Global Bibliometric Mapping of Faculty Resistance to Change in Higher Education: Uncovering the Psychological Costs of University Governance

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, higher education systems worldwide have undergone radical neoliberal governance reforms centered on accountability, performance metrics, and audit culture. While these reforms are ostensibly designed to boost institutional efficiency and transparency, they have consistently triggered widespread faculty resistance and inflicted profound, yet understudied, psychological burdens on academic staff—including burnout, identity strain, and emotional exhaustion. As higher education grapples with sustaining academic vitality and faculty well-being amid relentless structural change, understanding the interplay between university governance, faculty resistance, and psychological costs has become an urgent global imperative. This study represents the first comprehensive global bibliometric mapping of scholarship at the intersection of these three critical domains. Drawing on 48 core Scopus-indexed publications (2000–2025), we deploy rigorous science-mapping techniques—co-occurrence networks, thematic clustering, and longitudinal evolutionary analysis—to systematically clarify the intellectual foundations, conceptual trajectory, and emerging research frontiers of the field. Our findings reveal a pivotal shift in the scholarship: from early structural debates about managerialism to a nuanced "emotional turn" that centers identity strain, emotional labor, and psychological sustainability. Governance and accountability mechanisms emerge as the structural core driving faculty resistance, which we frame not as mere organizational obstruction but as a vital form of professional agency. Additionally, we identify datafication and digital governance as fast-emerging forces amplifying psychological strain among faculty. We further map key global research hubs in the United States, Brazil, Australia, and the United Kingdom, while highlighting persistent disciplinary fragmentation that limits cross-contextual insight. Concluding, we propose a targeted research agenda for advancing the psychological

sustainability of institutional change in higher education, with a focus on leadership models that prioritize emotional intelligence, professional autonomy, and human-centered governance. This study delivers actionable insights for policymakers, university leaders, and academic researchers, filling a critical gap in the global understanding of how governance reforms shape the emotional and professional lives of the faculty who form the backbone of higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education Governance, Faculty Resistance, Accountability, Psychological Costs, Bibliometric Mapping, Professional Identity

Introduction

Higher education systems across the globe stand at a crossroads. Neoliberal governance reforms rooted in New Public Management (NPM) principles of accountability, performance measurement and audit culture have reshaped institutional operations over the past 20 years, redefining expectations for academic work and intensifying administrative oversight (Berlemann & Haucap, 2015; Kim, 2010). Proponents argue these reforms enhance institutional transparency, efficiency, and global competitiveness, positioning them as essential for modernizing public-sector higher education. Yet critics have long highlighted their unintended and far-reaching consequences, including the erosion of faculty professional autonomy, the intensification of work demands, the normalization of constant performance monitoring, and the replacement of academic evaluative logics with corporate-style metrics (Crow & Weindling, 2010; Sharma & Lawrence, 2009). These shifts have generated pervasive uncertainty and structural pressure within academic communities, sparking widespread faculty resistance to change—a phenomenon that has become a persistent and defining feature of contemporary higher education governance worldwide.

Faculty resistance, once misinterpreted as passive obstruction or attitudinal conservatism, is now recognized as a complex and meaningful response to reforms that undermine disciplinary norms, pedagogical values, and the core professional identities of academic staff (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Nolan, 2015; Terhart, 2013). Manifesting as skepticism, passive disengagement, or active opposition, this resistance is not just an organizational challenge for universities; it is a signal of deeper systemic stress. Compounding this challenge is the growing body of evidence linking neoliberal governance reforms to severe psychological costs for faculty, including heightened stress, chronic burnout, emotional exhaustion, identity conflict, and diminished intrinsic motivation (Alaqeel, 2024; Cannizzo, 2018; Stevenson, 2017).

These psychological burdens extend beyond individual well-being to shape institutional outcomes, including reduced organizational commitment, disrupted pedagogical practice, and impaired academic productivity, and they threaten the core mission of higher education to advance teaching, research, and knowledge creation. The urgency of studying the intersection of university governance, faculty resistance, and psychological costs stems from three interconnected global realities. First, higher education's reliance on faculty well-being: academic staff are the foundational human capital of universities, and their psychological and professional vitality is inextricable from institutional success. When governance reforms inflect psychological harm, they erode the very capacity of higher education systems to deliver on their educational and research mandates. Second, neoliberal governance has spread globally, with NPM-inspired reforms no longer limited to Western higher education

systems but adopted across Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. This creates a global need for context-aware insights into how these reforms shape faculty experiences.

Third, digital governance and datafication have risen in prominence, with algorithmic monitoring, data-driven accountability, and digital audit systems introducing new forms of surveillance and workload pressure, amplifying psychological strain and creating uncharted territory for understanding faculty resistance in the digital age (Mansouri & Belhaj, 2024; Faller, 2024).. For these reasons, this topic is not merely an academic curiosity but a practical necessity for anyone invested in the sustainability, equity, and effectiveness of global higher education.

The issue is growing in urgency, yet research on governance, faculty resistance and psychological strain remains deeply siloed across different disciplines. Higher education studies focus on professional identity and reform processes, while organizational behavior centers on leadership and employee responses. Public administration scholarship prioritizes accountability mechanisms, and educational psychology addresses stress and burnout (Crow & Weindling, 2010; Tatto et al., 2006). This fragmentation has created conceptual gaps, limited cross-disciplinary synthesis, and left policymakers and university leaders without a unified framework to understand or address the psychological impacts of governance reform. What's more, no existing research has pulled this diverse body of scholarship together in a systematic way using bibliometric analysis. This method is essential for mapping the intellectual structure of an emerging field, pinpointing key research trends and highlighting critical gaps in knowledge.While isolated reviews examine individual aspects of governance or faculty work, none integrate resistance, identity, and emotional dimensions into a cohesive global analysis, leaving a critical void in the literature.

