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# Dynamics of Scientific Production on Regionalization of Higher Education: A Bibliometric Study

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#### Abstract

The regionalization of Higher Education goes beyond the mere expansion of academic programs to peripheral regions. It should involve a genuine recognition of the particularities and needs of each context, with educational programs that extend beyond the classroom and fill the gap in educational quality in these areas. The objective of this study is to address fundamental questions about international research on the regionalization of higher education. The analysis was based on specific criteria: documents published between 2013 and 2023, diverse document typologies, the English language, and presence in the SCOPUS database. Tools such as VOSviewer, Biblioshiny, and Excel were used to identify patterns and trends. The results reveal a total of 20 academic works, with the year 2016 standing out as the most active, representing 25% of the production. Despite fluctuations, no clear growth trend in production is perceived. Additionally, it is noted that the regionalization of education does not have a prominent presence in high-impact academic journals. This study emphasizes the need to intensify research in the field of regionalization of higher education, foster stronger collaboration among researchers, and raise the visibility of this topic in renowned journals. These steps are essential to effectively address the challenges associated with the regionalization of higher education and ensure that the specific needs of communities in all regions are met.

**Keywords:** Regionalization; Higher Education; Universities.

### Introduction

Higher Education plays a fundamental role in the social, economic, and cultural development of a country, significantly contributing to the globalized world and the knowledge society (Pardo, 2011). It generates conditions and opportunities that benefit not only metropolitan areas but also extend to regions, promoting their own growth. As reported by the OECD in 2016, there is a considerable challenge in achieving fair and equitable access to the higher education system to overcome inequality, a characteristic that has been a powerful barrier to poverty eradication, the expansion of citizenship, the exercise of rights, and even democratic governance (CEPAL, 2016). In this context, the Regionalization of Higher Education (RHE) acts as a response to the challenge proposed by the OECD, addressing the state's inability to reach regions with relevant and high-quality programs that consider science, technology, and innovation plans and projects in harmony with the socio-economic characteristics of the regions and in response to the demands of populations in the more remote areas of their territory.

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The aim is to provide people facing significant challenges with the opportunity to access higher education, thereby helping to reduce exclusion, discrimination, inequity, and centralization. This is achieved through cooperation, strategic alliances, and the development of relationships with the productive sector, both in rural and urban environments (Villalobos, 2017). It involves not only expanding academic programs but also implementing research, extension, and social action initiatives in regions that have had limited access compared to central areas. In this sense, as proposed by Medina and Velazco (2014), the RHE "plays an important role in regional development management, given its potential to build human infrastructure and local productive and technological networks" (p. 313) by integrating administrative and academic processes according to the particularities, needs, and issues of each region, supported by entrepreneurs, production guilds, municipal and departmental government authorities, and even international cooperation organizations, thus consolidating high-impact processes in the educational community.

In this context, this paper aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of scientific production related to the Regionalization of Higher Education (RHE). The focus is on the identification of relevant keywords, predominant publishing journals, prominent authors, the most active countries in research on this topic, and the correlation between these aspects. In addition, various indicators related to production, citation, and collaboration in this field are considered. The existence of collaboration networks at both national and international levels is explored, involving both academic institutions and individual authors. The co-authorship network among document authors is analyzed in detail, and the concentration and dispersion of documents related to the RES theme are evaluated.

This analysis aims to answer a series of fundamental research questions, such as: What are the most prominent academic journals in this field? Who are the most influential authors and institutions in research on the RHE? Which countries show the greatest interest in this area of study, and how is research on the regionalization of higher education geographically distributed? To address these questions, this article is structured in five sections: Introduction, addressing the subject of study; then, a theoretical framework is provided to facilitate the understanding of the concept of RHE, establishing a solid foundation for research. The methodology used in the systematic collection and analysis of information is detailed, allowing the identification of significant trends and patterns in the literature related to the RHE. Next, the results and discussions are presented, offering a comprehensive view of key contributions and emerging perspectives in this field of study based on information obtained from the Scopus database. The article concludes by summarizing the main findings and indicating possible directions for future research in the field of the Regionalization of Higher Education (RHE).

