

Mapping Government Efficiency and Public Expenditure Management: A Bibliometric Analysis (2010-2025)

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Abstract

This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of global research on government efficiency and public expenditure management. The analysis is based on a total of 1,522 publications retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection database (as of 30 May 2025) that were published between 2010 and 2025. The analyzed publications were then mapped using VOSviewer software based on co-authorship, citation, keywords, and bibliographic coupling of the analyzed publications.

Our study reveals three distinct research clusters on government efficiency and public expenditure management: governance, studies on fiscal policy and studies on performance measurement in the public sector. Importantly, the number of publications has sharply increased from 2020 onwards. We can hypothesize that the global health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic stimulated research on efficient government and on effective public expenditure management worldwide. Furthermore, our study pinpoints leading authors, leading research institutions, very productive regions and countries of the world as well as considerable research gaps for transitional and developing economies in Central and Eastern Europe, in Asia and in Latin America.

This research contributes to the body of knowledge on government efficiency and public expenditure management by means of a systematic, globally oriented and data-based analysis of the subject matter studied by researchers. The results of this research are intended for use by scholars, by policy makers and by institutions. The study reveals significant research gaps in transitional economies, as well as possible research avenues. The study can function as a reference work for evidence-based decisions by government, other public sector bodies and business, in order to improve public sector performance.

Keywords: government efficiency, public expenditure, bibliometric analysis, public sector management, public sector efficiency, fiscal governance.

Introduction

The main area of research for this study focuses on monitoring and analyzing written work on Government Efficiency and Public Management all over the world and their structures. An analysis of public sectors and their historical development will complete the monitoring of how well governments are functioning.

Based on 1,522 studies (Peer-Reviewed Articles) from Web of Science Core Collection (WCC) database between years 2010 and 2025, the existing bibliometric data such as co-occurrence of keywords, citations, and co-authorship networks are mapped and visually presented using VOSviewer software to disclose the Intellectual Structure (IS) of the field under study.

Research tools such as Web of Science, Google Scholar, and VOSviewer were used to identify key themes, influential authors, institutional affiliations, and geographic trends.

The primary goals of this research are to present quantitative data on government efficiency, showcase examples from developed countries, identify research clusters and collaboration patterns, and highlight gaps that future studies could address. This article contributes to the existing body of knowledge by offering a fresh, data-driven perspective on the topic.

For the purposes of this research work, the time period from 2010 until 2025 has been chosen. The Web of Science Core Collection database contains publications from before the year 2000. Thus, a time span of 15

years until now is most suitable for an up-to-date analysis of current trends and recent developments within the field of historical research. The 2010-2025 period was selected to capture recent developments in government efficiency, public expenditure management, and public sector performance research. This time frame allows the study to focus on contemporary trends, especially the growing interest in fiscal governance and public sector efficiency after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

Bibliometric analysis is increasingly applied in studies on the development of disciplines and their structure. The majority of such studies are conducted in the fields of the social sciences, economics and public administration (Donthu et al., 2021; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). Using large numbers of published scientific papers such studies enable a systematic analysis of the development of research topics as well as of individual authors and institutions, and of groups of co-authors. They can also be used to produce a ‘map’ of current trends in research.

The numerous studies, employing the bibliometric approach to examine a variety of domains related to governance and public policy, have already been comprehensively reviewed. For instance, in their recent study, Chankseliani, Lovakov, and Pislyakov (2021) provide a large-scale bibliometric analysis of academic publications from post-Soviet countries, showing that the region remains unevenly represented in global research output and impact. The study also exposed the variety of challenges that researchers from this region are facing, including those related to maintaining long-lasting research collaborations that cross the borders of particular countries and/or regions. Donthu et al. (2021) and Aria and Cuccurullo (2017), in turn, provided methodological frameworks that have since guided numerous bibliometric investigations in management and policy studies.

Tools such as VOSviewer and Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) have proven especially effective in uncovering structural patterns, including keyword co-occurrence networks, co-authorship clusters, and citation mapping. Recent analyses using these tools have addressed themes like fiscal decentralization, public sector performance, and good governance, often revealing that research is concentrated in wealthier countries, thereby marginalizing developing and transitional states (Benito & Bastida, 2009). Ropret and Aristovnik (2019) use bibliometric analysis to evaluate academic literature on public sector reform from the post-New Public Management perspective, with particular attention to Central and Eastern European contexts.

Journals such as Sustainability, Health Policy and Planning, and the Journal of Cleaner Production have featured several bibliometric studies examining the interplay between public expenditure, policy design, and institutional effectiveness — frequently with an emphasis on health systems, environmental policy, and financial governance (Barasa et al., 2017; Ni et al., 2017). These studies contribute to our understanding of public finance mechanisms but often treat efficiency and budgeting practices in isolation or within narrowly defined sectors.

Although there is a wealth of literature on topics like government efficiency and public expenditure management, a bibliometric study that looks at these topics from a cross-sectional perspective is still lacking. The existing bibliometric studies deal mainly with highly active countries and therefore lack the experience of transitional and developing countries with their specific administrative legacies and current governance challenges (Gel'man, 2022; de Vries & Nemec, 2025).

Our search in the Web of Science Core Collection (2010-2025) by author, source and topic showed that 1,522 articles were written on the topics of efficiency of government through expenditure management, but no study could be used as a basis for a bibliometric study of these topics. Countries of the transitional world, including Kazakhstan, are underrepresented in terms of the production of scholarly research on governance topics as well as in terms of the focus of such research as case studies.

