



THE ROLE OF SELF-LEADERSHIP IN ENHANCING FREELANCE

CAREER PERFORMANCE

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Abstract:

Freelancing has emerged as a prominent career path, requiring individuals to adapt self-leadership strategies to achieve sustained performance. This study explores the role of self-leadership in enhancing freelance career performance by synthesizing findings from key journals, authors, regions, and thematic trends. "Frontiers in Psychology and the Journal of Nursing Administration" are highlighted as pivotal sources, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of self-leadership research. The USA leads in contributions and impact, while the UK demonstrates high per-article influence. Emerging themes such as leadership dynamics, gender considerations, and career mobility underline the evolving challenges faced by freelancers. Thematic analysis indicates that self-leadership is central to improving job performance, career mobility, and adaptability in freelance contexts, with niche themes like personal training and educational frameworks supporting skill development. The findings reveal that freelancing success is influenced by self-regulation, personal growth, and effective management of resources. These insights establish a foundation for future research and practical interventions aimed at empowering freelancers to optimize career outcomes through self-leadership.

Key Words: Self-Leadership, Career Performance, Freelance Career, And Personal Effectiveness.

Introduction:

Self-leadership is about taking charge of your actions, emotions, and thoughts to reach your personal and professional goals. Self-leadership is a process in which individuals assess and regulate their behaviors to achieve desired outcomes by applying a defined set of cognitive and behavioral strategies (Neck & Houghton, 2006). The key components of self-leadership are self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation, which help you tap into your creativity, take smart risks, and bring fresh ideas to life (Khahan, N. N. et al., 2024). It's the skill that empowers you to steer your path and make things happen. Self-leadership encompasses behaviors and skills employees demonstrate to achieve success and accomplish goals effectively. Self-leadership empowers individuals to recognize and eliminate unproductive work behaviors through the processes of self-reflection and self-assessment, ultimately leading to enhanced work performance (Harari, M. B. et al., 2021; Krampitz, J. et al., 2021). This approach emphasizes self-management as an ongoing journey of personal improvement. A fundamental aspect of this process is the ability to set clear, actionable goals and establish structured methods to achieve them, coupled with the capacity to monitor and regulate their execution (Krampitz, J. et al., 2021). Additionally, self-leadership plays a critical role in fostering creative work behaviors within organizational contexts. By cultivating self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation, individuals can effectively generate innovative ideas, embrace calculated risks, and actively engage in activities that drive innovation and creativity.

With the advancement in technology and innovation, humans' ways of working also keep on changing. The advent of freelance work is in the competitive era of work culture. But succeeding in a freelance career is not solely about skills; it requires effective self-leadership-being able to be your own boss. Self-leadership is the skill of owning your own actions, feelings, and decisions, keeping you on target, motivated, and efficient for the work ahead. For freelancers, balancing client expectations, meeting deadlines, and delivering great results all come with the territory. That's where personal effectiveness comes in. By building self-awareness, practicing discipline, and staying driven, freelancers can improve their career performance and consistently achieve their goals, even facing challenges (Korenman, J. 2017; Gerber, M. E. 2021).

Personal effectiveness is especially crucial for freelancers, as they operate independently and must manage multiple aspects of their work without the structure of a traditional workplace. Freelancers need to cultivate self-awareness, continuously develop relevant skills, and adapt to an ever-changing market (Bennett, 1988). Personal effectiveness encompasses a range of skills and behaviors that are crucial for effective self-management and achieving success in both personal and professional life (Wambui, 2009; Bennett, 1988). It involves gaining self-awareness, continuously developing new skills, and being adaptable to the changing demands of the workplace (Bennett, 1988). Core elements of personal effectiveness include being open to feedback, sharing one's thoughts and feelings, and remaining perceptive of others' perspectives (Jain et al., 2014). For instance, a study conducted with public health managers in Southeast Asia found that while most individuals were receptive to feedback and attentive to others, fewer excelled in self-disclosure (Jain et al., 2014). Additionally, research has suggested that individuals who exhibit traditionally masculine and feminine qualities-psychological androgyny-are often more effective in management roles (Maheshwari & Kumar, 2008). Enhancing personal effectiveness is increasingly important as workplaces face challenges like growing expectations, technological shifts, and rising competition (Wambui, 2009). Managers are encouraged to focus on self-development while also fostering growth in others to drive organizational success (Wambui, 2009; Bennett, 1988).

