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A Systematic Review of School Governance Literature Between 2000 and 2023

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ABSTRACT

School governance is a contested concept due to ongoing disagreements over its meaning and application, particularly in education sub-fields like leadership, management, and administration (ELMA). Aware of global efforts to differentiate ELMA's knowledge base, this paper critically reviews school governance literature from 2000 to 2023. Using PRISMA guidelines, 361 journal articles were identified from Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Employing both statistical and qualitative methods, we explore the volume, geographic distribution and publication outlets of said literature, as well as map the conceptual structures constituting the school governance field. Statistical results point to interesting findings, revealing a consistent upward trend in volume, together with an internationalisation of the ELMA field beyond the Global North, being published more widely in generic education journals including the Global South. A critical narrative synthesis of the 361 publications enabled us to construct a conceptual framework based on five main themes: school participation politics; autonomy and control; policy reform trends; global education confluences and influences; and digital governance. These findings yield important insight for future research relevant to theory, policy, and practice while simultaneously identifying blind spots and gaps in the field, thus laying the groundwork for future knowledge production.

Introduction

Introducing School Governance

Governance has been designated as a "contested and complex territory" (Connolly & James, 2011, p. 501), giving rise to ongoing debates about its meaning and application in the public sector, including education, inspiring further contributions to literature in the field (e.g., Bell & Hindmoor, 2009; Laegreid & Verhoest, 2010). This systematic literature review attempts to explore how the concept of governance is differently applied in the context of schools and education research more generally.

School governance refers to "the *patterns of rule* . . . concerned with regulation, direction and procedure" (Balarin et al., 2008, p. 3 added emphasis). Schools serve an important function in society, with various stakeholders having a vested interest. Thus, the complexity, diversity, and inter-dependency in the formation of present-day school governance systems. School governance is a field of action (and dissension) occupied by many actors that may include teachers, headteachers, politicians, teachers' unions, local authorities, government departments/agencies, voluntary organizations, public companies, community members, parents/guardians, and school governors. School governance is often regarded as "overloaded," "over-complicated" and "overlooked" by some (Balarin et al., 2008, p. 4). It entails onerous responsibilities in an unnecessarily complex and challenging school environment. This is also exacerbated by the lack of attention given to the work of school governing bodies in an ever-increasing landscape of diversity of school provision, that is, the varying nature of work owing to changes in school setups, for example, multi-academy trusts and maintained schools in the English context. Moreover, ensuring good governance in schools is not a straightforward task due to the various actors and processes involved, coupled with the demanding expectations on schools to ensure high quality performance and improvement. In a comparative cross-case analysis, Connolly and James (2011) identify the following emergent themes: 1) implications of improving

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school performance and pupil attainment; 2) the pulsating character of school governance and the elusive nature of change management; 3) diversity in governance and governing modes; 4) conflicting roles and responsibilities; 5) diversity of provision and complexity; 6) demanding governing capabilities and participation matters; 7) micro-macro issues in policy implementation; 8) collective modes of governance.

Consequently, the increasing complexity surrounding school governance discourses has led us to consider the polyvalence of the concept and the slipperiness around the language of governance, due to its meaning "being continually stretched and adapted in ways that make it appear . . . as a detached signifier" (Wilkins & Mifsud, 2024, p. 359). In the previous work (Wilkins & Mifsud, 2024), the creativity of researchers working with and adapting the concept of governance to explain new trends in education policy both nationally and globally is acknowledged and celebrated. Moreover, by pointing to the polyvalence of governance, we do not make any authoritative claim to the "proper" conceptualization of governance, nor do we claim that there is a privileged method or approach to studying governance. The vagueness or lack of consensus surrounding the concept of governance can be attributed to its complicated history and language as: i. an empirical or calculated object of government or professional organizations seeking efficiency or compliance in the governing of institutions; and ii. an analytic for theorizing the historical and political conditions for the emergence of various modes of governing, from state governance to network governance (see Wilkins & Mifsud, 2024). The former approach, what we might call evaluative-interventionist concepts of governance, is typically driven by performative and organizational aspirations to strengthen the technical-instrumental practicality of applied knowledge to improve the governing of peoples and institutional goals and outcomes. This might include optimizing governance in ways that improve the capacity of remote authorities to hold public servants to account for specific government policy aims (see World Bank, 2013). In contrast, the latter approach represents a shift away from "fixing" the meaning of governance as a shorthand for performance or compliance reporting and monitoring. Rather, it is concerned with the open-endedness of governance as an analytic or theory for improving empirical investigations of the changing modes of governing through which peoples and institutions are organized.

While the term school governance shares some commonalities with the more general term governance described above, as both denote the formal and informal means by which authorities secure power over something or someone, usually for the purpose of improving efficiency, affecting behavior change or enhancing accountability, it is important to note that school governance describes the histories of the rise of political-administrative structures in schools and efforts to strengthen the continuous monitoring and improvement of school conditions and outcomes. We use the term histories to denote the plurality and diversity of school governance arrangements that have emerged around the globe, thus avoiding any normative claims to a pure or universal definition of school governance. Our approach to the study of governance is therefore located within a strict understanding of school governance, used to refer to the way school leaders and governors pursue certain institutional and ideological means to maintain accountability of their organizations as custodians of education services.

School Governance as a Sub-Field within ELMA: The Significance of Our Systematic Literature Review

Hence, our interest in exploring trends and developments in school governance scholarship in the literatures, given the proliferation and plurality of the term in theory, policy, and practice. Traditionally, school governance functions as a sub-field within the broader educational leadership, management, and administration (ELMA) literature, often being obscured within the wider, and more conspicuous ELMA field. Cognizant of the fact that scholars throughout the world are working to diversify the ELMA knowledge base (Hallinger, 2018), this paper identifies trends and recent developments in concept meaning and application in school governance literature published between 2000 and 2023 in order to widen the database via the identification of blind spots and gaps while also bringing this somewhat "hidden" field of school governance to the fore (as presently obscured by the over-arching ELMA field). Previous systematic literature reviews of research on educational leadership and management in specific geographic regions point to a gap in the topic of school governance. A systematic review covering close to 500 journal articles on educational leadership and management (EDLM) in Asia reveals that school governance constituted 8% of the publications, despite featuring as one of the six most common foci (Hallinger & Chen, 2015). School

governance-related articles make up 11% in a similar systematic review of 500+ publications in Africa (Hallinger, 2018).

Notwithstanding the burgeoning interest in the topic of school governance by both researchers and policymakers since 2000, no comprehensive reviews of school governance research have been conducted. We appraise and synthesize the results of "existing research using explicit, accountable and rigorous research methods" (Gough et al., 2017, p. 4), consequently utilizing those research findings to help shape future research in the field and policy and practice more generally. In our use of the term "field," we draw on the distinction made by Gunter (2016) referring to a metaphor of a terrain that is "inhabited by a range of *knowers* as *knowledge actors* . . . who draw on a range of *knowledges* and experiences to develop understandings and explanations about, for and within educational services" (p. 2, original emphasis), in our case via school governance as reported in the literature, and therefore comprising a plurality of people and interests. The research questions guiding this review are:

(1) What are the general trends of the school governance literature published between 2000 and 2023 in terms of volume, geographic distribution, and publication outlets?
(2) What is the conceptual structure (topical foci, frequently used concepts and their application) constituting the school governance field?

The following section outlines the methodological approach adopted that provided us with the dataset of publications that informed our systematic literature review, mainly qualitative in nature while adopting a critical synthesis approach.

Methodology

The following section presents the methodology adopted in the systematic literature review in order to provide a transparent, comprehensive, and accurate account of the rationale behind the review and all the procedures followed that yielded the findings presented in this article. Gough and Thomas (2016) regard reviews as "providing a level of analysis rather than a fixed method," being "less of an event than a process with multiple levels of analysis" (p. 95).

