

Past And Present For The Future Of Research On Transcendence In Education And Values

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Abstract

As the world becomes more diverse, discussions surrounding religion and spiritual beliefs and their roles in educational systems have acquired significant relevance. There is an ongoing debate on whether the study of religion in education can serve as a means of transmitting common values within society and bridging different perspectives on reality. This topic stands to benefit from scientific analysis, particularly in exploring the relationship between religion, education, and values, and their impact on various aspects of well-being, including mental and physical health.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognize the social and interpersonal dimensions of religion and spirituality. Moreover, identity, diversity, and culture play significant roles in this area of research. Therefore, future studies should aim for a comprehensive understanding of how religion and spiritual beliefs affect both individuals and society as a whole. This understanding is crucial to establish inclusive educational environments that promote a sense of belonging and foster respect for diverse beliefs and practices.

Keywords: Religion, Culture, Education, Values, Spirituality.

I. Introduction

The concept of transcendence, which refers to that which is beyond natural limits, holds significance in people's lives. Research indicates that spirituality and religion are important to several individuals, and they desire these aspects to be integrated into their care, either through the direct involvement of professionals or specialized personnel, such as chaplains in hospitals (King et al., 2013, p. 140). Opinions vary depending on the country,

however, several studies suggest that social workers are inclined to include religion and spirituality in their personal lives, as well as in their professional work with clients (Vetvik et al., 2018, p. 126; Gardner, 2020).

Although human reason has been approached from various areas of knowledge such as religion, philosophy, and psychology, its understanding has changed gradually and in the culture in which it is studied. These changes are continuous and parallel to human

evolution, and have their place within the field of social sciences.

Recent social science literature has highlighted the crisis proposed by the theory of secularization as an explanatory paradigm for the decline of religion in public life. Alternatively, the concept of post-secularity was introduced with the aim of "building bridges between religious and secular rationality" (Garzón, 2014). To date, it has been affirmed that this dimension, beyond the purely immanent, is often avoided. In their study of the regulations and norms in social work education and practice in some countries, Crisp and Dinham (2019) found a common avoidance of religion, beliefs, and spirituality.

In the study of the relationship between human beings and transcendence, religion, as a set of beliefs or dogmas, is recognizable in its more formal dimension. However, spirituality is subjective and informal and encompasses personal and heterogeneous practices, feelings, and moral norms. Although research on religion and spirituality is necessarily characterized by its reductionism to the purely observable, leaving several nuances uncovered (Sami et al., 2021), subjectivity is a characteristic of our time, posing an important challenge, particularly in the field of values (Ogretici, 2018, p. 1).

According to the definition provided by the Royal Spanish Academy of Language (2022) for the term "value," considering the first seven meanings, it can be deduced that values are useful, important, permanent, and gradable (López-Cordero, 2020, p. 37). Therefore, for appropriate education in values, it is necessary to specify teachings that are considered important, useful, and in accordance with the value scale of each society. This should be followed by the implementation of teaching methods and the effect of education on the search for positive qualities for societal development.

Regarding formally transmitting the human knowledge necessary to cultivate values for living well (Ferrari et al., 2019, p. 47; Olmos et al., 2023), various educational systems use legislation and teaching methods

to propagate a certain manner of understanding reality in accordance with a specific social vision. The upbringing, teaching, and doctrines of educational systems aim to reflect a set of common values, granting a degree of utility or aptitude to satisfy needs and provide welfare.

Although religion and spirituality in both Eastern and Western contexts can infuse meaning and value into the nature of working with people (Kwan, Yeung, and Kong, 2020, p. 543), in several instances, practitioners feel ill prepared to meet the needs of their religious and spiritual clients. Formal education on religion and spirituality remains optional or exclusive to a particular belief in most countries, resulting in a lack of cultural understanding in increasingly diverse societies and resulting in misunderstandings rooted in ignorance and simplistic stereotypes (Sami et al., 2021, 1).