## Regionalization in Education

For decades, universities were consolidated as urban institutions, mostly accessible to men and students with significant economic resources (García-Guadilla, 2004). This concentration of enrollment in capital cities excluded a significant portion of the population that faced difficulties in accessing higher education. This resulted in limited and elitist access, reserved for those with high incomes or the financial means to relocate and bear the associated costs of higher education (Rama, 2009). Fortunately, over time, political transformations drove new dynamics related to decentralization and expansion towards regional economies. This generated an increased demand for professionals who could meet the needs of businesses, concurrently with a rise in the number of high school graduates. However, the surge in demand

contradicted existing requirements, as inequalities ingrained in higher education systems limited their massification process (Montecinos, 2013).

Unmet demands regarding access to education have exerted pressure and, simultaneously, paved the way for the regionalization of university education. Leveraging this dynamic, competition among educational institutions, aiming to broaden their reach and dimensions, has also contributed to the reconfiguration of traditional admission processes (Rama and Cevallos, 2016). The Regionalization of Higher Education (RHE) is, by nature, a political process marked by the diverse interests of each country, its university system, its regulatory frameworks, and, to some extent, leading universities. These changes, driven by the need to overcome geographical and economic barriers that historically excluded large sectors of the population from access to higher education, are actually a result of complex dynamics in power structures and the resistance of various actors (Carnoy, 2007). Both academics and urban politicians resist relinquishing influence, enrollment, or quality in teaching processes.

According to Villalobos (2016), university regionalization represents a philosophy opposite to centralization, as it seeks to enrich the higher education of a country through development and collaboration. The author defines regionalization as an approach, a planned process, or a strategic intervention (public policy) designed to transform the political, social, or cultural structure of a country or organization. This process involves recognizing the particularities and unique characteristics of the territorial units where it operates, without neglecting the essential functions and strategies of the central entity. Regionalization focuses on implementing specific actions with the aim of achieving optimal management, control, and evaluation of goals and outcomes, through the formulation of strategic plans for the institution (Chou and Ravinet, 2015).

It is crucial to recognize that each region has its own history, distinctive characteristics, specific needs, and unique challenges. Regionalization allows these local needs to be strategically integrated into the university structure, as pointed out by Rama (2015). According to the philosophical approach of the regionalization policy at the University of Antioquia, institutions must design educational programs whose curricula consider regional particularities, truly addressing the specific demands of society (UdeA, 2017). In other words, university regionalization should not be limited solely to offering some careers; it should involve mutual recognition, so that programs go beyond the classroom and fill the gap in educational quality in those peripheral regions, addressing aspects such as extension, research, academic technology, access to high-quality infrastructure and equipment, interinstitutional collaboration, and other strategies that promote both regionalization and cooperation, connection, and internationalization (Passarelli, 2019).

In this context, Villa (2001) highlights the importance of university presence in regions, as it contributes to forging a sense of belonging with communities, fostering the creation of contextualized knowledge. This implies that skills, knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes rooted in the local or community environment are incorporated into academic programs, considering the particularities of the areas where the university is established. The purpose is to challenge the previous notion in which the State did not consider regionalization as a means to empower regions and provinces as political actors (Montesino, 2013). Therefore, the university must play a fundamental role as a facilitator and promoter of local and regional development processes through its academic and administrative activities, respecting the singularities that make each region unique and valuable (Rama, 2011). This ensures that pedagogical experiences emanate from robust teaching and research processes that are in harmony with the local reality.

In this regard, regionalization configurations, whether adopted or dismissed, constitute a means to address the reduction of socioeconomic disparities and, consequently, the fight against poverty. A strategic model of academic regionalization must focus on balanced development between different regions and the reduction of social gaps (Sampaio, 2014) through the implementation of educational technologies, the promotion of cooperation and healthy competition between the public and private sectors, the formation of alliances, and the promotion of economic and social growth in regions. Additionally, regional empowerment is promoted, contributing to equity, social inclusion, and the economic and cultural development of all geographical areas. It is essential that these strategies receive support from the government, educational institutions, and civil society organizations (Rama, 2013). This collaborative support enables the creation of synergies that drive these actions and ultimately maximize the benefits of higher education that is more connected to the diversity and specific needs of the country.

