LEGAL EDUCATION REFORM: AN ANALYSIS OF SCOPUS-INDEXED PUBLICATIONS

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Abstract

The past decades have witnessed numerous reforms in legal education (LE) worldwide. However, the current state of these reforms remains insufficiently explored in depth. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the existing literature on LE reform (LER) through a bibliometric approach, utilizing data from Scopus. Specifically, 303 LER-related articles were analyzed across various dimensions, including timeframe, country, publishing outlets, authors, research groups, and keywords. In addition to descriptive analysis, science mapping was conducted to explore the co-occurrence of cross-country collaborations, research groups, and co-keyword appearances in previous LER studies. The findings indicate that LER remains at a nascent stage: it has emerged only since 2009; is dominated by scholars from a few Anglophone countries; and is characterized by small, fragmented, short-lived, and largely mono-disciplinary research groups. The extant literature clusters into four core themes: 1) Clinical and practical LER, 2) LER through online learning, teaching, and pedagogy, 3) LER through curriculum redesign, artificial intelligence, and 4) Legal technology, LER through internationalization and globalization. These results carry theoretical and practical implications for policymakers, law school and university leaders, curriculum designers, and LER researchers.

Keywords: Legal Education, Law Education, Reform, Scopus, Bibliometric

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1. INTRODUCTION

The past decades have witnessed numerous reforms in legal education (LE) worldwide (Carasik, 2011; Zhao, 2025; Zhang, 2025). Such reforms stem from various driving forces. First, it is because of the disconnection between the theoretical underpinning offered by law schools and institutions and the practical skills needed in actual legal practice, which often results in unprepared law graduates to meet demands from professional environments (Carasik, 2011; Rhee, 2011). Second, many law schools need to reform their programs and curriculum due to the economic pressures,

including rising tuition fees, student debt, and limited job prospects (Carasik, 2011). Third, some LE systems require reform due to their traditional inherent characteristics. For example, LE in the United States needs to address its lack of diversity and inclusivity, as the legal profession is predominantly dominated by white individuals, with limited representation from other racial groups (Anderson, 2009). Similarly, legal education reform (LER) in China is closely linked to the internationalization of the country's legal system, drawing inspiration from the US model to promote critical thinking and analytical skills (Erie, 2009). Fourth, the recent emergence of artificial intelligence has also led to growing pressure to reform all educational disciplines — including teaching, learning, testing and assessment, as well as curriculum and material development — and LE is no exception (Zhang, 2025).

Nevertheless, implementation of LER normally faces struggles due to several reasons. For instance, Carasik (2011) reported that the process of LER is often slow because faculty and administrators who are entrenched in traditions within educational institutions and the legal profession are often reluctant to adopt new methods or curricula. For the case of China, adopting international models, such as the US's, further introduces challenges as these may not align with local legal traditions or socio-political contexts, limiting the effectiveness of the LER (Erie, 2009).

Despite receiving increasing attention from both law and education scholars, there has yet to be a systematic review focusing on the topic of LER on a global scale. The overarching goal of this study is to address this research gap by employing a bibliometric approach to analyze 303 publications on the topic of LER from the Scopus database, covering the period between 1966 and 2023. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of publications (journal articles, book chapters, books, and conference papers) and temporal trends in publications have characterized LER over the past decades?

RQ2: Which countries lead in LER publications, and how do these countries collaborate in producing LER research?

RQ3: Who are the top authors in LER, and how do they collaborate to form the scholarly community of LER?

RQ4: Which publishing outlets do LER scholars prefer, and what are the top outlets for LER research?

RQ5: Which LER documents are the most highly cited?

RQ6: What are the most frequently used keywords in LER publications, and how do they co-occur to form the main research themes of the field?

By addressing the above RQs, this study aims to present a preliminary overview of LER research. In turn, this overview may offer valuable insights for the LE community, including policymakers, law school and university leaders, curriculum designers, and LER researchers to inform their future research and practices. To the best of our knowledge, this paper is among the first to apply bibliometric analysis within the field of law and legal studies. A few notable examples of bibliometric research in this domain include studies on legal ethics (Valanciene & Valanciene, 2022), legal medicine (Shi et al., 2019), and criminal law (Jamshed et al., 2020).

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the research method of bibliometric analysis employed to address the research questions. Section 3 presents the results. Section 4 discusses the main findings. Section 5 concludes the paper, providing research limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This study uses bibliometric analysis as an approach to address the research questions. Initiated in 1969, bibliometric analysis was widely used by scholars in different fields to conduct systematic review in studied topics (Groos & Pritchard, 1969). According to the Scopus database, until the end of 2023, there have been 22,812 articles using this research approach (searched bibliometric keywords in Title, Abstract, and Keywords fields in Scopus on December 11, 2024, at 18:00). In the fields of law and/or education, we may also find several bibliometric studies such as Boulanger et al. (2024), Mong and Thanh (2024), and Valanciene and Valanciene (2022).