Rationale of the Study:

The rationale for this study stems from the growing popularity of freelancing in today's fast-paced and ever-changing work environment. As more people choose freelancing, they face unique challenges that set them apart from traditional employees. These challenges include managing their time effectively, staying motivated, and consistently producing high-quality

work without the structure and support of a typical organization. In this context, self-leadership becomes a key factor in achieving success in a freelance career.

Self-leadership is about taking control of one’s actions, emotions, and thoughts to reach personal and professional goals. This is particularly crucial for freelancers, as they are responsible for managing their workload, nurturing client relationships, and growing their careers independently. Freelancers need to practice strong self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-motivation to navigate the complexities of their work. However, despite its importance, there is limited research on how self-leadership directly influences freelance career performance. This study aims to explore this gap and provide valuable insights into how self-leadership can enhance freelance success.

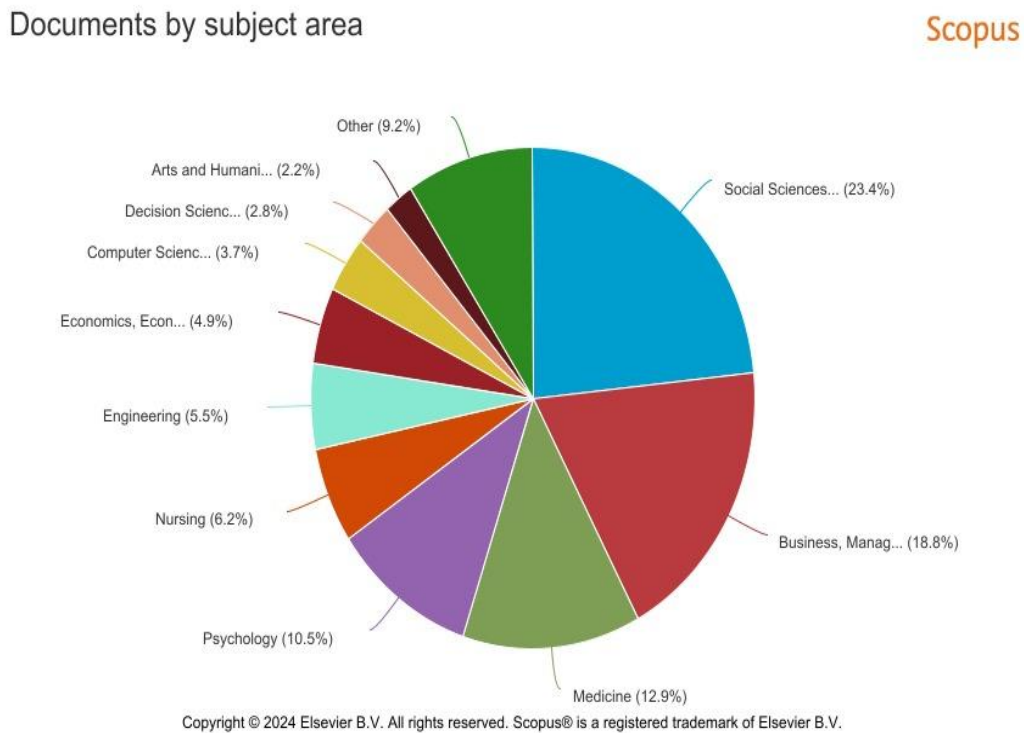
Research Questions:

- RQ1 Which are the most influential journals and authors in the field of self-leadership and career performance?
- RQ2 which is the most influential country in the area of self-leadership and career performance?
- RQ3 What are the emerging themes in the related field?