## Methodology

The methodology employed to conduct the bibliometric analysis of scientific production related to the regionalization of education was based on the approach proposed by Kart and Kart (2021). This method was deemed suitable for addressing research questions and obtaining robust and meaningful results in the study. The research design adhered to a structured and organized process conceived by experts in the field, as detailed in the methodological stages proposed by Castillo-Paredes et al. (2022), in alignment with other bibliometric studies, such as the one carried out by Cuellar-Sánchez et al. (2023).

These stages provided an essential guide to systematically and comprehensively carry out the research, enabling the achievement of the pre-established objectives. The following table breaks down in greater detail the different phases of the methodology used:

**Table 1** Methodological Phases for the Study: Scientific Production in the Context of Virtual Communication (VC).

Fases	Actividades	Resultado		
1	Keyword Selection	Regionalization of education, education regionalization, high education regionalization.		
2	Search in Academic Databases with Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	Search and selection of articles, conference papers, book d chapters, and reports published in English within the period from 2013 to 2023 on Scopus.		
3	Data Extraction in Information Record Format	Record of country of origin, publication year, author(s), and		
4	Selection of Specific Study Areas	Social sciences, arts and humanities, computer science, Business, Management, and Accounting.		
5	Quantitative Analysis of Extracted Data	Utilize VOSviewer with Scopus data in CSV format (version 1.6.19) and Bib for Biblioshiny. These tools enable the creation of networks and the performance of bibliometric analyses. Biblioshiny is an open-source tool facilitating various bibliometric activities (Van-Eck and Waltman, 2010).		
6	Comparison of Objectives against Results	Interpretation of results through co-occurrence analysis to identify nodes within the network, paying special attention to centrality and power measures. For this analysis, attributes of weighting, linking, and link strength (total link strength) were utilized.		

Note: Phases Developed by the Authors Based on Cuellar-Sánchez, et al. (2023).

#### Results

The analysis of scientific production related to the regionalization of education between January 2013 and October 2023 reveals a fluctuating dynamic without showing a clear growth trend. The collected data indicates a total of 20 academic works in this period (Table 1), of which 13 are classified as articles in Scopus.

Table 1 Annual Scientific Production.

Year	N	0/0	MeanTCperArt	%
2013	1	5%	7	23%
2014	2	10%	10	33%
2015	1	5%	1	3%
2016	5	25%	3,2	11%
2017	3	15%	1,67	6%
2018	1	5%	1	3%
2019	2	10%	0	0%
2020	1	5%	0	0%
2021	1	5%	6	20%
2022	1	5%	0	0%
2023	2	10%	0	0%

Note: Information Based on Scopus and Biblioshiny Data.

The year 2016 stands out as the period of highest activity in terms of publications on the topic, representing 25% of the total production. It is followed by the year 2017, accounting for 15% of the production. In contrast, the years 2014, 2019, and 2023 each recorded 10% of the production, while the remaining years represent the remaining 5%. In light of this data, it is evident that the production does not show a growing trend but rather remains at relatively low levels throughout the analyzed period.

It is crucial to highlight that Chao's article (2014) titled "Pathways to an East Asian Higher Education Area: a comparative analysis of East Asian and European regionalization processes" stands out as an outstanding work in this field. It conducts a meticulous comparison between the processes of regionalization of higher education in Europe and East Asia. This analysis emphasizes the interdependence of higher education regionalization in East Asia with its overall regionalization process. It is important to underscore that this article has received the highest number of citations among the examined documents. Second, Knight's article (2013) titled "Towards African Higher Education Regionalization and Harmonization: Functional, Organizational, and Political Approaches" holds a prominent place in this study. This work focuses on policies and programmatic initiatives in Africa that seek to promote the regionalization of higher education, providing valuable insights into African strategies in this area.