In bibliometric analysis, it is essential for researchers to identify suitable sources for data collection. Two primary sources are the Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus databases. For this study, we selected Scopus, as it provides broader coverage of publishing outlets compared to WOS, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, including fields such as education and law (Harzing & Alakangas, 2016). Accordingly, we conducted the following search query on the Scopus database on November 8, 2024:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("legal education reform" OR "law education reform" OR (("legal education" OR "law education") AND (reform OR renewal OR renovation OR innovation)) OR (("law reform" OR "legal reform") AND educat) OR ("law school" AND (reform OR renewal OR renovation OR innovation))*

As indicated in the search query, in addition to the main keyword "legal education reform", we incorporated alternative synonyms such as "law education", "law school", "renewal", and "renovation". This strategy was employed to minimize the risk of overlooking relevant publications.

The above search query yielded a preliminary dataset of 1,143 publications. Subsequently, following the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2009), we conducted data collection, followed by screening and applying the eligibility criteria outlined in Table 1. Specifically, two co-authors were assigned to thoroughly review the titles, abstracts, and, if necessary, the full contents of 1,143 publications to determine each paper's eligibility for inclusion. In cases where the two co-authors disagreed on the inclusion or exclusion of a paper, a discussion was held between them, with the arbitration of a third co-author, until a consensus was reached. Eventually, we obtained the final dataset of 303 LER publications, which were used for further analysis, using Excel and VOSViewer (see Figure 1).

Table 1. Screening and eligibility criteria for data collection

Criteria	Including	Excluding
Subject areas	Indexed in social sciences categories	Other categories
Publication time	Before January 1, 2024	After January 1, 2024
Publication stage	Final	Article in press
Language	English	Other languages
Eligibility content	LER and related topics as an issue for research	Other topics

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Figure 1. Data collection process following the guide of PRISMA
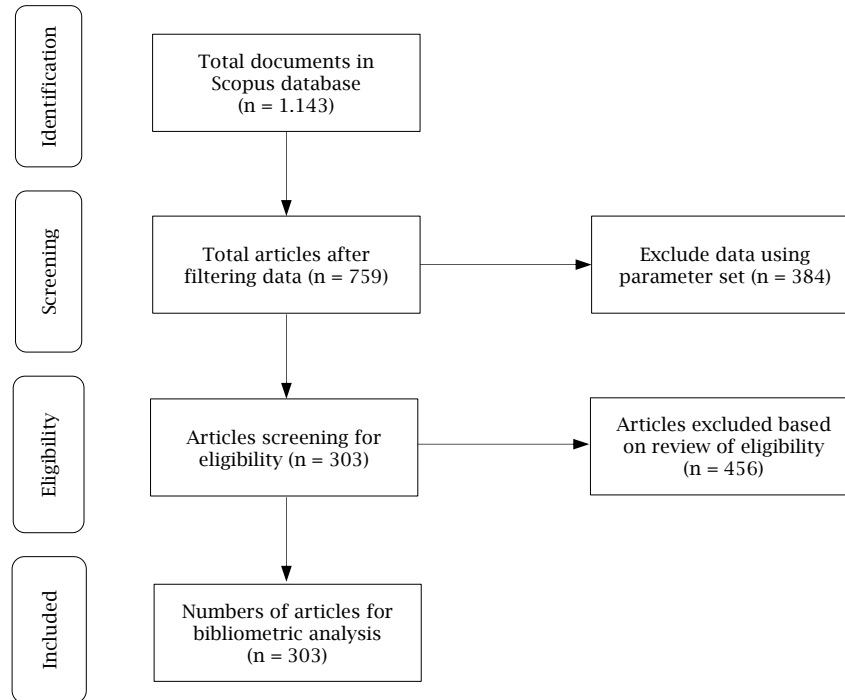
Source: Authors' elaboration.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The objective of this study is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of 303 Scopus-indexed publications on LER from 966 to 2023. It maps publication types and temporal trends, identifies leading countries and their collaboration networks, profiles prolific authors and the co-authorship structure of the field, highlights preferred publishing outlets and the most highly cited documents, and examines keyword frequencies and co-occurrence patterns to reveal thematic mapping of LER.

### 3.1. Types of documents and temporal trend of legal education reform publications

Regarding document types, among the 303 final LER publications, the majority (194 publications, or 64.69%) are journal articles. The remaining publications are distributed among book chapters (77 publications, 25.41%), books (19 publications, 6.27%), and conference papers (11 publications, 3.63%). This result aligns with findings from many other bibliometric studies, such as Pham et al. (2021). However, this finding also highlights a limitation in the current state of LER publications, which will be further discussed in the Conclusion section.

In terms of the annual trend of publications, as shown in Figure 1, we may divide the period from 1996 to 2023 into three periods as follows:

• 1966–2000: This period is characterized by the following: a very small number of LER publications (16 publications or 5.28% of the total 303 publications), with the majority of the years during this period having no publications at all (24 years out of the total 35 years in this period). For the remaining 11 years, the year with the highest number of LER publications recorded only three, a single-digit figure.

• 2001–2008: This eight-year period contributed a total of 34 publications, accounting for 11.22% of the total 303 LER publications. Two notable characteristics distinguish this period from the previous one: 1) for the first time, a year (2001) recorded a two-digit number of LER publications; and 2) there was no year without any LER publications.

