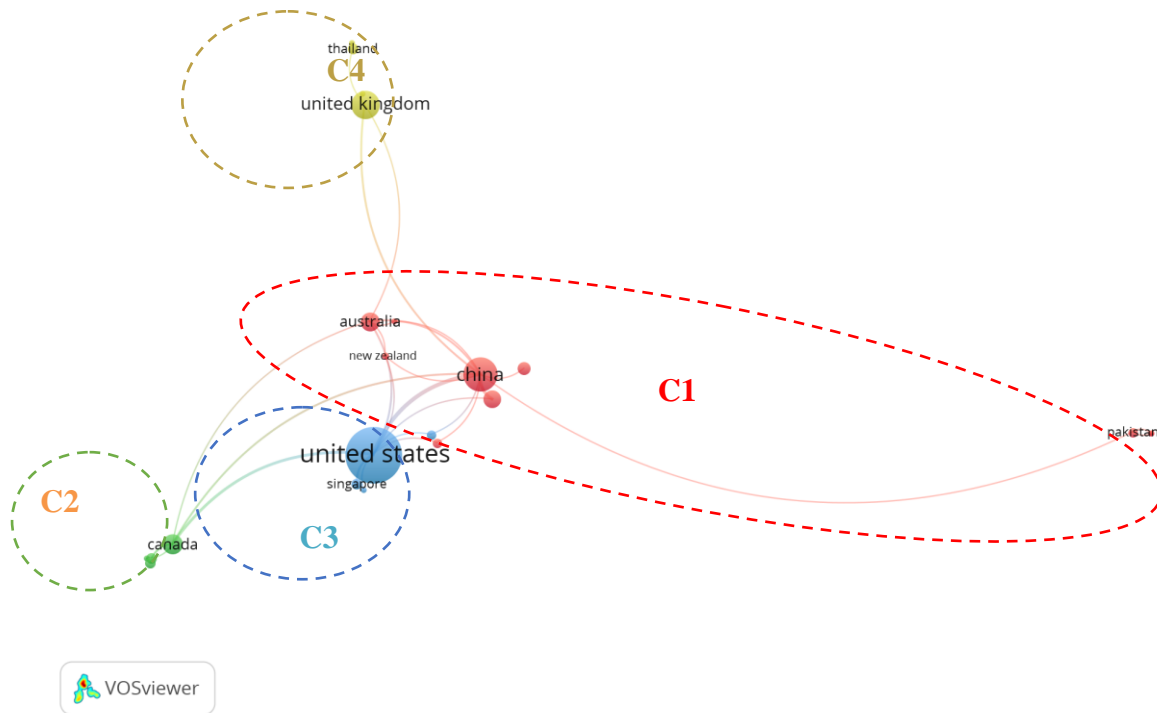

Fig. 5 Co-authorship networks by countries that publish articles on moral leadership

In Figure 5, the largest node diameter, represented by the United States (USA), illustrates that it is the leading country in the study of moral leadership. Node size in network analysis often represents the degree or centrality of a node, reflecting the magnitude of its influence or connections (Opsahl et al., 2010). In this case, it represents the high volume and diversity of moral leadership studies emanating from the USA. The research conducted in the USA spans a wide variety of dimensions within the field of moral leadership, demonstrating a comprehensive exploration of the topic. For instance, the essential role that moral leaders play in navigating the complex ethical challenges and humanitarian issues that arise in such crises is highlighted in Crawford's moral leadership analysis concerning the refugee crisis (Crawford, 2021). Ethical guidance can shape geopolitics and diplomacy in a rapidly transforming global landscape, further expanding on the role of moral leadership in changing international political systems (Larson, 2020). Similarly, the importance of moral leadership in achieving organizational accountability and fostering staff development (Kautzman, 2018). In the corporate domain, the necessity of moral leadership in contemporary businesses emphasizing the ethical duties of corporate leaders in maintaining corporate social responsibility (Adewuyi et al., 2018) . Simultaneously, the significance of ethical guidance in democratic governance and constitutional processes, focusing on the role of moral leadership in democracy and constitutions (Newswander, 2012). The USA's leadership in moral leadership studies also extends to the healthcare and education sectors. Moral leadership within the context of nursing, underlining the need for ethical leaders in healthcare settings to ensure the best patient outcomes (Bjarnason, Lasala, 2011). The necessity of moral leadership in educational and school settings, demonstrating how it can positively influence school culture and student development (Evans, Shirley, 2008; Warsongko et al., 2021).