Our research will fill the mentioned gap by means of a focused bibliometric study applying co-authorship mapping, keyword co-occurrence and bibliographic coupling to visualise the current ‘intellectual structure’ of relevant articles, to draw maps of collaborative networks of co-authors, and to identify current themes which can be used to improve government efficiency through better expenditure management. Studying the efficiency of government and the ways of managing public expenditure in newly independent countries, including Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states, is of particular relevance. In the global bibliometric research on governance, these countries so far have been underrepresented. The study thus complements the existing field of research on governance and points out regional gaps and future research needs for comparative public administration.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a structured bibliometric approach using data sourced from the Web of Science Core Collection (WoS), a comprehensive and multidisciplinary academic citation database. To identify relevant literature, a Boolean query was developed to target keywords associated with government efficiency, fiscal management, and public expenditure. The query was applied to titles, abstracts, and author keywords to capture a broad and representative dataset.

Figure 1 shows the Boolean string used: TS=(government efficiency* OR public sector efficiency* OR fiscal efficiency* OR bureaucratic efficiency* OR public administration efficiency*) AND TS=(government expenditure* OR public spending OR public finance OR budget* OR fiscal policy* OR resource allocation OR expenditure management) AND TS=(public management OR public governance OR fiscal management OR performance-based budgeting OR transparency OR accountability OR new public management OR results-based management) AND TS=(government efficiency* OR public sector efficiency*)

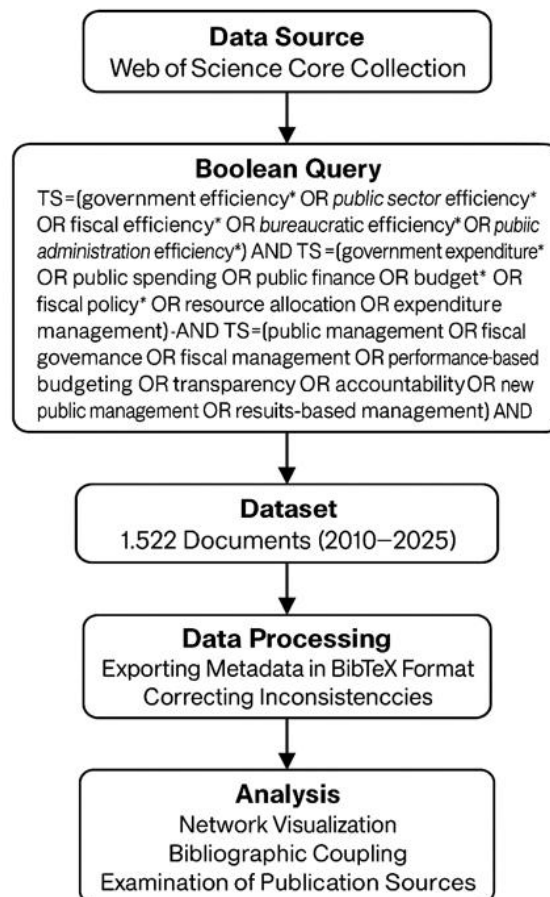


Figure 1. Visual diagram of the methodology process

In the case of narrowing the topic either by language or by very specific search queries, the number of articles shrank to 100-150; therefore, work on a broader topic was continued. A total of 1,522 peer-reviewed publications from 2010 to 2025 were identified. These were retrieved from major WoS indices, including SSCI, A&HCI, ESCI, and SCI-Expanded. The dataset was manually cleaned to remove duplicates and irrelevant entries. The metadata — comprising titles, abstracts, author affiliations, keywords, citations, SDG classifications, and journal sources — was exported in BibTeX format. Inconsistencies in author names and keyword terminology were corrected prior to preprocessing to ensure data uniformity.

Prior to analysis, inconsistencies in author names, institutional affiliations, and keyword usage were resolved through normalization. Data processing and visualization were conducted using VOSviewer, which enabled the mapping of keyword co-occurrence, citation networks, co-authorship structures, and bibliographic coupling. The investigation further examined publication sources, Web of Science subject classifications, and indexing databases that significantly shaped the academic landscape of this research area. An analysis of

existing research on the issue of efficiency of government and public management was carried out and summed up in order to present to the reader a full review of the subject.

This methodology enabled the identification of dominant research themes, collaboration patterns, institutional productivity, and regional contributions. It also allowed for a critical examination of thematic concentration and gaps in global academic discourse, particularly with regard to underrepresented transitional economies.

Findings

Figure 2 shows the Web of Science Core Collection of this research. Based on the Boolean query written earlier, the database showed 1522 relevant articles. Further analysis was done based on this study's dataset. Cleaning of the articles was done manually, and all of these articles are relevant for this research, meaning that the Boolean query was written properly.