The main methodological framework followed for this systematic review of literature on school governance was that initially developed by Mifsud (2023) and refined after consulting previous methodologies cultivated by Hallinger (2013, 2014) and Oplatka and Arar (2017) for conducting systematic reviews in ELMA while being holistically framed within Gough et al. (2019) main stages for systematic reviews in education more generally. This framework builds on Hallinger (2013, 2014) main stages in terms of distinction of the review contribution to the ELMA field; data sourcing and identification; data analysis and synthesis; and implications for theory, policy, and practice, with the uniqueness of the framework emerging most clearly in Step C (as outlined in Table 1 below). Although it does present a quantitative analysis, it has a more focused qualitative thrust due to the narrative synthesis approach adopted. This involves a thorough analysis of the individual publications constituting the dataset manually, going beyond the simple keyword analysis to generate the conceptual framework but moving beyond by screening each individual abstract and also skimming the paper to look into the results. This process is explained in more detail in the sections that follow.

Table 1 below presents the main criteria of the Mifsud (2023) framework for conducting ELMA systematic reviews, which are mainly qualitative in nature adopting a critical synthesis approach:

These steps are delineated in detail in the sections that follow.

Identification of Sources

Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar were selected as the primary search engines for the electronic sourcing of publications as they are considered leading databases for systematic reviews in the social sciences (Zupic & Cater, 2015) and also due to their comprehensive coverage in the ELMA field (Hallinger, 2019). Our search followed the "Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-

Table 1. Methodological framework for ELMA systematic reviews with a qualitative thrust and a critical synthesis approach (adapted from Author, 2023).

A	Identify the review contribution to the distinct ELMA literature narrative under exploration	• *Develop the review guiding research questions (RQs)* • *Define the search terms, in addition to inclusion and exclusion criteria dictating the final publication dataset*
B	Data sourcing and identification	• *Decide on primary search engines (e.g., WoS and Scopus)* • *PRISMA method to guide identification* • *Cross-checking (screening and filtering via electronic and manual means)* • *Data extraction in Excel sheet from bibliometric data for analysis and synthesis in response to RQs*
C	Data analysis and synthesis	• *Quantitative analysis: Descriptive statistics of dataset elements to determine trends in volume; geographic distribution; publication outlets; article type/ methodology (according to RQs)* • *Qualitative thrust: Narrative synthesis of complete dataset to generate conceptual structure of the topic within the ELMA field*
D	Implications	• *Contributions to educational theory, policy, and practice in the ELMA field* • *Identification of directions for future research*

Analysis" (PRISMA) 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021) to guide the identification of reviewed documents constituting the dataset for our systematic literature review.

Sourcing

An initial scoping search on both search engines revealed a vast body of potentially relevant publications to enable us to create a dataset of peer-reviewed journal articles on school governance to form the basis of this study. The steps outlined below were conducted separately on both search engines, which after thorough identification, screening (via both automation tools and researcher engagement) and eligibility processes, yielded a combined list of 361 records that served as the corpus for analysis to provide the findings of this systematic literature review (see Figure 1). The search terms used were: "school governance" OR "education governance" OR "governing schools" OR "school governors," searched by article title, abstract, author keywords, and keywords plus. This search was carried out in October 2023.[1]

Scopus initially yielded a list of 1352 records, displaying all results unfiltered for the 4 search terms. Automated filters were used to narrow down the results. The choice of subject area limited to the social sciences reduced this number to 1194 records, which after being limited to articles and reviews with English as the language of publication narrowed down to 834 records. An automated keywords filter to exclude: higher education/higher education governance/higher education policy/university governance/university autonomy/universities/higher education reform, narrowed the list to 704 records. A similar process was repeated on Web of Science. The initial unfiltered list with the 4 search terms yielded 992 results. Filtering it by document type to include articles and review articles reduced this number to 719 records, further going down to 522 via selecting the research area "Education Educational Research." Filtering this list by citation topics meso "Education and Educational Research" narrowed this number down to 356, with the final automated filter of English as the publication language gave a final list of 341 records.

Both the Scopus (n = 704) and Web of Science (n = 341) lists filtered with the help of automation tools were then examined individually by both researchers according to the previously agreed upon inclusion and exclusion criteria. To be considered for the final dataset, the articles had to be specifically education-focused; cover compulsory schooling (from early years to school-leaving age at 16); only articles and review articles in peer-reviewed academic journals published in English; while the topic needed to focus on school governance issues, not simply be a case of the search terms appearing in the abstract. The following exclusion criteria were adopted: further education and higher education were both disqualified; editorial material, book reviews, book chapters, books, and conference proceedings were not considered; while publications in other languages (besides English) were excluded.

Reading carefully through the titles and abstracts led to 274 records from Scopus and 207 from Web of Science. Google Scholar was then searched, as an additional cross-checking measure, to ensure that we did not miss any relevant sources, but this failed to yield any additional publications not already included in the Scopus and Web of Science search. We subsequently read through both bibliographies

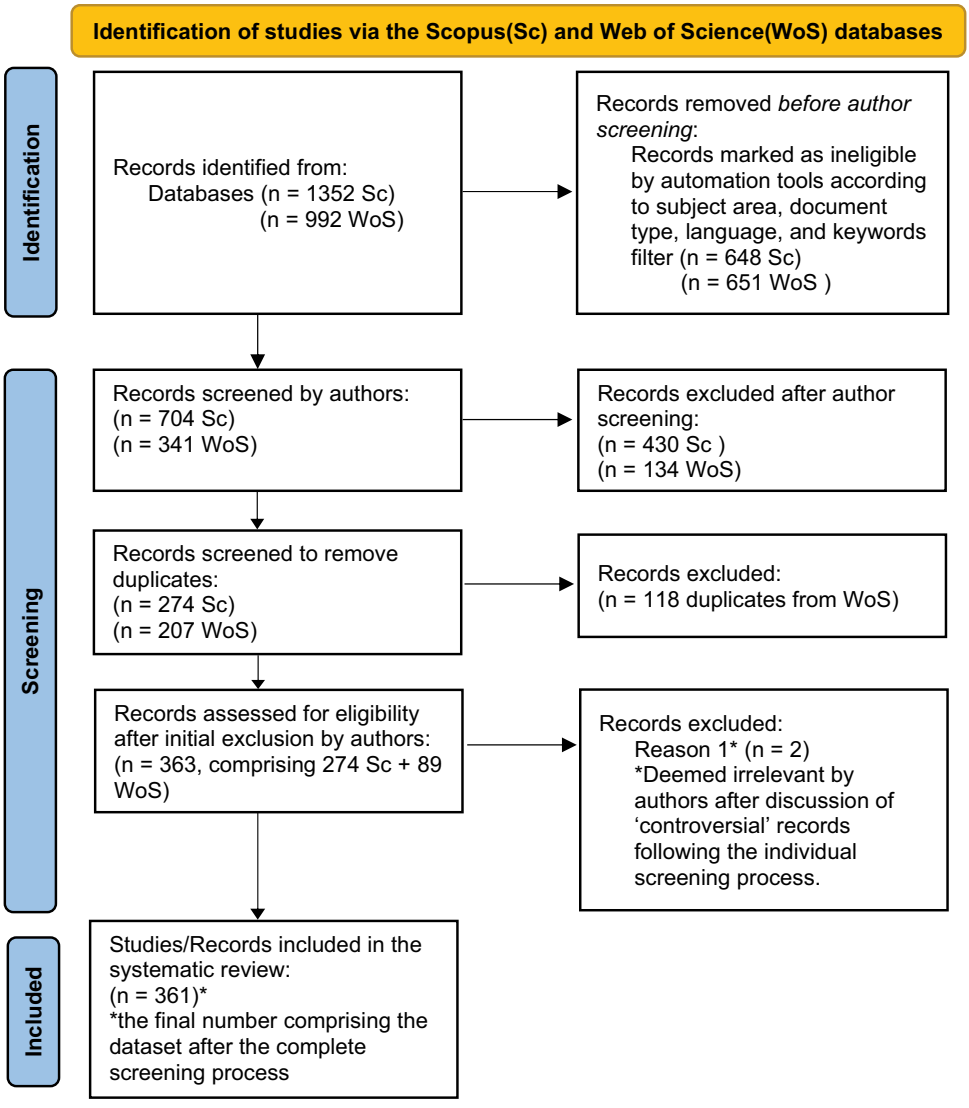


Figure 1. PRISMA (2020) flow diagram.