This study fills this void by providing the first comprehensive global bibliometric mapping of faculty resistance to change in higher education, with a laser focus on the psychological implications of neoliberal governance reforms. Drawing on 48 peer-reviewed Scopus-indexed publications (2006–2024), we use state-of-the-art science-mapping tools (bibliometrix in R and VOSviewer) to examine how governance, resistance, and psychological constructs have co-evolved and intersected over time. This study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1 : What are the major publication trends and intellectual structures of research on faculty resistance to change in higher education (2000–2025)?
RQ2 : What thematic clusters link governance reforms with faculty resistance and psychological outcomes such as stress, burnout, and emotional strain?
RQ3 : How has research on governance-induced resistance evolved over time, and what emerging themes signal future directions for the field?

Significance and Utility of the Study
This research delivers both scholarly and practical value for a wide range of stakeholders with a stake in global higher education, and each group stands to gain concrete, actionable insights from its findings.

For academic researchers, the study pulls together fragmented disciplinary research into a cohesive global framework. It clarifies the intellectual underpinnings of this field of study, pinpoints key thematic clusters and emerging research priorities, and highlights disciplinary gaps that need further exploration. It also offers a rigorous bibliometric roadmap for future research, guiding scholars in higher education, organizational behavior, public administration and educational psychology toward collaborative, cross-disciplinary inquiry.

For university leaders and administrators, the study demystifies faculty resistance by framing it as an act of professional agency rather than simple obstruction. It also directly connects governance reforms to measurable psychological costs for faculty, and shares actionable strategies for designing and implementing institutional change that centers faculty emotional well-being. These approaches reduce resistance and foster constructive engagement with reform, and include centering emotional intelligence in leadership practices and adopting human-centered digital governance systems.

For national and international higher education policymakers, the global bibliometric analysis illustrates how governance reforms play out across different regional contexts – such as the U.S., Brazil, Australia and the UK. It provides context-specific evidence to inform policy design, helping policymakers better balance accountability and performance metrics with faculty professional autonomy. This balance avoids unintended psychological harm to academic staff and ensures reforms boost institutional efficiency without compromising the core academic mission of higher education.

For faculty associations and academic labor advocates, the study quantifies and contextualizes the psychological toll of neoliberal governance on academic staff, offering empirical evidence to advocate for more equitable and sustainable working conditions in higher education. It centers faculty voices and experiences, framing their resistance to reform as a legitimate defense of professional values and personal well-being.

For future higher education leaders and practitioners, including graduate students and early-career academics, the study builds awareness of the psychological dimensions of academic work in the age of managerialism. It equips the next generation of academic leaders with the knowledge needed to design human-centered governance models that support faculty success and institutional sustainability.

Beyond these stakeholder-specific benefits, the study advances the broader global conversation around psychological sustainability in higher education – a vital yet underdeveloped concept that links institutional change to the long-term well-being of the academic workforce. In an era where universities face unprecedented pressure to adapt to global shifts, this research makes a clear case that sustainable governance is not just about efficiency and accountability. It is equally about nurturing the human capital that is the foundation of all higher education institutions.

In the sections ahead, we synthesize existing literature on governance reforms, faculty resistance and psychological costs in Section 2. We then outline our rigorous bibliometric methodology in Section 3, and present our findings on publication trends, thematic clusters and global research patterns in Section 4. Section 5 explores the implications of these findings

for both scholarship and practice, and we conclude in Section 6 with a targeted research agenda and practical recommendations for building human-centered higher education governance systems.

Literature Review and Evolutionary Analysis
Research on faculty resistance to change in higher education is situated at the intersection of governance reform, organizational change, and the psychology of academic work. Although these domains share common concerns about how institutions evolve and how individuals respond to structural pressures, the literature remains highly fragmented. This section synthesizes the conceptual foundations of the field, highlighting three interrelated streams that have shaped scholarly debate over the past two decades: (1) governance reforms and managerial restructuring, (2) faculty resistance as organizational and professional behavior, and (3) the psychological and emotional costs of contemporary academic work.

Governance Reforms and Managerial Restructuring in Higher Education
Since the early 2000s, higher education institutions across the world have undergone extensive governance reforms aligned with neoliberal public-sector modernization. These reforms introduced new forms of managerial oversight, performance measurement, audit culture, standardized evaluations, and accountability regimes. Much of this transformation draws from the principles of New Public Management (NPM), emphasizing efficiency, transparency, and output-based control.

These reforms introduced new forms of managerial oversight, performance measurement, audit culture, standardized evaluations, and accountability regimes (Curto-Rodríguez et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2024). Much of this transformation draws from the principles of New Public Management (NPM), emphasizing efficiency, transparency, and output-based control—evident in initiatives such as digital transformation for accountability in public sectors (Khan et al., 2024) and the integration of international accounting standards to enhance financial transparency in non-profits (Rodriguez-Galindo et al., 2024).

While these measures aim to modernize universities, critics note unintended consequences: for example, accrual accounting in public sectors has been linked to administrative burdens and reduced flexibility (Edwards, 2023; Bonollo, 2022), and accountability pressures may reinforce overconfidence in unprofitable projects (Jermias & Hoi Hu, 2020). Intelligent accountability systems in schools, despite their evaluative goals, often face implementation challenges due to misalignment with teachers' daily work (Tolo et al., 2020).

Faculty Resistance as Organizational and Professional Behavior
Faculty resistance has been a recurring theme in education and organizational change scholarship. Initially conceptualized as a barrier to reform implementation, resistance has evolved into a more nuanced construct encompassing both behavioral and symbolic dimensions. Studies document diverse manifestations of resistance, including skepticism toward policy directives, disengagement from mandated practices, and active confrontation (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Johnson & Watt, 2022). In religious schools, for instance, secular teachers may resist religious norms through subtle "passing" or open advocacy for religious freedom (Perry-Hazan et al., 2021), while in corporate and banking contexts,

resistance often emerges against performance measurement system overhauls (Valuckas, 2019; Munir et al., 2013).

Critical perspectives frame resistance as a challenge to power—such as "panoptic" accountability systems that normalize surveillance and provoke professional pushback (Kim, 2010)—or as a response to poorly implemented reform initiatives (Guhn, 2009; Chaudhuri et al., 2024).