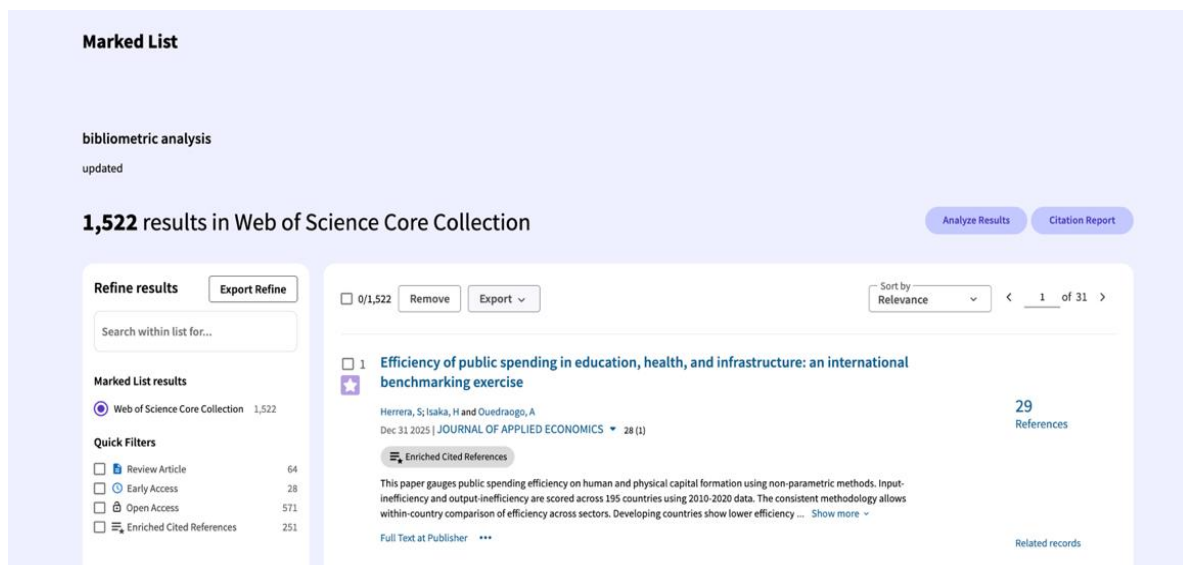


Figure 2. Web of Science marked list

According to Figure 3, the dataset contains a minimal representation of other types of documents. Those include:

- Review articles and early access materials, giving 6 % of the dataset;
- 2 % of the dataset represents books and book chapters;
- A few editorial materials, retracted publications, and discussion meetings;

The research field shows high-quality control through the low percentage of retracted publications.

The majority (92 %) of the materials are articles and proceedings papers, which proves the academic advancement of the field, published by respected peer-reviewed journals. The prevalence of journal articles maintains and ensures that the conducted bibliometric study is reliable, resulting in relevant co-occurrence, co-authorship, and citation analyses.

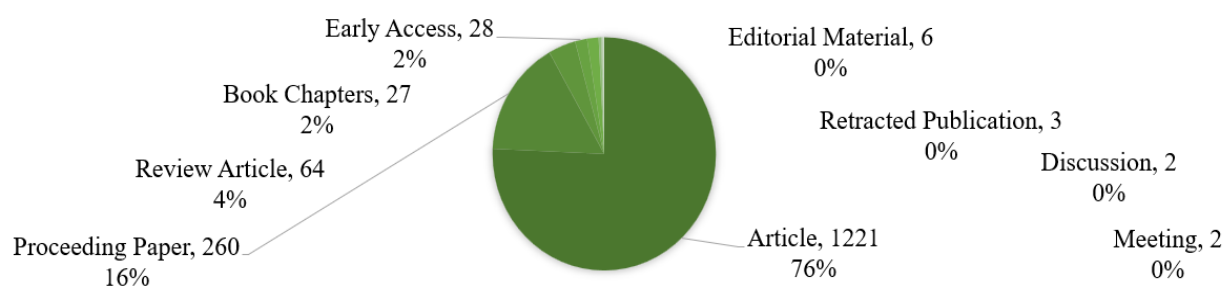


Figure 3. Distribution of document types in the dataset

The graph in Figure 4 tracks the number of publications. It has sharply increased — particularly from 2020 — as the efficient public sector has gained a lot of public interest during the global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is an increasing amount of research on good governance and efficient public fiscal management and their reforms to deal with global challenges. Therefore, the topic is very relevant for academics, for officials of governments and organizations that want to improve the quality of public services world-wide.

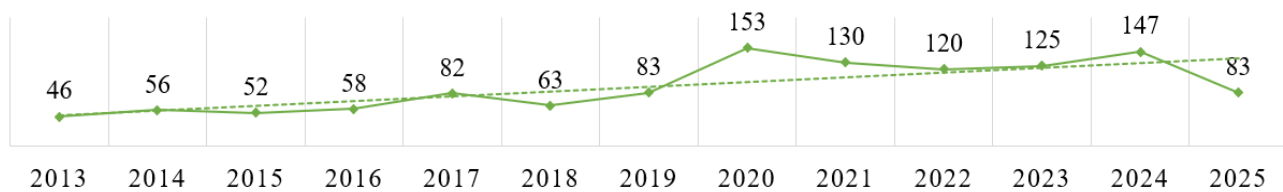


Figure 4. The annual number of publications by year

Figures 5 and 6 outline the thematic focus for a number of Meso- and Micro-level topics. While the Meso-level topics are grouped into broad themes (fiscal policy; public governance), the Micro-level topics are organized around specific tools and policy mechanisms (performance-based budgeting, etc.). This dual-layered analysis reveals the structural organization of knowledge within the field. The distinction between meso- and micro-levels allows for a deeper understanding of how general themes are operationalized in applied research and policy frameworks.

