

## ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY IN PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT: A GLOBAL BIBLIOMETRIC AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

### CAPACIDADE ADMINISTRATIVA E INSTITUCIONAL NA GESTÃO DAS FINANÇAS PÚBLICAS: UMA ANÁLISE BIBLIOMÉTRICA E TEMÁTICA GLOBAL

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#### Abstract

Public financial management (PFM) serves as the institutional backbone of fiscal governance, shaping how governments allocate resources, ensure accountability, and sustain macroeconomic stability. While reform agendas over the past decade have emphasized fiscal decentralization, performance-based budgeting, and governance modernization, the role of administrative and institutional capacity in sustaining these reforms remains conceptually fragmented. This study provides a global bibliometric and thematic analysis of research published between 2015 and 2025 to clarify how institutional capacity is positioned within PFM scholarship. Using 458 Scopus-indexed journal articles, the analysis applies Bibliometrix (RStudio 2025.05.1) and VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) to map publication trends, intellectual structures, thematic clusters, and international collaboration networks. Results indicate accelerated growth in the field, with fiscal decentralization and macroeconomic governance emerging as dominant motor themes. However, administrative and institutional capacity appears structurally embedded rather than foregrounded as an independent explanatory construct. Thematic mapping reveals conceptual fragmentation between fiscal performance modeling and governance reform literature, while collaboration analysis highlights geographic concentration in developed economies. These findings suggest that despite expanding scholarly output, theoretical integration between institutional capacity and fiscal sustainability remains incomplete. The study contributes by systematically mapping the intellectual architecture of PFM capacity research and identifying critical gaps, including the underdeveloped operationalization of

#### Resumo

*A gestão das finanças públicas (GFP) constitui a espinha dorsal institucional da governança fiscal, determinando a forma como os governos alocam recursos, garantem a prestação de contas e mantêm a estabilidade macroeconômica. Embora as agendas de reforma da última década tenham enfatizado a descentralização fiscal, o orçamento baseado no desempenho e a modernização da governança, o papel da capacidade administrativa e institucional na sustentabilidade dessas reformas permanece conceitualmente fragmentado. Este estudo apresenta uma análise bibliométrica e temática global das pesquisas publicadas entre 2015 e 2025 para esclarecer como a capacidade institucional se posiciona no âmbito dos estudos sobre PFM. Utilizando 458 artigos de periódicos indexados no Scopus, a análise aplica o Bibliometrix (RStudio 2025.05.1) e o VOSviewer (versão 1.6.20) para mapear tendências de publicação, estruturas intelectuais, agrupamentos temáticos e redes de colaboração internacional. Os resultados indicam um crescimento acelerado no campo, com a descentralização fiscal e a governança macroeconômica emergindo como temas motores dominantes. No entanto, a capacidade administrativa e institucional parece estar estruturalmente incorporada, em vez de ser destacada como um constructo explicativo independente. O mapeamento temático revela fragmentação conceitual entre a literatura sobre modelagem de desempenho fiscal e a de reforma da governança, enquanto a análise de colaboração destaca a concentração geográfica nas economias desenvolvidas. Essas descobertas sugerem que, apesar da expansão da produção acadêmica, a integração teórica entre capacidade institucional e*



institutional capacity, limited cross-regional comparisons, and insufficient integration of human capital dimensions. Strengthening conceptual integration is essential for advancing both scholarship and evidence-based fiscal reform.

**Keywords:** Public Financial Management. Administrative Capacity. Institutional Capacity. Fiscal Decentralization. Bibliometric Analysis.

*sustentabilidade fiscal permanece incompleta. O estudo contribui ao mapear sistematicamente a arquitetura intelectual da pesquisa sobre capacidade de GFP e identificar lacunas críticas, incluindo a operacionalização subdesenvolvida da capacidade institucional, comparações inter-regionais limitadas e integração insuficiente das dimensões de capital humano. O fortalecimento da integração conceitual é essencial para o avanço tanto da pesquisa acadêmica quanto da reforma fiscal baseada em evidências.*

**Palavras-chave:** Gestão das Finanças Públicas. Capacidade Administrativa. Capacidade Institucional. Descentralização Fiscal. Análise Bibliométrica. [Topo do Formulário.](#)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Public financial management (PFM) constitutes the operational backbone of fiscal governance. It structures how governments mobilize revenue, allocate public resources, manage expenditures, and safeguard fiscal discipline. In both developed and developing contexts, effective PFM systems are indispensable for ensuring macroeconomic stability, public accountability, and sustainable development. As fiscal pressures intensify amid global economic volatility, demographic transitions, and post-pandemic recovery efforts, the institutional robustness of PFM systems has become even more consequential (Allen, Hemming, & Potter, 2013. OECD, 2019).

Over the past decade, reform agendas in public financial management have shifted markedly. Traditional input-based budgeting frameworks have gradually been supplemented, or in some cases replaced, by performance-based systems that emphasize measurable outcomes and results-oriented accountability (Robinson, 2007. OECD, 2019). Simultaneously, fiscal decentralization has transferred financial authority to subnational governments to improve efficiency, local responsiveness, and developmental equity (Oates, 1999. Shah, 2007). These transformations reflect broader governance paradigms influenced by New Public Management, institutional reform theory, and public governance frameworks (Hood, 1991. March & Olsen, 1989).