This study aims to explore recent research trends in the relationship between religion and education. We focus on formal aspects, including concepts such as religion, formal education, and values; and informal aspects, including spirituality, non-formal education, and informal education. To accomplish this, we conducted a comprehensive analysis of high-impact publications to identify research patterns within four thematic categories related to education in the Web of Science (WoS) database: education and education research, education specialty, education scientific disciplines, and educational psychology.

To delve into the conceptual structure of our study's overarching theme, we analyzed a sample of 483 scientific articles using a co-occurrence analysis of various keywords. This analysis allowed us to identify the primary associations between the terms. Initially, we constructed a co-occurrence network map that revealed distinct clusters representing the research fronts. Additionally, specific keywords emerged as popular research topics in more specialized subject areas.

Subsequently, we conducted a more in-depth analysis by creating thematic maps that differentiated between the authors' keywords and keywords plus, which served as the main units of analysis. These maps incorporate clusters represented by bubbles, with each term positioned on a plane based on measures of density and centrality. These methodologies are employed to provide insights into the current research landscape, highlighting prominent themes, concepts, and connections within the fields of religion and education

2. Method

Variables of the Study

The variable considered in this study pertains to the construct related to the conceptual structure of the thematic structure of religion, education, and values. This conceptual structure is based on the interrelationships between words and terms found within the same body of scientific work. Networks of connections emerge through the analysis of associated words, also known as co-verbal analyses. Such an analysis and the resulting structure enable the exploration of emerging research fronts and popular topics within a specific field or discipline. Furthermore, it allows for the assessment of performance, identification of terminological subdomains, and evaluation of the level of advancement within a particular topic (Marín-Marín et al., 2021, 4).

Sample

Using a quantitative scientiometric methodology, we explored the Web of Science (WoS) database and retrieved 483 scientific papers.

The search procedure was initiated by selecting the WoS database and applying the "topic" filter, which included both the title and the abstract of the publications. Thereafter, the search sequence was constructed using Boolean operators "and" and "or" with the

following structure and search terms: religion AND (spirituality or formal education or non-formal education or informal education or values).

The search was further refined by applying filters related to time, language, document type, and area of research. Specifically, we focused on the scientific production of the last decade, from 2012 to 2021, retrieving documents written exclusively in English and Spanish. Scientific articles were selected as the preferred document type as they best represent empirical studies published in journals indexed in databases such as Journal Citation Reports (JCR) or Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR). Finally, we considered four thematic categories related to the educational disciplines that WoS encompasses: education and education research, education specialty, education scientific disciplines, and educational psychology.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, we considered two types of keywords found in scientific articles: authors' keywords and keywords plus. To construct and visualize graphs, network maps, and thematic maps, we used the Biblioshiny interface of RStudio version 4.0.4 (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017, 962) and the VOSviewer program version 1.6.16 (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010, 525). The Biblioshiny interface in RStudio provides a platform for data construction and visualization, allowing us to create various graphs and maps. Additionally, we used the VOSviewer program, which specializes in constructing and analyzing bibliometric networks, to generate network and thematic maps.

3. Results

Conceptual Structure Analysis

To construct a co-occurrence network and analyze the associated words, we mapped all works related to our thematic focus on religion, education, and values. In this mapping process, we considered both types of keywords, that is, the authors' keywords and keywords plus, as units of analysis. To ensure sufficient data for analysis, we set the minimum number of occurrences of a keyword

to five. Consequently, out of the initial sample of 483 articles, we identified 1934 keywords, of which 108 met the minimum occurrence threshold. By applying this criterion, we aimed to capture the most frequently occurring and relevant keywords within our dataset, allowing us to generate a comprehensive co-occurrence network for further analysis.