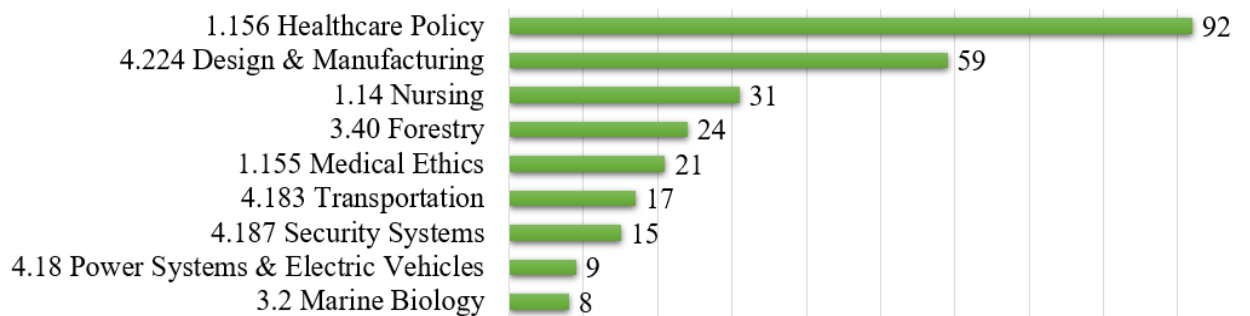


Figure 5. Most common meso-level citation topics

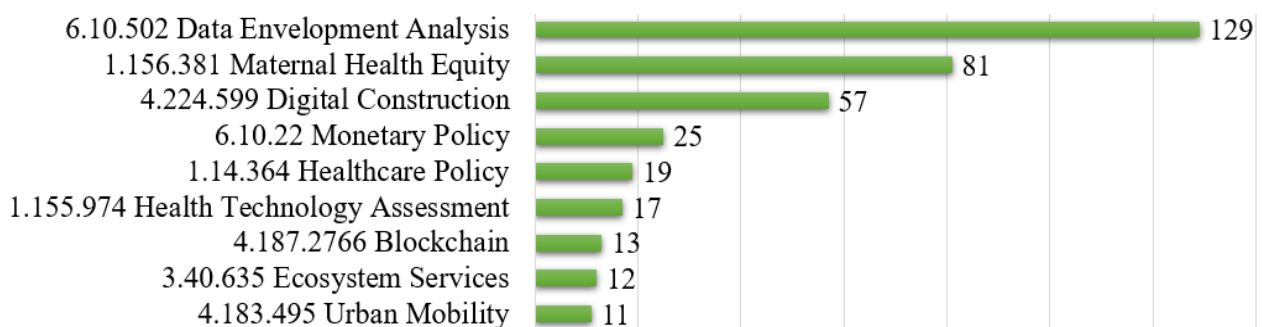


Figure 6. Most common micro-level citation topics

The author's productivity chart (Figure 7) identifies key thought leaders in government efficiency scholarship. Recognizing these individuals highlights intellectual leadership and may guide future collaboration or literature reviews. Tracking the publication activity of prolific authors helps reveal where cutting-edge research is being produced and by whom, potentially opening avenues for academic networking and partnership building. The top five authors produced five or more publications throughout the years, showing consistency and interest in the topic. Authors like Zhang S.J., Warner M.E., and others have 5 articles, meaning that the subject matter is interesting for many authors around the globe. Regional and national diversity indicates that there are a lot of paths to future collaborations.

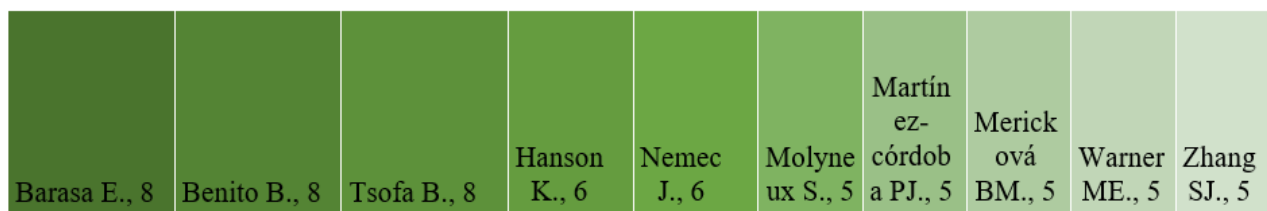


Figure 7. Most productive authors

Figure 8 reveals an uneven global distribution of research. Countries with advanced economies dominate, reflecting disparities in academic infrastructure and funding. Transitional economies, including post-Soviet states, are underrepresented, pointing to a critical knowledge gap. These disparities suggest the need for more inclusive global research practices and may highlight the importance of investing in research capacities in underrepresented regions. This graph shows once more that the countries with transitional economies have limited representation not only in the research data but also in the research area.