generated by Scopus and Web of Science via reference management software, and amalgamated these into one by deleting duplicates and merging records. This element of cross-checking was required due to the fact that although both databases produced articles common to both (in the majority), other sources were specific either to Web of Science or Scopus. There was a quasi-unanimous agreement among the two authors in their initial coding and application of said exclusion of non-eligible articles following the individual screening process, which was consolidated to the final dataset after discussing several documents in more detail, thus allowing for consensus coding (Patton, 2014). This robust screening and filtering process conducted by both authors led to 361 journal articles in total used here as the database for our systematic literature review. Both databases were used and then cross-checked, using Google Scholar as an additional checking measure, to address comprehensiveness and systematicity issues within the ELMA field. Throughout this review, we remained mindful of the need to ensure the robustness of our findings. Besides applying strict inclusion and exclusion criteria as outlined above, we conducted a methodological quality assessment on the subset of empirical studies identified (n = 279), using the framework developed by Kmet et al. (2004). This framework includes criteria applicable to both quantitative and qualitative research, such as the clarity of research questions or objectives, suitability of research design, systematic data collection procedures, transparency in data analysis methods, and the clear presentation of results. Our analysis confirmed that the selected studies met these standards. With regard to the conceptual articles (n = 82), we accepted their robustness based on

the fact that they had already undergone rigorous peer review in the Q1 and Q2 journals they featured in.

The next step involved going through the bibliometric data generated by both search engines to extricate the pertinent data for analysis and synthesis in reply to the research questions. The following data were collected: author, title, and date of publication; source (journal); abstract; and author keywords. This data was collated into an Excel spreadsheet as raw text, thus enabling us to select and sort data to initiate evaluation, analysis, and synthesis according to literature publication volume (by year), authorship, source, and country. A folder with downloaded files of the 361 publications constituting the dataset was also created since these needed to be accessed individually for the narrative synthesis leading to the production of the conceptual framework. Notwithstanding our use of descriptive statistics to demonstrate tendencies in the variables under investigation, the main focus of this review being qualitative (refer to Mifsud, 2023 for further details), a narrative synthesis "explor[ing] heterogeneity descriptively rather than statistically and is appropriate for use with results from different types of empirical research" (Booth et al., 2012, p. 91) was conducted. This involved both researchers independently carrying out a content analysis of the abstract and keywords for each of the 361 articles manually, generating codes, and then coming together to discuss the main emergent themes in our dataset of publications by organizing our codes into categories. This ensured interrater reliability in order to guarantee consistency and reduce potential bias in theme identification. After both authors coming to an agreement on the five broad themes in the conceptual framework presented further on, the lead author, who developed this particular qualitative methodological systematic literature framework, then undertook the task of further analyzing the aforementioned abstracts, keywords and also skimming through the individual papers in the folder (for the results) in order to present a critical narrative synthesis under the broad themes while also identifying the sub-themes as outlined in Table 2 further on in the article.

This permitted the development of an initial framework of themes by content, further strengthened by analyzing the results of the complete publication dataset, thus addressing RQ2 in our exploration and eventual presentation of the topical foci and frequently used concepts. We thus generated a conceptual framework of the main themes constituting the school governance field in the ELMA literature narrative published between 2000 and 2023. As declared elsewhere (Mifsud, 2023, p. 159), "our critical-synthesis approach [is considered] to be somewhat distinctive from other research mapping projects (as outlined in McGinity et al., 2022)." Lastly, we would like to acknowledge our positionality and self-reflexivity as critical ELMA scholars, cognizant of the possibility that other researchers working within different schools of thought may have yielded different insights and thematic arrangement of the literature analyzed and discussed. We also acknowledge "the crucial function of qualitative, subjective interpretation in typologising and mapping" (Mifsud, 2023, p. 171) various contested and contestable issues in the ELMA field.

Findings

Our analysis produced some noteworthy findings about the volume and geographic distribution of school governance literature published between 2000 and 2023, as well as its intellectual structure (publication outlets and research traditions) which we will present prior to the narrative synthesis results framing the research discourses and subsequent conceptual structure within the ELMA field.

Volume and Geographic Distribution

Figure 2 below indicates the volume of school governance research since 2000. The figure shows how research in this field was scant and sporadic throughout 2000–2010, taking an upward turn in 2008, followed by a slight dip, but then rising again in 2014, with the biggest increase in volume observed post-2019, with another distinct leap in volume occurring in 2022–2023 – all indicative of a consistent upward trend in volume. This concurs with findings from other studies, for example, McGinity et al. (2022) who report a significant proportion of papers presenting empirical research in the ELMA field in 2007 (70%) and

2017 (80%). Our findings also resonate with Hallinger and Chen (2015) who highlight the engagement with empirical research of ELMA academics globally. Out of the corpus comprising the dataset of this literature review, the majority of the publications are empirical (n = 279, 77.3%) with the rest being conceptual/review articles (n = 82, 22.7%), a finding that concurs with previous reviews exploring specific issues in the ELMA field (Mifsud, 2023).

An analysis of the geographical distribution of the empirical papers points to a gradual shift in the ELMA field in terms of global dominance and geographical incidence leading the school governance research corpus, as indicated in Figure 3. The United Kingdom emerges as leading in terms of volume of literature in this field (n = 65, 18%), closely followed by the United States (n = 64, 17.7%), South Africa (n = 54, 15%), Australia (n = 20, 5.5%), Sweden (n = 16, 4.4%), Denmark (n = 12, 3.3%), Germany (n = 11, 3%), and Hong Kong (n = 11, 3%). [The rest of the countries that produced less than 10 articles will not be presented here as it does not fall within our scope to list all the countries where empirical research was conducted but to identify geographical incidence and any evidence of global dominance.] Our country unit analysis thus demonstrates that research on school governance has spread beyond the English-speaking "Western" countries, revealing an internationalization of the ELMA field beyond the Global North (McGinity et al., 2022) that is publishing in the English language. A more diversified field in terms of geographical production may be observed were it not for the "hidden literature" phenomenon identified by Hallinger and Chen (2015) of the contributions to the field made by papers written in languages other than English being overlooked. Research in school governance published in English was carried out across the continents to varying degrees, led by Europe, followed by North America, Africa, Australia, Asia, and South America. This trend highlights the growing contributions from scholars located in "emerging nations," while simultaneously offering evidence of the increasing geographical distribution and diversification, hence internationalization of the ELMA field as attested by Hallinger (2019) and Hallinger and Kovacevich (2021). However, it should be noted that cross-country studies on school governance are still rare albeit in evidence in places, with little evidence of international collaboration, as previously indicated by Gumus et al. (2021) in their review of social justice leadership research.

