

# Global Trends in Employee Retention Research: A Bibliometric and Network Analysis

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**Abstract.** *Employee retention has become a critical focus in recent years, as the costs associated with employee turnover and the recruitment of new hires often exceed those of retaining existing staff. Furthermore, high turnover rates can jeopardize an organization's stability and growth. Numerous studies in scientific literature have explored the topic of employee retention, either by analyzing the factors driving employee departure or by proposing strategies to enhance retention efforts. Additionally, research has examined employee retention in relation to various factors such as compensation, leadership, employee voice, communication, career development, training, job flexibility, and job satisfaction. Nevertheless, a series of bibliometric papers have been identified in the scientific literature that deal with the employee retention subject, but on specific issues such as isolating the scientific papers for a specific country, employment area or more specific themes under the employee retention umbrella. In this context, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the field of employee retention through a bibliometric analysis. The objective is to identify key research themes, commonly used n-grams in literature, prolific authors and journals, and patterns of international collaboration. To achieve this, a dataset was compiled using specific keywords. The analysis reveals an annual growth rate of 11.9%, underscoring the increasing interest of researchers in this area. The findings of this study are valuable for researchers seeking to contribute to the field, as they highlight key trends and elements specific to employee retention research.*

**Keywords:** Employee retention, Bibliometrix, Employee engagement, Employee happiness, Employee fatigue

## Introduction

The long-term success of an organization is highly dependent on the retention of the key employees. As Das and Baruah (2013) stated, in a comparison made with the human body, the key employees can be seen as the “lifeblood” of any organization. Furthermore, Singh (2019) mentioned that the employees, but mostly the key employees, represent the most important, valuable, and productive asset of an organization, while their retention is one of the most difficult challenges for managers.

As a result, the process of employee retention becomes vital in order to support the organizations' long-term health and success (Kossivi et al., 2016; Kyndt et al., 2009; Phillips & Connell, 2004). According to Singh (2019), the employee retention process can be defined as a cumulus of measures taken by an organization on the purpose of determining the employee to remain as much as possible within the organization.

Thus, a series of works from scientific literature have addressed the issues related to employee retention and have tried to extract the main factors that can affect this process. Among the identified factors, the following factors can be mentioned: the level of compensation received (Moncarz et al., 2009), the rewards and recognition offered by the employer (Silbert, 2005), promotion and growth opportunities (Prince, 2005), participation in decision-making (Noah, 2008), work-life balance (Shockley et al., 2017), the work environment (Naz et al., 2020), training and development opportunities provided (Nguyen, 2020), the type of leadership practiced by the manager (Thomas, 2021), job security/safety (B. L. Das & Baruah, 2013), etc.

Based on these factors, a series of retention strategies have been discussed in the scientific literature. For example, Das (1996) proposes a retention strategy made by six factors, namely accelerated vertical growth, compensation, benefits and security, learning opportunity, merit orientation, and work autonomy. Furthermore, Cloutier et al. (2015) propose a strategy based on four main pillars, as follows: workforce diversity, effective communication, hiring of skilled workers, and creating a training and development plan for employees.

As the scientific field related to employee retention is vast, in the present paper, we aim to observe the evolution of this field, highlighting the most prominent authors, the main journals in which the papers from this field have been written, the characteristics of the collaboration between authors, the most used bigrams and the main themes addressed in the selected dataset. To this aim, we will conduct a bibliometric analysis (Delcea et al., 2024) which aims to answer to the following research questions:

- RQ1: Who are the most prominent authors in the area of employee retention?
- RQ2: What can be said about corresponding authors countries' in this area?
- RQ3: Which are the journals with the most important contribution?
- RQ4: Which are the most used terms in the selected research?
- RQ5: Which are the main themes addressed in this area?

Even though there are a series of papers in the scientific literature dealing with bibliometric analysis in the area of employee retention, most of them address more specific themes or works from specific countries around the world. Even more, it has been observed that there are bibliometric papers in the area of employee retention that are focusing on specific employment areas, such as service sector (Padma, 2024), pharmaceutical sector (Ahmed & Vijayakumar, 2024), information technology sector (Bharat & Mittal, 2024), etc. As a result, the present work differs from the other papers in the field as it does not discriminate based on employment area, country of the study nor very specific aspect, but rather it provides a general overview on the selected field.

The paper is organized as follows: the next section is dedicated to dataset extraction through the use of specific keywords. Section 3 presents the results of the bibliometric analysis, while section 4 provides a brief discussion of the obtained results. The paper ends with concluding remarks and references.