Research Methodology:

Research methodology refers to the organized process employed to conduct research and gather information, encompassing study design, data collection, and analysis techniques. In this study, bibliometric analysis is utilized as a quantitative approach to uncover patterns in collaboration, identify research clusters, and pinpoint knowledge gaps. This method also helps define the intellectual framework of the field and highlights emerging trends. The study uses a descriptive approach and bibliometric analysis via R-Studio for a thorough literature review. Data is extracted from the Scopus database, known for its robustness, to meet the research objectives. The data is extracted using the keywords “self-leadership AND career performance” and the number of documents that are extracted is 196 from different subject areas which is shown in Figure: 1. Key information extracted from biblioshiny includes: “main information, annual scientific production, most relevant sources, most relevant authors, thematic map, word clouds, most relevant words, the most cited countries, and countries scientific production”. This analysis provides researchers with a clear overview of the field, helping to identify research gaps and guiding future investigations in the area.

Figure 1: Documents by Subject Area



Source: Scopus

From figure 1 it is interpreted that, the “Social Sciences” account for the largest proportion of documents, contributing 23.4%, followed by “Business and Management” with 18.8%, highlighting significant research activity in these fields. “Medicine” ranks third with 12.9%, emphasizing its prominence in the dataset. Other notable subject areas include “Psychology” (10.5%), “Nursing” (6.2%), “Engineering” (5.5%), and “Economics” (4.9%), reflecting diverse research contributions. Smaller shares are observed in “Computer Science” (3.7%), “Decision Sciences” (2.8%), and “Arts and Humanities” (2.2%), while the "Other" category comprises 9.2%, representing a range of less-represented disciplines. Overall, the chart underscores the multidisciplinary nature of research, with a clear dominance of social sciences, business, and medical studies.

Analysis and Findings:

Table 1: Main Information

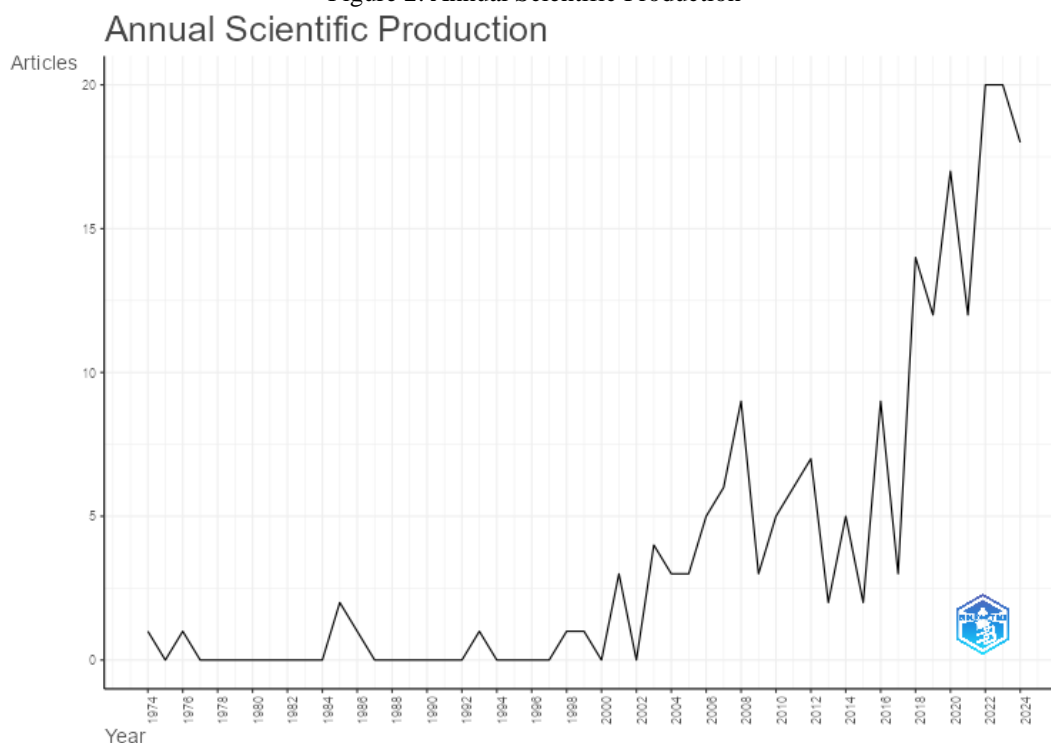
Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	1974:2024
Sources (Journals, Books, Etc)	174
Documents	196