However, while fiscal reform discourse frequently concentrates on policy instruments, budget rules, and macroeconomic indicators, the success of these reforms ultimately depends on institutional and administrative capacity. Fiscal systems do not operate independently of bureaucratic structures. They are implemented through them. Without capable institutions, competent civil servants, and coherent governance arrangements, even well-designed fiscal reforms risk ineffective implementation or policy failure (Fukuyama, 2013. Grindle, 1997).

At this juncture, an important intellectual tension becomes evident. On one hand, fiscal policy scholarship often emphasizes economic performance, decentralization outcomes, and fiscal sustainability metrics. On the other hand, administrative capacity and institutional reform are frequently analyzed within governance, civil service, or organizational studies. These parallel streams of research rarely converge systematically. Consequently, the intellectual architecture linking institutional capacity and fiscal sustainability remains fragmented (Painter & Pierre, 2005. Peters, 2010).

Despite the substantial growth of scholarship between 2015 and 2025, there has been no comprehensive attempt to map how administrative and institutional capacity is positioned within public financial management research. The absence of such synthesis obscures the field's conceptual structure, thematic priorities, and geographic distribution. Without systematic mapping, it remains unclear whether institutional capacity is treated as a core explanatory variable, a contextual factor, or merely a supporting concept within fiscal governance discourse (Donthu et al., 2021. Zupic & Čater, 2015).

To address this gap, this study undertakes a global bibliometric and thematic analysis (Zupic & Čater, 2015) of research published between 2015 and 2025. Using bibliometric and network analysis techniques implemented in RStudio (Bibliometrix package) (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and VOSviewer version 1.6.20 (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), the study examines 458 Scopus-indexed journal articles to identify publication trends, intellectual linkages, thematic clusters, and collaboration patterns. The purpose is not merely descriptive. Rather, the study seeks to clarify the structural position of administrative capacity within PFM scholarship and to identify areas where theoretical integration and empirical development remain insufficient (Donthu et al., 2021).

In doing so, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how fiscal governance and institutional capacity intersect. It also provides a foundation for

advancing integrated frameworks that bridge economic, administrative, and governance perspectives in public financial management research (Fukuyama, 2013).

## 2 LITERATURE CONTEXT

To appreciate the significance of administrative capacity within public financial management, it is necessary to situate the discussion within two intersecting bodies of scholarship: fiscal reform literature and institutional governance theory. Only by examining these domains together can we understand the conceptual fragmentation that currently characterizes the field (Peters, 2010. Painter & Pierre, 2005).

Public financial management reforms have evolved considerably over the past few decades. Early fiscal reform efforts focused primarily on budget control, expenditure tracking, and macroeconomic stabilization. More recently, reform agendas have expanded to include performance-based budgeting, fiscal decentralization, medium-term expenditure frameworks, and results-oriented management systems. These reforms aim not only to strengthen fiscal discipline but also to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public spending (Allen et al., 2013. OECD, 2019).

Fiscal decentralization (Oates, 1999. Shah, 2007) has emerged as one of the most studied reform strategies. By transferring fiscal authority to subnational governments, decentralization is expected to improve service delivery, promote regional development, and encourage fiscal responsibility. Similarly, performance-based budgeting (Robinson, 2007) seeks to align resource allocation with measurable outcomes, thereby strengthening accountability mechanisms within public institutions. These developments are often framed within broader paradigms such as New Public Management, governance theory, and institutional economics (Hood, 1991. March & Olsen, 1989).

Yet, beneath these reform instruments lies a critical enabling factor: administrative and institutional capacity. Institutional capacity encompasses bureaucratic competence, regulatory coherence, organizational infrastructure, intergovernmental coordination, and policy implementation capability. Administrative capacity refers to the ability of public institutions to design, execute, monitor, and adapt fiscal reforms effectively. Without these capacities, fiscal decentralization may lead to inefficiencies,

performance-based budgeting may become symbolic, and reform initiatives may stall (Fukuyama, 2013. Grindle, 1997).

Despite recognition of the importance of capacity, the empirical linkage between administrative capability and fiscal outcomes remains underdeveloped. Many fiscal studies treat institutional capacity as an implicit assumption rather than an explicitly measured variable. Conversely, governance literature often discusses capacity-building in abstract terms without integrating fiscal performance metrics. This disciplinary separation results in conceptual fragmentation (Painter & Pierre, 2005. Peters, 2010).

Three major gaps become evident when reviewing the existing literature. First, although individual studies examine decentralization, governance reform, and capacity-building, there has been no comprehensive bibliometric synthesis mapping how these themes intersect within PFM research. The field's intellectual structure remains largely uncharted. Second, there is limited theoretical integration between fiscal outcome studies and administrative reform scholarship. Capacity is frequently treated as a contextual factor rather than a core determinant of fiscal sustainability. Third, geographic concentration in developed economies suggests an imbalance in knowledge production, raising questions about the applicability of dominant frameworks to developing fiscal systems (Donthu et al., 2021. Zupic & Čater, 2015).

These gaps are not merely academic concerns. They have practical implications for policy design and for the implementation of reform. If institutional capacity remains under-theorized and insufficiently measured within PFM research, reform strategies risk overlooking the very conditions necessary for their success. Therefore, systematic mapping of the field is not only intellectually valuable but also policy relevant (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017).