• 2009–2023: This period contributed the majority of the total 303 LER publications (i.e., 253 publications or 83.50%). As shown in Figure 1, the publication trend during this period increased significantly, far surpassing that of the previous period. On average, each year in this period recorded 16 publications, with the highest number in a single year reaching 32 (in 2023).

Figure 2. Temporal trend in legal education reform publications, 1966–2023
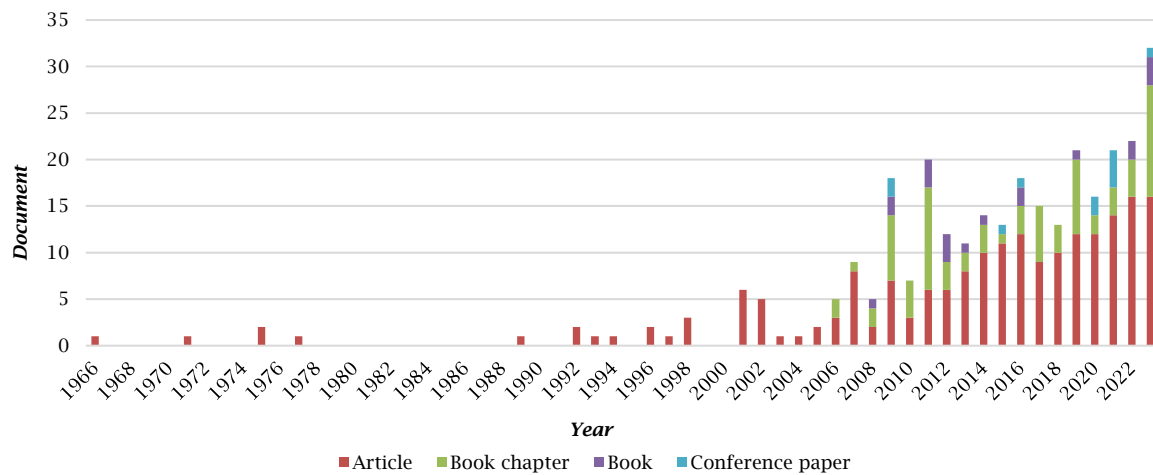
Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.2. Top legal education reform countries and their collaborations

Table 2 highlights the two leagues of the top LER countries based on the number of documents and citations from 1966 to 2023. Seven countries (marked with *) appear in both leagues. Among these, three are Anglophone nations: the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia. These three countries also hold the top three positions in both leagues. Of the remaining four countries, three are Asian (China, India, and Japan), while one is European (Spain).

Table 2. Top 10 countries of legal education reform research sorted by documents and citations, 1966–2023

| Rank	Country	Number of documents	Rank	Country	Number of citations
1	The US*	93	1	The US*	459
2	The UK*	38	2	Australia*	187
3	Australia*	37	3	The UK*	128
4	China*	20	4	Japan*	64
5	India*	16	5	China*	61
6	Spain*	9	6	Hong Kong (China)	39
7–10	Japan*	7	7	Spain*	29
7–10	Canada	7	8	India	28
7–10	Ukraine	7	9	Russia	24
7–10	Netherlands	7	10	Argentina	22

*Note: * Countries appearing in both top lists of authors in terms of number of documents and citations.*
Source: Authors' elaboration.

To further explore the collaboration among countries in LER research, we used VOSViewer to map co-authorship patterns (see Figure 3). Consistent with the findings in Table 2, the three Anglophone countries — the US, the UK, and Australia — occupy central positions on the map. Among the 303 LER publications, 158 include at least one co-author from these three countries, while nine have at least two co-authors from them. Apart from the top countries of LER research, from Figure 3, we can also identify some new countries in LER research, represented by yellow-colored nodes, such as Ukraine, Vietnam, and Serbia. Authors from these countries published their first LER-related works within the past three years, for example, Ukraine (Khrystokin & Lozovytskyi, 2023), Vietnam (Ho, 2023), and Serbia (Stanković et al., 2022).

In summary, LER research has been predominantly led by scholars from developed nations, particularly those in Western countries. Scholars from non-Western regions, such as Asia, have also made significant contributions to the LER literature; however, their research interests often appear to be inspired by and refer to LER studies originating from Western countries. Lastly, some emerging contributors from developing nations, such as Ukraine, Vietnam, and Serbia, have started to establish their presence in this field.