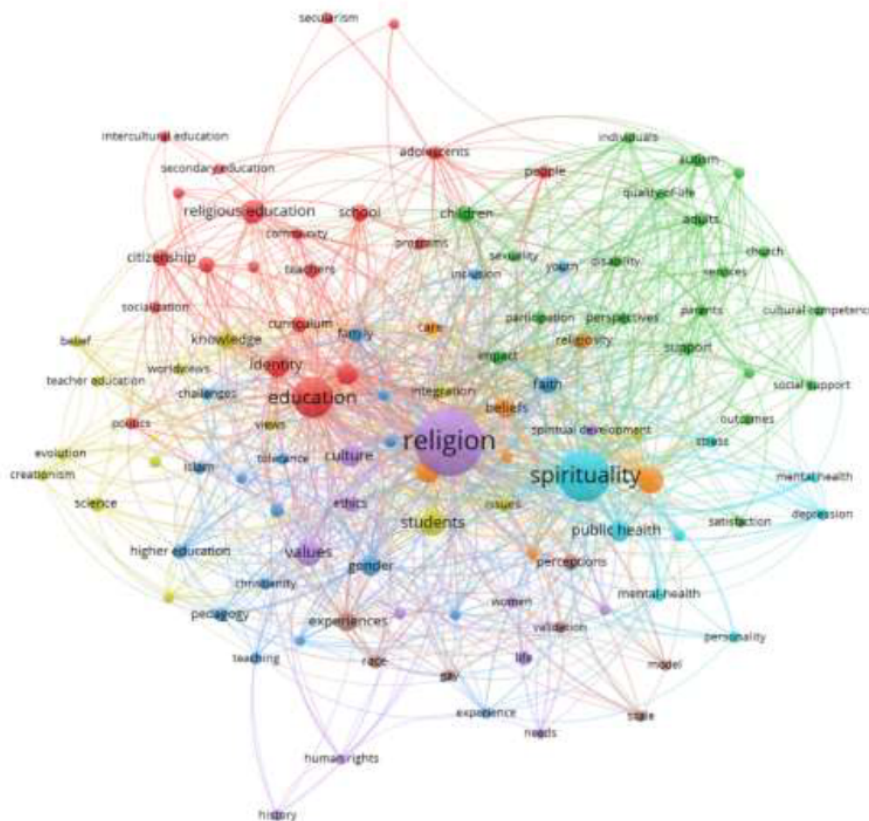


Figure 1: Co-occurrence Network Based on All the Keywords of the Articles

Based on the network map obtained, we identified eight clusters differentiated by color: red, purple, light blue, blue, orange, yellow, green, and pink. These clusters represented different research fronts or themes within the study. Among these clusters, the most important keywords were as follows:

Purple Cluster (religion): This cluster is associated with keywords related to religion. The key terms within this cluster include culture, values, ethics, history, life, needs, policy, prayer, and spiritual development.

These keywords reflect aspects related to the spirituality and religious life of a group of individuals who share common interests and needs at the ethical, cultural, political, and value levels.

Light Blue Cluster (spirituality): This cluster is associated with keywords related to spirituality. The keywords within this cluster focused on specific problems related to mental health and personality from personal and psychological perspectives. Examples of the keywords in this cluster include mental health, public health, personality, stress, and

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depression.

Red Cluster (education): This cluster, specifically within the context of religious education, explores the elements and content that can be incorporated into religious education curricula and their impact on society. The keywords within this cluster include religious education, school, programs, people, moral education, intercultural education, identity, diversity, curriculum,

community, and citizenship.

Table 1 (partially shown) presents information on each of the 108 keywords, including the total strength of the occurrence links with other keywords. The keywords with the highest total link strength are selected, indicating the strength of the relationships between the keywords in terms of co-occurrence links.