By situating administrative and institutional capacity within the broader landscape of public financial management research, this study provides a foundation for addressing these gaps. The following sections build upon this theoretical grounding to empirically map the field, interpret thematic structures, and identify directions for future inquiry.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

Having established the theoretical fragmentation and conceptual gaps in public financial management scholarship, the next step is to empirically map the field's structure. To accomplish this, a systematic bibliometric research design was adopted. This section outlines the data collection process, dataset preparation procedures, and analytical techniques employed to ensure methodological transparency and replicability (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

This study employs a quantitative bibliometric approach combined with network visualization analysis. Bibliometric methods are particularly suitable for examining intellectual structures, thematic evolution, and collaboration patterns across large bodies of literature. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, bibliometric analysis enables objective mapping of knowledge production, citation influence, and thematic clustering based on metadata. The analytical workflow consisted of three major stages: data extraction and refinement, descriptive and structural analysis using Bibliometrix (RStudio 2025.05.1), and network visualization and clustering using VOSviewer version 1.6.20. Together, these tools allow both statistical summarization and graphical mapping of research patterns (Donthu et al., 2021. Zupic & Čater, 2015).

The dataset was extracted from the Scopus database on 26 February 2026. Scopus was selected for its comprehensive indexing of peer-reviewed journals in the social sciences, economics, public administration, and governance studies. Its structured metadata format is also compatible with Bibliometrix and VOSviewer, ensuring reliable bibliometric processing. A structured search string was developed to integrate two conceptual domains: public financial management, including terms such as “public financial management,” “fiscal policy,” “public budgeting,” and “fiscal administration,” and administrative and institutional capacity, including terms such as “administrative capacity,” “institutional capacity,” “capacity building,” “civil service reform,” “governance reform,” and “performance-based budgeting.”

The search was restricted to publications between 2015 and 2025, limited to journal articles written in English, and confined to relevant subject areas including Social Sciences (SOCI), Economics (ECON), Business (BUSI), Arts and Humanities (ARTS), and Multidisciplinary (MULT). The SOCI classification refers to Scopus's Social

Sciences category, which encompasses public administration, governance studies, policy analysis, and institutional research. Restricting the dataset to these areas ensured disciplinary relevance while excluding unrelated technical or scientific domains. The initial export yielded 458 documents.

Data preparation followed a structured cleaning process to ensure internal consistency while preserving analytical integrity. Duplicate records were checked using DOI and title matching procedures. No duplicate entries were identified within the exported dataset. Keyword harmonization was then conducted manually to standardize plural and singular variations, hyphenation differences, abbreviations such as “PFM” standardized to “public financial management,” and spelling variants such as “decentralisation” standardized to “decentralization.” Importantly, after removing duplicates and harmonizing keywords, no documents were excluded. The cleaned dataset remained at 458 articles, confirming that the analytical sample represents the full set of retrieved records and maintains complete coverage of the defined search criteria. The absence of document loss during cleaning enhances the robustness and comprehensiveness of the analysis.

The descriptive characteristics of the dataset are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Dataset*

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Value</b>
Total Documents	458
Publication Years	2015–2025
Document Type	Journal Articles
Language	English
Total Keywords Identified	2007
Selected Keywords ( $\geq 8$ occurrences)	66
Keyword Clusters Identified	4
Countries Identified	98
Countries Meeting Threshold ( $\geq 5$ docs)	35
Country Clusters	7

The descriptive profile of the dataset establishes the structural foundation of the analysis. Building on this dataset, the study used performance and science-mapping techniques to uncover intellectual and collaborative patterns within the field.

Bibliometrix (RStudio 2025.05.1) was used to generate annual scientific production analyses, source productivity metrics, citation impact analyses, three-field plots, and thematic maps (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Bibliometrix enables structured computation of performance indicators and conceptual structures through co-word analysis and centrality–density mapping, thereby allowing both descriptive and strategic positioning of themes.

To complement these analyses, VOSviewer version 1.6.20 was used to visualize keyword co-occurrence and country collaboration patterns (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The co-occurrence analysis began with 2007 unique keywords extracted from the 458 publications. To ensure analytical clarity and minimize noise, a minimum occurrence threshold of eight was applied. This filtering process yielded 66 verified and high-frequency keywords suitable for network mapping. Using the association strength normalization method with a resolution parameter of 0.90 and a minimum cluster size of 1, the visualization generated four distinct thematic clusters. The clusters were distributed as follows: 29 items in the red cluster, 17 in the green cluster, 15 in the blue cluster, and 5 in the yellow cluster. These clusters represent the dominant conceptual groupings structuring research on public financial management and institutional capacity.

The association strength method was selected because it normalizes link weights and provides balanced clustering, particularly appropriate for medium-sized datasets. The resolution parameter ensured meaningful differentiation between themes without excessive fragmentation.

In addition, a country collaboration network analysis was conducted to examine patterns of international scholarly cooperation. Of the 98 countries represented in the author affiliations, a minimum of 5 publications per country was required to focus on substantive contributors. This resulted in 35 countries meeting the threshold and forming seven collaboration clusters. The clusters were distributed as follows: eight countries in the red cluster, six in the green cluster, six in the blue cluster, five in the yellow cluster, four in the purple cluster, four in the light blue cluster, and two in the orange cluster. This clustering structure illustrates regional research alliances and the global distribution of knowledge production in the field.

Threshold levels for both keyword and country analyses were carefully calibrated to balance interpretability and representativeness. Lower thresholds risk producing overly

dense and noisy networks, whereas excessively high thresholds risk excluding emerging yet meaningful research streams.