3.2.3. Keyword co‑occurrence analysis by author keyword

Keywords are the core content or study of the article, and keywords with high frequency reflect research hotspots in the field (Zhu et al., 2022). Each keyword is represented by a node whose size is proportional to the frequency, and a more significant number of links indicates a more frequent occurrence of the keyword, as in Figures 6 and 7. The thickness of the joint reflects the strength of the joint. Analysis of the network between keywords with a minimum threshold of 2 articles published per keyword, 64 keywords were selected, resulting in a map of the cooperative relationship of countries with 63 links.

Table 3. The 30 keywords with the most frequency from the scientific analysis of moral leadership

Rank	Keywords	Occurrences	Total link strength
1	Moral leadership	54	284
2	Paternalistic leadership	28	114
3	Leadership	24	95
4	Ethics	16	71
5	Authoritarian leadership	11	56
6	Benevolent leadership	11	53
7	Ethical leadership	8	34
8	Trust	7	39
9	Servant leadership	4	23
10	Empowerment	4	20
11	Authentic leadership	4	19
12	Employee voice	4	17
13	Morality	4	16
14	Self-efficacy	4	16
15	Principals	4	13
16	Transformational leadership	4	12
17	Democracy	3	18
18	Integrity	3	17
19	Values	3	17
20	Corruption	3	16
21	Culture	3	14
22	Teachers	3	11
23	Legitimacy	3	7
24	Race	2	19
25	Social capital	2	17
26	Gender	2	14
27	Civil society	2	13
28	Work performance	2	13
29	Leadership style	2	12
30	Charisma	2	11

Source: Scopus Database

Table 3 lists the top 30 high-frequency keywords. 'moral leadership' (54) was the most common, followed by 'paternalistic leadership' (28), leadership (24), ethics (16), authoritarian leadership (11), benevolent leadership (11), ethical leadership (8), and trust (7) shows that moral leadership is related to other leadership models or styles that have similarities in several dimensions and concepts of leadership. Using VOS Viewer, researchers categorized keywords scattered throughout the network and then grouped them based on the regular frequency that appeared most often. In bibliometric analysis, each cluster in the co-occurrence network map represents a theme and research focus in a particular area (Zhu et al., 2022).

The recent examination of moral leadership research literature reveals the categorization of essential keywords into five distinct groups, each representing a specific aspect within the larger context of moral leadership studies. Figure 6 graphically displays this division into varied clusters, each with its unique thematic focus. Cluster C1, shown in red, highlights terms like 'paternalistic leadership', 'empowerment', and 'interactional justice', among others. These terms illuminate the multifaceted nature of moral leadership, particularly its connection to the broader concept of paternalistic leadership. This relationship significantly affects various organizational factors, notably employee empowerment and perceptions of justice and trust in leadership, thereby influencing their behavior as organizational citizens. In Cluster C2, colored green, terms such as