## Methodology

Having as main objective to observe the evolution and the techniques approached by employers on the process of employee retention, it was considered to be useful and relevant to use a bibliometric analysis, which will help to analyze the different processes both statistically and mathematically (Donthu et al., 2021). In recent years, more and more authors have chosen to use this type of analysis in order to be able to investigate the evolution over time of different scientific fields, being very flexible and providing valuable information for the interested reader (Hakkaraki, 2024).

With the objective set, the next step was to extract and prepare the dataset in order to start the actual analysis.. Having a high number of bibliometric analyses performed, it was observed what were the choices of the other researchers in terms of dataset extraction (Cui et al., 2025; Ge et al., 2025; Wan et al., 2025). Reading and comparing their choices, it was concluded that the most beneficial data source for this analysis is the Web of Science Core Collection of Clarivate Analytics (WoS, 2024). The main reason for the choice was the large number of papers it contains, their diversity, and the indexing it possesses in several publications (V. K. Singh et al., 2021).

In order to have a dataset as suitable as possible for the desired research, four steps were considered for its extraction (**Table 1**). During these steps, specific filters were applied for a more relevant consistency.

**Table 1. Data selection steps**

Exploration steps	Questions on Web of Science	Description	Query	Query number	Count
1	Title	Contains one of the personal well-being and related concepts keywords	(((((TI=(personal_well-being)) OR TI=(psychological_well-being)) OR TI=(employe*_mental_health)) OR TI=(burnout)) OR TI=(work-life_balance)) OR TI=(employe*_happiness)) OR TI=(work-life_integration)) OR TI=(employe*_fatigue)) OR TI=(occupational_stress)) OR TI=(workload_management)) OR TI=(work_intensity)) OR TI=(job*_strain)) OR TI=(workplace_stress)) OR TI=(personal_health_outcome*)) OR TI=(employe*_engagement)	#1	644
2	Language	Limit to English	(#3) AND LA=(English)	#2	623
3	Document Type	Limit to Article	(#4) AND DT=(Article)	#3	470
4	Year published	Exclude 2025	(#3) NOT PY=(2025)	#4	469

Source: Authors' own research.

The first step consisted of a filter applied at the title level to search for only those papers that contained one of the significant word groups that could describe the field of research. Thus, word clusters such as: "*personal\_well-being*", "*psychological\_well-being*", "*employe\_mental\_health*", "*work-life\_balance*", "*employe\_happiness*", "*work-life\_integration*", "*employe\_fatigue*", "*occupational\_stress*", "*workload\_management*", "*work\_intensity*", "*job\_strain*", "*burnout*", "*workplace\_stress*", "*personal\_health\_outcome*" or "*employe\_engagement*" were searched. By performing this meticulous search, the dataset ended up containing a total of 644 papers.

In the second step, the filter was applied to the language in which the articles were written. Therefore from the previous number of 644 papers, we ended up with 623 papers. At the basis of

this filter was the consideration that English is one of the most widely known and used languages globally, and is often used in the scientific field. In fact, including only English-language articles can facilitate access to the most important and recent research.

In the third step, only those documents whose type is considered as "Article" were selected, thus reaching a total of 470 papers. It is worth mentioning that, as other researchers have argued, an "article" is an original scientific report of undefined length, including meta-analyses (Donner, 2017).

In the fourth and last step of the paper selection, a filter was chosen regarding the time period in which the paper was published. Thus, it was decided to remove the year 2025 from the dataset, resulting in a total of 469 documents. The year 2025 was removed due to the fact that the dataset is not yet complete, being at the beginning of the year, and the number of papers that ended up already published in this period is relatively small, thus not having an impact on the analysis.

## Results

Having created the database, according to the needs of the analysis, it was loaded in RStudio, a programming language specialized in various statistical calculations and graph generation, using a special package for bibliometric analysis, called Bibliometrix.

In **Table 2**, some of the most important information about our set of documents has been summarized.

**Table 2. Main information about the data**

Indicator	Value
Timespan	1976-2024
Sources	311
Documents	469
Average years from publication	7.3
Average citations per documents	23.32
Keywords plus	825
Author's keywords	1176
References	21097