Methodological transparency was maintained by explicitly documenting the search string, threshold values, normalization method, resolution parameter, and software versions used. Importantly, no documents were removed during duplicate verification and keyword harmonization. The final analytical dataset remained at 458 articles, ensuring full coverage of retrieved publications.

With the dataset systematically curated and analytical parameters clearly defined, the study now proceeds to present the empirical findings. The following section examines publication growth patterns, intellectual structures, thematic clusters, and international collaboration networks to illuminate how administrative and institutional capacity is positioned within public financial management research.

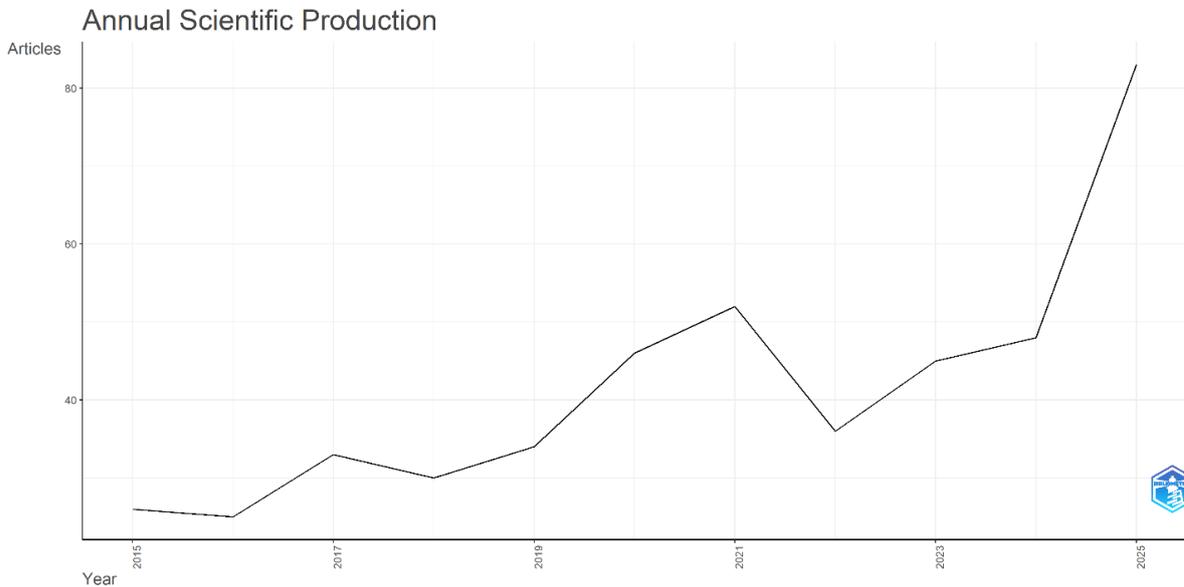
## **4 RESULTS**

With the dataset systematically curated and analytical parameters clearly defined, this section presents the empirical findings. The analysis proceeds from descriptive production patterns to intellectual structures, thematic clustering, and international collaboration dynamics. Together, these results illuminate how administrative and institutional capacity are positioned within public financial management research.

## 4.1 Scientific production trends

**Figure 1**

*Annual Scientific Production*



The figure presents the annual scientific production of research on administrative and institutional capacity within public financial management from 2015 to 2025.

The trajectory reveals three distinct phases. The first phase (2015–2018) reflects gradual expansion, with publication output increasing steadily but moderately. The second phase (2019–2021) marks accelerated growth, peaking in 2021 before experiencing a temporary decline in 2022. The third phase (2023–2025) demonstrates renewed expansion, culminating in a sharp surge in 2025, which represents the highest annual publication volume in the dataset.

This pattern indicates not merely incremental growth but structural consolidation of the field. The post-2020 acceleration likely reflects intensified global debates over fiscal resilience, institutional preparedness, and governance reform amid economic disruptions. The significant peak in 2025 suggests that research interest in the intersection of fiscal governance and institutional capacity has entered a phase of heightened maturity and urgency.

The sustained upward trajectory confirms that the topic is not episodic but increasingly institutionalized within scholarly discourse.

## 4.2 Core Publication Sources

The distribution of publications across journals reveals the field's interdisciplinary grounding.

These journals collectively illustrate that scholarship on administrative capacity within PFM spans public administration, development economics, and governance studies. The dominance of decentralization and fiscal policy journals reinforces the structural embedding of capacity within macro-fiscal discourse.

**Table 2**

*Top 10 Most Productive Journals*

Rank	Journal	Thematic Orientation
1	Public Administration Review	Governance & Institutional Reform
2	Public Finance Review	Fiscal Policy & Public Finance
3	Journal of Public Economics	Decentralization & Macroeconomics
4	Governance	Institutional & Political Reform
5	Public Budgeting & Finance	Budget Systems & Accountability
6	World Development	Development & Fiscal Systems
7	Journal of Public Policy	Policy Implementation
8	Regional Studies	Subnational Governance
9	Economic Modelling	Empirical Fiscal Analysis
10	Fiscal Studies	Public Expenditure & Taxation

## 4.3 Influential publications

Citation analysis indicates that the most globally cited works predominantly examine fiscal decentralization, macroeconomic governance, and institutional reform. These highly cited publications serve as intellectual anchors and shape the field's conceptual direction.