Annual Growth Rate %	5.95
Document Average Age	8.52
Average Citations Per Doc	16.77
References	8942
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	932
Author's Keywords (DE)	553
AUTHORS	
Authors	567
Authors of single-authored docs	47
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-Authored Docs	47
Co-Authors Per Doc	2.92
International Co-Authorships %	16.33
DOCUMENT TYPES	
Article	136
Book	7
Book Chapter	9
Conference Paper	16
Editorial	3
Erratum	1
Note	4
Review	17
Short Survey	3

Source: Biblioshiny

This table shows the main information about the data which is extracted from the database. This data has 196 scholarly works drawn from 174 different sources like journals, books, and conferences. The body of research has grown steadily at an annual rate of nearly 6%, with the average paper being about 8.5 years. Impressively, each document has been cited around 17 times on average, reflecting their significance in the academic community. Together, these works reference nearly 9,000 sources, highlighting the depth of scholarship. When it comes to content, researchers have used 932 indexed keywords and provided 553 of their own to describe their work. In terms of authorship, a total of 567 researchers contributed, though only 47 papers were written by a single author. Most papers were collaborative efforts, with an average of nearly three authors per paper. Notably, around 16% of the work involved international teams, showcasing the global nature of research in this field. As for the types of publications, journal articles dominate with 136 entries, followed by reviews (17), conference papers (16), and book chapters (9), books (7), editorials (3), short surveys (3), and notes (4) were also part of the dataset.

Figure 2: Annual Scientific Production



Source: Biblioshiny

This figure illustrates the annual scientific production from 1974 to 2024, highlighting the growth and evolution of research in this field. In the early years, from 1974 to around 2000, publications were infrequent, with only a few articles

appearing, indicating that the topic was either in its infancy or received limited academic attention. However, from the early 2000s onward, there was a gradual increase in the number of publications, signaling growing interest and engagement among researchers. This growth became more pronounced between 2016 and 2021, where a sharp rise in scientific output is evident. This surge likely reflects heightened global interest, increased funding, or policy-driven research in the field. In the most recent years, from 2022 to 2024, while publication levels remain high, there are slight fluctuations, suggesting that the rapid growth may be stabilizing.

Table 2: Most Relevant Sources

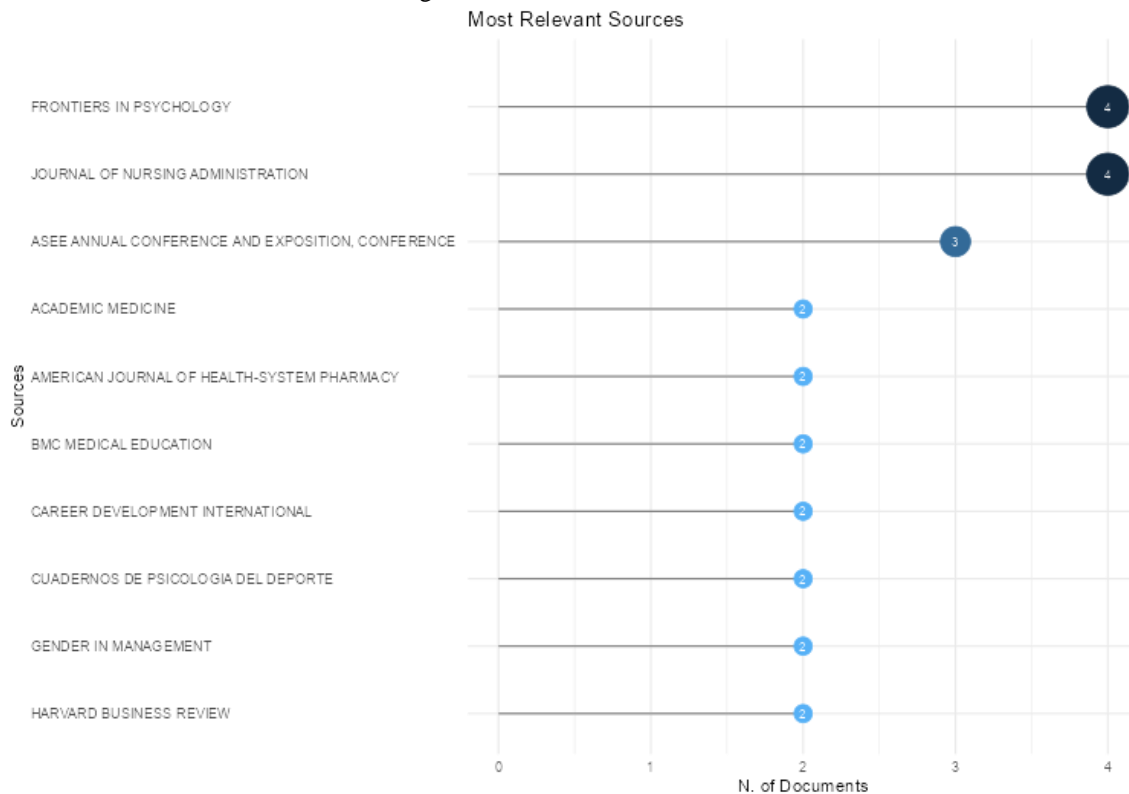
Sources	Articles
Frontiers in Psychology	4
Journal of Nursing Administration	4
ASEE Annual Conference and Exposition, Conference Proceedings	3
Academic Medicine	2
American Journal Of Health-System Pharmacy	2
BMC Medical Education	2
Career Development International	2
Cuadernos De Psicologia Del Deporte	2
Gender in Management	2
Harvard Business Review	2