The third relevant document in this research is Vitarelli's article (2021) titled "Higher Education Regionalization in South America." This study analyzes the meanings, concepts, and processes related to the regionalization of higher education in South America, offering an enriching perspective on this topic in a specific region. These documents underscore the importance of regionalization in education, not only as a means to provide access to education in distant locations but also as a vehicle to empower communities and promote transformations in the social and economic structures of regions (Rodriguez and Baltodano, 2021). This highlights the relevance of this field of study and its significant implications in society.

## **Scientific Collaboration Among Countries**

The analysis of the scientific production of countries reveals significant differences in the quantity of academic publications related to the regionalization of higher education. Examples of this are Canada, China, South Korea, the Netherlands, Kazakhstan, and Nigeria, each with 2 publications. This might reflect a focus on other aspects of higher education or simply lower activity in this area of research during the analyzed period. Although the quantity for countries like Nigeria demonstrates a moderate interest in this area, given its diverse and evolving educational system. On the other hand, there are countries with a single publication in the field of higher education regionalization, such as Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Ecuador, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay. This could indicate that there are other research priorities and a more limited focus on higher education regionalization in academic research. These observations reflect that the regionalization of higher education may not be a central research theme in these countries, despite differences in their educational systems and research approaches. In this sense, research in higher education is often influenced by the specific needs and priorities of each country.

When analyzing collaboration among authors from different countries in the context of research, the results show a consistent trend with the aforementioned. According to the analysis using VOSviewer, three prominent collaboration groups can be identified. The first involves Russia and Kazakhstan; the second cluster consists of authors affiliated with Canada; and the third groups researchers linked to Hong Kong. However, it is important to note that there is no significant collaboration observed between these groups. This panorama indicates that, in the scope of our research, there is scarce or virtually nonexistent international collaboration of relevance.

#### Prominent Authors in the Study Topic

Twenty articles have been identified in the Scopus database, written by a total of 48 authors. According to the data collected through Biblioshiny, it can be observed that, on average, each document has the contribution of approximately one (1) author, suggesting a relatively low association in scientific production related to the subject in question. A relevant finding from the Scopus information is that 100% of the authors have published only one article on this topic in the analyzed time period. This highlights limited diversity in the scientific production of these researchers regarding the study topic.

Another aspect of interest deserving attention in this section is the diversity of institutional affiliations of these authors. Many of them are associated with institutions worldwide, including, among others, the Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, The Institute for the Development of Education Nizhny Tagil Branch, Korea University, University of Ilorin, and Lingnan University. This underscores the geographical breadth and diversity of institutions involved in research on the topic. Table 2 provides detailed information about some of these authors, including the number of documents they have published, their affiliated institution, their country of origin, and their h-index, a bibliometric indicator reflecting their scientific performance over time.

Table 2 Authors, Publications, and Affiliations

Order	Authors	docs.	H-Index	Institution	Country
1	Abiahay NV	1	7	Abai Kazakh National	Almaty,
1	1 Abishev, N.K.		/	Pedagogical University	Kazakhstan
2	Abramova, N.A.	1	1	Yakutsk State Agricultural	Yakutsk, Russian
	Abramova, 18.71.			Academy	Federation
3	Akanbi, G.O.	1	1	Emmanuel Alayande College	Oyo, Nigeria
				of Education	
4	Aleshina, E.	1	2	University of Penza	Penza, Russian
	mesimia, i.i.			Chiversity of Tenza	Federation
5	Andreev, V.V.	1	2	Russian University of	Russian
	murcev, v.v.			Cooperation	Federation
6	Batchayova KKM	. 1	2	Karachay-Cherkessian State	Russian
	6 Batchayeva, K.K.M.		4	University	Federation
7	Didaibalaar VV	7. 1	5	Abai Kazakh National	Almaty,
/	Bidaibekov, Y.Y.			Pedagogical University	Kazakhstan
8	Byun, K.	1	7	Korea University	Seoul, South
					Korea
9	Cevallos, M.	1	2	CES	Quito, Ecuador
10	Chao, R.Y.	1	5	International Centre for	Shenzhen, China
		1		Higher Education Innovation	

Note: Information Developed by the Authors Based on Scopus Data.