The citation analysis reveals that the most influential articles within the dataset are concentrated in journals spanning energy economics, development studies, environmental governance, and macroeconomic policy. The prominence of *Energy Economics*, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, and *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* indicates strong interdisciplinary integration between fiscal governance, sustainability transitions, and macroeconomic policy frameworks. Notably, many of the highly cited articles situate fiscal and institutional capacity within broader sustainability

and economic transformation debates rather than isolating administrative capability as an independent analytical construct. This reinforces the earlier thematic findings that institutional capacity is frequently embedded within fiscal decentralization, sustainability, and macroeconomic governance discourses rather than foregrounded as a primary explanatory variable. The concentration of citations in interdisciplinary outlets further underscores the expanding policy relevance of fiscal governance research amid global economic and environmental transitions.

**Table 3**

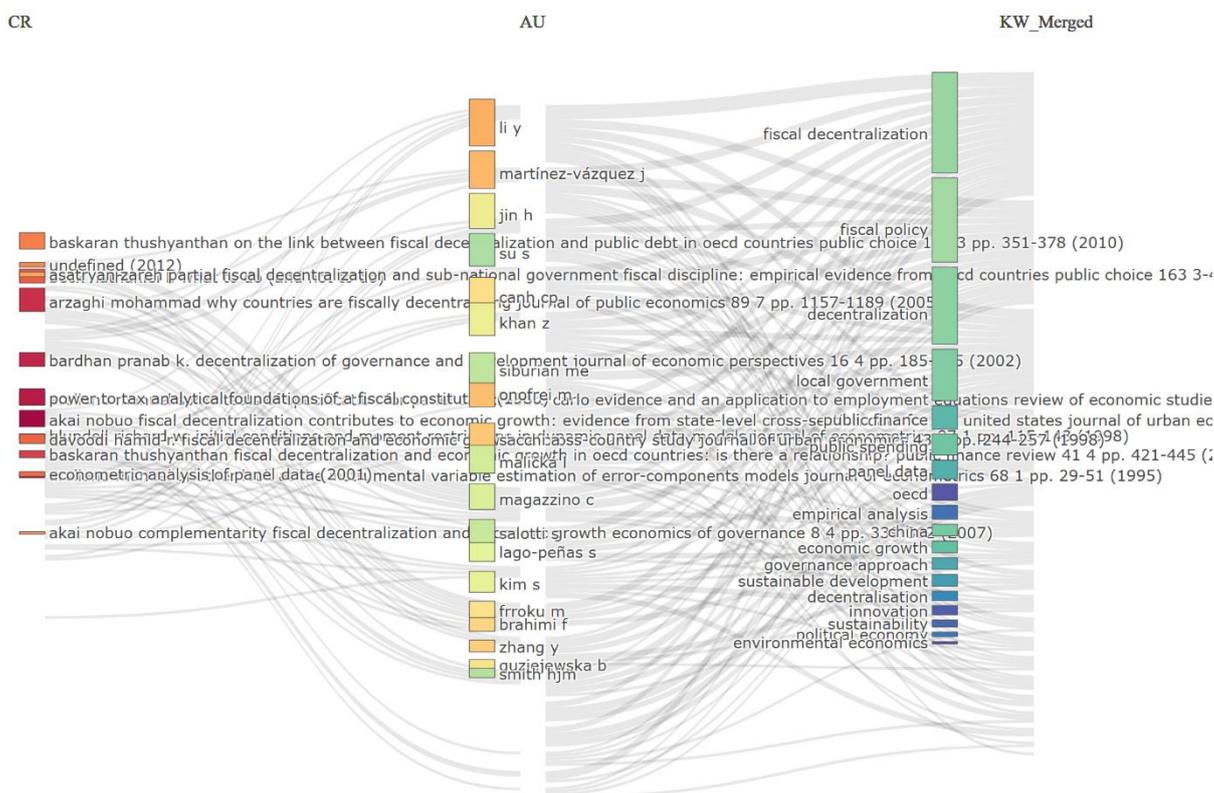
*Top 10 Most Influential Articles*

Rank	Author(s)	Year	Source Title	DOI Link	Total Citations
1	Khan, Z.	2021	<i>Energy Economics</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2020.105060">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2020.105060</a>	551
2	Hepburn, C.	2020	<i>Oxford Review of Economic Policy</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/graa015">https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/graa015</a>	435
3	Cheng, Y.	2021	<i>Technological Forecasting and Social Change</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2020.120398">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2020.120398</a>	348
4	Van der Kamp, D.	2017	<i>World Development</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.02.021">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.02.021</a>	168
5	Sun, Y.	2022	<i>Sustainable Development</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2292">https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2292</a>	165
6	Wang, Y.	2015	<i>Socio-Economic Review</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwv016">https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwv016</a>	136
7	Hughes, L.	2015	<i>Environmental Science &amp; Policy</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2015.06.014">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2015.06.014</a>	112
8	Que, W.	2018	<i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.02.285">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.02.285</a>	106
9	Bigger, P.	2021	<i>Annals of the American Association of Geographers</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2020.1749023">https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2020.1749023</a>	102
10	Yang, X.	2022	<i>Empirical Economics</i>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s00181-021-02151-y">https://doi.org/10.1007/s00181-021-02151-y</a>	96

Highly cited works predominantly focus on fiscal decentralization, macroeconomic stability, and institutional reform, reinforcing decentralization as the central intellectual anchor.

### 4.4 Intellectual structure

**Figure 2**  
*Three-Field Plot (Authors–Keywords–Sources)*



Three-Field Plot maps the relationships among cited references (CR), authors (AU), and merged keywords (KW\_Merged) (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The visualization reveals strong connectivity between influential authors and central themes such as “fiscal decentralization” and “fiscal policy.” These keywords are linked to core journals in public finance and governance, demonstrating that decentralization operates as the intellectual hub connecting macroeconomic and institutional debates.