'democracy', 'moral authority', and 'integrity' are included, emphasizing key aspects of moral leadership. This cluster points to the essential role of democracy in moral leadership, stressing the need for leaders to uphold high moral standards, legitimacy, and integrity, thereby shaping the actions and perceptions of their followers. The third cluster, C3, presented in blue, merges terms like 'ethical leadership', 'transformational leadership', and 'gender'. This cluster explores the convergence of moral leadership with other leadership styles and its approach to significant issues such as gender equality and organizational commitment. Cluster C4, highlighted in yellow, comprises keywords like 'authoritarian leadership' and 'benevolent leadership', revealing the diverse dimensions within the paternalistic leadership framework. This cluster suggests that moral, authoritarian, and benevolent leadership styles, though part of the same paradigm, have distinct influences within an organizational context. Finally, Cluster C5, in purple, includes terms related to 'leadership' in various sectors like education, sports, and business. It emphasizes the impact of moral leadership in these fields, notably in shaping the attitudes of educators and the role of moral principles in business ethics. Together, these clusters provide a comprehensive and detailed view of the diverse areas within moral leadership research, enhancing our understanding of its complex dynamics and relevance in different contexts. This detailed study of the clusters contributes significantly to the existing knowledge in the field of moral leadership.
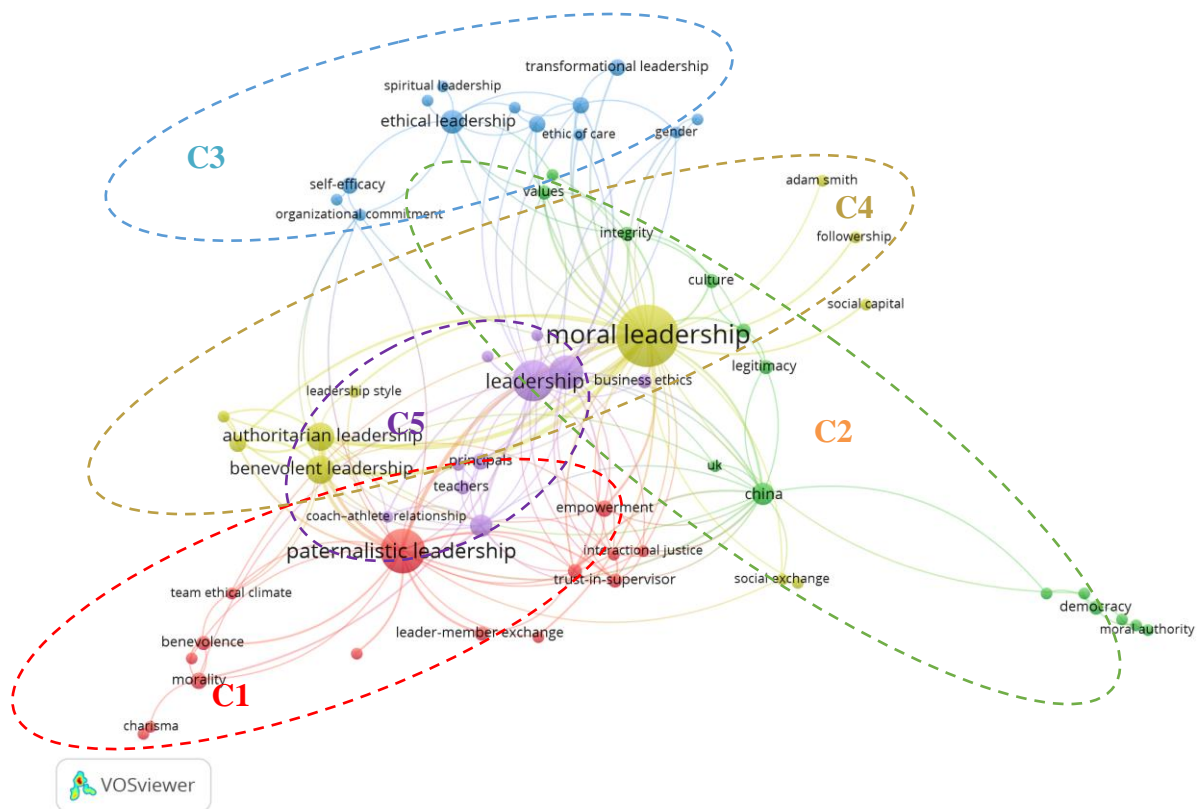

Fig. 6. Co-occurrence network map by author keywords from articles published on moral leadership