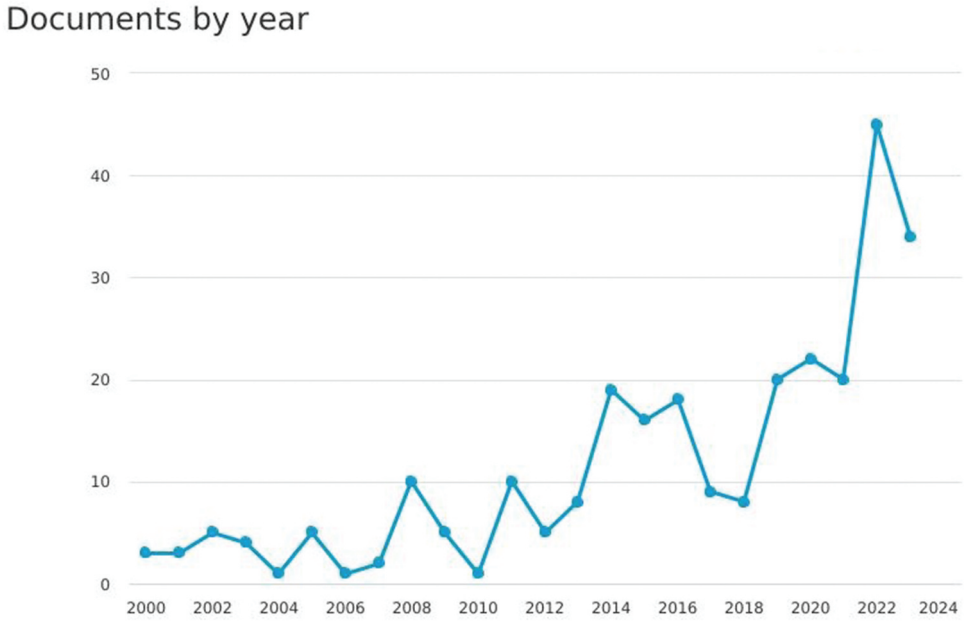


Figure 2. Volume of research.

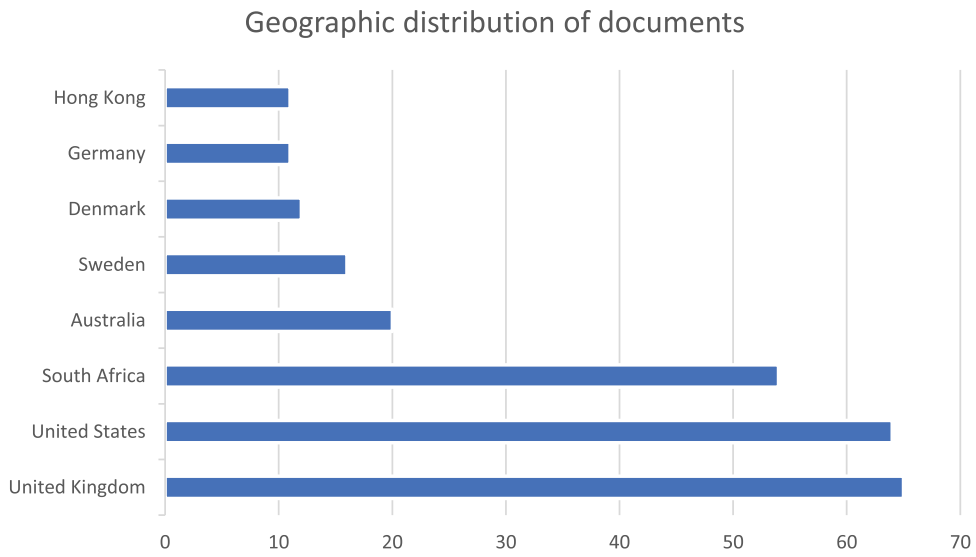


Figure 3. Geographic distribution of documents.

Dissemination Pattern of the Field

Analysis of the publication outlets of the 361 articles underpinning the database of this systematic literature review is illustrated in Figure 4. Academics exploring school governance between 2000 and 2023 published their outputs in various journals encompassing a range of intellectual traditions and specialist, sometimes practice-focused orientations in the field of general education. *South African Journal of Education* was the leading publication outlet (n = 18), with both *Educational Leadership Management and Administration* (n = 15) and *European Education Research Journal* (n = 15) following. *Journal of Education Policy* (n = 14) and *Management in Education* (n = 14) are also preferred publication outlets for articles of this description, with *International Journal of Educational Management* (n = 10), *Educational Policy* (n = 9), and *Compare* (n = 8) similarly emerging as preferred publication outlets [The rest of the journals featured in our dataset are not mentioned here due to the two authors' unanimous cutting off point of appearing in our dataset with 7 or less publications, demonstrates the vast range of outlets considered].

These results point to strong evidence of the wide distribution of papers on school governance beyond those journals with a sole focus on educational leadership, echoing McGinity et al. (2022) observation about

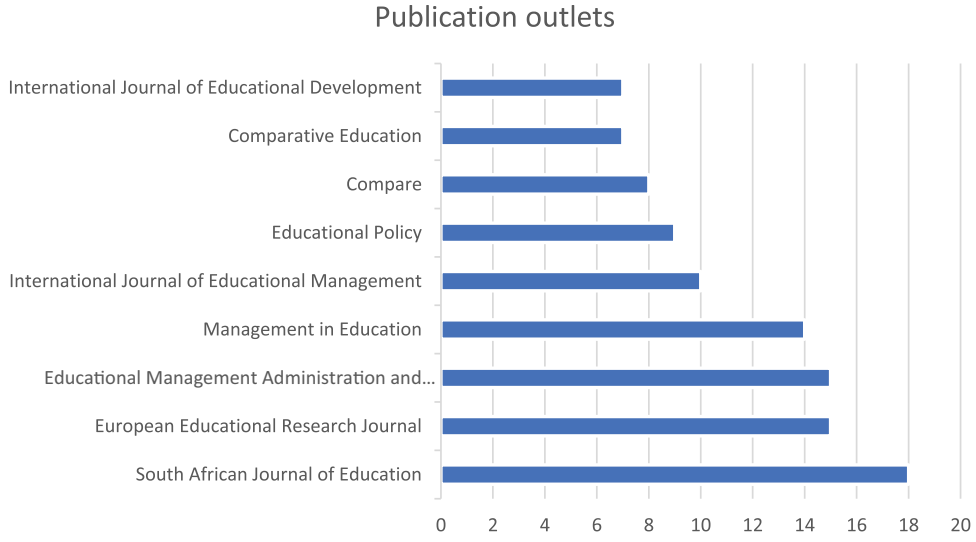


Figure 4. Publication outlets.

publication sites. General education journals lead the field, originating in South Africa and Europe respectively, with two leadership specialist UK-originating journals following suit (with *Education Management Administration and Leadership* being more academic and *Management in Education* being more practitioner-focused). Education policy journals both UK and US based are also featured, together with the specialized *International Journal of Educational Management*, as well as a comparative education journal being in the top 8 of our list (in terms of containing the highest number of publications on school governance). Keeping in mind the geographical distribution of the empirical research already discussed, this is evidence that ELMA scholars are submitting to publication outlets beyond the specialist field and across the globe. Notwithstanding the fact that the vast majority of the 8 journals featured above have high impact factors, this is belied by the *South African Journal of Education*, a generalist education journal with a somewhat lower impact factor of 0.854 in comparison.[2] This evidence points to the internationalization and consolidation of school governance scholarship, while somewhat contradicting McGinity et al. (2022) point of ELMA academics being pressured to pursue Q1 journals with a high impact factor (IF).

The Conceptual Structure of the School Governance Field

A narrative synthesis of the 361 publications that were filtered and eventually selected as the dataset informing this systematic literature review enabled us to construct a conceptual framework. The main themes and concepts that have been explored in school governance literature published between 2000 and 2023 are presented below and discussed in more detail further along this section (Table 2):

Participation Politics in Schools

A recurrent theme that emerged in the publications we analyzed was that of democracy, revolving around interrelated topics of parental involvement and student participation that we hereby label as "participation politics."

The post-apartheid school governing body concept in South Africa gives prominence to parental involvement in education, considered an innovation in education management and leadership in the cultural context of developing countries, a stark contrast to previous processes where parents were handpicked, thus resulting in undemocratic and ineffective participation (Quan-Baffour, 2020). The positive contribution made by parental involvement in school governance has been documented in various ways. Nana Adu-Pipim Boaduo et al. (2009) identify a positive correlation between the visibility of parent and community contribution to school governance and the subsequent consequences on teacher effectiveness and student improvement. Rural school parent engagement is also significant (Duma, 2014a), as well as direct parental input in multicultural settings (Gordon & Nocon, 2008). Notwithstanding, this leads to another issue: the marginalization of parents in school governance decision-making, with their role as parent governors limited to being "school financiers and builders of infrastructure" (Chikoko, 2008). The

Table 2. Conceptual framework of school governance scholarship between 2000 and 2023.