Source: Biblioshiny

Table 2 has two columns one is of sources and the second is of articles or numbers of articles. “Frontiers in Psychology” and the “Journal of Nursing Administration” each contributed four articles, highlighting their significant role in the field. The “ASEE Annual Conference and Exposition” provided three articles, indicating its importance, especially in the context of educational or engineering studies. Journals such as “Academic Medicine”, “American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy” and “BMC Medical Education” each offered two articles. Other journals, including “Career Development International”, “Cuadernos de Psicología del Deporte”, “Gender in Management”, and “Harvard Business Review” each contributed two articles as well.

Figure 3 is the graphical presentation of the table 2. In this graph on the x-axis number of document are shown and on the y-axis sources are shown; in this figure “Frontiers in Psychology” and the “Journal of Nursing Administration” are on the top with 4 document each.

Figure 3: Most Relevant Sources



Source: Biblioshiny

Table: 3 Most Relevant Authors

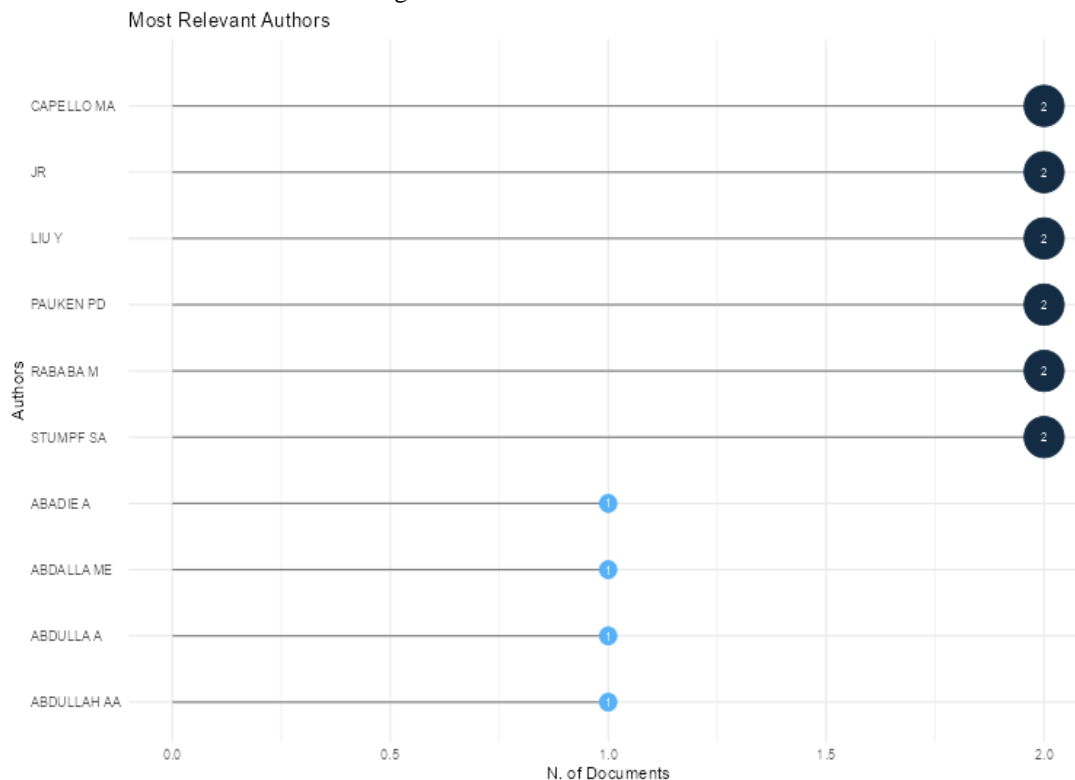
Authors	Articles	Articles Fractionalized
CAPELLO MA	2	1
JR	2	0.45
LIU Y	2	0.4
PAUKEN PD	2	1
RABABA M	2	0.22222222
STUMPF SA	2	1.2