While research on moral leadership dates back to 1912, it wasn't until 2010 that a detailed keyword analysis in this area began, marking a significant progression in the field. Prior to 2010, no specific keywords had been associated with studies in this area. An overlay visual in Figure 7 depicts the evolution of moral leadership research from 2010 through 2020. Before 2014, the focus was on terms like 'ethics', 'business ethics', and 'legitimacy', indicating a concentration on enhancing aspects of business, organizational, or national practices. From 2014 to 2018, the emphasis shifted to integrating moral leadership within the broader framework of paternalistic leadership, particularly in educational and organizational contexts, as reflected in keywords such as 'moral leadership', 'culture', and 'paternalistic leadership'. Post-2018, the scope of research broadened to incorporate topics like 'organizational commitment', 'gender', and 'authoritarian leadership', reflecting a deeper exploration into various aspects of moral leadership, including its role in authoritarian and benevolent leadership styles, and its relevance to contemporary issues.
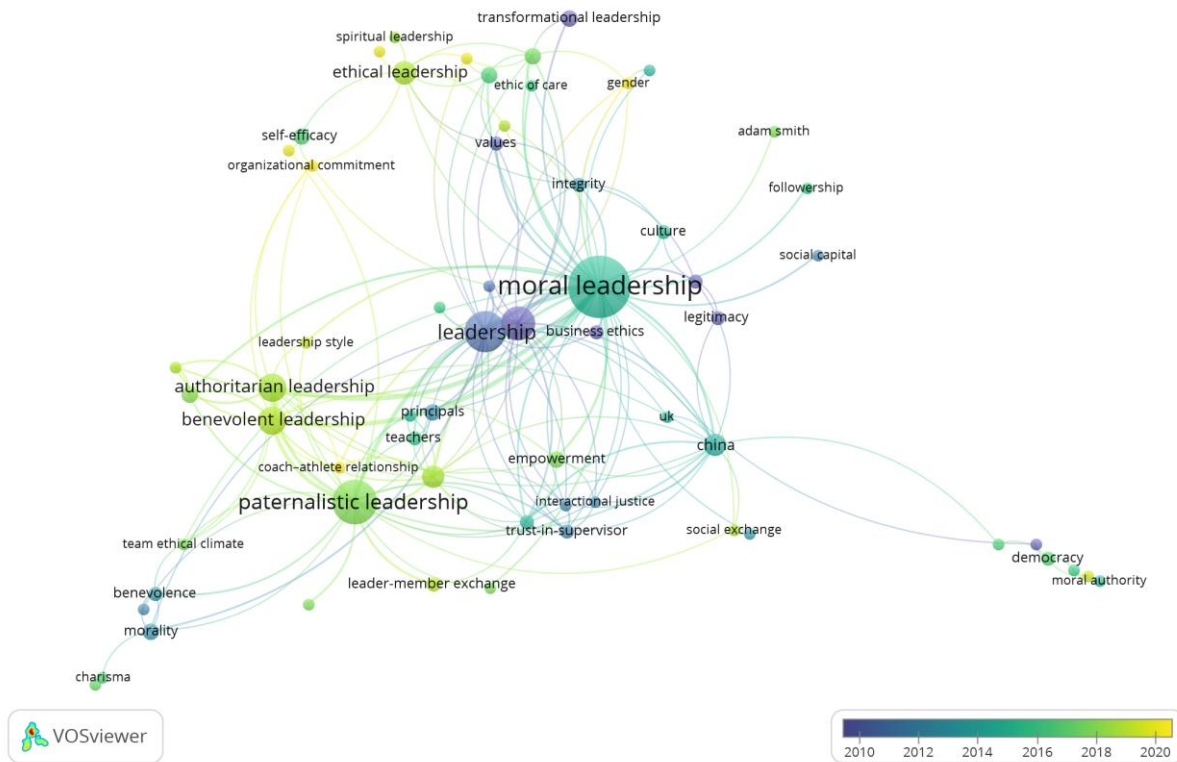
Fig. 7. Overlay visualization of moral leadership based on author keywords

3.3. Analysis of frequent citation by documents

Analyzing the frequency of citations in academic documents provides a reliable and empirical strategy for identifying the most impactful papers in a particular area of study. This technique relies on the frequency of article citations as a foundational element of bibliometric analysis (Zhu et al., 2022). The effectiveness and accuracy of this approach are enhanced by its ability to quantitatively measure the influence exerted by various journals, individual studies, and researchers, making it a valuable tool in scholarly assessment (Ochoa Jiménez et al., 2022). In Table 4, the top ten articles receiving the most citations in the realm of moral leadership research, spanning the years 1912 to 2021, are listed.