Table 1: The 20 Most Relevant Keywords According to their Occurrence Value and Total Link Strength

Keyword	Occurrences	Total link strength
Religion	202	639
Spirituality	122	446
Education	73	211
Health	32	131
Values	30	85
Students	29	121
Attitudes	28	132
Religious education	26	39
Identity	25	81
Diversity	21	79
Culture	21	63
Public heath	20	98
Beliefs	17	84
Experiences	17	64
Gender	16	61
Knowledge	15	49
Faith	14	73
Citizenship	14	39

Children	13	71
School	13	46

From Table 1, it is evident that the term "religion" has the highest values in both occurrence (202) and link strength (639). It serves as the most important and central keyword, acting as the nucleus of the research front in the entire network and demonstrating strong connections with other clusters and neighboring nodes. A similar pattern is observed for the terms "spirituality" and "education." Further, the term "values" holds significance in terms of occurrence value, however, its link strength (85) does not correspond as closely. This may be because of the theoretical nature of the concept of values, which may have a strong presence in scientific studies and research initially, but weaken as we approach professional practice and educational reality, resulting in less interest from the scientific community. Other terms with lower occurrence values than "values," such as "students," "attitudes," and "public health," exhibit better results in terms of link strength, with values of 121, 132, and 98, respectively. In the case of education, the first two terms represent universal issues within the field that consistently carry significant weight regardless of the specific context. The strength of public health lies in the relationship between religion, spirituality, and mental health.

Following the descriptive visual mapping of keywords, the next step in defining the conceptual structure of the scientific production of religion and education is to

create thematic maps. Two maps are presented: one based on the authors' keywords and the other based on keyword plus. The parameters for both maps were as follows: a maximum of 250 keywords per map, each keyword with a minimum frequency of five within each cluster, and each cluster with only one label. Each network cluster within the map is represented by a bubble, and the size of the bubble is proportional to the number of keywords within that cluster. The keyword with the highest occurrence value serves as a label for each cluster or bubble. The locations of the bubbles within the map were determined using two measures: centrality and density. Centrality is a global measure that indicates the position of a node in relation to other nodes and provides insights into the importance of a particular theme within a given research field. Density, is a local measure that reflects the position of a node in relation to a set of neighboring nodes, explaining the degree of development of a theme. Following the guidelines of De la Rosa et al. (2005, 6) and Cobo et al. (2011, 150) for the interpretation of thematic maps, four quadrants of the Cartesian axis can be identified: the upper left quadrant for niche themes, lower left quadrant represents emerging or declining themes, upper right quadrant represents pivotal themes, and lower right quadrant represents fundamental themes. The first thematic map, based on the authors' keywords, is presented below:

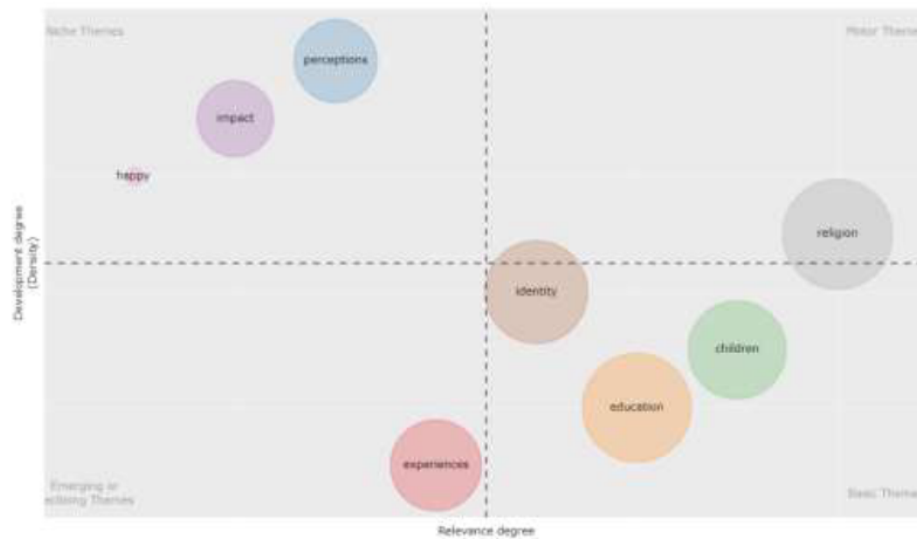


Figure 2: Thematic Map Based on Authors' Keywords from the Articles

From the observations presented in Figure 2, a series of conclusions can be drawn from the information provided by the authors' keywords. The clusters happy, impact, and perceptions are situated within the general themes of religion and education as niche themes that can be understood as either highly developed or isolated themes. The happy cluster is not a central theme with a total absence of density because it is made up solely of this term. Impact and perceptions do not enjoy significant centrality, although they have a slightly higher internal density among their terms. Within the impact cluster we find terms such as "culture," "stress" or "parents" among those with the highest values of occurrences. It is similar for the perceptions cluster and some of the most relevant terms such as "support," "needs," "end," "cancer-patients," "medical-care," "palliative care" or "prayer." These results indicate that part of the research has focused on topics and issues related to health and medicine. Further, it indicates the impact that illness can have on patients and the environment around them, affecting the well-being and happiness of all parties involved, considering from the perspective of religious beliefs and faith. In religion, we found the only cluster that

considered a theme engine and characterized it as one of the clusters with the highest centrality and density in the thematic map; that is, it has a high external connectivity with the rest of the neighboring nodes, as well as a high internal connectivity between the keywords constituting it. Among its nodes with the highest occurrence values we identified the terms "spirituality," "health," "life," "pedagogy," "personality" or "satisfaction," where aspects of a more personal nature are observed, focusing on the well-being of oneself from the perspective of spirituality and education. The experience cluster is the only emerging front with a somewhat lower density and centrality. It reveals research interests in diverse aspects, areas, and groups around religion, education, and sexuality. Some of the themes to be highlighted are: "diversity," "gay," "mindfulness," "homophobia," "belief," "communities," "educational-leadership," "heterosexism," "love," among others. Finally, we identified the clusters identity, education, and children as basic themes. These are clusters with high internal connectivity, as they comprise several keywords and have a certain centrality with respect to the rest of the clusters. These are basic and transversal themes and among the specific problems of

each cluster with the highest occurrence values, we identified the terms "schools," "faith," "values," "religious-education," "race" or "community"; for the education cluster we identified the terms "attitudes," "students," "beliefs," "citizenship," "gender,"

"integration" or "socialization"; and finally the children cluster constituted, among many other terms, "adolescents," "adults," "people," "mental-health," "autism," "disability," "quality-of-life," "families" or "inclusion."