Across these perspectives, a consistent thread emerges: resistance is not merely obstruction but a meaningful reaction to change processes that disrupt established professional beliefs and working conditions. This shift in conceptualization has significant implications for understanding how governance systems interact with faculty emotions and motivations.

Psychological and Emotional Costs of Higher Education Governance
A substantial and growing body of research demonstrates that contemporary governance regimes impose considerable psychological burdens on faculty(Crow & Weindling, 2010). Rising expectations for productivity and continuous evaluation contribute to stress, burnout, and identity strain (Cannizzo, 2018; Kerins et al., 2021). For learning disabilities teachers in Saudi Arabia, data-driven decision-making intensifies anxiety and undermines self-efficacy (Alaqeel, 2024), while in Macao, teachers' resistance to accountability reforms is rooted in emotional exhaustion from conflicting institutional demands (Huang & Vong, 2015).Even in STEM education, reform-induced shifts in pedagogical expectations alter teachers' attitudes and increase emotional labor (Al Salami et al., 2017), highlighting the universality of psychological costs across disciplines.

Research suggests that governance-induced pressures not only affect individual well-being but also influence workplace behaviors, including resistance, disengagement, and decreased organizational commitment(Stevenson, 2017). Emotional consequences thus become both outcomes of governance and mediators of faculty responses to reform(Alaqeel, 2024).

Fragmentation and Emerging Directions in the Literature
Despite rich conceptual activity, scholarship on governance, resistance, and psychological strain remains highly fragmented across disciplines. Higher education studies foreground professional identity and reform processes, while organizational behavior emphasizes leadership and employee responses. Public administration literature focuses on accountability mechanisms and institutional structures, whereas psychological studies address stress, burnout, and well-being. The lack of synthesis across these domains has hindered efforts to construct a holistic understanding of how governance reforms shape faculty experiences.

Recent convergence includes the emotional turn in academic work (Ventista et al., 2024), digital governance (Mansouri & Belhaj, 2024), and globalization of governance models—evident in China's administrative power constraint reforms (Gao & Tyson, 2018), postcolonial Hong Kong's policing legitimacy debates (Ho, 2020), and Brazil's organizational sustainability barriers (Duarte, 2015).Stakeholder engagement in water governance (Howell et al., 2023) and "seth leadership" in developing countries (Zaidi & Jamshed, 2023) further illustrate how regional contexts shape governance-resistance dynamics.

Still, without a structured mapping of the field, it remains unclear how these themes interact or evolve over time. Bibliometric analysis provides a systematic method for identifying the intellectual foundations and emerging trajectories within this complex body of work.

The Need for a Comprehensive Bibliometric Mapping
Given the conceptual fragmentation, disciplinary diversity, and rapid evolution of research topics, a bibliometric mapping is essential for consolidating knowledge in this domain. Bibliometric methods offer several advantages, which can provide systematic synthesis of dispersed scholarship, identify the thematic clusters and conceptual relationships, and visualize the emerging research fronts. It also give the assessment of geographical and institutional contributions and make clarification of how governance, resistance, and psychological constructs intersect.

No prior study has attempted such a mapping for faculty resistance in the context of university governance. This study fills that gap by providing a global overview of research trends, thematic clusters, and psychological dimensions embedded in the literature from 2006 to 2024.

Methodology
This study employs a bibliometric and science-mapping approach to examine the intellectual structure, thematic patterns, and evolutionary dynamics of research on faculty resistance to change within the context of higher education governance. Bibliometric methods are increasingly used to synthesize fragmented research fields, providing quantitative insights into publication trends, conceptual relationships, and thematic evolution. Following established procedures in science mapping, this study integrates descriptive analysis, co-occurrence networks, thematic clustering, and longitudinal mapping.

Data Source
Consistent with prior bibliometric reviews in education and social sciences, the Scopus database was selected as the sole data source. Scopus offers broad journal coverage across education, management, psychology, and public administration—domains central to this study. Its standardized metadata, including author keywords, affiliations, abstracts, and cited references, enables robust mapping of conceptual and intellectual structures. Scopus is also recognized for its high indexing quality and is widely used in bibliometric studies for fields involving governance, policy, and organizational studies.

Search Strategy and Data Retrieval
A structured search was conducted on 15 December 2025, targeting publications that address faculty resistance, governance reforms, and psychological outcomes in higher education. Based on iterative testing and relevance screening, the following search string was applied to the TITLE-ABS-KEY fields:

("faculty resistance" OR "teacher resistance" OR "resistance to change" OR "organizational change resistance")
AND ("university governance" OR "higher education governance" OR accountability OR managerialism OR "governance reform*")

AND (PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2026)

The search returned 114 records. These records encompassed journal articles, reviews, and conceptual papers across multiple disciplines. No restrictions were placed on country of origin, discipline, or methodological orientation to ensure broad coverage.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
To ensure relevance, the following criteria guided screening:

Inclusion criteria:

Focus on higher education or university contexts
Peer-reviewed journal articles or review papers
Written in English
114 records remained for title and abstract screening.The final dataset comprised 48 publications. These numbers and decision points were documented in a PRISMA-compliant flow diagram.
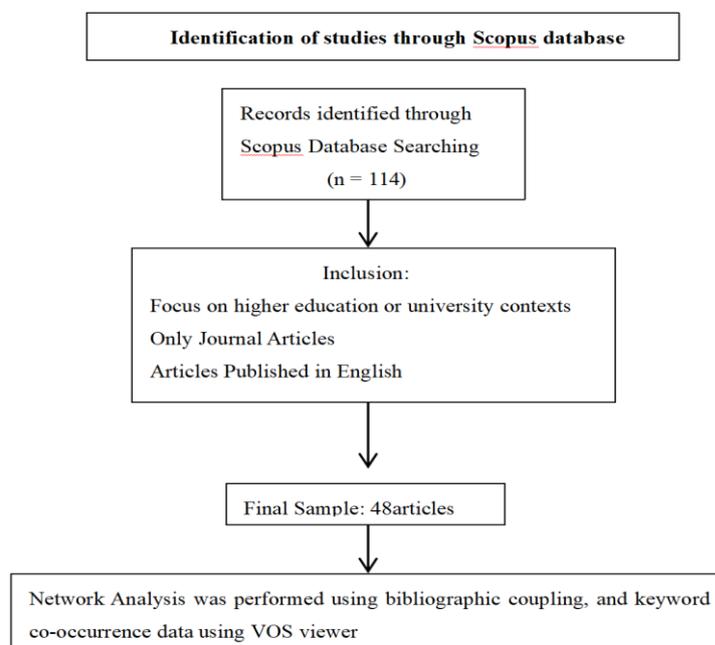
Data Cleaning and Preparation
The 48 retained records were exported in CSV and BibTeX formats, containing complete metadata: titles, abstracts, author keywords, index keywords, affiliations, cited references, and publication information. Data cleaning procedures included:

Normalization of keywords (e.g., merging "burn out" and "burnout")
Harmonization of author names and affiliation variants
Removal of duplicate keywords and generic terms
Standardization of governance-related constructs (e.g., "accountability," "audit culture," "managerialism")

These steps ensured consistency in subsequent co-occurrence and thematic analyses.

Bibliometric and Science-Mapping Techniques
Following data cleaning, bibliometric analyses were conducted in R (bibliometrix package) and VOSviewer, consistent with established practices in science mapping. The analysis proceeded in three stages:

(1) Descriptive Analysis
This included annual publication trends, prolific authors, most-cited countries, and institutional contributions. These indicators provide a macro-level overview of the field's development and geographical distribution.

(2) Conceptual Structure Analysis
Co-occurrence networks of author keywords were generated to identify conceptual clusters and core thematic areas. Clustering algorithms grouped keywords into thematic clusters that reveal how governance, resistance, and psychological constructs coalesce.

(3) Thematic Evolution Analysis
Thematic mapping and longitudinal analysis were conducted to track how dominant topics evolved from structural governance debates (2000s) to identity and emotional labor themes (2010s), and eventually to digital governance and psychological costs (2020s).

VOSviewer was used to generate density maps, co-occurrence networks, and theme clusters, while bibliometrix provided thematic maps, historical trends, and structural indicator outputs.

Reproducibility and Transparency
To ensure methodological transparency, search strings, filtering criteria, and exported datasets were archived. All stages—from search to screening to mapping—follow reproducible procedures aligned with PRISMA guidelines. The final dataset and preprocessing scripts can be provided upon request.

Results
This section presents the findings of the bibliometric and science-mapping analysis conducted on 48 publications addressing faculty resistance to change in higher education within the context of governance reforms. Results are structured into descriptive indicators, publication trends, geographical and institutional contributions, and conceptual structures, followed by thematic clustering and evolutionary mapping. The figures generated through bibliometrix and VOSviewer guide the interpretation of conceptual patterns and intellectual trajectories in the field.

Descriptive Indicators of the Field
Figure 2 summarizes the main bibliometric indicators of the dataset. The field spans 2006 to 2024, comprising 48 documents published across 46 distinct journals, demonstrating a high degree of dispersion and interdisciplinary distribution. The 109 authors contributing to this body of work underscore a relatively large researcher base, yet the low rate of collaboration— an average of 2.29 co-authors per document—indicates a fragmented scholarly network. Only 20.83% of publications involved international collaboration, suggesting that research on

governance-induced resistance remains strongly context-dependent and regionally anchored.

The dataset includes 175 unique author keywords, reflecting conceptual heterogeneity and confirming the lack of unified terminology in describing faculty resistance, governance, and psychological constructs. The average article citation rate (22.77 citations per document) suggests moderate but meaningful intellectual impact, especially given the field's small size. Collectively, these indicators position the field in an early but maturing phase of development, characterized by diverse disciplinary contributions and emerging conceptual convergence.

Timespan	Sources	Documents	Annual Growth Rate
2006:2024	46	48	3.93 %
Authors	**Authors of single-author**	**International Co-Authors**	**Co-Authors per Doc**
109	17	20.83 %	2.29
Author's Keywords (DE)	**References**	**Document Average Age**	**Average citations per do**
175	0	8.6	22.77

Figure: Summary of Main Information

Annual Scientific Production

Figure 3 illustrates publication trends over the 19-year period. Despite a modest output from 2006 to 2010, the field displays intermittent growth from 2011 to 2016, followed by a more pronounced upward trajectory beginning in 2017. The most notable increase occurred in 2024, which recorded eight publications, the highest in the entire dataset.

This pattern reflects broader shifts in higher education governance, particularly the intensification of accountability regimes, performance-based management, and datafication during the late 2010s and early 2020s. These systemic pressures appear to correspond with heightened scholarly interest in resistance behaviors, emotional responses, and the psychological sustainability of academic work. The overall growth rate of 3.93% further suggests steady, incremental expansion rather than rapid field saturation.
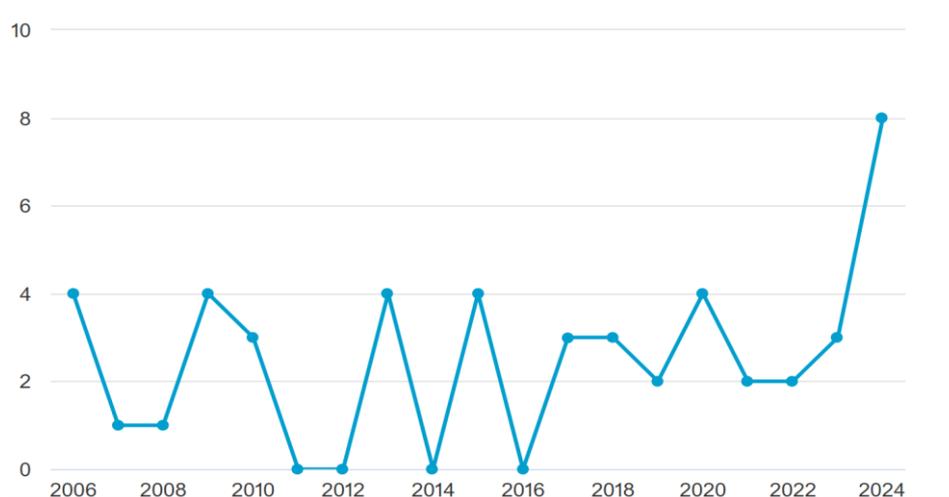
Figure: Annual Scientific Production

Source Dynamics

The distribution of publications across journals provides insights into disciplinary roots and the diffusion of the topic. Figure 4 shows that most journals contributed only a single article, reinforcing the dispersed nature of the field. However, contributions from education policy, public administration, and organizational management journals increased after 2019, illustrating a broadening intellectual community.