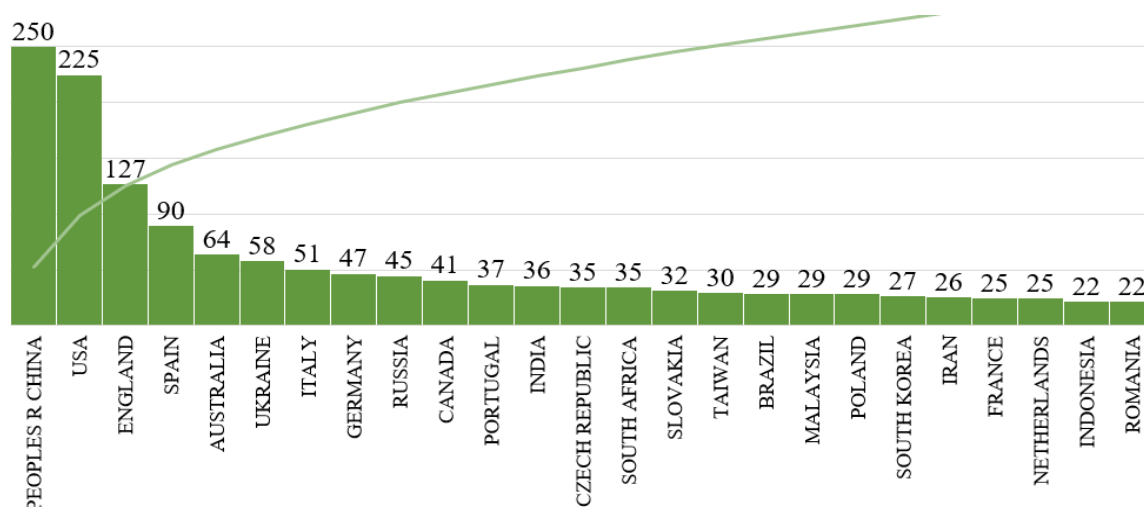


Figure 8. Number of publications by country/region

Institutions leading publication output are typically located in OECD countries (Figure 9). Their prominence may suggest well-established research ecosystems and sustained policy interest in public sector reform. This figure also helps identify institutional partners for future collaborative work. The concentration of research in certain institutions underscores the role of policy-oriented academic centers in shaping the discourse on governance and fiscal performance. However, we can see that the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has a leading position in the graph. The strong representation of Ukrainian institutions may reflect Ukraine's active integration into European research networks and its participation in international academic collaborations. However, further investigation would be needed to explain this pattern more precisely.

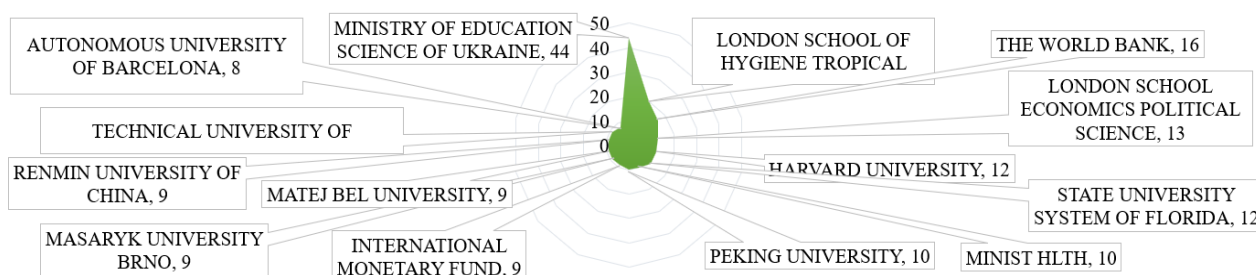


Figure 9. Most productive institutional affiliations

This graph (Figure 10) links scholarly output to global policy agendas, showing which SDGs—such as quality education or strong institutions—are most associated with government efficiency research. It offers a crosswalk between academic inquiry and international development priorities. Understanding these intersections helps identify the societal relevance of research and informs policy alignment with global goals like Agenda 2030.

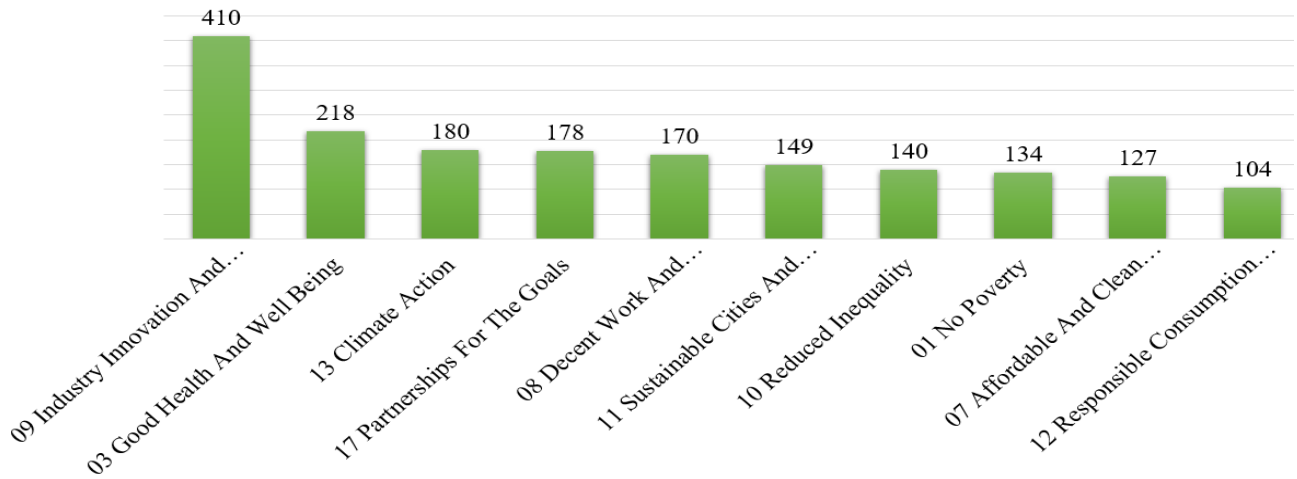


Figure 10. Distribution of literature by the Sustainable Development Goals

As Figure 10 shows, the most important goal of the researchers is industry innovation and infrastructure, which aligns with the main idea of those researchers: government efficiency and public expenditure management. Other SDGs are:

- Goal 13: Climate action, because researchers are worried about the government not spending enough money on the future and sustainability (ESG).
- Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth, which aligns with the main goal and general research topic.
- Goal 10: Reduced inequality, which highlights the interconnection between government efficiency and the socioeconomic status of the people.