Figure 3. Science mapping of 57 countries in legal education reform research, 1966–2023
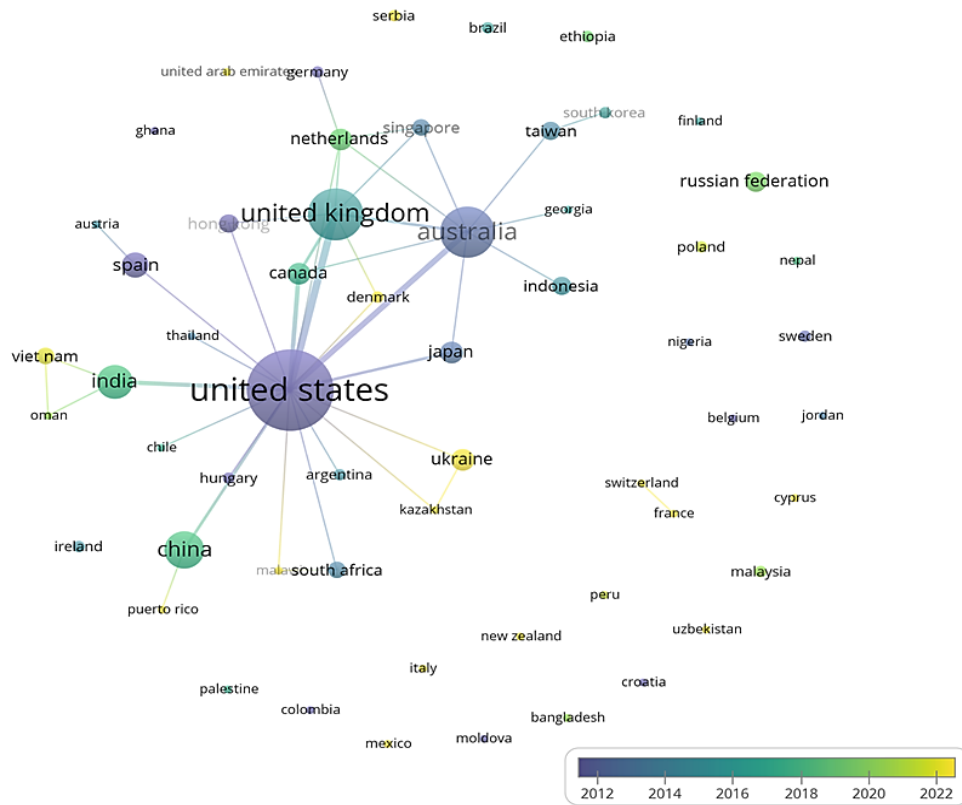
Source: Authors' elaboration using VOSViewer.

3.3. Top legal education reform scholars and research groups

Overall, 498 authors from 57 countries have published at least one LER document between 1996 and 2023. However, these authors predominantly work independently, with limited collaboration, leading to the absence of large, sustained research groups in LER studies. Specifically, only 22 authors have published at least two LER documents, while the remaining 476 authors have published only one.

The author with the highest number of LER publications and citations is Bloch Frank from Vanderbilt University, the US (see Table 3). Notably, Bloch published two of four papers as a sole author (Bloch, 2010, 2020). Among the top 10 authors ranked by the number of publications and citations, apart from Bloch, only two others appear in both

rankings simultaneously: Butler Des and Anderson Michelle J.

Notably, a single publication by McFaul and FitzGerald (2020), which has accrued 42 citations, has elevated its co-authors, Elizabeth FitzGerald and Hugh McFaul, to occupy the third and fourth positions, respectively, on the list of top-cited authors (see Table 3). Similarly, another publication by Miyazawa et al. (2008), with 40 citations, has advanced its co-authors — Chan Kay-Wah, Ilhyung Lee, and Setsuo Miyazawa — to the fifth, sixth, and seventh positions on the same list (Table 3).

In terms of affiliation, it appears that all top authors come from law schools and departments. The exceptional case is Fitzgerald, Elizabeth, from an educational technology-based institute, who co-published an interdisciplinary paper between edtech and law (McFaul & FitzGerald, 2020).

Table 3. Top authors in legal education reform research by number of documents and number of citations, 1966–2023 (Part 1)

	Top authors by number of documents			Top authors by number of citations		
No.	*Author*	*Affiliation*	*Number of documents*	*No.*	*Author*	*Affiliation*	*Number of citations*
1	Bloch, Frank S.*	Vanderbilt Law School, Vanderbilt University, the US	4	1	Anderson, Michelle J.*	Charles Widger School of Law, Villanova University, the US	70
2–4	Butler, Des*	Faculty of Law, Queensland University of Technology, Australia	3	2	Bloch, Frank S.*	Vanderbilt Law School, Vanderbilt University, the US	49
2–4	Steele, Stacey	Melbourne Law School, The University of Melbourne, Australia	3	3–4	Fitzgerald, Elizabeth	Institute of Educational Technology, Open University, the UK	42
2–4	Schepard, Andrew	Law Faculty, University of Haxhi Zeka, Serbia	3	3–4	McFaul, Hugh	Law School, Open University, the UK	42

Table 3. Top authors in legal education reform research by number of documents and number of citations, 1966–2023 (Part 2)

|	*Top authors by number of documents*				*Top authors by number of citations*		
No.	*Author*	*Affiliation*	*Number of documents*	*No.*	*Author*	*Affiliation*	*Number of citations*
2–4	Schepard, Andrew	Law Faculty, University of Haxhi Zeka, Serbia	3	3–4	McFaul, Hugh	Law School, Open University, the UK	42
5–10	Anderson, Michelle J.*	Charles Widger School of Law, Villanova University, the US	2	5–7	Chan, Kay-Wah	Department of Business Law, Macquarie University, Australia	40
5–10	Ho, Daniel E.	Stanford Law School, Stanford University, the US	2	5–7	Lee, Ilhyung	School of Law, University of Missouri, the US	40
5–10	Difonzo, J. Herbie	School of Law, Hofstra University, the US	2	5–7	Miyazawa, Setsuo	Law School, Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan	40
5–10	Abel, Richard L.	UCLA School of Law, University of California, Los Angeles, the US	2	8	Law, Wing-Wah	Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong	36
5–10	Hagan, Margaret	Legal Design Lab, Stanford University, the US	2	9–10	Butler, Des*	Faculty of Law, Queensland University of Technology, Australia	24
5–10	Babacan, Alperhan	School of Accounting, Economics, Finance and Law, Swinburne University, Australia	2	9–10	Erie, Matthew S.	Cornell University, the US	24

*Note: * Authors appearing in both top lists of authors in terms of number of documents and citations.*
Source: Authors' elaboration.