This trend indicates a structural shift in how governance-induced resistance is framed. Earlier studies were concentrated within education and teacher identity scholarship, whereas recent contributions increasingly emerge from public sector reform, management, and accounting—fields concerned with performance metrics and audit cultures. The diversification of journals suggests that governance-driven resistance is now recognized as a phenomenon of both educational and organizational significance.

Figure: Source Dynamics Over Time

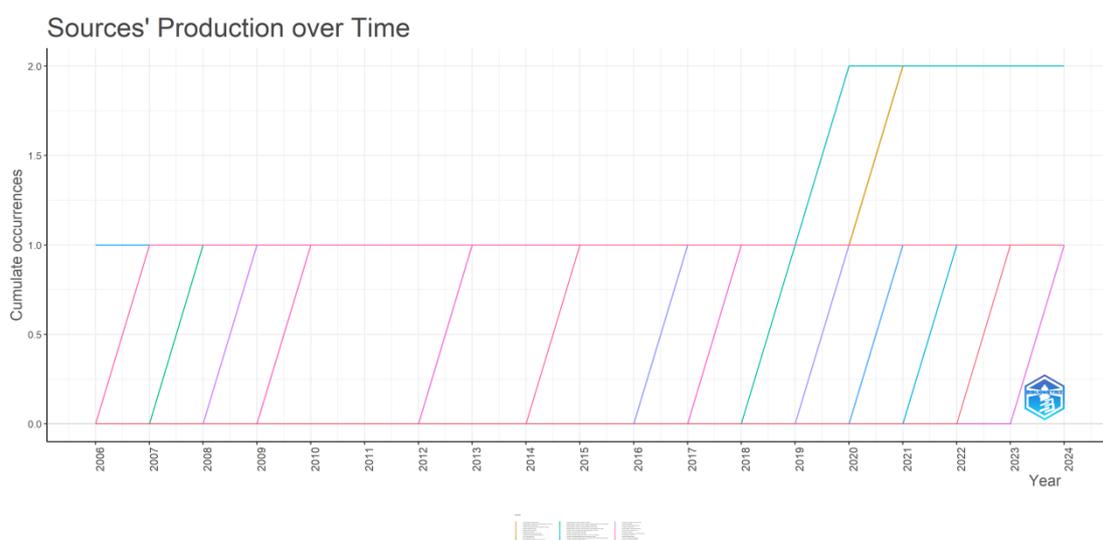*Institutional and Author Affiliation Patterns*
Figure 5 presents affiliation-based production over time. Institutions such as Monash University, Simon Fraser University, and the University of Oxford exhibit notable and sustained contributions. Monash, in particular, shows consistent output across multiple years, reflecting its strong research investment in governance, professional identity, and emotional labor frameworks.

The emergence of institutions from Latin America and the Middle East in the later years indicates growing global interest in the psychological and organizational effects of governance reforms. This diffusion reflects the widespread adoption of managerialist and accountability-based governance models beyond traditional Western contexts, as well as the increasing visibility of emotional and identity-based analyses in diverse higher education systems.
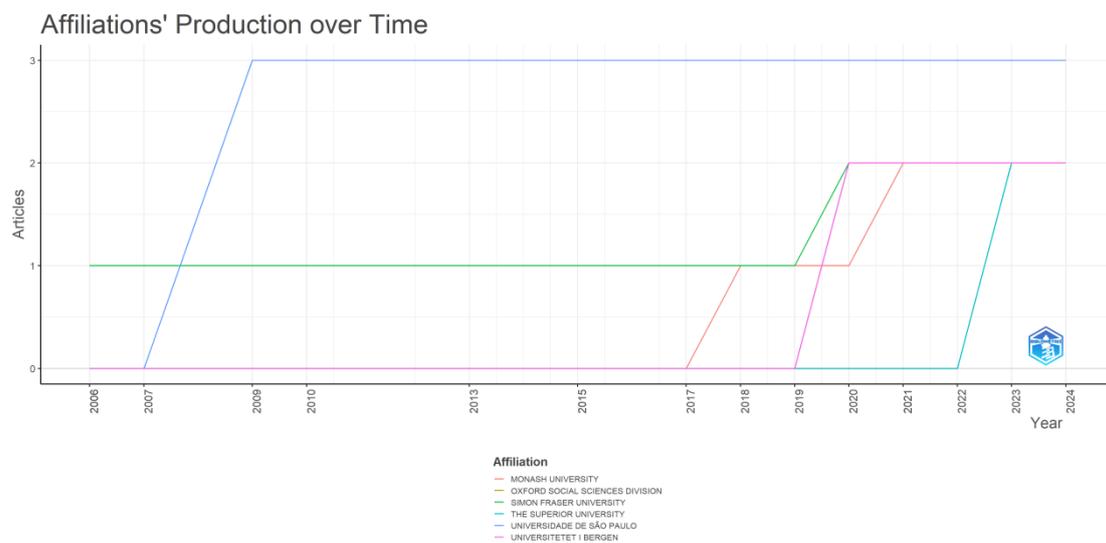
Figure: Affiliation Production Over Time

Geographical Distribution and Citation Impact
Figure 6 reports country-level citation counts, revealing that the United States leads with 243 citations, followed by Brazil (166), Australia (133), Germany (93), and the United Kingdom (87). The United States' prominence reflects its early adoption of performance-driven governance models and its robust output on accountability, professional autonomy, and academic labor. Meanwhile, Brazil's unexpectedly high citation impact underscores intense governance reform activity and political restructuring in Latin American higher education, positioning Brazil as a significant empirical context for studying resistance.