These results suggest the literature strongly aligns with climate action, decent work, economics, and reduced inequality. Yet, there is a growing interest in decent work and economic growth, partnership for the goals, affordable and clean energy, within the context of government efficiency.

Subject classifications show strong interdisciplinary engagement, especially across economics, public administration, and environmental sciences. This highlights the field's complexity and its embeddedness within broader academic debates on governance. Top Web of Science categories include: business finance, management, health policy services, and environmental studies. The diversity of categories indicates that the research on government efficiency transcends disciplinary boundaries, reinforcing its multidimensional nature (Figure 11).

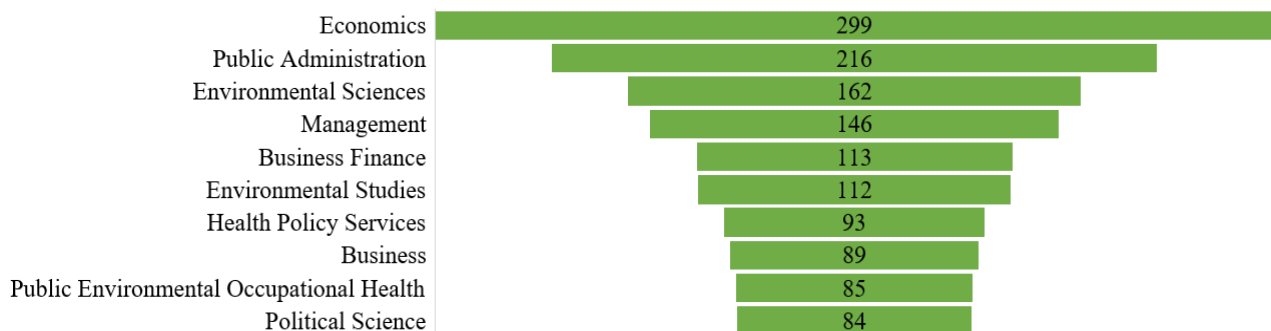


Figure 11. Most popular Web of Science subject categories

Figure 12 confirms the indexing quality and visibility of the analyzed literature. Most of the articles — 1,211 out of 1,522, or 79.56 % — are included in high-ranking indices such as the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) or Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-Expanded), which strengthens the credibility and academic reach of the sources, meaning that the topic is usually studied through the lenses of political science, economics, and area studies. The Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) contains 300 articles, which indicates that new scholarship has not yet entered citation indexes.



Figure 12. Distribution of publications by the Web of Science index

Other indexes included are:

- Conference Proceedings Citation Index — Social Science & Humanities (CPCI-SSH) — 180 articles, indicating academic engagement through conferences.
- Conference Proceedings Citation Index — Science (CPSI-S) — 109 articles, highlighting science-focused conferences.
- Book Citation Index — Social Science & Humanities (BKCI-SSH) — 23 articles, etc.

Researchers and policymakers can rely on these indexed publications for evidence-based insights, ensuring the legitimacy of findings presented in this study.

The keyword co-occurrence network graph reveals dominant thematic clusters, such as fiscal decentralization, transparency, performance management, and accountability. The most important terms are: efficiency, management, performance, and governance, which serve as the basis that links other thematic keywords. These clusters provide a visual representation of how the field is intellectually structured and what concepts are most interconnected. Identifying these patterns enables researchers to detect emerging trends and shifts in focus within the broader discourse on public expenditure and governance (Figure 13).

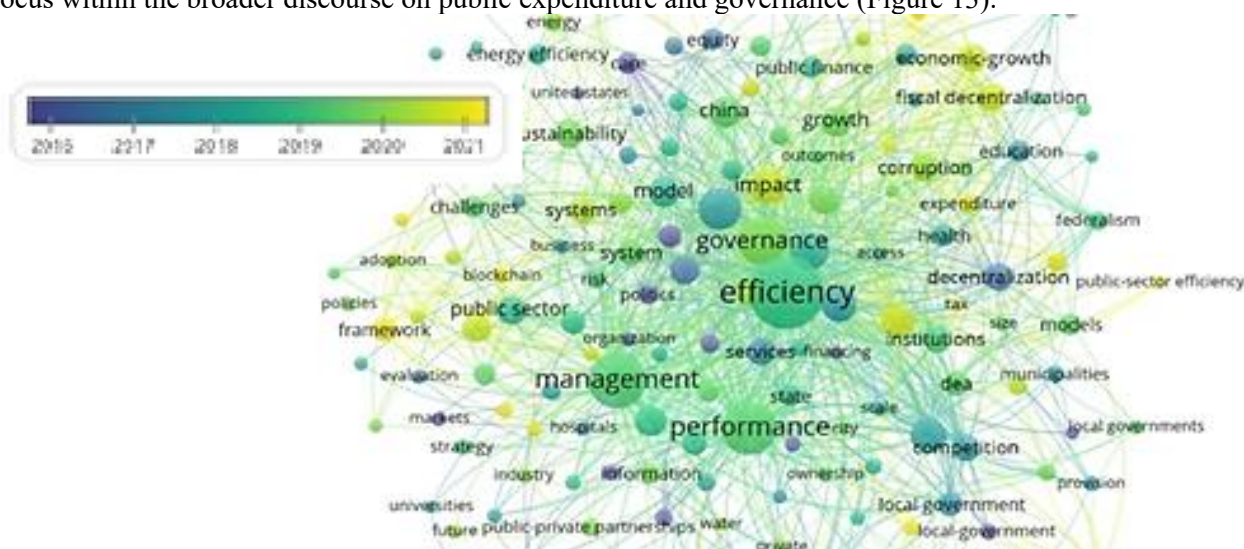


Figure 13. Keyword co-occurrence network (keywords ≥ 10 occurrences, N=162)