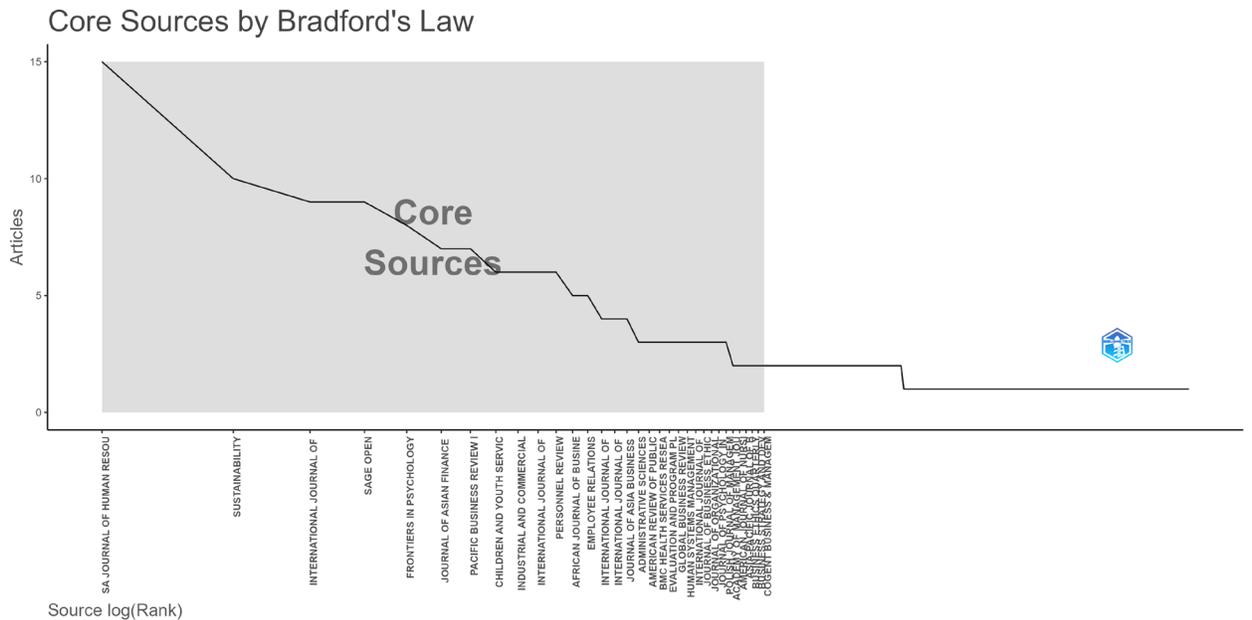
Source: Authors' own research.

Thus, the period of time taken into consideration in which papers have been published is a rather long one from 1976 to 2024. The sources from which the documents were extracted totaled 311, thus having a variety of publications. The total number of documents that we have in the database of 469, indicates the concentration of the selected papers, for the field of research. The average years from publication of 7.3, suggests that the emphasis in the selection of papers was placed on their novelty and usefulness. With an average citation per paper of 23.32 we deduce the relevance of the published papers, which are quite influential in their field. Moreover, the increased interest in this field can also be seen from the average annual growth rate of 11.9%. Analyzing the keywords, we observe a total of 1176 words for "author's keywords" and 825 words for "keywords plus". With these we can deduce the diversity of the topics, using meaningful terms and addressing the most relevant topics. The high number of 21097 references indicates an extensive citation network between documents. This high number may indicate that the research in the database is based on well-grounded literature.

In terms of sources, the Bradford's Law of clustering has been used for better presenting the main contributors to the area of employee retention research. Through Bradford's Law, the

journals included in the dataset are separated into three categories by considering the total number of papers published by each of these sources, starting with zone 1 which contains the most productive journals and ending with zone 3, which includes the journals with the lowest number of relevant articles (Sandu et al., 2024). According to Yang et al. (2016), in general, the sources follow a  $1:n:n^2$  distribution law, with  $n$  being the ratio of journals between successive zones.

**Figure 1** provides the sources distribution, with an accent on zone 1, which represents the core sources, highlighted in grey. As it can be observed, the top-five most important journals in the field in terms of number of papers included in the core zone are SA Journal of Human Resource Management (with 15 papers), Sustainability (with 10 papers), International Journal of Human Resource Management (with 9 papers), Sage Open (with 9 papers), and Frontiers in Psychology (with 8 papers). A total number of 33 journals are included in the core zone, with a number of papers ranging between 2 and 15 papers. The remaining journals (up to 311), included in zone 2 and zone 3 have been published, each of them, up to 2 papers. Thus, it can be observed a sharp decrease of the journals' contributions to the domain as soon as we move outside the core zone depicted in grey in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1. Bradford’s law sources clusterization**

Source: Authors’ own research.

The analysis of the sources through the use of the Bradford’s law provides an important overview on the most relevant sources in the analyzed area and can be a useful source of information for the researchers who aims to public research papers in the area of employee retention and, at the same time, aim for maximizing the impact of their work over the field.

Analyzing the most important countries in the area of employee retention research from the perspective of the corresponding author, the results in **Figure 2** have been obtained. It shall be mentioned that in this figure, the SCP (Single-Country Publications) indicator stands for the publications made by a single country, while the MCP (Multiple-Country Publications) for papers having authors from more than one country.