The substantial citation footprints of Australia and the United Kingdom reflect long-standing debates around managerialism, performativity, and the emotional politics of academic work. Overall, the geographical distribution highlights both the global relevance of the topic and the contextual specificity of governance frameworks that shape faculty responses.
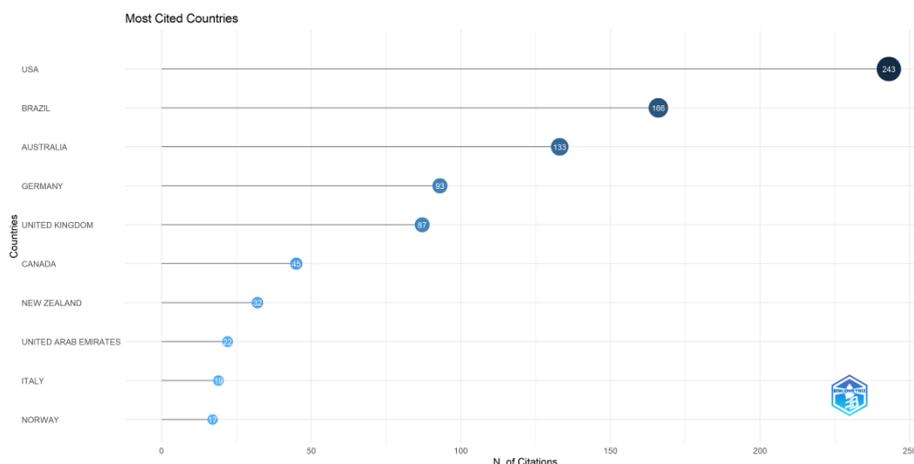
Figure: Most Cited Countries

Keyword Distribution and Conceptual Emphasis
The word cloud presented in Figure 7 offers an initial view of conceptual emphases in the field. Dominant keywords include "resistance to change," "accountability," "governance," "education," "humans," "professional development," and "curriculum." The prominence of accountability and governance terms indicates that policy and structural pressures are foundational drivers of faculty resistance. Meanwhile, keywords such as "professional development" and "curriculum" highlight how reforms often intersect with pedagogical practices and instructional autonomy.

Interestingly, the presence of "humans" and "medical education" points to increasing interdisciplinary applications, especially within high-stakes training environments where curricular reforms and assessment changes may directly challenge professional identity and emotional resources.

Figure: Word Cloud

Conceptual Structure: Keyword Co-Occurrence Network
The keyword co-occurrence network (Figure 8) reveals three major conceptual clusters:

Cluster 1 (Red): Governance, Accountability, Resistance to Change
This core cluster includes studies on open government in Spain (Curto-Rodríguez et al., 2024), digital transformation for accountability in public sectors (Khan et al., 2024), and financial

transparency standards in non-profits (Rodriguez-Galindo et al., 2024), all interrogating how structural governance shapes resistance.

Cluster 2 (Blue): Humans, Education, Medical Education
This cluster links resistance to emotional labor in medical education (Kerins et al., 2021; Banerjee et al., 2019) and anxiety in data-driven teaching (Alaqeel, 2024), reflecting focus on lived experiences of reform.

Cluster 3 (Green): Teaching, Curriculum
Resistance here emerges from curricular reforms in STEM (Al Salami et al., 2017) and religious schools (Perry-Hazan et al., 2021), where pedagogical autonomy conflicts with institutional mandates.

Together, these clusters demonstrate how governance pressures cascade through organizational structures to shape emotions, identities, and everyday pedagogical decision-making.
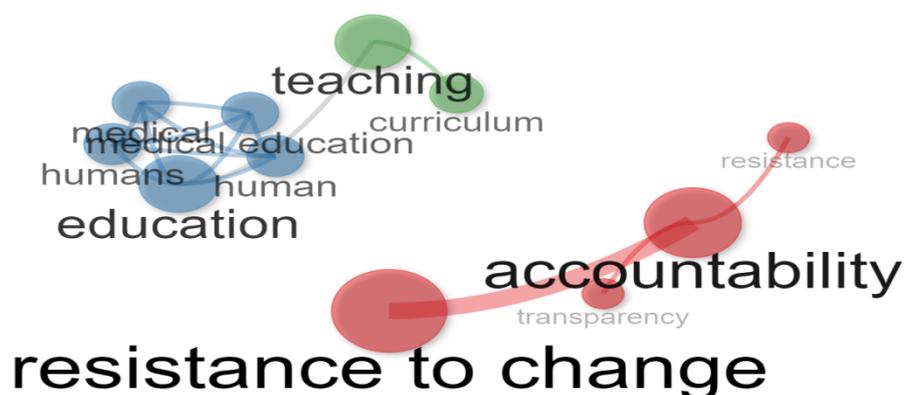
Figure: Thematic Network – Keyword Co-occurrence

Thematic Map and Strategic Positioning of Themes
Figure 9 presents the thematic map, which plots clusters along the axes of centrality and density, providing insights into the strategic importance and developmental maturity of each theme.

Motor Themes (High centrality, high density): "Education," "Humans," "Human"

These themes form the engines of the field. They indicate a sustained and increasingly sophisticated examination of the human dimensions of governance reform, particularly the psychological and emotional experiences of faculty navigating change.

Basic Themes (High centrality, low density): "Resistance to Change," "Accountability," "Brazil"

Brazil's prominence stems from studies on participatory water policy (Abers & Keck, 2009) and organizational sustainability barriers (Duarte, 2015), making it a key context for governance-resistance research.

Niche Themes (Low centrality, high density): "Professional Development," "Implementation," "School Leaders"

These topics are well-developed but confined to specific subfields. They offer valuable insights into leadership mediation and change implementation but exert limited influence on the field's conceptual core.