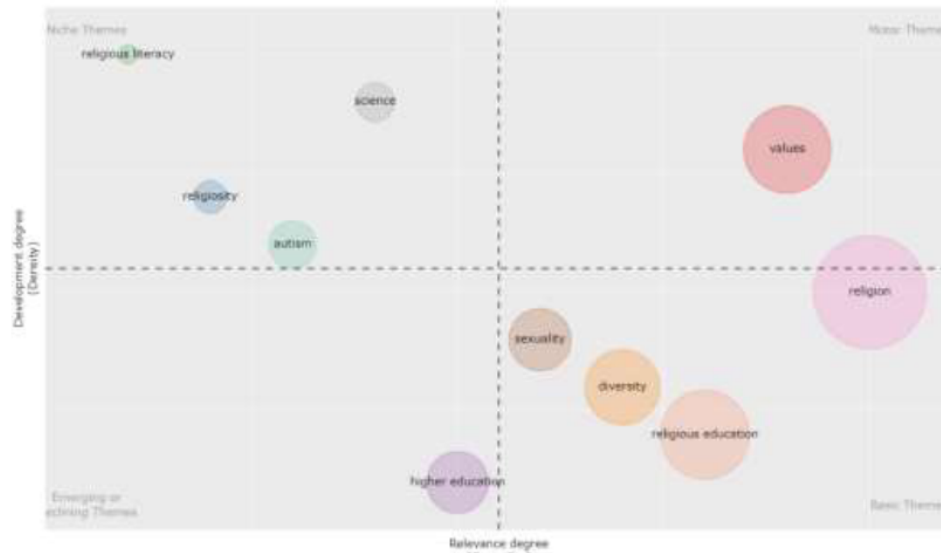


Figure 3: Thematic Map Based on the Keywords Plus from the Articles

In the thematic map based on keywords plus (Figure 3), several clusters represent niche themes, including religious literacy, religiosity, autism, and science. These clusters exhibited low density and relative centrality compared with the other clusters. Owing to their low density, not many specific issues are highlighted, apart from the significant presence of the religious component in mental health, particularly in relation to intellectual disabilities, and its connection with science through terms such as "critical thinking," "ideology," "philosophy," or "religious beliefs."

The cluster "values" stands out as a driving theme and one of the main topics to be investigated in this study. Within the context of religion and education, keywords related to values with the highest occurrence values include "ethics," "gender," "human rights," "social justice," "multiculturalism," "equity," and "pluralism."

The cluster "higher education" falls into the quadrant representing emerging or declining themes. It has medium density and centrality measures, focusing on higher education as the primary research area for the topic at hand. It explores aspects such as "students," "identity," "moral education," and "ethics education." This cluster investigates students' ethical, moral, and psychological dimensions within a formal university educational environment.

The clusters "sexuality," "diversity," "religious education," and "religion" represent the basic themes. These research fronts exhibit high internal connectivity, except for the "sexuality" cluster, which has medium density and significant external connectivity with other fronts. As expected, "religious education" and "religion" form the fundamental themes within the overall topics studied in this research. Specific topics of interest include "spirituality," "education," "public health," "health," "spiritual development," "mental health," "intercultural education," "worldviews," "citizenship,"

"secularism," "religious studies," and "faith schools." These topics are closely related to other fronts, such as the intersection of sexuality within the religious sphere and its educational context. Additionally, the cluster "diversity" focuses on research topics such as "curriculum," "medical education," "tolerance," "inclusion," "resilience," "belief," "empathy," and "integration."

4. Conclusions and Discussion

This study aimed to analyze dance as a tool for social intervention to promote the transmission of values in multicultural contexts. This is an interesting study because interactions in these types of activities allow the transmission of different cultural, religious, and social values. Additionally, owing to the diversity within the city, the participants were from different cultures; hence, it is important to transmit these cultural values through the dance itself. The experiences and challenges that occur in societies are owing to numerous personal encounters that lead to religious, linguistic, and cultural challenges with the sole purpose of seeking negotiations and integration to create these cross-cultural personalities (Correa y Inamdar, 2022).

In an increasingly multicultural world, references to religion and spiritual beliefs, as well as their inclusion or removal within formal educational systems, are subject to debate among policymakers who develop legal guidelines (Crisp and Dinham 2019, 1544). In turn, the study of religion within education as a transmitter of common values in society and an element of connection between the different mechanisms of conceiving the reality of which we are a part, becomes an issue that should benefit from scientific analysis.

The search for extant studies is the first step in the path to scientific investigation. This article presents the results of a study on research in the last ten years, in high impact scientific journals, on the relationship between religion (in its formal or informal aspect, as religiosity), education (considered in both its

academic and informal dimensions) and values.

By means of quantitative analysis, it is possible to visualize the relevance of the topics dealt with by researchers by establishing groupings by coincidence of terms established as keywords, both by the authors of the articles and by the database that indexes them, and interrelating the different terms by order of importance in appearance and interrelation. These groupings facilitated the creation of semantic fields obtained through keywords.

After the analyses were conducted and the subsequent results obtained, it was possible to verify that beyond the general theme investigated around the union of religiosity, values, and the various types of education in its different stages and levels, the specific problems and lines of research of greater interest are broader and related to other areas such as health, psychology, and sexuality.