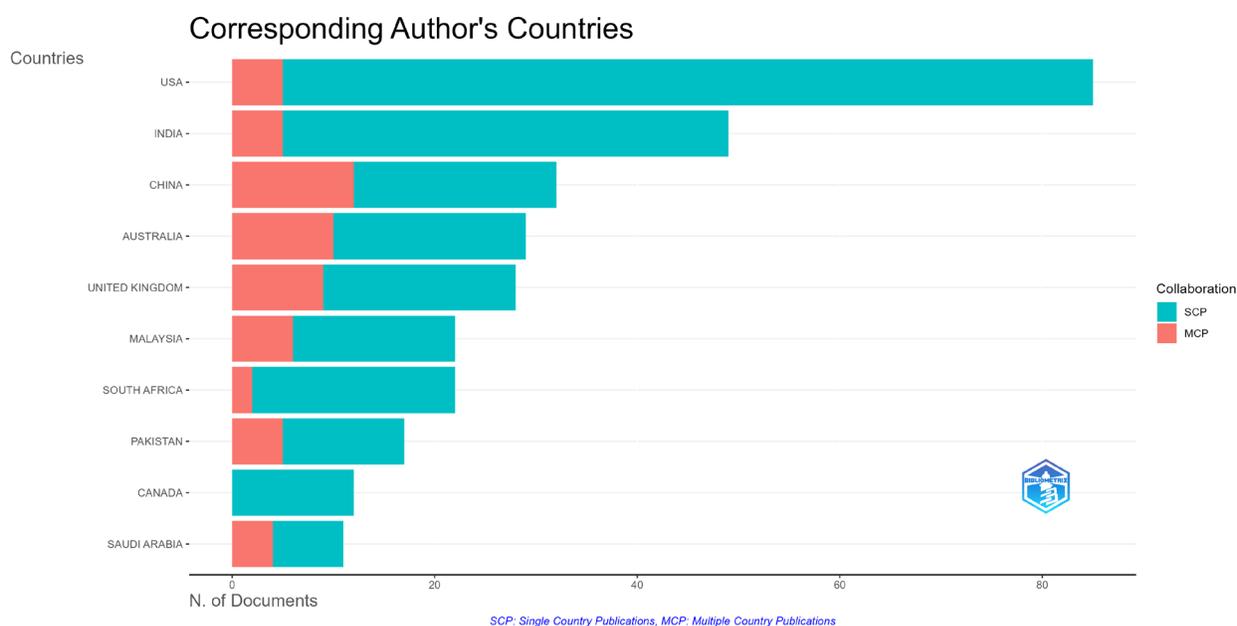
Based on the obtained results, it can be observed that the leading country is the USA, with 85 papers, 80 of them being marked as SCP, while 5 of them being marked as MCP. Similarly,

India has 5 papers marked as MCP, but with a significantly lower number of SCP papers, namely 44 papers.

More balanced SCP and MCP contributions can be found in the case of the countries listed on the third, fourth and fifth position in **Figure 2**, namely China, Australia and United Kingdom, with SCP of 19 or 20, and a MCP between 9 and 12.

Nevertheless, there are countries in which the number of papers marked as MCP is zero – such as Canada, with a MCP of 0 papers, and a SCP of 12 papers.

Overall, it can be observed that for the top-contributor countries in terms of first author (USA, India, China, Australia, United Kingdom), even though the values of the SCP indicator are higher, there are significant values obtained even in the case of the MCP indicator, highlighting their inclination to international collaborations. This preference for international collaboration can also be due to various factors offered by the countries the corresponding authors belong to, such as resources, founding, and networks.



**Figure 2. Top 10 Most important corresponding authors' countries**

Source: Authors' own research.

In order to deduce which were the most frequently used groups of words, **Table 3** has been made. As we could expect, being our field of research, both at title and abstract level, we have the most occurrences for the group "*Employee retention*", with a total number of 199 and 383 occurrences respectively. If we were to categorize the observed groups of words, most of them are related to human resources and management, as we would expect: "*Employee loyalty*" (87 occurrences and 229 occurrences), "*Staff retention*" (45 occurrences), "*Job satisfaction*" (18 occurrences and 163 occurrences), "*Employer branding*" (56 occurrences), etc. Besides this category we could also talk about psychology and behavior thanks to the terms: "*Mediating role*" (16 occurrences), "*Mediating effect*" (8 occurrences) or "*Social responsibility*" (9 occurrences). The totality of the identified groups of words are related both to the workplace environment and to the attitude or feelings of the employee or employer.