Emerging or Declining Themes (Low centrality, low density): "Governance," "Public Sector Reform," "Change Management"

These themes are reflected in recent work on e-governance in the Philippines (Faller, 2024) and corporate governance in Fiji (Sharma & Lawrence, 2009), signaling a shift from structural to psychological analyses.
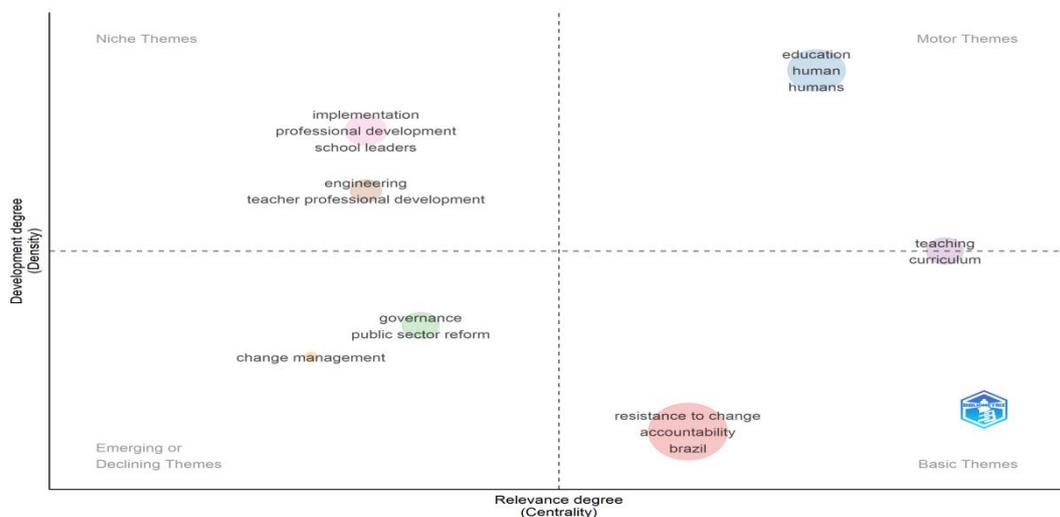
Figure: Thematic Map

Funding Landscape
The analysis of funding sponsors (Figure 10) shows a relatively sparse distribution, with only a small number of studies supported by agencies including the National Science Foundation, China Scholarship Council, Pfizer, Amgen, and several universities. This limited funding pattern aligns with the field's theoretical orientation and its qualitative and policy-focused nature, which traditionally receive less external funding than STEM or experimental research.
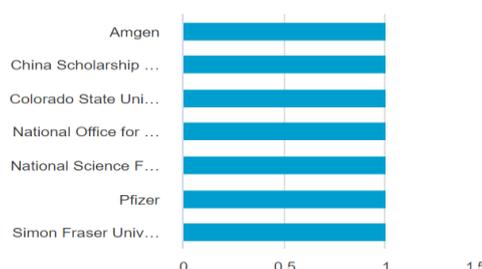
Figure: Funding Sponsors

Discussion

This study provides the first comprehensive bibliometric mapping of global scholarship on faculty resistance to change within the context of higher education governance. Through descriptive indicators, conceptual structures, and thematic evolution patterns, several important insights emerge regarding how governance reforms shape faculty behavior and psychological experience. This section discusses the key implications of these findings in relation to the research questions and broader debates in higher education studies, organizational theory, and the psychology of academic work.

Governance as a Central Driver of Faculty Resistance

Across all analyses, governance and accountability mechanisms appear as the structural core of the field. The dominance of keywords such as governance, accountability, and resistance to change, as well as their positioning in the most central thematic clusters, reinforces that faculty resistance is fundamentally tied to institutional restructuring rather than individual unwillingness or attitudinal conservatism. This finding aligns with earlier scholarship arguing that managerial reforms—performance evaluations, audit systems, quality assurance frameworks—reshape faculty work in ways that constrain autonomy and increase administrative demands.

The thematic network demonstrates that resistance is conceptualized not only as a behavioral reaction but increasingly as an interpretive and emotional response to governance pressures. Faculty often resist when reforms conflict with academic values, disciplinary identities, or professional ethics, or when the pace and scope of change induce feelings of uncertainty or loss of control. Thus, resistance is better understood as a form of professional agency that emerges within governance systems characterized by heightened managerial oversight. Managerial reforms—such as performance evaluations, audit systems, and digital transformation (Khan et al., 2024)—constrain autonomy and increase administrative demands. For example, e-procurement systems in public sectors, while intended to enhance efficiency, may provoke resistance by altering professional workflows (Gardenal, 2013), and accrual accounting in central governments has been criticized for prioritizing output over academic values (Edwards, 2023; Bonollo, 2022).This perspective challenges traditional deficit-based interpretations of resistance and instead positions faculty as active sense-makers negotiating their place within evolving institutional landscapes.

The Emergence of Psychological and Emotional Themes

One of the most significant findings is the prominence of psychological constructs—stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and identity strain—within the thematic map and keyword network. The evolution from structural governance debates in the early 2000s to more emotionally oriented analyses after 2017 suggests an "emotional turn" in scholarship on academic work. This shift is consistent with broader movements in organizational and educational research that foreground the affective dimensions of work, especially in environments experiencing rapid change.

The clustering of "humans," "education," and "medical education" as motor themes further highlights that governance-driven reforms are increasingly examined through the lens of human experience. Medical education's presence is particularly noteworthy, as intense curricular reform cycles and high emotional labor demands make it a critical testing ground

for understanding resistance as an emotional and identity-laden process. The findings therefore emphasize the need to incorporate psychological frameworks—such as emotional labor theory, identity theory, and occupational stress models—into analyses of institutional change in higher education.

Datafication, Digital Governance, and Technological Pressures
Another emerging dimension is the intersection of faculty resistance with datafication and digital governance. While earlier research focused on structural reforms, more recent publications highlight how algorithmic monitoring, data dashboards, and digital accountability mechanisms intensify emotional and psychological burdens. These technologies introduce new forms of surveillance and redefine expectations around productivity and responsiveness.