Notably, while institutional reform and governance appear in the network, explicit references to “institutional capacity” are less dominant than those to decentralization and fiscal policy. This pattern suggests that capacity remains conceptually integrated but not fully theorized as an autonomous research stream.



Green	17	fiscal decentralization, local government, panel data, econometrics	Decentralization & Subnational Systems
Blue	15	sustainable development, public policy, innovation, environmental economics	Fiscal Governance & Sustainability
Yellow	5	governance approach, political economy, institutional framework	Governance & Institutional Framing

The red cluster (29 items) is the largest and centers on macro-fiscal governance, economic growth, and public spending. This cluster reflects the dominance of macroeconomic framing in the literature.

The green cluster (17 items) is anchored in fiscal decentralization and local government analysis. It emphasizes empirical modeling and subnational governance structures.

The blue cluster (15 items) integrates sustainability, innovation, and environmental economics with fiscal policy, indicating growing cross-sectoral expansion of the field.

The yellow cluster (5 items), although smaller, plays a bridging role by linking governance theory and political economy perspectives to fiscal systems.

The network visualization shows that “fiscal decentralization” and “fiscal policy” are the most central and strongly connected nodes. Institutional capacity appears within governance and reform clusters but does not function as a central hub. This reinforces the structural observation that capacity is embedded rather than foregrounded.

## 4.6 Thematic evolution and maturity

**Figure 4**

*Thematic Map*

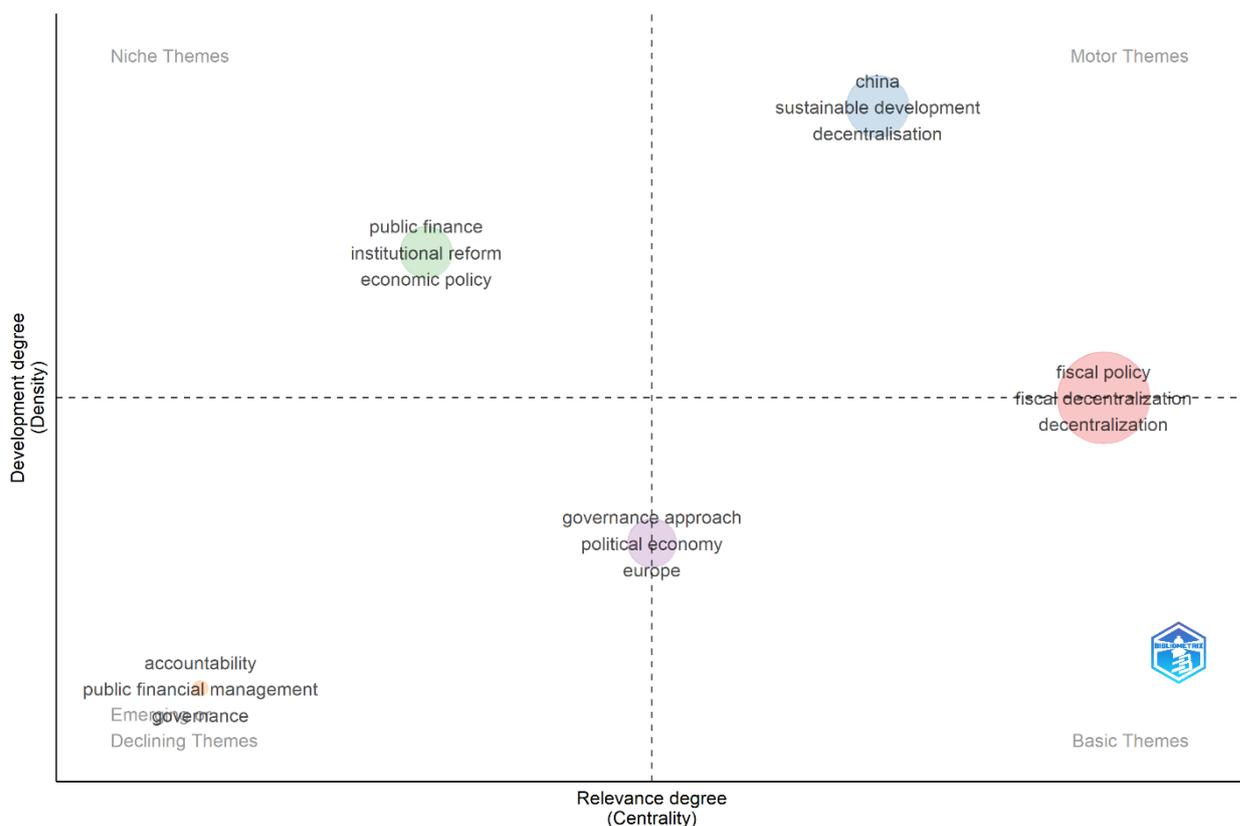


Figure 4 presents the thematic map based on centrality and density measures.

Motor themes in the upper-right quadrant include fiscal policy and fiscal decentralization. These themes exhibit both high centrality and high density, indicating that they are well-developed and central to the research field.

Basic themes, located in the lower-right quadrant, include governance approach and political economy. These themes are central but less internally developed, suggesting their foundational importance but potential for deeper theoretical development.

Niche themes, positioned in the upper-left quadrant, include public finance, institutional reform, and economic policy. These areas are internally coherent but less central to the broader field.