**Table 3. Top 10 most used bigrams in titles and abstracts**

<b>Titles Bigrams</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Abstracts Bigrams</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Employee retention	199	Employee retention	383
Employee loyalty	87	Employee loyalty	229
Staff retention	45	Job satisfaction	163
Job satisfaction	18	Human resource	90
Human resource	16	Structural equation	59
Mediating role	16	Employer branding	56
Resource management	12	Resource management	46
Child welfare	10	Turnover intention	40
Social responsibility	9	Workforce retention	34
Mediating effect	8	Organizational commitment	31

Source: Authors' own research.

**Figure 3** includes the most relevant 250 keywords plus, measuring the references and local citations score.

In total, there are 4 clusters, with different importance, based on the size of the cluster. The most representative is colored in red and it presents the “*turnover*” (which appeared in 61.7% of the references), “*work*” (which appeared in 68.4% of the references) and “*performance*” (which appeared in 31.4% of the references), having a total frequency of 105.

The second cluster, colored in green contains “*performance*” (which appeared in 25.7% of the references), “*commitment*” (which appeared in 24.5% of the references) and “*job-satisfaction*” (which appeared in 17.6% of the references) keywords, having a total of 41 appearances.

The third cluster is colored in blue and it’s exploring the “*performance*” (34.3% in the references), “*impact*” (40% in the references) and “*job-satisfaction*” (37.3% in the references), while the last cluster includes “*management*” (14.6% in the references), “*performance*” (8.6% in the references) and “*framework*” (28.6% in the references). The number of occurrences is equal to 89. There are in total 15 appearances for the last cluster.

Centrality and impact are two important metrics displayed in the graph. Centrality defines the relevance of keywords on the investigated theme, based on the external associations, and the impact shows the influence of the keywords in the researched topic (Wilczewski & Alon, 2023).

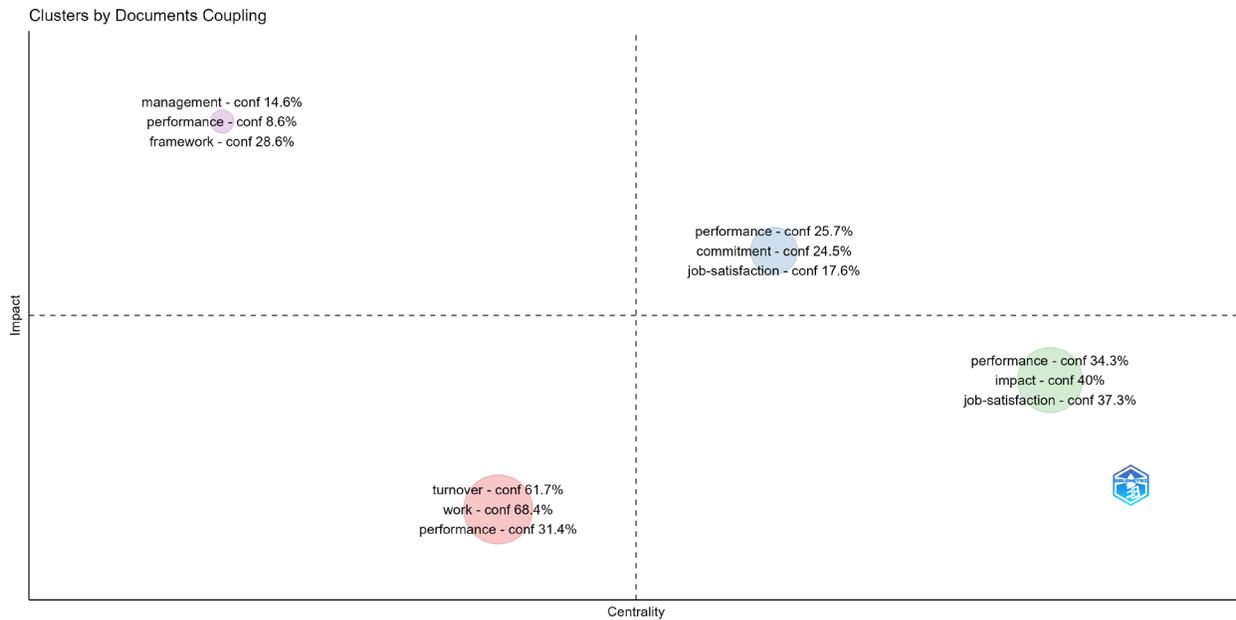


Figure 3 Clusters of the documents

Source: Authors' own research.

**Figure 4** explores the keywords plus that describes the main in the employee's retention area. In total, 200 keywords have been included into the graphical representation, and the minimum cluster frequency per thousand documents is 27.