ABADIE A	1	0.2
ABDALLA ME	1	0.25
ABDULLA A	1	1
ABDULLAH AA	1	0.25

Source: Biblioshiny

In this table, there are three columns. In the first column, the author's name, in the second column articles and the third column articles fractionalized are shown. Fractionalized contributions account for co-authorship by dividing credit among contributors. From this table it is interpreted that, “CAPELLO MA and PAUKEN PD” authored 2 articles each with full contributions (fractionalized count: 1), indicating sole or significant authorship. On the other hand, “JR and LIU Y”, with 2 articles each, have fractionalized contributions of 0.45 and 0.4, respectively, suggesting partial involvement. Similarly, “RABABA M”, with 2 articles, has a fractionalized count of only 0.222, indicating minimal contribution. “STUMPF SA” shows a notable fractionalized contribution of 1.2 across 2 articles, possibly due to lead authorship or greater involvement in multi-authored works. Among authors with a single article, contributions range from full credit, as seen with “ABDULLA A”, to partial credit, such as “ABDULLAH AA” (0.25).

Figure 4: Most Relevant Authors



Source: Biblioshiny

Table 4: Country Scientific Production

Region	Freq
USA	186
UK	36
Canada	26
China	26
India	23
Germany	21
Indonesia	17
Netherlands	16
Australia	15
Spain	12