Emerging or declining themes in the lower-left quadrant include public financial management, accountability, and governance. The placement of “public financial

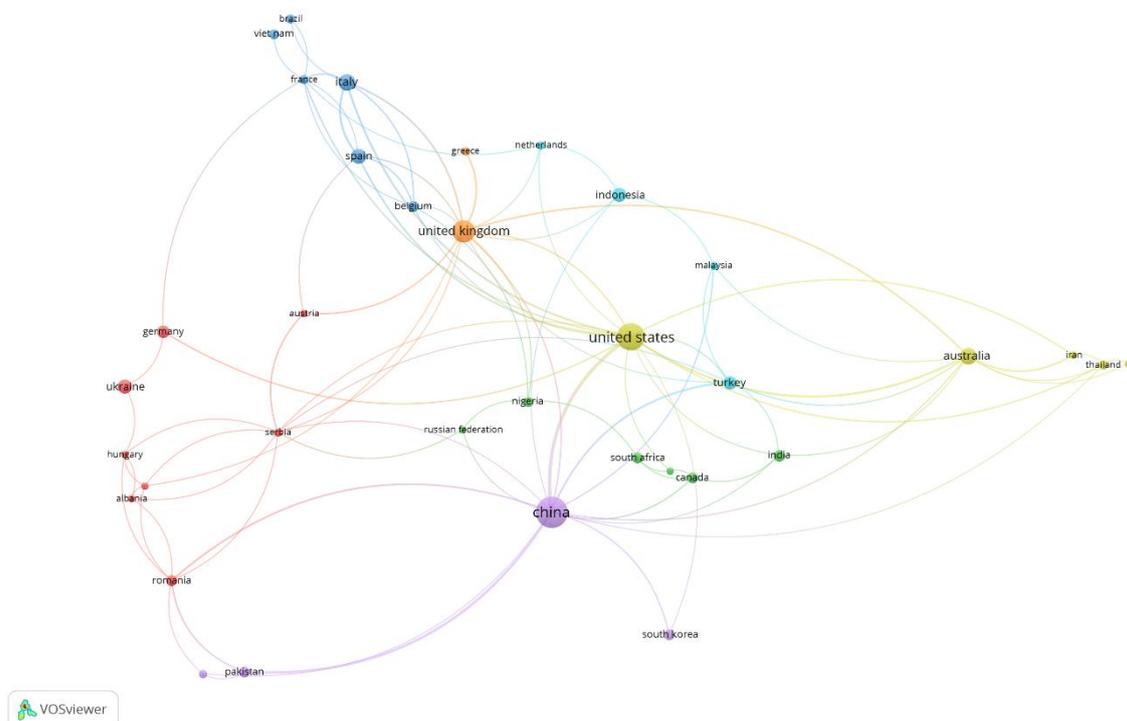
management” in this quadrant is particularly noteworthy. It suggests that while decentralization dominates, broader integrative PFM discourse may still be evolving or insufficiently consolidated.

This thematic positioning highlights a key structural imbalance: decentralization dominates as a motor theme, whereas institutional capacity remains less central.

#### 4.7 International collaboration

**Figure 5**

*Country Collaboration Network*



Of 98 countries represented in author affiliations, applying a minimum threshold of five publications resulted in 35 countries meeting the criterion. These countries formed seven collaboration clusters.

The United Kingdom and China emerge as structurally central nodes in the network, functioning as collaboration bridges. The United States also maintains strong connectivity across clusters.

The dominance of developed economies within central network positions reflects a geographic concentration of research influence. While emerging and developing countries are represented, their roles are comparatively peripheral.

Across temporal, thematic, and geographic dimensions, the results reveal a field characterized by strong consolidation around fiscal decentralization and macroeconomic governance. Administrative and institutional capacity are clearly present but remain embedded within broader reform narratives rather than positioned as independent analytical cores.

Thematic mapping confirms decentralization as a motor theme, while public financial management and accountability appear less central. Country collaboration analysis further reveals concentration in developed economies, reinforcing structural imbalances.

Taken together, these findings indicate that while scholarship has expanded significantly, theoretical integration between institutional capacity and fiscal sustainability remains incomplete. This sets the stage for deeper theoretical discussion and identification of research gaps in the next section.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a research field that has grown substantially in volume yet remains structurally concentrated around fiscal decentralization and macroeconomic governance themes. Across co-occurrence networks, thematic mapping, and citation analysis, decentralization and fiscal policy consistently emerge as motor themes, highly central and well-developed within the intellectual landscape. This dominance indicates that public financial management scholarship continues to frame fiscal reform primarily through macroeconomic performance, expenditure efficiency, and subnational governance lenses (Oates, 1999. Shah, 2007).

However, a closer examination of the thematic structure reveals a critical structural imbalance. While governance reform and institutional perspectives are present, administrative and institutional capacity rarely appear as central analytical anchors. Instead, capacity-related concepts are embedded within decentralization or governance reform clusters. This embedding suggests that institutional capacity is frequently treated

as a contextual enabler or background condition rather than as an independent explanatory variable shaping fiscal outcomes (Fukuyama, 2013. Painter & Pierre, 2005).

The thematic map further reinforces this observation. Fiscal policy and decentralization occupy the motor-theme quadrant, indicating intellectual consolidation and high relevance. In contrast, public financial management and governance-related terms appear in less central quadrants, suggesting either emerging consolidation or insufficient theoretical integration. This structural positioning implies that, while fiscal reforms are widely studied, the institutional mechanisms that sustain them remain under-theorized (Painter & Pierre, 2005. Peters, 2010).