The most important cluster is colored in pink and defines the “*performance*” (89 appearances), “*turnover*” (79 appearances) and “*impact*” (68 appearances), one of the key terms in the analyzed area, since the performance have a significant impact in the turnover decision. The rest of the keywords has a smaller frequency but are still important for the research: “*job-satisfaction*” (65 appearances), “*commitment*” (61 appearances), “*management*” (58 appearances), “*work*” (50 appearances), “*satisfaction*” (46 appearances), “*organizational commitment*” (42 appearances), “*model*” (30 appearances).

The second most important cluster, colored in purple, explores the “*antecedents*” (29 occurrences) and “*metaanalysis*” (19 occurrences), while in the center bottom part of the graph is the third cluster, colored in gray which encapsulates the “*perceived organizational support*” (18 occurrences) and “*turnover intention*” (14 occurrences).

The last two clusters are on the top left part of the figure, containing only 1 item each one, that are describing the factors that affect the employee's (“*determinants*” with 12 appearances) and the engagement on the job (“*work engagement*” with 12 appearances).

In our case, the most important cluster, colored in pink, has a high centrality and a medium density, while the second cluster has a high centrality and a small density. The third cluster has a medium centrality and a small density, while the last two clusters have a small centrality and a high density.

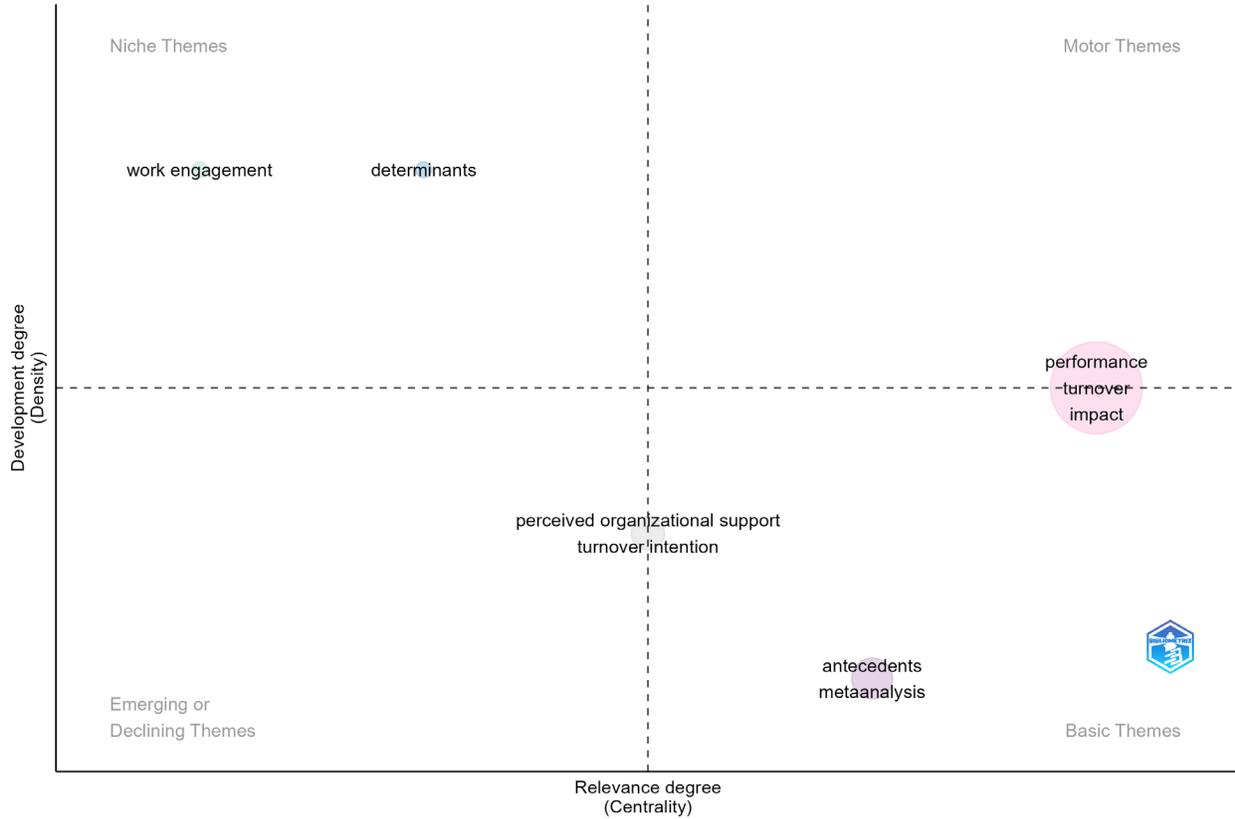


Figure 4 Thematic Map

Source: Authors' own research.

In order to create a clearer idea of the evolution of the works, **Figure 5** figure has been realized to be able to deduce how keywords plus have evolved over certain time intervals.