Table 4. The top 10 most frequently cited documents/articles of moral leadership

Rank	Year	Documents/Articles	Citation	Ref.
1	2015	Does moral leadership enhance employee creativity? Employee identification with leader and leader member exchange (LMX) in the Chinese context	196	Gu et al., 2015
2	2012	Moral leadership and work performance: testing the mediating and interaction effects in China	115	Wu, 2012
3	2015	Moralized leadership: the construction and consequences of ethical leader perceptions	94	Fehr et al., 2015
4	2014	Measuring the effects of safety management system practices, morality	85	Chen, Chen, 2014

		leadership, and self-efficacy on pilots' safety behaviors: safety motivation as a mediator		
5	2018	Construct redundancy in leader behaviors: a review and agenda for the future	81	Banks et al., 2018
6	2009	Effectiveness of a moral and benevolent leader: probing the interactions of the dimensions of paternalistic leadership	78	Niu et al., 2009
7	2001	Chinese culture and leadership	74	Wong, 2001
8	2014	Paternalistic leadership and employee voice: does information sharing matter?	67	Chan, 2014
9	2015	The Mediating effect of ethical climate on the relationship between paternalistic leadership and team identification: a team-level analysis in the Chinese context	66	Cheng, Wang, 2015
10	2007	Feeling trusted by business leaders in China: antecedents and the mediating role of value congruence	66	Lau et al., 2007

Source: Scopus Database

Table 4 showcases the top ten articles most frequently referenced in the field of moral leadership from 1912 to 2021, based on data from the Scopus Database. This data serves to empirically strengthen the analysis, affirming the soundness of the results obtained. Leading the list with 196 citations is "Does moral leadership enhance employee creativity? Employee identification with leader and leader-member exchange (LMX) in the Chinese context" (Gu et al., 2015). This research delves into how moral leadership influences employee creativity, introducing an innovative model that emphasizes the significance of employee identification with leaders and the dynamics of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) in fostering creativity. Following closely is "Moral leadership and work performance: Testing the mediating and interaction effects in China" (Wu, 2012), which has received 115 citations. This study critically examines the operational dynamics of moral leadership and its implications for work performance, challenging the interaction between moral and authoritarian leadership styles in relation to employee trust and performance. The third most cited is "Moralized Leadership: The Construction and Consequences of Ethical Leader Perceptions"(Fehr et al., 2015), with 94 citations, investigates the development and impact of ethical leader perceptions, highlighting how moralization influences follower behavior driven by leaders' ethical values. These studies collectively underscore the fundamental role of moral leadership in both academia and practice, particularly in fostering employee creativity and enhancing work performance. The research suggests that moral leadership, coupled with strong leader-member relations, creates a conducive environment for creative output (Gu et al., 2015), echoing findings on the empowerment and safety felt by employees under moral leadership (Liu et al., 2012). Further illustrate the positive impact of moral leadership on work performance, spotlighting the crucial role of trust as an intermediary between leadership style and performance (Wu, 2012). Moreover, meta-analysis, confirms the significant role of ethical leadership in achieving positive organizational and individual outcomes, including job satisfaction, commitment, and performance at various levels (Piccolo et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the intricate nature of moral leadership and its diverse implications call for ongoing research to deepen the understanding of its influence over time (Treviño et al., 2014). This continuous research is essential for evolving and enhancing our grasp of how moral leadership shapes various outcomes in different organizational contexts.