		SCHOOL GOVERNANCE		
Theme 1	*Theme 2*	*Theme 3*	*Theme 4*	*Theme 5*
Participation politics in schools	"Modes" of autonomy & control in school governance practices & mechanisms	Policy trends in school governance reform	"Confluences" & "influences" of global education governance impacting schools	Digital governance in schools
(a) Democracy (b) Parental involvement (c) Student participation	(a) Decentralization (b) Autonomy & control (c) School governing boards (SGBs) (d) School inspection	(a) School reform (b) Policy instruments (c) Regulatory governance turn (d) Pandemic-induced change	(a) Transnational authorities (b) International organizations (c) Globalization (d) Europeanization (e) Global education policy actors	(a) Artificial intelligence (b) Datafication (c) Digital infrastructures (d) Software systems (e) Computational education policy

exclusion of parents from participation is attributed to various processes including the absence of well-defined boundaries between teaching staff and school governing body roles; insufficient time; lack of faith; language barriers; no training; high turnover rate; and transport problems, among others (V. S. Mncube, 2007).

Parental involvement is also utilized as a policy tool, as Buser and Kübler (2020) argue in the case of novel participatory school councils for parents of school children in Switzerland, which they regard as a "response to a perceived *democratic malaise*" in the policy design of "democratic innovations of citizen participation" (p. 2, original emphasis). Parental participation may also be regarded as a means of accountability assurance of decentralized institutions, as is the case of Uganda (Suzuki, 2002). What are the implications for school autonomy, equity, and social justice if these parents are handpicked by the school principals? Blackmore et al. (2023) identify an emerging tension in repositioned school councils following recent school autonomy reforms in public education in Australia. Parent movements have emerged as "counter-publics claiming participatory parity in decision-making" with principal selection of "self-interested and politically influential actors . . . potentially politicising school councils" (p. 547).

The literature also highlights another issue contributing to the malaise of "handpicked" parents, what Khanal (2013) describes as "the community represented in school governance is restricted to a small number of political elites," with participation "taking a form of tokenism" (p. 235), due to the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic traits of the local Nepalese. This resonates with mccarthy Foubert's (2023) problematization of racial equality in school governance, where white supremacy appears to still operate in liberal spaces owing to Black parents' input being taken up only when it converges with the interests of the White parents. Healey (2022) reveals how parental engagement in the English multi-academy trusts governance structures are regarded as a "commodity," "contemporarily constructed in policy as mattering less than engagement by professionalized governors and trustees" (1). In their examination of one leading restructuring movement in Australia, Gerrard and Savage (2022) demonstrate how contemporary schooling reforms are creating a new "governing parent-citizen," through which the "parental labour of social reproduction is being extended, valorised, and rearticulated" (p. 744) due to the elasticity and imprecision surrounding "parent engagement" discourses internationally. On the other hand, parent trigger policies, regarded as "a popular option in the education reform toolbox" (Rogers et al., 2015, unpaginated) in the United States and their power to generate consequential structural reforms at their local public school, may simply add "another element of instability to already unstable school communities in disadvantaged areas" (Rogers et al., 2015).

The literature also identifies other obstacles impacting how parents navigate the field of school governance. B. A. Brown and Duku (2008a, 2008b) point to an inherent tension between values implicit to African traditions and gender politics and the values of modern school legislation. A related issue is the attitude of teachers and school principals to parent participation in school governance. Davids (2022) argues that research on school governing bodies in South Africa has revolved around two contrasting narratives of parents' inability to be genuinely involved and the supremacy of parental involvement destabilizing the principal's authority. Davids (2022) therefore questions whether current governance practices and actions in fact "promote or hamper the democratising agenda" (p. 436). Moreover, it has been observed that some principals express concern about the role of the school governing board (SGB) in school governance due to their limited level of education, highlighting the need for training to improve working knowledge of school governance activities, prompting questions about whether parental involvement in school governance is a "reality" or "rhetoric" at best. Ng (2013) conceptualizes four phases of development in parent inclusion in school governance in Hong Kong: 1) "unwelcome guests" – separate responsibilities; 2) "volunteers" – participation encouraged; 3) "clients" – accountability approach; 4) "school governors" – shared responsibilities. This is imbued with power relations where teaching professionals position parents as "resources" while at other times regard them as "school governors" in the policy rhetoric of home-school co-operation implementation (Ng & Yuen, 2015). Community-based school governance has been endorsed as a desirable policy for education decentralization globally; however, literature reveals a "disjunctured reciprocity" in the policy–practice gap and the yet unacknowledged competing logics of school-community relations (Pradhan et al., 2019). Can schools sustain democratic structures and transform into community centres? (Phillips, 2008; Prieto-Flores et al., 2018).

Promoting student participation in school governance (Cheng et al., 2020), building democracies in schools as a means of teaching active citizenship (Brasof & Spector, 2016), in other words empowering students through giving prominence to their voice, is regarded as a means of forging community by some education scholars (Gawlicz & Millei, 2022). Lac and Cumings Mansfield (2018), for example, attribute value to the way some educational leaders include students in shaping policies and practices affecting young people's schooling experience. In a similar vein, Duma (2014b) highlights the importance of learner governors in schools and their participation in collective decision-making, following the South African Schools Act (1996) stipulation that all public secondary schools are required to have a democratically elected representative council of learners. However, this is not always the case as attempts to "give voice to the voiceless" (Mabovula, 2009, p. 219) through intentional democratic school governance as sometimes hampered by the silencing of learners' voices. These forms of implicit or explicit silencing point to wider issues relating to social justice and democracy (V. Mncube, 2008). Student participation in school governance in Hong Kong, for example, is rarely encouraged due to the conservative nature of schools (Leung et al., 2014) in turn raising questions about whether student unions in these contexts are merely token forms of student participation, serving as a representative albeit powerless mechanisms to initiate any meaningful action leading to social change.

"Modes" of Autonomy and Control in School Governance Practices and Mechanisms

The issue of autonomy featured very prominently in the dataset of publications under analysis. The effectiveness of autonomy in relation to organizational performance is shaped by an amalgamation of internal and external contingencies, as perceived by the school actors themselves (Hashim et al., 2023). Notwithstanding, the process of decentralization and stakeholders' perceptions of the locus of decentralized decision-making power are contested issues, with Chikoko (2009) arguing that no automatic link exists between decentralization and quality improvement. Principals negotiate autonomy in their daily job by "utilizing institutional autonomy to support individual autonomy and skirting around the boundaries" (Kim & Weiner, 2022, p. 487). How does the autonomy "issue" or "non-issue" unfold in different contexts? To what extent is autonomy a reality, or a reality for certain schools under certain conditions? Allen and Gann (2022) problematize "the notion of *academized governance* with respect to the democratic deficit and the consequential lack of stakeholder engagement" (p. 11 original emphasis). According to Keddie and Lingard (2015), the English schooling context, with its new system of decentralized school governance coupled with rigid external accountabilities, has created a "heterarchical" form of governance, "increasingly complex in its overlap, multiplicity and asymmetric power dynamics, but one that remains strongly tied to and regulated by the reductive and narrow measures of success imposed by the state" (p. 1117), transforming quality and equitable schooling in the process. Adolfsson and Alvunger (2020) state that the "re-centralization" in the Swedish changing governing landscape with its newly formed relations between the state, local education authorities (LEAs) and schools has diminished principal autonomy with the LEA quality assurance system functioning as "gatekeeper." Gvirtz and Minvielle (2009) demonstrate how the democratization of school governance via school autonomy in Nicaragua generated "exclusion and autocracy in defiance of democracy and participation" (p. 544).