From the co-occurrence network, which provides broader and more general information, eight large clusters differentiated by color were identified, in which the main themes can be summarized as spirituality and religious life, mental health, personality, education, religion from the curriculum, and impact on society.

The thematic map based on authors' keywords presents the chief focus of interest from the research topics on health and medicine, impact of disease, well-being and happiness, religious beliefs and faith, spirituality and education, religion, education, and sexuality. Conversely, from the thematic map corresponding to keywords plus, the following most relevant lines of research can be highlighted: religion and mental health, intellectual disability, values, ethics and morals in higher education students, and sexuality and diversity.

Considering this panorama, which is rich in topics that religion and education offer from scientific research, it is interesting to observe the tremendous scope that religious beliefs continue to have today at the level of influence, transforming power, and significant

repercussions in the most routine and vital aspects of life. In an increasingly transforming world, where technological progress and the immediate satisfaction of pleasures and needs have modified individual behavior and social relations, research on religion reveals that it is a topic that continues to arouse significant interest at the social level as well as in the scientific community. Aspects that help strengthen the human being as a person before the world and that attend to more intimate and personal feelings, such as faith, spirituality, or beliefs, as well as the load of values that it carries with it, are a reason for work and study from the educational world in its different stages and involve agents that constitute the educational community: students, families, and teachers. All of this has significant relevance in areas such as sex education and mental health. The presence of a religious sense in these contexts, as well as in the rest of the peripheral topics to which it is related, proves to be a broad and interdisciplinary field of study that arouses interest in science in numerous areas of action and focuses on a multitude of groups.

As some words can sometimes be polysemic and even have different shades of meaning depending on the language in which they are used, it is important to justify the use of English terms for data processing. As most of the research has been conducted in English and the keywords have been translated into English by the authors themselves, it is preferable to cross-reference the data in English so that, after the creation of the thematic maps, the terms can be translated for interpretation and discussion.

Some studies emerge from the idea that the meaning of words is defined according to the argumentative discourse specific to each linguistic system that each of them evokes (Zucchi 2016). Some words can be assigned the same or similar meanings. For example, it is possible to use terms such as religion, spirituality, and culture as synonyms in different studies, thus softening their respective semantic specificities. The use of one term or another is in itself a source of

information about what is intended to be transmitted, becoming a clear indicator of currents, fashions, and social taboos.

Similarly, it is possible to speak of originally transcendent terms that, after passing through immanence, become different words but with similar meanings, so that internally, they are linked in their meaning but not formally. Examples include spirituality, personality or mental health.

The terms religion, spirituality and education are the keywords with the highest values owing to the fact that they have been considered as the root of the search, so that, in themselves, they do not provide relevant information, however, the result of these searches allows us to discover terms linked to these that are relevant to highlight as a result of the search.

Remarkably, the importance of the keyword health, without being part of the initial search terms, appears to be connected with greater relevance than even the terms values or attitudes that apparently could be more linked. The concept of religious education as a means of transmitting social values is well known, however, according to the results of this research, both mental and physical health appears to be receiving more attention than in the publications of the sample. This may be owing to a conceptual broadening of the term health beyond the physiological and sociological realms. Moreover, it is possible that the number of existing health research journals has a specific impact on the outcomes of the thematic interrelationships. Be that as it may, the connection between health, even public health, with religion and education is evident in this research. It could be that the interest of research on education and religion is linked more to the world of personal well-being, both physical (health) and mental (identity), highlighting its relational aspect (diversity and culture).

Other words to highlight owing to their frequency of appearance are identity, diversity and culture, which we can interpret as researchers searching for a sense of identity

and belonging through religion, education and values. This may be its most social dimension and, therefore, one that may have a more immediate projection within the field of social sciences. When educating students in the social sciences, skills should be sought that lead them to understand and interpret facts through a critical analysis that allows the construction of meaning through hypotheses, approaching in a more responsible manner the conflicts and dilemmas that arise today (Valencia, 2004).