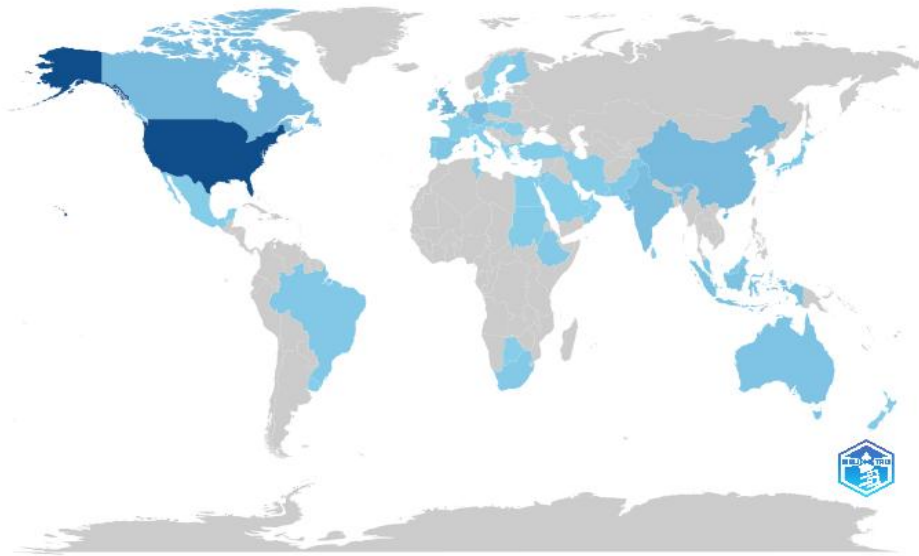
Source: Biblioshiny

This table is divided into two columns one is of region and the second is of frequency. This table shows the top ten contributing countries in self-leadership and career performance. The table highlights the regional distribution publications, with the “USA” standing out at the top, with a frequency of 186, far surpassing all other regions. The “UK” follows as the second-highest contributor with a frequency of 36, while Canada and China share an equal frequency of 26 each. India (23) and Germany (21) also have moderate contributions, indicating their active presence in the dataset. Regions like Indonesia (17), Netherlands (16), and Australia (15) show relatively lower but still notable frequencies. At the bottom of the list is “Spain”, with a frequency of 12.

Figure 5 is the pictorial presentation of Table 4. In this picture the dark-shaded portion shows the highest contribution of the country, the lighter the shade lesser the contribution.

Figure 5: Country Scientific Production

Country Scientific Production



Source: Biblioshiny

Table 5: Most Cited Country

Country	TC	Average Article Citations
USA	1552	35.3
United Kingdom	432	61.7
Germany	109	21.8
Portugal	102	34
Turkey	77	77
Finland	67	22.3
China	62	7.8
Pakistan	59	14.8
Canada	54	9
Australia	36	12

Source: Biblioshiny

Table 5 shows the most cited country and has three columns of country, total citation (TC), and average article citations. The “USA” stands out with the highest total citations (1552) and an impressive average of 35.3 citations per article, showcasing its dominant presence in research. The “United Kingdom”, with 432 total citations, has the highest average citations per article at 61.7, indicating a significant individual impact of its publications despite a lower total count than the “USA”. “Germany” (109 citations) and “Portugal” (102 citations) have approximately similar total citation counts, but Portugal exhibits a higher average of 34 citations per article compared to “Germany”(21.8). “Turkey” shows (77 total citations), with an average of 77 citations per article, indicating a remarkable individual article impact. “Finland” (67 total citations, 22.3 average article citations) and “Pakistan” (59 total citations, 14.8 average article citations) demonstrate moderate research contributions. “China” (62 total citations, 7.8 average article citations), “Canada” (54 total citations, 9 average article citations), and “Australia” (36 total citations, 12 average article citations) reflect lower total contributions and average impacts.

The “USA” is the most influential country overall due to its high frequency and high total citations, the “United Kingdom” shows greater influence on a per-article basis, making its individual publications more impactful.

Table 6: Most Relevant Words

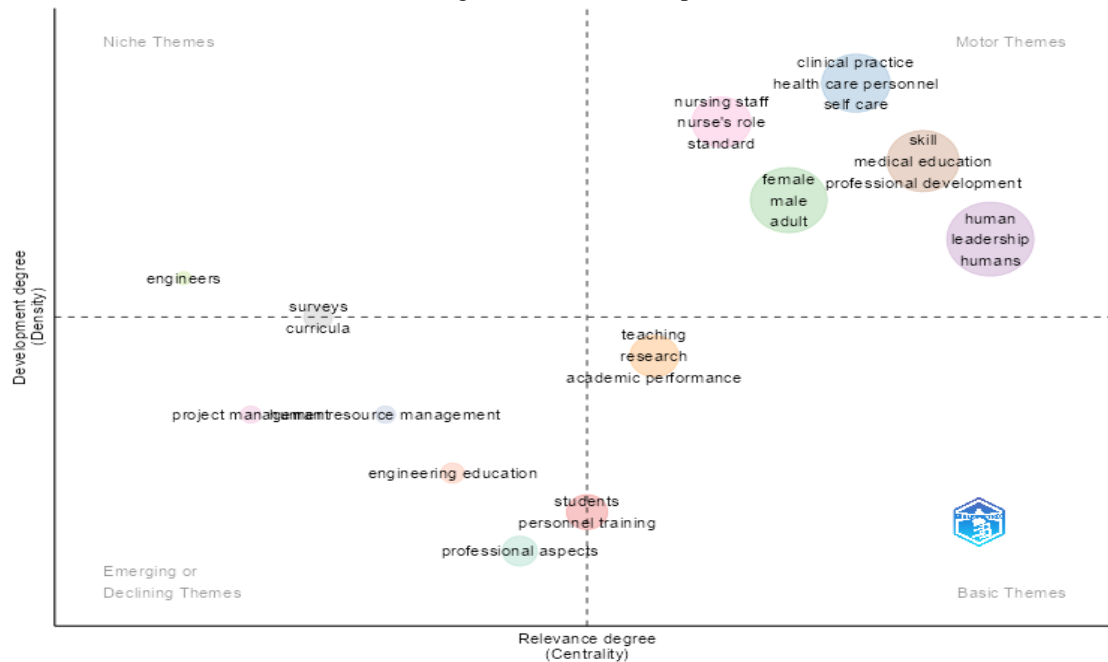
Words	Occurrences
Leadership	99
Human	72
Female	55
Humans	54
Male	48
Adult	42
Article	36
Career	29
Job Performance	25
Career Mobility	24