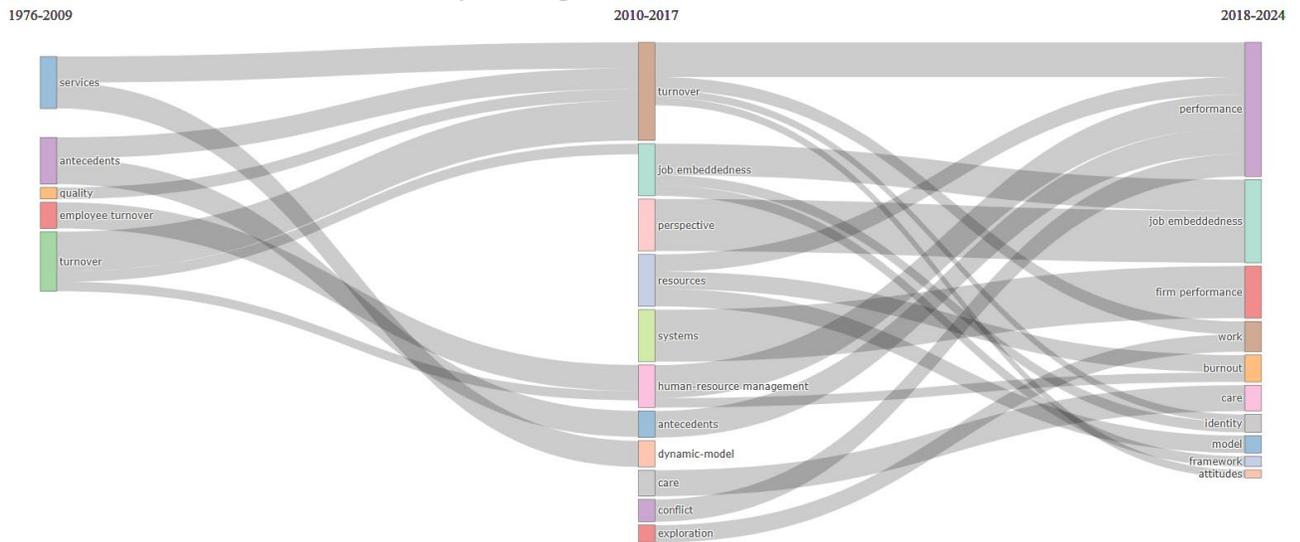
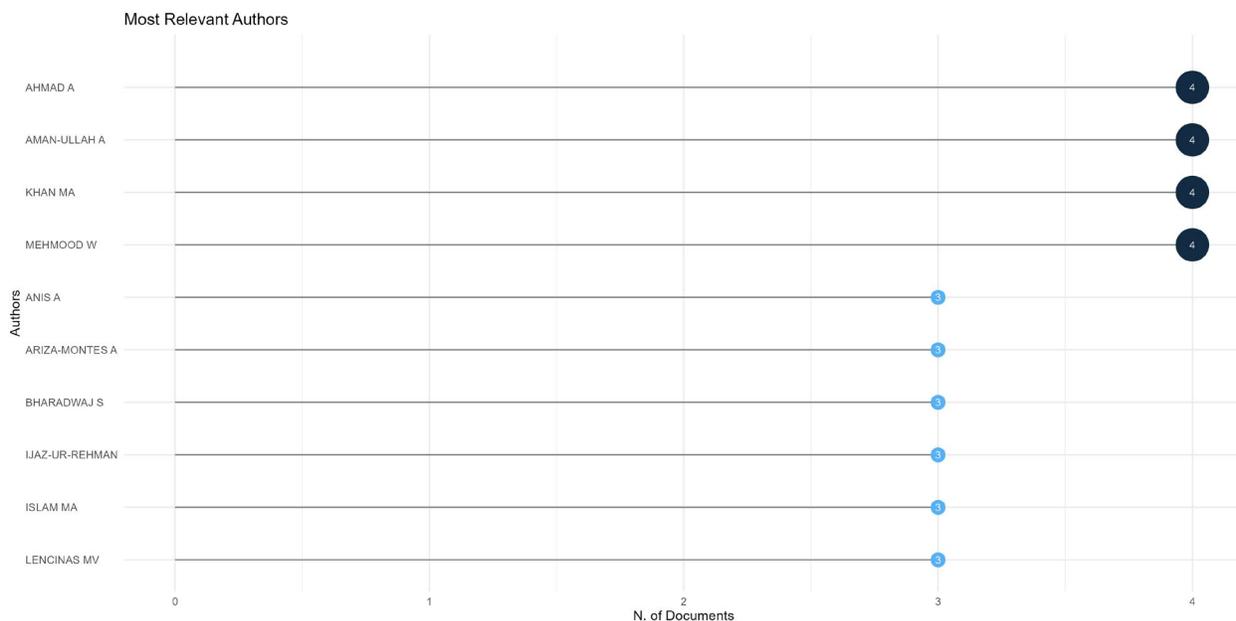


Figure 5 Thematic Evolution

Source: Authors' own research.