Geographic concentration adds another layer of imbalance. The country collaboration network shows that developed economies, particularly in Europe and East Asia, dominate central positions within global research networks. Although developing countries are represented, their participation is comparatively peripheral. This concentration risks reinforcing theoretical models grounded primarily in institutional contexts of advanced economies, potentially limiting the applicability of findings to developing fiscal systems where institutional capacity constraints are more pronounced (Andrews et al., 2017).

The citation structure further confirms the field's interdisciplinary expansion, with highly cited articles often appearing in sustainability, environmental economics, and macroeconomic policy journals. While this reflects policy relevance and cross-sectoral integration, it also indicates that institutional capacity is frequently examined indirectly—through sustainability transitions or fiscal restructuring—rather than directly operationalized as a measurable determinant of fiscal sustainability (Allen et al., 2013. OECD, 2019).

Taken together, the findings suggest that the field has matured in terms of volume and thematic density but remains fragmented in conceptual integration. Administrative capacity is widely acknowledged as important but insufficiently modeled as a core driver of fiscal performance.

## 6 RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The bibliometric mapping reveals several structural and conceptual gaps that warrant systematic attention.

First, there is no unified theoretical framework explicitly linking administrative and institutional capacity to fiscal performance metrics. While decentralization and fiscal policy outcomes are extensively modeled, institutional capacity often appears as an implicit assumption rather than a clearly defined and operationalized construct. Future research should develop integrative models that position bureaucratic capability, organizational competence, and institutional coherence as measurable determinants of fiscal sustainability.

Second, developing fiscal systems remains underrepresented in the central collaboration networks. The dominance of developed economies in shaping research agendas raises concerns regarding contextual bias. Future studies should prioritize empirical analysis in emerging and low-income fiscal systems, where institutional capacity constraints may exert a stronger influence on fiscal reform outcomes.

Third, the dimensions of human capital development and bureaucratic training within public financial management are insufficiently operationalized. Although capacity-building is frequently mentioned, few studies provide systematic measurement of training systems, professionalization, or the development of administrative skills. Research should advance empirical instruments to quantify human resource development within fiscal institutions.

Fourth, measurement of institutional capacity remains inconsistent across studies. Concepts such as governance quality, bureaucratic competence, and regulatory effectiveness are operationalized differently, limiting cross-study comparability. Standardized measurement frameworks would enhance theoretical coherence.

Fifth, cross-regional comparative research is limited. Most studies remain single-country analyses. Expanding comparative designs would improve generalizability and clarify contextual variation in the relationship between capacity and fiscal outcomes.

Future research should therefore move toward integrated fiscal capacity models that combine macroeconomic analysis with institutional performance indicators. Mixed-method approaches and longitudinal designs may further strengthen empirical robustness.

## **7 IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 Theoretical implications**

The findings call for reconceptualizing administrative and institutional capacity as central rather than peripheral to public financial management scholarship. Integrating institutional theory, governance paradigms, and fiscal economics can generate a more cohesive framework that explains not only fiscal outcomes but also the mechanisms through which reforms succeed or fail.

By positioning institutional capacity as a core explanatory construct, future scholarship can bridge the divide between economic performance modeling and governance reform literature. This integration would advance a more holistic understanding of fiscal sustainability.

### **7.2 Policy implications**

For policymakers, the findings underscore that fiscal reform success depends not solely on policy design but on institutional capability. Capacity-building should be recognized as foundational to fiscal sustainability rather than as an auxiliary reform component. Investments in bureaucratic training, professionalization, and institutional coherence are not secondary reforms—they are structural prerequisites for effective fiscal governance.

Recognizing administrative capacity as a strategic investment may improve long-term fiscal resilience and reform durability.

### **7.3 Limitations**

While this study provides a comprehensive bibliometric mapping, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the dataset is restricted to Scopus-indexed English-language journal articles, potentially underrepresenting scholarship published in other languages or in regional databases. Second, bibliometric analysis identifies structural and relational patterns but does not evaluate methodological rigor or the

theoretical depth of individual studies. Third, reliance on keyword-based mapping may overlook nuanced conceptual variations that are not captured in metadata.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a robust macro-level synthesis of the intellectual landscape.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

This study mapped 458 global publications on administrative and institutional capacity within public financial management from 2015 to 2025 using bibliometric and network analysis techniques. The findings reveal accelerating scholarly growth, thematic concentration around fiscal decentralization and macroeconomic governance, and geographic imbalance in knowledge production. While the field demonstrates maturity in volume and structural cohesion, administrative capacity remains conceptually embedded rather than fully theorized as an independent driver of fiscal sustainability.

Closing this gap requires integrated theoretical development, standardized measurement frameworks, expanded geographic inclusion, and stronger empirical operationalization of institutional capacity. As fiscal systems face increasing complexity and global uncertainty, understanding the institutional foundations of fiscal governance is no longer merely an academic concern but a strategic imperative.

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## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study relies exclusively on secondary bibliographic data retrieved from publicly accessible databases and does not involve human participants. All data were handled with integrity, used solely for academic purposes, and analyzed in aggregate form. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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### Authors' Contribution

The author solely undertook all tasks, including conceptualization, methodology, data curation, software, analysis, visualization, investigation, writing/reviewing, and editing.

### Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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