In terms of research groups, as shown in Figure 4, there are no research groups with nodes represented by multiple colors (e.g., purple and green, or green and yellow), except the group led by Richard Abel. This finding indicates that LER research groups tended to collaborate for a very short period, often producing one or two publications before ceasing their collective focus on LER research. Furthermore, it is evident that all research groups consist of a small number of members (i.e., the number of nodes in a research group). Specifically, three research groups with the highest number of co-authors comprise only seven members, led by Butler Des, Rowe Thomas D., and Dunn Rachel. On average, each group appearing in Figure 4 only has three members.

Figure 4. Research groups in legal education reform research, 1996–2023
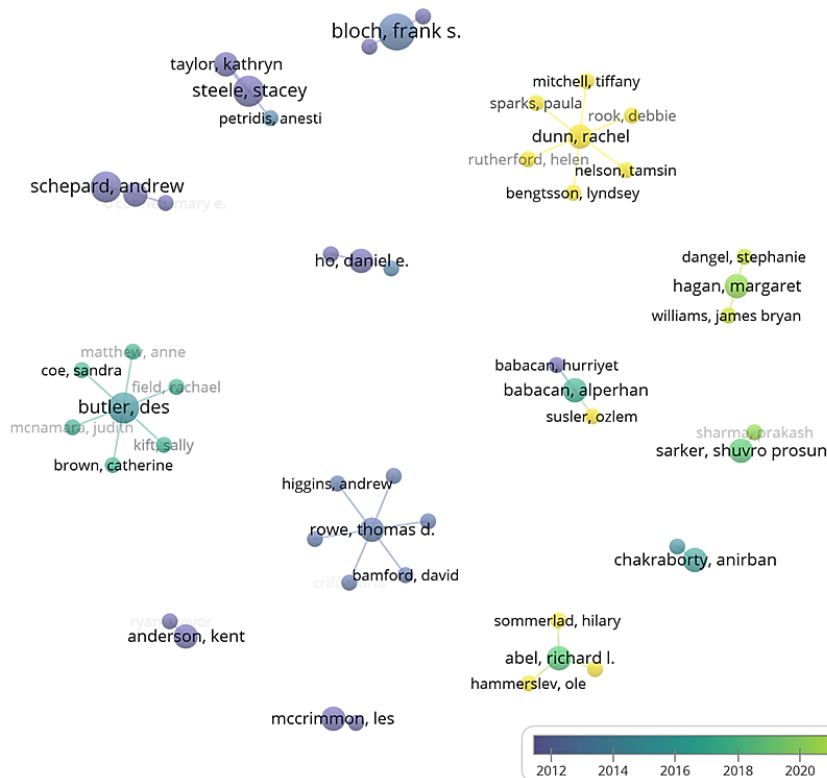
Note: Twenty-two lead authors, i.e., authors at the centers of each research group with at least two documents, along with their co-authors in the same research group.
Source: Authors' elaboration using VOSViewer.

3.4. Top legal education reform publishing sources and publications

Overall, there are 191 publishing sources, including journals, books, and conferences, that have published at least one LER publication. Table 4 lists the top 10 sources, comprising seven journals and three books, ranked by the number of LER publications. Together, these 10 sources account for 63 LER publications, equivalent to 20.79% of the total LER output. Regarding the aim and scope of these sources, nine of the 10 are law/legal-related,

while one is an educational technology journal (ranked No. 9 in Table 4). A closer examination of the nine law/legal-related sources reveals two sub-groups: LE (Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 10 in Table 4) and law and society (Nos. 5, 7, and 8 in Table 4). The findings above reconfirm that LER research is still in its infancy, with relatively few publishing outlets producing a high volume of LER publications. Moreover, the scope of these LER studies appears to be concentrated within a limited number of sources that share similar aims and scopes.

Table 4. Top 10 sources of legal education reform research by number of documents, 1966–2023

No.	Source (Type)	Number of documents
1	Law Teacher (Journal)	17
2	The global clinical movement: Educating lawyers for social justice (Book)	10
3	Journal of Legal Education (Journal)	8
4	Legal education in Asia: Globalization, change and contexts (Book)	8
5	Legal Reference Services Quarterly (Journal)	6
6	Modernising Legal Education (Journal)	4
7	Journal of Law and Society (Journal)	3
8	International Journal of the Legal Profession (Journal)	3
9	Australasian Journal of Educational Technology (Journal)	2
10	Legal education in the digital age (Book)	2

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 5 presents the top 10 documents with the highest impact, as reflected by their citation counts. Among these, seven are journal articles, two are book chapters, and one is a book chapter. Three key findings can be drawn from Table 5. First, only three authors of the top 10 LER documents listed in Table 5 (Nos. 1, 4, and 9) also appear in Table 3, which highlights the top authors in LER research by the number of documents and citations. Second, only two sources of the top 10 LER documents in

Table 5 (Nos. 2 and 9) are aligned with the top 10 sources of LER research by number of documents, as shown in Table 4. Third, several top LER documents in Table 5 (Nos. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 10) have high global citation counts but no local citations. It should be noted that global citations refer to the number of citations a document receives from any Scopus-indexed documents, whereas local citations refer to the number of citations the document receives from the 303 LER documents included in this study.