Figure 14 maps global academic cooperation. It shows clear clustering around countries with strong research funding and English-language publication traditions. Notably, limited co-authorship links with developing or transitional countries point to potential barriers in international collaboration. Enhancing such collaboration could lead to richer, more diverse perspectives in the study of public management.

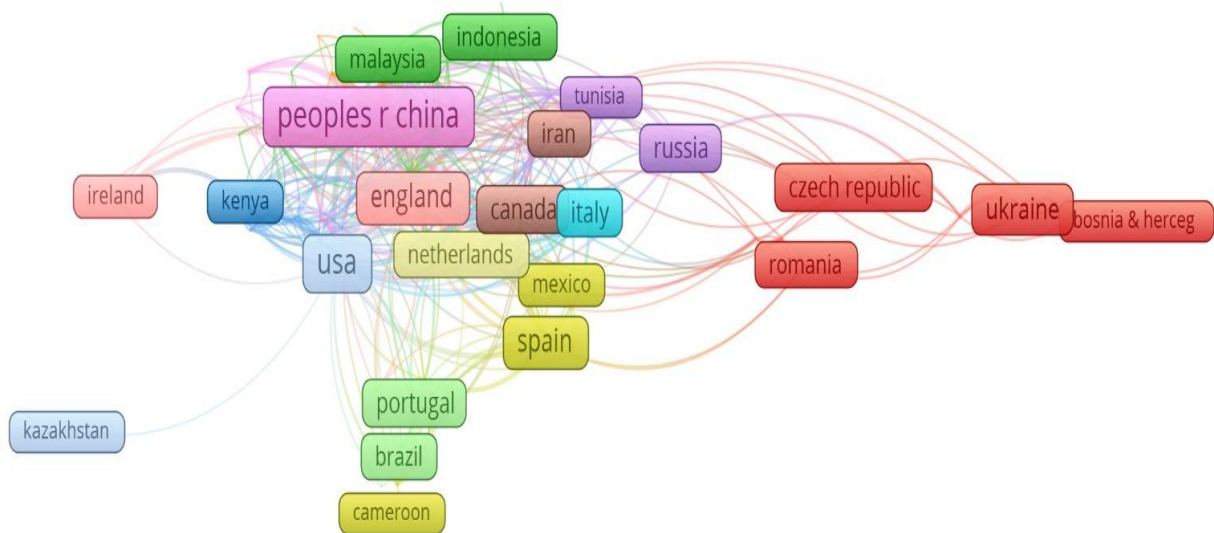


Figure 14. International Co-authorship Network by Countries/Region

As shown in Figure 14, the People's Republic of China is the main contributor to the topic, along with England, the United States, and the Netherlands. Also, by looking at this co-authorship graph, we can observe clustering by regions, geopolitics, and historical backgrounds of the countries.

Cluster 1 (light blue) includes 23 countries: Austria, Denmark, England, the USA, Kenya, etc. This cluster may reflect stronger participation in English-language academic publishing and established international research networks. Another thing is that people from these countries mostly developed or are in the process of creating, showcasing the correlation between co-authorship and socioeconomic status.

Cluster 2 (green) includes 20 countries: Australia, Indonesia, the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, Singapore, etc. The thing that these countries have in common is their geopolitical positions: most of them are located in the Indo-Pacific region.

Clusters 3 (red) and 4 (mustard color) have 15 and 12 countries, respectively. The same as before, these clusters are formed based on the common language and geopolitical position. In the first case, most of the countries are Eastern European and Balkan, which confirms the fact about geopolitics. On the other hand, Cluster 4 consists of Spanish-speaking countries, which have language and history in common.

The smallest clusters are clusters 5 (purple) and 6 (light yellow), both having 8 countries. We can assume that they formed clusters based on the economic relationships that they have. Also, one notable thing is that they form their own clusters within the cluster: Russia-United Arab Emirates, Egypt-Jordan-Tunisia, Turkey-Cyprus, Algeria-Zimbabwe.

Discussion

The findings of this bibliometric analysis provide valuable insights into how government efficiency and public expenditure management have evolved as academic research domains. The substantial increase in publication volume after 2020 demonstrates the field's responsiveness to global events, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified scrutiny on public sector performance and fiscal resilience.

A key observation is the concentration of research outputs in high-income OECD countries, particularly the United States, China, the United Kingdom, and European Union member states. Results reveal an imbalanced global research landscape. Most studies on government efficiency are produced by institutions in advanced economies with stronger research infrastructure, while transitional and post-Soviet economies remain underrepresented. This imbalance limits the diversity of perspectives in the literature and may reduce the applicability of findings to countries with different administrative and fiscal systems.