3.4. Benefits for pedagogy

Utilizing bibliometric analysis, researchers delve deep into the world of pedagogical science, identifying the most predominant themes and trends shaping the field. This comprehensive understanding enables researchers to identify not just the prevailing topics but also the gaps within the literature, pointing towards areas ripe for further exploration and investigation. Such an approach ensures that future research is strategically directed towards contributing meaningfully to the field. Concurrently, the identification of these thematic clusters fosters collaborative opportunities, encouraging researchers working on similar topics to form partnerships, share knowledge, and collectively advance the field. With this insight at their disposal, educators and those creating curricula are more equipped to develop teaching materials and curricular programs that are in sync with the latest trends in research. This ensures that the educational content delivered to students is both current and pertinent. Such synchronization not only elevates the quality of education but also aids in advancing the theoretical aspects of pedagogical science. Researchers, by examining these identified groupings, have the opportunity to expand upon existing knowledge, formulating innovative theories or models that more effectively elucidate the connections among various concepts. On the policy and practice front, the insights garnered from bibliometric analysis play a crucial role in informing evidence-based decisions for policymakers and practitioners in education. Understanding the key themes and trends within pedagogical science ensures that policies and practices are grounded in the latest research, fostering more effective and impactful outcomes in the educational landscape.

3.5. Implications

This comprehensive analysis of moral leadership literature has significant implications for both academic and practical realms. In the academic realm, the heightened attention towards research in moral leadership, as indicated by the rising volume of related publications, signifies a notable evolution in the study of leadership. This trend signifies a deepened focus on morality in leadership and encourages further exploration and contribution in this area (Pasricha et al., 2018). In the context of educational leadership, this study's findings can guide curriculum development and pedagogical practices. By incorporating elements of moral leadership into educational curriculums, educators can cultivate moral awareness, ethical decision-making abilities, and benevolent attitudes among students (Starratt, 2004). Similarly, teachers and school administrators can imbibe moral leadership principles, fostering an environment of integrity, fairness, and ethical conduct (Greenfield, 2004; Gunawan et al., 2020). The analysis also revealed specific trends in moral leadership research, such as the convergence of paternalistic, benevolent, and moral leadership models. This knowledge can aid in refining leadership development programs, tailoring them to foster comprehensive leadership traits encompassing various dimensions of leadership (Pellegrini, Scandura, 2008). Furthermore, the study's implications extend to policy-making in educational institutions. The findings suggest that school leaders play a crucial role in shaping the moral and ethical climate of schools, influencing students' character development and staff's ethical conduct (Bafadal et al., 2020; Shapiro, Stefkovich, 2016). Therefore, the recruitment, selection, and development of school leaders should place a premium on their commitment to moral and ethical leadership.

Practical implications also exist for leadership across diverse sectors beyond education, such as business, sports, and governance. For instance, business leaders practicing moral leadership can contribute to creating ethical organizational climates, enhancing trust and commitment among employees (Brown et al., 2005). The study has also made visible the global network of authors and countries contributing to the discourse on moral leadership, underlining the need for international collaborations and knowledge sharing to advance the field. The results of this study, however, should be interpreted with caution considering the database and language biases inherent in the study. The bibliometric analysis primarily relied on English-language publications and utilized the Scopus database, potentially excluding relevant contributions in other languages and databases.

4. Conclusion

The study of moral leadership has attracted significant attention both academically and globally, evidenced by the consistent increase in related publications, diverse authorship, and contributions from various countries. The field has undergone considerable development, expanding in scope and diversifying in viewpoints, all the while affirming the critical importance of moral leadership. The dynamic and collaborative academic network, encompassing a range of

collaborations and perspectives, has been instrumental in propelling this area of research. Additionally, the examination of frequently associated keywords has revealed how the focus areas of moral leadership research have evolved, encompassing everything from paternalistic approaches to democratic ideals and specific industry-related inquiries. The chronological mapping of these focus areas, transitioning from business ethics to enhancements in organizational structures, pedagogical aspects, and varying leadership styles like authoritarian and benevolent leadership, has deepened our comprehension of the field's progression. Notably, the review of highly cited works in this domain underscores moral leadership's role in fostering environments that nurture creativity, trust, and enhanced performance in organizations. However, these findings also indicate the necessity for ongoing research to further dissect the complex dynamics and situational variables that affect moral leadership's effectiveness. In summary, this body of research highlights the fundamental role of moral leadership across both scholarly and practical domains, showcasing its influence across different industries and its capability to meet modern leadership challenges. Therefore, continual investigation is essential to enrich and broaden our understanding of this vital aspect of leadership.

5. Conflict of interest

6. Acknowledgements

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