Table 5. Top 10 documents in legal education reform research sorted by number of citations, 1966–2023

No.	First author (Year)	Title	Source (Type of source)	GC	LC
1	McFaul (2020)	A realist evaluation of student use of a virtual reality smartphone application in undergraduate legal education	*British Journal of Educational Technology* (Journal)	42	0
2	Montoya (2010)	The current state of legal education reform in Latin America: A critical appraisal	*Journal of Legal Education* (Journal)	21	0
3	Thornton (2012)	Privatising the public university: The case of law	Privatising the public university: The case of law (Book)	20	1
4	Ho and Kelman (2014)	Does class size affect the gender gap? A natural experiment in law	*Journal of Legal Studies* (Journal)	18	0
5	Kaczorowski (2012)	Fordham University School of Law: A history	Fordham University School of Law: A history (Book)	17	1
6	Ashar (2016)	Deep critique and democratic lawyering in clinical practice	*California Law Review* (Journal)	17	0
7	Arewa et al. (2014)	Enduring hierarchies in American legal education	*Indiana Law Journal* (Journal)	15	0
9	Bloch (2010)	The global clinical movement: Educating lawyers for social justice	The global clinical movement: Educating lawyers for social justice (Book)	13	8
10	Siekkinen et al. (2016)	Recruitments in Finnish universities: Practicing strategic or pathetic HRM?	*Nordic Journal of Studies In Educational Policy* (Journal)	13	0

Note: Global citations — total citations from all Scopus-indexed publications, LC: local citations — total citations from 303 LER publications in this study.
Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.5. Key legal education reform research topics

Table 6 presents the top key topics in LER research, represented by the most frequently occurring keywords in LER publications. It is noteworthy that, due to the presence of several synonymous keywords (Pham et al., 2021), it is necessary to synthesize a thesaurus from the studied LER

documents, grouping synonyms and relevant keywords together. For instance, the keyword "clinical legal education" as found in seven documents may appear in others as synonyms or related keywords such as legal clinics (Lazarte et al., 2021) or global clinical movement (Bloch, 2020). Therefore, the thesaurus table (Table 6) was created to prevent misunderstandings among readers.

Table 6. Thesaurus of keywords in the knowledge base of legal education reform, 1966–2023

ID	Keyword	Synonyms and relevant keywords	Frequency
1	Legal education	Law school; law	48
2	Law/legal reform and innovation	Innovation; reform; legal innovation; law reform; legal reform	21
3–4	Curriculum	Curricula innovation; law school curriculum	10
3–4	Online learning	Distance education; e-learning; distance learning	10
5	Higher education	Higher education institutions; higher education institutes	9
6–7	Artificial intelligence	Artificial intelligence (AI)	8
6–7	Internationalisation and globalization	Internationalization; internationalisation; globalization; global	8
8–10	Clinical legal education	Legal clinics; global clinical movement	7
8–10	Interdisciplinarity	Interdisciplinary approach; interdisciplinary	7
8–10	Legal profession	Legal technicians; lawyers; legal technologists	7
11–15	Competence and skills	Professional competence; lawyering skills; comparative law publications; professional competencies	6
11–15	Education reform	Teaching reform	6
11–15	Research	Comparative law research; comparative legal research; legal research	6
11–15	Student	Law students; students	6
11–15	Social justice	n/a	6
16	Legal technology	n/a	5
17–19	Community	Communities	3
17–19	Quality	Qualities	3
17–19	Teaching and pedagogy	Teaching; pedagogy	3

Source: Authors' elaboration.

To explore how the keywords presented in Table 6 combine to form the knowledge base of the current LER literature, we conducted a science mapping through co-keyword analysis, as shown in Figure 7. Specifically, the two most important keywords are legal education and law/legal reform and innovation, as they are connected (represented by lines linking the two nodes) to nearly all other keywords. Furthermore, the current LER literature appears to be divided into four themes, each represented by a distinct color corresponding to the respective node. However, it is noteworthy that these themes may share some common nodes. For instance, the node legal education is shared by all four themes, while the node legal technology is shared by both the blue and green themes.

The first and largest theme, represented by the color red, focuses on reforming LE to make it more clinical and practical. Publications in this theme emphasize community engagement and connections to the real-world legal profession. Consequently, the development of students' competence and skills is a central concern. This theme is titled Clinical and Practical LER.

The second theme, represented by the color blue, centers on online learning, teaching, and pedagogy in higher education students. We title this theme LER through online learning, teaching, and pedagogy.