If in the period 1976-2009 there were some well-defined topics such as "services", "turnover" or "antecedents", we can see how these topics branched out in the following years, helping to form other topics. In the period 2010-2017 as main topics we can observe the emergence of the terms "perspectives", "conflict", "exploration" or "systems", and for 2018-2024 we have "performance", "job embeddedness" or "firm performance".

**Figure 6** describes the most important authors based on the number of publications. There are 4 authors in first place, having each one 4 documents published: *Ahmad A.*, *Aman-Ullah A.*, *Khan MA.*, *Mehmood W.* The rest of the authors have published 3 papers each one: *Anis A.*, *Ariza-Montez A.*, *Bhardawaj S.*, *Uaz-Ur-Rehman*, *Islam MA.*, *Lencinas MV.*



**Figure 6 Top 10 most important authors**

Source: Authors' own research.

## Discussions

Thanks to the bibliometric approach, a complete overview in the area of employee retention trends have been achieved, providing a detailed analysis of the most important sources, authors, countries, topics and themes that have been discussed in the academic literature, starting with 1976 and up to 2024. The scope of the research was to identify which are the most useful and important retention methods for the employees and how they evolved during the timespan.

Das (1996) offered an idea about the retention of the employees in 1996 which was mainly focusing on the benefits, learning opportunities, work autonomy, or compensation, but as the recent academical research showed, the employees are more interested in participating in decision-making processes, leadership and promotion opportunities (Naz et al., 2020; Shockley et al., 2017; Thomas, 2021).

The most representative country is the USA which contributed the most, achieving a total of 85 documents which represents 18.1% of total documents, expressing the growth interest of the USA authors. The most relevant authors are *Ahmad A.*, *Aman-Ullah A.*, *Khan MA.*, and *Mehmood W.* with 4 articles published each one.

The research has also some limitations, most of them related to the extraction of the dataset. ISI Web of Science (WoS) is one of the most popular databases among the academical researchers, and the decision of keeping only WoS papers. According to Liu (2021), the filtering step using key terms could limit the number of extracted. On the other hand, some papers could not have the author keywords, keywords plus or abstracts, which is mainly caused by the inaccurately collecting data from journals. In our case, there are 91 keywords missing (19.40%), 79 keywords (16.84%), 56 DOIs (11.94%), 28 abstracts (5.97%), 19 affiliations (4.05%), 9 corresponding authors (1.92%) and 9 cited references (1.92%). The decision of including exclusively English papers represents another limitation. Vera-Baceta et al. (2019) explained the differences between WoS and Scopus databases for non-English papers, which is significant, but for English papers, the extraction process is similar.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the research offers a perspective on the employee retention trends, presenting the most used techniques, together with the academical evolution of the domain, which explored a total of 469 articles extracted from WoS database, detailing the most representative authors, affiliations, themes, bigrams and sources. In order to present the findings, we will respond to the scientific questions that have been defined in the Introduction:

- The most important authors are *Ahmad A.*, *Aman-Ullah A.*, *Khan MA.*, and *Mehmood W.* which released 4 documents each one;
- USA is the most relevant country, having a total of 85 documents published, while in second place is India with 49 documents, followed by China (32 articles), Australia (29 articles) and UK (28 articles);
- The most representative journals that contributed the most in the domain of employees retention trends are *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* (15 articles), *Sustainability* (10 articles), *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (9 articles), *Sage Open* (9 articles), and *Frontiers in Psychology* (8 articles);
- The most used keywords in titles and abstracts are describing the “*employee retention*”, together with the “*job satisfaction*”, “*employee loyalty*”. On the other hand, “*workforce retention*”, “*human resource*” and “*turnover retention*” were frequently used;
- The main topics that have been discussed are related to performance, turnover, job embeddedness, burnout, resources, work engagement, job satisfaction, performance and commitment;

Furthermore, it can be stated that the topic of the present paper is relevant for the academic community, providing various methods for employees’ retention, and the journals such as *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Sustainability*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Sage Open* or *Frontiers in Psychology* presents the most recently published articles.

Future research should focus on increasing the dataset size, by including multiple databases, such as Scopus, in order to discover new topics and methods for employees’ retention, obtaining a deeper understanding of the investigated area in future papers.

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