The information provided by VOSviewer offers an enlightening view of the collaboration and citation among the authors mentioned in Table 2. In particular, notable contributions from authors such as Knight, Chernoyarova, Akanbi, Jekayinfa, Abishev, and Bidaibekov stand out in this context. However, when exploring the groupings within the co-citation networks of authors, as represented in Figure 1, a total of twenty distinct clusters are identified. These clusters reflect the calculation of the overall strength of co-authorship links with other researchers, although no substantial relationship between them is evident.

Figure 1 Co-Authorship Network Among Writers.



Note: Information Developed in Vosviewer Based on Scopus Data.

To map the institutional collaboration network, a criterion allowing a maximum of three organizations per document was applied to highlight the strongest connections. Of the 41 organizations listed in the study documents, this criterion led to the creation of a single cluster grouping seven universities. These institutions include the Academy for Advanced Studies, Kazan State University, Kazan Federation, Kostroma State University, North Kazakhstan State University, The Institute for the Development, and finally, the University of Russian Academy. This cluster represents a notable example of joint collaboration in the context of the research topic. It contains a total of seven documents that have contributed significantly both academically and in terms of the relevance of international collaboration in this discipline.

## Concentration-Dispersion of Documents

The distribution of information related to the regionalization of higher education in scientific journals was carried out through the applied analysis of Bradford's Law, allowing a deeper understanding of how academic production is distributed in scientific journals in this particular discipline. This analytical approach facilitated understanding the relationship between the quantity of journals and articles published in this specific field and their contribution to the discipline, as well as current research trends and areas of interest in the regionalization of higher education. In the period from 2013 to 2023, a total of 19 journals were identified that published relevant papers in this area of study. The analysis of document distribution revealed three main focus zones. Zone 1, comprising six journals (equivalent to 31.5% of the total), stood out by concentrating 35% of the total production, equivalent to a total of 7 documents (Table 3). In a similar pattern, Zone 2 included 7 journals, representing 37% of the total and contributing 35% of the articles. Finally, Zone 3 consisted of 6 journals (31.5% of the total), and its contribution was distributed evenly, with 30% of the published documents.

The analysis of this distribution indicates that, despite a limited number of journals in this specific area of higher education, there is a concentration of academic production in Zones 1 and 2, suggesting a particular emphasis on specific topics or increased research activity in these areas.

Table 3 Distribution of Journals and Articles by Zone - Bradford Model. 2013-2023.

Zone	Number of Journals per Zone	% of Journals	N. of Articles	% of Articles per Zone	Average Articles per Journal in the Zones
1	6	31,5%	7	35%	1,2
2	7	37%	7	35%	1
3	6	31,5%	6	30%	1
Total	19	100%	20	100%	

Note: Information Developed by the Authors in Biblioshiny Based on Scopus Data.

In the conducted search, a keyword filter was applied, including "Education regionalization," covering the period from 2013 to 2023, along with related terms such as "Regionalization of education" and "Higher Education regionalization." This search yielded relevant results in various academic publications and specialized journals. The collected results, presented in Table 4, indicate that the researched topic and its related concepts have had limited presence in research published in high-quality academic journals. Many of these publications are located in the Q4 quartile in the education field, suggesting a relatively low level of influence compared to other research areas. In particular, the journal "Espacios" is observed to have published the

highest number of articles related to the studied topic, with a total of 2 articles. This evidence points to a relative scarcity of high-impact research in journals regarding the regionalization of education in the analyzed period.

Table 5 Journals with the Highest Thematic Production in the Area.

Journal		SJR 2020	Quart ile	Category
Higher Education	1	1.952	Q1	Social Sciences: Education.
Higher Education Policy	1	0.777	Q1	Social Sciences: Education
Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities	1	0.171	Q2	General Arts and Humanities
Magis	1	0.308	Q3	Social Sciences: Education
Calidoscopio	1	0.133	Q3	Language and Linguistics
International Review of Management and Marketing	1	0,167	Q4	Business, Management and Accounting
Man in India	1	0.136	Q4	Cultural Studies
History of Education	1	0.152	Q4	Social Sciences: Education

Note: Information Developed by the Authors Based on Scopus Data.