The third theme, represented by the color green, addresses topics such as artificial intelligence, legal technology, and curriculum design. Publications in this theme examine the integration of these elements to modernize LE. As such, this theme is titled LER through curriculum redesign, artificial intelligence, and legal Technology.

The fourth theme, represented by the color yellow, focuses on internationalization, globalization, and quality in LE. This theme is titled LER through internationalization and globalization.

Figure 7. Science mapping of 19 keywords in legal education reform research, 1966–2023
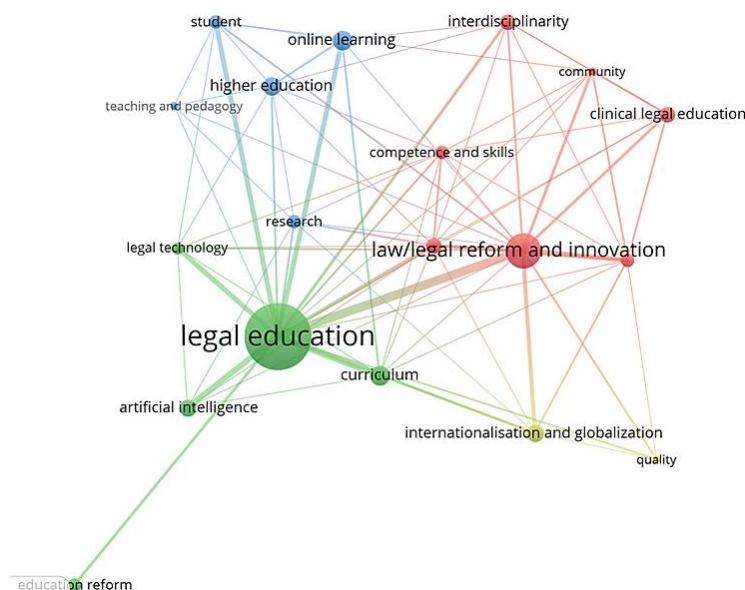
Note: Each occurrence at least three times, cluster representation mode.
Source: Authors' elaboration using VOSViewer.

From a temporal perspective, as shown in Figure 8, the keywords found in LER publications can be divided into three groups:

• The first group comprises traditional keywords, represented by purple or dark green, including interdisciplinarity, community, online learning, quality, law/legal reform, innovation, and internationalization and globalization. These keywords are predominantly found in LER documents published before 2014.

• The second group includes medium-term keywords, represented by green, including legal education, education reform, curriculum, research, and teaching and pedagogy, which are primarily found in LER documents published between 2015 and 2018.

• The third group consists of newly emerging keywords, represented by yellow and light green. These keywords, including higher education, legal technology, and artificial intelligence, have appeared more frequently in recent years, specifically from 2019 onward.

Figure 8. Science mapping of 19 keywords in legal education reform research, 1966–2023
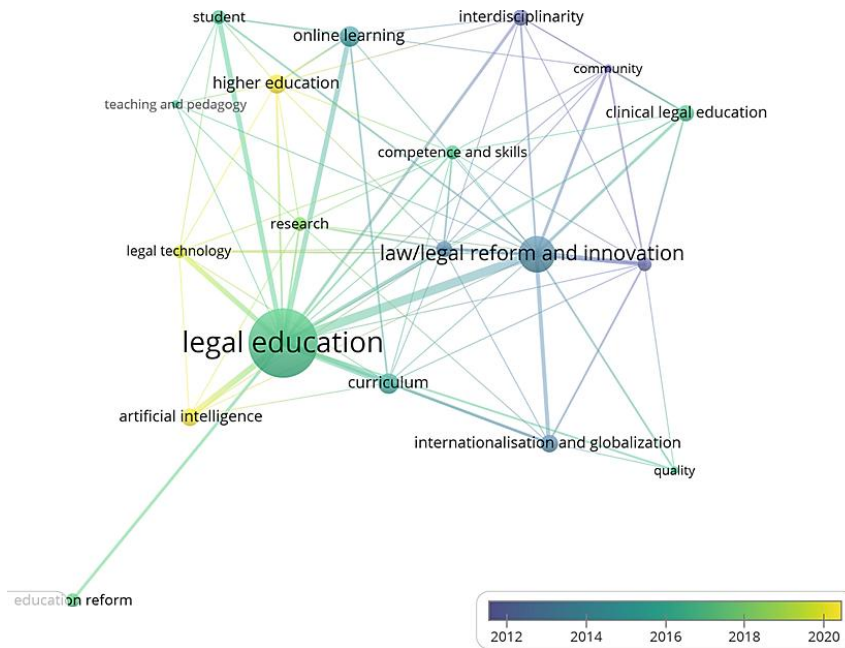
Note: Each occurrence at least three times, overlay representation mode.
Source: Authors' elaboration using VOSViewer.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

LER is an emerging interdisciplinary field at the nexus of law and education. As LER has gained traction in law schools and institutes worldwide, researchers have examined its many dimensions. To synthesize this body of work, we conducted a bibliometric analysis of 303 Scopus-indexed publications from 1966 to 2023.