Human beings are social beings, and there is an inevitable dialectical tension between unity and diversity, between who we are and what we belong to. This, in turn, is manifested today within an increasingly globalized society that tends toward homogenization, attempting to level, harmonize, and unite the different elements of the social whole. It is the responsibility of society, including secular societies, to ensure that its members can exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief (Segev, 2023). However, identity is based on distinction or the awareness that a person or collectivity has of itself, which makes it different from others.

The search for social values possesses this double function by integrating diverse things into a whole, establishing common values in the midst of the search for the set of estimable qualities of oneself and the collectivity to which one belongs, which characterizes them in relation to others.

To understand the different thematic maps, it is useful to distinguish between the concepts of the authors' keywords and keywords plus. The authors' keywords are more related to the formal subject matter of the articles as they are selected and marked by the authors of the research, so that they can follow the trail of their research. Although there may be a temptation to forcibly adapt these keywords to the specific content of special issues or the journal's lines of research, it is clear that they necessarily reflect the research intention and subject matter of these scientific communications. This provides us an insight

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into the initial intention of the researchers when planning different studies and can therefore, help us understand the initial effort and topic of interest driving the research. However, the keywords plus are created by the database in a broader context in response to the need to organize different publications around common areas of interest, and thus facilitate access and interrelation with other existing databases. Therefore, we can conclude that they represent a subsequent external filter, the product of the final result of the articles themselves, away from both the need for the article to be accepted in the journals, since they have already passed their corresponding reviews and have been published, and the legitimate editorial interests of the different journals.

Seeking a simplification that facilitates their differentiation, despite the inevitable biases, we affirm that the authors' keywords convey the immediate vision and intention of the researchers and that the keywords plus allow us to see the broader lines that the database implements in its search engines.

In the first comparison of both thematic maps, it can be observed that the centrality of the term identity within the thematic areas provided by the creators of scientific studies, through the authors' keywords, is evident. However, in the one coordinated by the databases through keywords plus, this centrality is held by sexuality, followed closely by diversity. We did not find a valid interpretation for this difference, however, it was striking. It is necessary to know the protocols and algorithms governing keywords, however, this set of rules goes far beyond our area and capacity for knowledge.

Nevertheless, comparing the results of both thematic maps could become a field of analysis that could elucidate future research.

In his Proverbs and Songs, the Spanish poet Antonio Machado identifies human action on the road as a present task, remembering the

past and without obsessing about the future:

Wayfarer, your footsteps are the way and nothing more; wayfarer, there is no way, the way is made by walking. As you walk, you make the way, and as you look back, you see the path that you will never tread again. Walker, there is no path but trails in the sea. (Machado 1979, 113)

Similarly, as footsteps have been creating a path that points in a specific direction, the possible meaning of the groupings of these words has been studied in the search for a common core of meaning traits, facilitating the signaling of future research paths.

The latest research on education and religion is linked to the world of health and personal well-being, both physical and mental, highlighting their relational and social aspects in search of the sense of identity and belonging necessarily to promote greater social cohesion in an increasingly diverse society. Simultaneously, identity, diversity and culture appear to be relevant and could be an orientation for future research on these topics.

In particular, the theme of diversity has highlighted recent common research concerns regarding variety, dissimilarity, and societal differences at the time of teaching. The abundance of different activities that occur simultaneously and in the same place renders social life difficult and enriches it, making it a challenge and attractive proposal for future scientific research in social sciences.

The present study does not intend to mark limited lines of research because, when contemplating the mosaic of keywords, each researcher must find his own way. However, it shares some possible lines that appear visible on the thematic maps. To claim to know imperfectly by slight hints at something immaterial, such as future lines of research in these fields, may appear to be unscientific foolhardiness; however, these conjectures are

based on the analytical results of a large sample of research reviewed and published in high-impact journals. Certainly, one footprint is not a pathway, however, many footprints, when put in order and visible, form a pathway.

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