**Continuation:** Journals with the Highest Thematic Production in the Area.

Journal		SJR 2020	Quart ile	Category
International Perspectives on Education and Society	1	0.130	Q4	Social Sciences: Education
Espacio, Tiempo y Educacion	1	0.116	Q4	Social Sciences: Education
International Journal of Engineering and Technology	1	0.110	Q4	Computer Science (miscellaneous)
Espacios	2	0.215	Q4	Management Science and Operations RHEearch

**Note:** Information Developed by the Authors Based on Scopus Data.

## **Key Descriptors**

This paragraph provides an analysis of the connections and meaning of the variable "Regionalization of education" in the context of educational policy. It highlights the importance of this variable by linking it with the regulation of access, integration, and retention of students in the state educational system. Furthermore, it emphasizes that this redefinition of education as a driver of social and economic policies involves a series of actors and elements, including institutions, programs, systems, networks, and agreements. This inter-institutional collaboration spans both national and territorial realms and extends to Higher Education Institutions.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of scientific production on the regionalization of education from January 2013 to October 2023 reveals a fluctuating landscape without a clear growth trend. In this period, 20 academic works were identified, of which 13 are classified as articles in Scopus. The year 2016

stood out as the most active period in terms of publications on this topic, representing 25% of the total production, followed by the year 2017 with 15%. In contrast, the years 2014, 2019, and 2023 recorded 10% of the production each, while the remaining years contributed the remaining 5%. The fluctuation in annual production may be indicative of various factors such as changes in research interest, funding availability, or the evolution of the theme in the academic field. A more in-depth analysis may be necessary to understand the reasons behind this variability in scientific production.

Based on the quantity of publications, it can be observed that the regionalization of higher education is a research topic with varying levels of interest in these countries. Factors influencing this variability could include educational policy, research funding, changes in educational structure, and specific research priorities of each country. This analysis suggests the need for increased attention and research development in this specific area to contribute to enriching the body of knowledge and its potential influence in the field of regional education. The limited presence of articles in high-impact journals could be an opportunity for researchers and academics interested in this topic to promote further research and dissemination in journals of greater visibility and prestige.

The analysis of scientific production by country shows significant differences in the quantity of academic publications related to the regionalization of higher education. Some countries, such as Canada, China, Korea, the Netherlands, Kazakhstan, and Nigeria, have 2 publications each, which could reflect a limited focus in this research area in the analyzed period. Other countries, such as Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Ecuador, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay, have only one publication in this field, indicating that the regionalization of higher education is not a central theme in their research agendas.

Regarding collaboration among authors from different countries, three prominent groups were identified: Russia and Kazakhstan, Canada, and Hong Kong. However, no substantial collaboration is observed between these groups, suggesting limited international collaboration in the field of this research.

In terms of institutional collaboration, a cluster was highlighted, including seven universities from different geographical regions, demonstrating the geographical breadth and diversity of institutions involved in research on the regionalization of higher education. In the analysis of information distribution in scientific journals, three main focus zones were identified, with Zone 1 and Zone 2 concentrating most of the academic production in this area.

Finally, the analysis of keywords used in the search reveals the limited presence of research in high-impact academic journals, suggesting that the regionalization of education is not a central theme in academic research in the analyzed period.

In summary, the analysis provides a clear insight into how the regionalization of education relates to policy formulation and collaboration among multiple stakeholders in the education sector. This information is relevant for understanding the dynamics and impact of regionalization in education and its influence on educational policy. Academic production on the regionalization of education shows fluctuation without a clear growth trend. Although prominent authors and works are identified in the field, international collaboration is limited, and the diversity of involved institutions is broad. The results emphasize the need for increased focus in this research area and stronger collaboration among researchers and countries to address challenges related to the regionalization of higher education.

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