Who or what shapes school autonomy? Dobbins and Christ (2019) explore how partisan preferences and teachers' unions have shaped the education governance reform trajectory in Spain, with conservative political parties granting "more extensive decision-making autonomy to schools to promote competition, accountability, and efficiency, while leftist governments seemingly use autonomy as a means of promoting political participation and democracy" (Christ & Dobbins, 2016, p. 359). Pages and Prieto (2020) also analyze school autonomy with accountability in Spanish education. There is a tension at work here in the system "between (peripheral/school) autonomy and (central/government) control and direction" (James, 2014, p. 893), with Wilkins (2017) affirming that the "hollowing out" of local government has failed to diminish hierarchy as an organizing principle of school governance. Consequently, "increased monitoring and surveillance of all school governing bodies" comes about as "a condition and effect of school autonomy" (Wilkins, 2015, p. 182), with school autonomy reforms globally exposing risks such as "depoliticisation," "corporatisation," "endogenous privatisation," and "disintermediation."

School governing boards (SGBs) were frequently discussed in the literature we analyzed, regarded by some as a measure of school autonomy. The establishment of SGBs as a legal act in South Africa signaled a willingness among some to encourage "the principle of partnership in and mutual responsibility for education" (Beckmann & Prinsloo, 2009, p. 171). School boards in the United States offer localized decision-making that effectively offers communities a mechanism for choosing its representatives (Collins, 2023). The functioning of SGBs in South Africa is regarded as a tool for promoting democracy in schools (Bush & Heystek, 2003; V. Mncube et al., 2015). Adopting contemporary policy restructuring in Australian public school governance, Gerrard and Savage (2023) explore the various policy interpretations of citizen engagement in school boards. While stakeholder involvement in governance was welcomed, this was arbitrated by divergences between strategic and operational decision-making, meaningful participation, and the level of "expertise" in community representation, especially in rural settings. At the same time, the role and function of SGBs is progressively more dependent on socio-economic and performance contexts, according to James et al. (2011). Moreover, governing bodies appear to encounter provocations resulting from both policy and procedural imperatives (James et al., 2013). Financial management of the school budget is a task that requires principals and SGBs to develop a good working relationship with stakeholders (Aina & Bipath, 2020; Mestry & Govindasamy, 2013; Mestry & Hlongwane, 2009). Consequently, the level of education of board members plays a considerable part in which budget scrutinizing and restraint is perceived.

Principals are regarded as a vital cog in the SGB when it comes to school governance, though persistent power struggles appear to exist in rural schools when principals "overplay their roles" (V. Mncube, 2009, p. 29). The challenge here concerns the dual role of the principal as employee of the Department and ex-officio member of the governing body (Prinsloo, 2016; Xaba & Nhlapo, 2014). The superintendent role is another bone of contention in Nordic countries as they are positioned "in crossfires between conflicting stakeholder demands, further situated in local social and political contexts" (Merok Paulsen et al., 2014, p. 812). Mayoral control of large city school districts also creates tension within school governance in the United States (Buendía & Humbert-Fisk, 2015; McGlynn, 2010; Wong, 2011).

Another issue in relation to SGBs revolves around their effectiveness as a governance body. According to Baker et al. (2016), the "intentional acculturation," or strategic identification and cultivation, of trustees impacts strategic effectiveness and contributes to institutional performance. It has also been observed that conflict appears to be "an underexposed factor in the effective behaviour of school boards" as research indicates that the effectiveness of governance depends more on behavior rather than structure (Heemskerk, 2023, p. 314). Other publications have explored the role of school board elections in local school governance (Feuerstein, 2002), with policies directing the design and scheduling of school elections influencing democratic portrayal in school decision-making (Allen & Plank, 2005). This leads to other issues surrounding volunteer governors, namely whether they should receive a remuneration for their contribution (Forrest et al., 2023) and also whether "volunteer citizens" on governing bodies, in the case of England and Wales for example, have equal opportunities to express their voice in what Ranson (2011) labels as "the largest democratic experiment in voluntary public participation" (p. 398).

Modes of "autonomy" preclude modes of "control" that take many guises in the school governance discourse. Ranson (2016) explores two contrasting accountability practices in the development of school governance in England. The conventional model is to be "held to account" involving performance-based evaluation against set standards, thus expressing a hierarchy of authority. Another model involves a dialogic process encouraging practitioners to "give an account," thus encouraging learning and democratic responsiveness. Hanberger (2016) regards evaluation as an umbrella term referring to evaluation, inspection, quality assurance, ranking, stand-alone evaluations, and evaluation systems. The latter both legitimizes and supports governance by objectives and results, parental school choice, and accountability for fairness and performance (Hanberger et al., 2016). Performance-based accountability (PBA) policies have been adopted in education systems worldwide in an effort to remodel school governance and ameliorate students' grades and school performance, resulting in the implementation of large-scale assessments to make school actors legible for governing by numbers, that is more amenable to statistical mapping and scrutiny as well as accountable for students' results. These "market forms of accountability" lead to "dynamics of interdependence increasing external pressures" to schools (Pages, 2021, p. 535) and have repurposed local governing institutions by reducing their autonomy (DiGaetano, 2015).

Consequently, such comparative evaluations of education systems have led to the rapid rise of inspection as a school governance mechanism. M. Brown et al. (2016) argue that school inspection has moved far from its historical roots and purposes and "in theory is concerned with creating a regulatory framework within which schools can enjoy greater autonomy while simultaneously being held responsible for student performance outcomes" (p. 1). A system of inspection highly specific to England is Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) (Baxter, 2017; Baxter & Clarke, 2013). Ehren et al. (2017) make the case for "polycentric" inspection models that fit education systems in Europe that are moving toward decentralized decision-making where multiple actors play a central role in school governance.

School Governance Reforms and Policy Trends

Are these control and accountability measures masked under the guise of school reform while being steered through the introduction of "new" policy instruments? Literature reveals traces of this in distinct degrees across the various national, local, and regional systems across the globe. Murphy (2000) argues that the landscape of educational control in the United States is being "reshaped in the post-industrial era," with the two most serious governance problems relating to "the professional-statist domination of school governance and the reliance on bureaucratic mechanisms to exercise control" (p. 57), with the latter encompassing five control processes exercised by the state, citizen, professionalism, community, and market. Consequently, rethinking school governance would involve engagement with "localism, direct democracy, lay control, choice, and democratic professionalism" (Murphy, 2000, p. 57). Contemporary school reform in Norway uncovers two antagonistic reform strategies centering around external control and professional commitment, as revealed in an empirical study exploring the translation of school reform policy at the local levels of implementation by superintendents, school board members, and principals (Paulsen & Høyer, 2016). The ongoing pressures on policymaking by "non-educational" actors are regarded here as "a *feature* of the Italian policies restructuring school governance and headship" (Serpieri & Grimaldi, 2015, p. 71, added emphasis). Headship in the Italian education policyscape has been conceived as a "lever of change," giving rise to "an invisible and politically remarkable dilemma" of "headship as a managerialist device to *control* education policies" (Serpieri & Grimaldi, 2015, p. 71, added emphasis), via a particular set of technologies such as headteacher training, selection, and evaluation. During the initial years of 2000, Latin America went through significant political changes, including a "regulatory governance turn" in education, characterized by the advent of four policy instruments, namely performance-based teaching career regulations; curricular standards regulation via textbooks; test-based accountability; and the "school unit" as an accountable decision-making body – a "new policy landscape leading to the paradoxes of the increasing regulation of classroom practices" (Rivas & Sanchez, 2022, p. 250).