Our first finding shows that very few LER studies appeared before 2009, followed by a marked global rise in publications from 2009 to 2023. This growing trend, indeed, aligns with the broader trends observed in other research topics within the social sciences and humanities (Narong & Hallinger, 2024; Tran et al., 2024). Notably, the significant increase in LER documents since 2009 corresponds with the rise of global university rankings, such as Times Higher Education and QS, which place considerable emphasis on indexed publications from the Scopus database (Hou & Jacob, 2017).

Our second finding reveals that the most LER publications are (co)authored by Anglophone countries (the US, the UK, and Australia). This finding reflects a phenomenon commonly referred to as the Western dominance of the global knowledge industry, or the knowledge monopolies of Western countries, as indicated by Fiormonte and Priego (2016). Such dominance is also evident in the co-authored publications between these three countries and other top 10 countries in both leagues, as shown in Table 2. Notable collaborations include the US-India (five co-authored publications) and the US-Canada (three co-authored publications). In total, the top 10 countries in terms of the number of documents published or co-published 217 LER publications, which equal 71.38% of the total 303 publications. A closer examination of LER publications co-authored by Asian scholars reveals that many LERs in Asia, such as those in China and Japan, have been inspired and influenced by the legal systems of Western countries, particularly Continental Europe and the US (Erie, 2009; Miyazawa et al., 2008; Weidong, 2016). This is, indeed, part of the trend of internationalization and globalization of LE systems worldwide.

Our third finding shows that, despite its interdisciplinary positioning between law and education (Lonardo & Nowak, 2024), LER is largely concentrated within law and legal scholarship, with limited participation from education researchers and other fields. This pattern is plausible given the law's field-specific norms, credentialing requirements, and publication venues, which can deter scholars from adjacent disciplines. In contrast, domains such as

tourism often draw contributions from multiple areas — e.g., marketing, economics, and development — creating a more visibly multidisciplinary literature (Wen et al., 2021). This result is reinforced by our analyses of research groups and global versus local citations. Specifically, existing LER teams are small, fragmented, and short-lived, while top documents attract more global than local citations. Together, these patterns indicate that LER remains at a relatively early, immature stage of development.

Last but not least, our fourth important result unveils that the current LER literature may be divided into four essential themes, including: 1) Clinical and practical LER, 2) LER through online learning, teaching, and pedagogy, 3) LER through curriculum redesign, artificial intelligence, and 4) Legal technology, LER through internationalization and globalization. These four themes constitute the dominant strands of the current LER literature. The first underscores the field's practical orientation; the second and third reflect the growing influence of educational technology across disciplines, including LER; and the fourth captures the globalization and internationalization of both legal studies and education.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aims to provide an overview of LER research through bibliometric analysis. The primary motivation is to offer policymakers, law school and university leaders, curriculum designers, and LER researchers a comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge on LER research worldwide. Additionally, it seeks to suggest potential avenues for further studies on this topic.

Specifically, while non-Western scholars are present, their research often seems to be influenced by and references legal systems in Western countries. The findings suggest that there is significant room for further contributions by future LER scholars, particularly from non-Western countries. Future studies could expand on comparative research between Western and non-Western LE systems or explore other promising topics in this field.

In terms of document types, as shown in Figure 2, the majority of LER publications are in the form of journal articles. Meanwhile, other types (books, book chapters, and conference papers) constitute only a small portion of the total. This finding suggests that future LE editors and conference organizers consider LER as a potential research topic for their forthcoming publications and events.

This study also identifies key authors, research groups, publishing sources, and the most significant LER documents in the existing literature. Undoubtedly, future scholars should not overlook these authors, sources, and documents when conducting literature reviews for their LER research. Furthermore, book editors and conference organizers of the topic of LER may also reference these authors, sources, and documents when issuing calls for paper submissions. Additionally, deans or directors of law schools may find this study useful for drawing lessons from previous LER documents when preparing to reform LE programs and courses.

In terms of research topics in LER, the findings of this paper, as illustrated in Figures 7 and 8, offer various strategies for future researchers interested in pursuing LER topics. First, future LER scholars may focus on one of the four major LER themes as presented above. Alternatively, scholars may combine these themes to explore cross-theme LER topics. For instance, clinical and practical LER could be combined with internationalization and globalization within a single study. Similarly, teaching and pedagogy could be integrated with artificial intelligence in single LER research.

Beyond these four themes, future LER scholars should also consider the temporal aspect of LER keywords, as shown in Figure 8. While newly emerging keywords such as artificial intelligence and legal technology undoubtedly remain valuable areas of study, revisiting traditional keywords such as interdisciplinarity and community — or combining these traditional keywords with emerging ones — provides a promising avenue for future research. Finally, identifying new keywords that have not yet appeared in Table 6 represents another viable option for advancing LER studies.

Like other research, this study has certain limitations that present opportunities for further improvement. First, it relies solely on the Scopus database and English-language documents for analysis. As a result, it misses the opportunity to investigate LER documents from other databases, such as WOS and Dimensions, as well as those written in non-English languages. Future studies are encouraged to explore other databases and include non-English documents to gain a more comprehensive understanding of LER. Second, while bibliometric analysis provides a broad overview of a studied topic, it lacks in-depth insights. Recently, several scholars have suggested combining bibliometric analysis with content analysis to achieve a more comprehensive review that encompasses both breadth and depth. This recommendation is equally relevant to this study.

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