Although digital governance does not yet appear as a dominant cluster in the thematic map, its presence in several keyword combinations and its link to emotional strain signals its increasing relevance. Institutions adopting technological governance mechanisms must recognize that data-driven reforms may inadvertently amplify resistance by undermining trust, increasing workload ambiguity, and intensifying feelings of scrutiny. Algorithmic monitoring and digital accountability mechanisms intensify emotional burdens (Stevenson, 2017), as seen in e-governance initiatives in the Philippines (Faller, 2024) and their impact on family business strategy execution (Mansouri & Belhaj, 2024). These technologies redefine productivity expectations and undermine trust, amplifying resistance in contexts where digital literacy or resource access is limited.This suggests a need for more sophisticated conceptual models integrating digital governance with emotional and behavioral responses.

Geographical and Institutional Patterns: Context Matters
The geographical distribution of publications and citations indicates that certain regions—particularly the United States, Brazil, Australia, Germany, and the United Kingdom—play disproportionate roles in shaping the field. These countries have undergone significant governance restructuring, often driven by neoliberal reforms, which explains their prominent representation. Brazil's high citation count, for example, reflects intense political and educational reform activities that have generated substantial scholarly attention.

At the institutional level, the consistent contributions from Monash University, Oxford, and Simon Fraser University suggest the formation of small but influential research hubs. However, the overall low rate of international collaboration indicates that research on governance-induced resistance remains strongly contextual and may not yet operate as a unified global field. This fragmentation underscores the need for comparative and cross-national analyses that explore how diverse governance models produce varying emotional and organizational consequences.

A Fragmented but Converging Field
While the field remains dispersed across multiple disciplines, the bibliometric maps reveal a slow but evident convergence of conceptual emphases. Studies that once focused primarily on structural governance reforms are increasingly integrating insights from psychology and organizational behavior, leading to richer accounts of how faculty interpret and respond to

change. The shift from macro-level policy examinations to micro-level emotional and identity-centered analyses represents a key intellectual development.

Nonetheless, the thematic maps also highlight underdeveloped areas. Topics such as public-sector reform and change management appear as emerging or declining themes, indicating that the field may not yet have fully synthesized organizational change theories with psychological and emotional perspectives. The challenge for future research lies in developing integrative frameworks capable of bridging governance structures, faculty agency, and emotional well-being.

Implications for Higher Education Governance and Leadership
The findings hold important implications for leaders and policymakers. First, governance reforms that emphasize accountability without considering psychological impacts risk generating unintended resistance, burnout, and disengagement. Second, faculty responses should be interpreted as relational and emotional processes rather than mere compliance or defiance. Third, leadership approaches that acknowledge emotional labor, professional identity, and workload realities are more likely to foster constructive engagement with reform."seth leadership" in developing countries emphasizes relational trust to mitigate resistance (Zaidi & Jamshed, 2023), and strategies to enhance influence through multi-source engagement can foster reform acceptance (Grenny & Pound, 2010). School leaders, in particular, play a mediating role in aligning reform with teachers' work realities (Tolo et al., 2020; Crow & Weindling, 2010).

Finally, the emerging prominence of digital governance underscores the need for ethical and human-centered approaches to data-driven management. Reform strategies must incorporate emotional intelligence, empathy, and psychological safety to ensure that faculty experience change not as a threat but as a meaningful opportunity for growth.

Conclusion
This study presents the first comprehensive global bibliometric mapping of research into faculty resistance to change within higher education governance, an investigation of urgent global importance. This urgency stems from the neoliberal reform agenda shaping universities across the world and the growing crisis of psychological well-being among faculty members. Drawing on 48 Scopus-indexed publications from 2000 to 2025, our analysis shows that this research field is conceptually diverse and geographically uneven, and it is undergoing a pivotal evolution. It is shifting toward integrating psychological and emotional perspectives into the exploration of governance and resistance dynamics. Early scholarship focused on structural managerialist reforms, while recent research places greater emphasis on the emotional and identity-related consequences of governance systems. This marks an important "emotional turn", one that reflects the growing recognition that faculty well-being is a cornerstone of institutional sustainability. The thematic clusters and evolutionary patterns we identify demonstrate that governance-induced pressures do more than shape organizational behavior. They fundamentally transform the emotional landscapes of academic work, with far-reaching implications for the core mission and long-term viability of higher education institutions worldwide.

Our findings highlight the need for a critical re-framing of faculty resistance. This resistance is not irrational or simply obstructive, but a meaningful and legitimate response to institutional conditions that compromise professional autonomy, academic values and personal identity. Governance mechanisms like accountability regimes, performance metrics and datafication processes bring measurable psychological costs, such as stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion and identity strain. These costs directly impact key institutional outcomes, from the quality of pedagogical practice to research productivity. For all stakeholders in higher education, these insights point to an unavoidable conclusion: effective and sustainable governance must be closely tied to the human dimensions of academic labor.

Practical Implications
The insights generated here carry important implications for policymakers, university leaders, and organizational designers. Governance reforms must consider faculty well-being, emotional labor, and the psychological sustainability of academic work. Leadership practices that emphasize transparency, relational communication, and shared sense-making are more likely to mitigate resistance and foster constructive engagement with reform initiatives. Additionally, institutions adopting digital governance and data-driven evaluation systems should recognize their potential emotional impact and prioritize humane and ethical implementation.

Limitations
This study is based solely on Scopus-indexed publications, which may omit relevant literature indexed in Web of Science, ERIC, or regional databases. The relatively small corpus (48 publications) reflects the emerging nature of the field and may limit the generalizability of certain patterns. Bibliometric methods also privilege published and indexed literature, potentially overlooking grey literature or context-specific reports that address faculty resistance or governance reforms.

Directions for Future Research
Future studies should expand the dataset across multiple databases and incorporate mixed bibliometric–qualitative approaches to deepen theoretical insight. Comparative research across governance regimes—particularly in underrepresented regions such as Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia—would illuminate contextual variation in resistance and emotional response. Additionally, the rising prominence of digital governance, algorithmic accountability, and AI-driven evaluation systems demands new conceptual frameworks that integrate technology with emotional labor and faculty identity.

Longitudinal and ethnographic studies could offer nuanced understandings of how resistance evolves as reforms unfold and how faculty negotiate identity and psychological well-being in dynamic institutional environments. Developing integrative theories that bridge governance structures, organizational behavior, and affective psychology remains a crucial task for advancing the field.

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