School governance reform is also influenced by the local context, taking recent developments in school governance in Ireland as an example. Ireland is experiencing a major transformation due to an increased population size and diversity; a negative attitude toward religion; economic growth; comparative school performance; the electoral system; and the unionization of the teaching profession – set within a context where "disquiet at the church's influence on educational policy and practice is increasing" (Connolly et al., 2023, p. 1). The role of religious institutions in school governing in Ireland is decreasing, with a "looming crisis in school patronage" (Connolly et al., 2023, p. 1). Western welfare states may also differ starkly in terms of the degree of (de-)centralization in school governance, as is the case of France and Sweden with their different forms of "educational corporatism" and the resulting patterns of teacher union relations as crucial educational players in terms of tight centralization and excessive decentralization, respectively (Dobbins, 2014). Politicians present school reform as a means of obtaining social reform and economic prosperity. However, within the UK system, there have been divergent practices and schemes at both national (Scottish, English, Welsh, and Northern Irish) and local levels toward school governance reform (Arnott, 2014). A similar situation may be observed in Spain, a country with a highly decentralized education system and controversial provincial politics, where school governance has developed in strikingly different policy routes across the different regional governments who have aimed to construct singular political profiles (Bonal et al., 2023).

Rapid and unprecedented changes in school governance worldwide were triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The major bone of contention with school governance at the outbreak of the pandemic revolved around the decision of school closures. These decisions were based on two alternative discourses on schooling. Closing schools was "a preventive measure underlined by discourses of schools as places for infection" while keeping them open conceived "schools as a place for social supportive measures" (Lindblad et al., 2021, p. 564). Ntuli et al. (2023) demonstrate how good governance depends on the alliance between schools and parents in times of crisis. B. Brown and Nikolai (2022) focus on the "interrelationship between different levels of governance and the responses of teacher unions" (p. 679), with the contestations that unfolded between them amidst the pandemic creating the prospective for transformation in policy settings and power over the direction of schooling. Germany and Australia reveal a degree of conformity to established institutional procedure and path dependencies, thus protecting the vested interests of the various policy actors. However, the temporary changes in school governance may also cause a possible trust issue for the central actors inflicting the measures (Bormann et al., 2021). Global education governance has also been put to blame in the context of COVID-19, mainly due to its failure "to defend and reinforce education as a public good and its public provision and regulation" (Wulff, 2021, p. 74).

The "Confluences" and "Influences" of Global Education Governance Impacting Schools

Global education governance, realized through key transnational authorities like the European Union, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and International Organizations (Ios) emerged as a prominent theme in our analysis of the 361 publications comprising our dataset.

Volante and Ritzen (2016) discuss the influence of evolving European Union governance on the quality of education amid its positioning as facilitator of national policy reform for its 28 member states with individual sovereignty in education policy formulation and enactment. Notwithstanding, challenges do exist in this emerging EU education governance. These include the development of value-added assessments, assessment revision to include broader skills, in addition to the provision of assessment feedback to teachers within an EU context where national and OECD assessments become complementary (Volante & Ritzen, 2016). Grek (2008) explores the changing nature of education governance in Europe that has been affected by the knowledge economy in two distinct ways. There has been a precipitous transformation of policy discourse and practice, shifting from constructing a European "culture" to a Europe of learning governed by numbers, accompanied by a gradual move of education from the periphery of European governance to the heart of its policy making. This notion also links to "soft privatisation" (Cone & Brogger, 2020) as private sector actors have become more embedded in public education provision and governance across Europe, with privatization as "a phenomenon embedded in, rather than a replacement of, public education in the EU" (p. 374) and the subsequent move of European education "from being a driver for economic growth to becoming an economy in itself" (Cone & Brogger, 2020). Literature reveals how national governments have ostensibly partially relinquished agency in education policy development to international organizations in the context of globalization and Europeanization as one of its channels (Grek, 2010).

Consequently, the OECD has had significant policy influence, reinforcing its infrastructural and epistemological global governance through measures such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Addey, 2017). However, the OECD did not achieve this paradigmatic shift in the philosophy and positioning of education solely through numbers but involved processes of socialization and learning. Grek (2017) states that Sweden is one of the few countries upholding the "indispensability of the OECD as an education policy expert and actor" (p. 295). Zhu et al. (2020, p. 525) explain the rise of the OECD as a global education policy actor through various governing mechanisms, namely: "governing by numbers; comparison; example; commensuration; affection; and what works." Moreover, they identify the main policy effects arising from the OECD's global education governance as the: "economization of education; datafication; learnification; a totally pedagogized society; and educational homogenization among different schooling systems" (Zhu et al., 2022, p. 525). Grek (2022, p. 295) argues that the development of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) as "an epistemic infrastructure" brought

about a major redirection in the field of global education governance, indicating "a move from the measurement of schooling to the measurement of learning." IOs legitimacy in global education governance is commonly regarded negatively as a function of their regulatory or prescriptive power, with research focusing on the role of the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank and their coercive and regulatory mechanisms. Zapp (2017, 2021), however, focuses on these IOs as producers, managers, and transmitters of knowledge, extolling them as the most important global research producers in education, emphasizing "the authority of science as the primary source of legitimacy – and even survival – in an increasingly crowded and competitive field of global education governance" (Zapp, 2021, p. 1022).

Digital Governance in Schools

A burgeoning topic in the literature on school governance in our dataset is that of digital education governance, apparent via issues related to artificial intelligence (AI), datafication, digital infrastructures, software systems, and computational education policy, among others.

"New" or "novel" rather, digital technologies for the collection, analysis, retrieval, and display of data activate new spaces of visibility and forms of school data-based managerialism. In his exploration of the enactment of data-based school governance in Italy, Landri (2021) illustrates the vital positioning of school agency and its associated space, thus troubling the either/or logic presenting "alignment" and "resistance" as opposite points along the continuum to demonstrate policy enactment of the data-based school governance. The "destiny of the digital governance of education" is not inevitable as schools can "align, imitate, and fabricate their data, use them partially and instrumentally; gaming, or opting out from the current regime of accountability" (p. 563). On the other hand, alongside data regimes associated with the "governing by numbers" enforced by state and federal governments, are "smaller-scale accountability procedures and practices initiated in-house by school managers and/or teaching staff, the latter pointing to subtle ways of data-based governance local enactments" (Selwyn, 2016, p. 54). Gulson and Webb (2017, p. 14) coin the term "computational education policy" to refer to the "policy rationalities focused on prediction, transparency and data" that provide the conditions for the integration of AI into policy, thus "intensifying an instrumental set of logics in educational governance and decision-making." It becomes a matter of education practitioners globally negotiating the discourse of digital education governance (Clutterbuck, 2022). In contrast to the dominant perspective in the data use literature, which often focuses on the accountability, control, and subjectification aspects, Proitz et al. (2022) highlight the role of municipal administrators in Norway as "interpreters of policy goals at a crucial yet understudied level of the education system" (p. 89) who can influence institutional processes related to setting performance goals.

European education governance is deploying digital technologies, more specifically websites, to mold and publicize its education policies, thus portraying "related interplays of absence and presence, enact[ing] specific spaces into being, and call[ing] for specific ways of taking action upon the reality they purport to represent" (Decuypere, 2016, p. 851). The rise of software systems in education, more specifically the "digital collection, calculation and circulation of educational data produce a new data-based knowledge infrastructure for education," besides intervening in the ways "educational institutions and actors are seen, known and acted upon" (Williamson, 2016, p. 34). These new data-driven technologies draw light on their reliance on the "precarious construction of objectivity as a key legitimator of policy-relevant scientific knowledge and evidence-based education governance" (Williamson & Piattoeva, 2019, p. 64). AI and big data provide essential innovations and a great potential in school governance (Gulson & Witzenberger, 2022) transforming both the formulation and implementation of education policy. However, they also pose a series of new dangers and perils that can be observed in the "institutionalization of new governance practices that emerge with digital technologies" (Filgueiras, 2024, p. 349).

Discussion and Implications

This article presents a systematic literature review about school governance in the compulsory education sector that reports on and analyses articles published between 2000 and 2023 to map the body of research according to volume, geographic distribution, and dissemination patterns, as well as construct a conceptual framework of this knowledge base. Several insights are worth highlighting.