The leading authors and institutions as well as the pattern of cross-country co-authorship are mostly embedded in already established research networks worldwide. Increased scholarly production can be fostered by inter-disciplinary collaboration of researchers from all regions of the world, especially from the Global South as well as from transitional contexts that are currently not part of these networks.

The main fields of study which are analyzed in the efficiency research of governments are depicted in a keyword co-occurrence network. They refer to the topics of performance-oriented budgeting, transparency,

accountability and to governance issues. These fields of study are congruent with SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 10 and SDG 13 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Some of the most frequently used keywords are thus associated with sustainability, equity and economic growth. Therefore a more efficient government is not only a matter of administration. It also plays a decisive role for a sustainable development in an inclusive sense (SDG).

Conclusion

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of studies on government performance metrics, government efficiency and public expenditure management published between 2010 and 2025. The findings from this study identify trends in the current body of knowledge on the subject, highlight disparities between developed countries and transitional economies, identify the dominant themes in the current literature and present the study's findings and the state of knowledge and gaps in the literature that currently exist. With the increase in global challenges and a rising interest in measuring the performance of governments, international research on this subject matter is increasing exponentially.

The study finds that the developed countries are leaders in the field while transitional economies are underrepresented in the published work. There is great potential in enhancing research capacity, in establishing international partnerships, and in stimulating studies focusing on specific regions. Such studies could be valuable for public administration and for fiscal policy.

This study is a foundation for future comparative studies in public administration as well as fiscal policy studies. Furthermore, this study suggests future potential research topics such as under-represented regions and topics in the bibliometric map. The study also aims to establish a more equitable and globally representative research community.

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Author Contributions

Ahadbek Zhaksylykov — Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing — Original Draft, Writing — Review & Editing;

Francis Amagoh — Conceptualization, Project Administration, Supervision.

The authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

**Үкіметтік тиімділік пен мемлекеттік шығыстарды басқару картасы:
библиометриялық талдау (2010-2025)**

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Аңдатпа

Бұл зерттеу Web of Science Core Collection индексінде 2010-2025 жылдар аралығындағы рецензияланған 1522 жарияланымдарды қамтитын мемлекеттік тиімділік және мемлекеттік шығыстарды басқару жөніндегі жаһандық академиялық зерттеулердің библиометриялық талдауын ұсынады. VOSviewer бағдарламалық жасақтамасын пайдалана отырып, зерттеу бірлескен авторлық желілерді, дәйексөз үлгілерін, кілт сөздерді ортақ пайдалануды және библиографиялық байланыстарды талдау арқылы саланың интеллектуалды құрылымын көрсетеді. Зерттеу нәтижелері басқару, фискалдық саясат және мемлекеттік сектордың тиімділігі салаларындағы айқын зерттеу кластерлерін анықтауға мүмкіндік береді; бұл салаларда 2020 жылдан бастап жарияланымдық белсенділіктің айтарлықтай өсуі байқалды, бұл COVID-19 пандемиясынан кейін тиімді басқару мәселесіне деген қызығушылықтың артқанын көрсетеді. Талдау барысында жетекші ғалымдар, ірі мекемелер мен негізгі аймақтар атап өтілген, сонымен қатар өтпелі экономикаларға қатысты зерттеулердегі елеулі олқылықтар айқындалды. Бұл зерттеу үкімет тиімділігінің жаһандық деңгейде қалай зерттелетіні туралы жүйелі деректерге негізделген түсінік беру арқылы әдебиетті дамытады. Ол талдауға аз ұсынылған аймақтарды қосу және болашақ зерттеулердің бағыттарын белгілеу арқылы бар олқылықты жояды. Алынған зерттеу нәтижелері мемлекеттік сектордың тиімділігін арттыруды қарастыратын ғалымдар, саясаткерлер және мекемелер үшін іргелі негіз болады.

Кілт сөздер: мемлекеттік тиімділік, мемлекеттік шығыстар, библиометриялық талдау, мемлекеттік секторды басқару, мемлекеттік сектордың тиімділігі, фискалдық басқару.

**Картирование эффективности Правительства и управления государственными
расходами: библиометрический анализ (2010-2025)**

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Аннотация

В данном исследовании представлен библиометрический анализ глобальных академических исследований по эффективности правительства и управлению государственными расходами, охватывающий 1522 рецензируемые публикации с 2010 по 2025 год, индексируемые в Web of Science Core Collection. Используя программное обеспечение VOSviewer, исследование отображает интеллектуальную структуру области посредством анализа сетей соавторства, моделей цитирования, совместного использования ключевых слов и библиографической связи.

Полученные результаты позволяют выделить отдельные исследовательские кластеры в области управления, фискальной политики и эффективности государственного сектора с заметным ростом публикационной активности после 2020 года, что отражает повышенный интерес к эффективному управлению после пандемии COVID-19. Анализ показывает главных ученых, основные институты и большие регионы. Анализ также выявляет большие пробелы в исследованиях для стран с переходной экономикой.

Данное исследование развивает литературу, предлагая систематизированное и основанное на данных понимание того, как эффективность правительства изучается во всем мире. Оно устраняет существующий пробел, включая в анализ менее представленные регионы и намечая направления будущих исследований. Полученные результаты служат основополагающей базой для ученых, политиков и учреждений, стремящихся повысить эффективность государственного сектора на основе фактических данных.

Ключевые слова: эффективность правительства, государственные расходы, библиометрический анализ, управление государственным сектором, эффективность государственного сектора, фискальное управление.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.