One must note the sharp rise in the production volume of school governance research post-2014 following an upward trend commencing in 2008, with the biggest increase being observed post-2019, most notably in the last 2 years (that would be 2022–2023 at the time of writing). Besides being in line with findings from other studies in the wider ELMA field (Hallinger & Chen, 2015; McGinity et al., 2022), this rise may also be attributed to trends in the governance of schools in England as identified by James (2014). The main trends relevant to this particular review revolve around the tension in the governance of the whole system between enabling institutional autonomy and ensuring control, as well as the sharpened focus on improving institutional performance. At school level, these are translated more specifically as the drive to improve school performance and pupil attainment, the influential growth of inspection bodies, the increasing diversity of and conflicting roles within governing structures, as well as the changing influence of stakeholders. Most of the dataset are made up of empirical studies (77.3%), similar to previous reviews in the ELMA field (Mifsud, 2023), which shows that academics are engaging with school governance issues in the field.

The geographical distribution analysis of the publications database yielded interesting results that point to a gradual shift in the ELMA field in terms of global dominance and geographical presence leading the school governance research corpus. While the Western world still dominates the field, with the United Kingdom and United States producing the largest number of publications, South Africa has presented itself as a strong contender. This development challenges Hallinger's (2018) claim of the uneven development of the global ELMA knowledge base where literature analyses highlighted most published sources of knowledge coming from a limited set of English-speaking, largely Western, Anglo-American societies. Additionally, in South Africa, school governance research became prominent following the established post-apartheid legislation in 1996 (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996), which decreed democratic engagement of stakeholder groups in local decision-making (Moorosi et al., 2020). Publication outlets are also interesting to note, with general education journals leading the field, pointing to overwhelming evidence of the field spreading beyond those journals concentrated on educational leadership. Publication outlets are also going beyond the Western world with the *South African Journal of Education* being the leading journal, closely followed by the *European Education Research Journal* and *Educational Leadership Management and Administration*.

A narrative synthesis of the 361 publications yielded the main themes and concepts that have been explored in school governance literature published between 2000 and 2023. This qualitative, critical synthesis approach enabled us to create a conceptual framework constituted by these themes: participation politics in schools; modes of autonomy and control in school governance practices and mechanisms; school governance reforms and policy trends; the "confluences" and "influences" of global education governance impacting schools; together with the emerging digital governance in schools. This systematic literature review has thus determined the expansion and development of school governance research after the turn of the twenty-first century, attesting to the fact that school governance may indeed be "overloaded" and "over-complicated," but definitely not "overlooked." The conceptual framework generated by our critical narrative approach makes a legitimate and opportune contribution to the theoretical field of school governance more categorically and the ELMA narrative more broadly, while contemporaneously commending further research in this particular field.

Notwithstanding the expeditious progress of school governance scholarship in the period under review, gaps to be addressed remain. It is therefore timely for researchers in the ELMA field to focus more specifically on school governance issues amid the wider leadership, management, and administration field as they evidently interlap, moreover, given the post-2019 sharp increase in its research production volume and the significant findings that emerged from our analysis of published research in this systematic literature review. We have noted that cross-cultural studies on school governance are still very scarce, not to say inexistent, with little evidence of international collaboration unfolding. Cross-comparative research would yield interesting results in how school governance is developing across distinct cultures globally within different levels in the compulsory education system. Notwithstanding global education governance (and its direct impact on schools) emerging as a strong theme under the guise of the European Union, the OECD and international organizations, the focus of the publications reviewed here was on the emerging EU

education governance and how the introduction of various measures by the knowledge economy are steering school governance in general, rather than a specific focus on how this is affecting the various countries. Specific studies of the effects of this "global governance" on education systems in both the Global North and, where applicable Global South would yield interesting results for policymakers considering making governance "more local and contextual." We have also noticed digital governance in schools as a burgeoning topic which started being explored pre-pandemic in relation to school data-based managerialism, developed as the only way of education provision during the pandemic-induced school closures and is now continuing due to new forms of artificial intelligence. We assume that this theme will expand, if not explode soon due to the new risks and threats attached to datafication and automated management of school operations including issues related to data protection, privacy, and confidentiality and the rights of "datafied" subjects mainly children.

We also noted the vast number of publications in the area of higher education, so a systematic review of publications covering governance in universities is considered very timely. Future reviews on the topic of school governance may even try to include the "hidden literature" by including databases in languages other than English in order to explore related literature in non-Western, non-Anglophone contexts. Future research concerning school governance and related issues may consider critiquing the notion in terms of its applicability to Global South contexts, where some countries have historically remained stateless (and therefore operating beyond static-centric models of governance, see Spotton, 1999) or engaging in unique forms of socio-economic coordination which exceed or refute traditional Global North perspectives there is a focus on governance embodied through notions of responsibility and rights, often elided with concepts of "small state," "small government" or "devolved government." Here, it is possible and timely to critique the universalizing claims of Global North perspectives on the basis they may obviate or overlook new iterations of governance (defined by resistance or alternative models of communicative action, for example) that are historically and culturally sensitive. Policy makers in the Global South may find that the research on school governance from the Global North literature has limited application for their own contexts because they do not the possess the political, technological or economic conditions necessary to realize and support these organizational aims and outcomes. Education systems in many countries in the Global South are economically poorer and tend to be funded by donor aid, NGOs and international organizations rather than state agencies, meaning that changing relations of accountability are defined at the international rather than the national or local level. Moreover, countries in the Global South are typically characterized by political instability and regime changes, making it challenging to implement structural and policy changes that require long-term commitments. Lastly, countries in Global South often lack the technological infrastructure required to support the kinds of data-driven systems of performance accountability so prevalent in modern education systems in the Global North.

Limitations

This systematic literature review contributes to educational theory, policy, and practice in the field of school governance for publications between 2000 and 2023. However, this study has some limitations, as all review studies do. This review analyzed a substantial dataset of 361 academic publications, excluding theses, conference proceedings, as well as gray literature. Thus, reiterating Hallinger's (2018) claim, the findings from this review of the journal literature may not be representative of the full literature in that sense. Furthermore, due to the very particular focus of the systematic review, only published literature exploring governance issues in compulsory schooling contexts (as described earlier) was included in the dataset and subsequently analyzed. The authors came across a significant body of literature investigating governance in higher education settings which provides a seedbed for a future systematic literature review of this specific sub-topic in the ELMA field at university level. We also acknowledge that different exclusion/inclusion criteria determined by different authors would have yielded different results, moreover, given the absence of a unanimous agreement on the conceptual definitions and perimeter of school governance (as similarly noted by (Gumus et al., 2021) in their bibliometric review of social justice leadership). A very thorough advanced search on Scopus and Web of Science, followed by Google Scholar as a cross-checking measure, was conducted by both authors separately to address reliability issues. Some negligible errors may

hypothetically remain given the high volume of publications used in the analysis, despite the significant time and effort spent to ensure meticulousness at the research process stage. However, the authors tried to counter this via a very time-consuming cross-checking as well as covering three databases, rather than one, to ensure systematicity and comprehensiveness. Finally, it might also be argued that the arbitrariness of the decisions on what to include and exclude, what Hallinger (2014) refers to as the "bricks and mortar" (p. 569) serving as structural bases for research reviews, can be considered as a weakness, as well as over-generalizations that may have been made during the meta-synthesis stage, with the latter being countered by citing specific examples to illustrate emergent themes and providing a rationale at every step of the methodological process. This systematic literature review targeted solely and specifically English language journals, thus incorporating publications in other languages besides English may lead to distinctive outcomes with regards to global geographic distribution.

Notes

1. The literature search yielding the 361 articles that constitute the database for the systematic review was conducted in October 2023, therefore more recent articles published after this date and relevant to the research may have been inadvertently omitted.
2. It is interesting to note, however, that the situation in South Africa is different from the Global North countries with regards to usage and impact of academic journals. Q1 is not the primary consideration, but on being included in the accredited list of journals acknowledged by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2024). The South African Journal of Education, which is the official journal of the Education Association of South Africa (EASA) is included in the Social Sciences Citation Index (ISI), International Bibliography of Social Sciences (IBSS), Scopus, SciELO, and the DHET List of Accredited South African Journals.

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