Source: Biblioshiny

Table 6 shows the most relevant words and has two columns one is of words and the second is of frequency or occurrences in the dataset. From this table it is interpreted that “Leadership” is the most frequently mentioned term, with 99

words appear smaller. According to this word cloud “leadership” is the larger word showing the highest frequency in the dataset. Followed by “human” and “humans”.

Figure 8: Thematic Map



Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 8 presents a thematic map of the extracted data, divided into four quadrants: niche themes, basic themes, emerging or declining themes, and motor themes. The horizontal axis represents the relevance degree (centrality), while the vertical axis indicates the development degree (density). From this figure, it is interpreted that, one cluster consisting of “surveys and curricula” is at the center of niche and emerging or declining themes. One cluster consisting of “engineers” is in niche themes. The niche themes have a low degree of centrality and a high development degree (density). One cluster of “students and personal training” is central to “emerging or declining themes and basic themes”. Emerging or declining themes have four clusters while basic themes have only one cluster of teaching, research, and academic performance. Motor themes have five clusters and all clusters are big, showing the importance of the topics. Motor themes have a high relevance degree and a high development degree, which shows the importance of the topic.

Discussion:

- RQ1 Which are the most influential journals and authors in the field of self-leadership and career performance?

The answer to the first question is “Frontiers in Psychology and the Journal of Nursing Administration” are the most influential journals in the field, each contributing four articles and the most influential authors are “CAPELLO MA and PAUKEN PD”, who authored two articles each, with a fractionalized contribution of 1, signifying full authorship or substantial involvement.

- RQ2 which is the most influential country in the area of self-leadership and career performance?

The “USA” is the most influential country in the field, as it leads in the frequency of publications and total citations. The USA has a frequency of 186 publications and a total of 1552 citations, with an average of 35.3 citations per article, showing its dominant presence in the research landscape. The “United Kingdom” is a significant player, with 36 publications and 432 citations. Despite having fewer publications than the USA, the UK has a higher average of citations per article (61.7), indicating that individual articles from the UK are more highly regarded and impactful.

- RQ3 What are the emerging themes in the related field?

With the help of the most relevant word, thematic map, and word cloud it is identified that “leadership” is a central theme, with a high frequency of occurrences, followed by terms related to human aspects, such as “human” and “humans”, and gender dynamics with terms like “female” and “male”. These keyword trends indicate that research is increasingly focusing on leadership dynamics, gender, and the role of individuals in career progression.

The research landscape in self-leadership and career performance is evolving, with an increasing focus on leadership dynamics, the role of gender, and the development of specialized curricula to enhance career performance across different sectors.

Conclusion:

This study highlights the critical role of self-leadership in enhancing freelance career performance by synthesizing insights from influential journals, authors, regions, and emerging themes in the field. The findings underscore the dominance of the USA in research output and impact, with the UK demonstrating significant per-article influence. Leading journals, such as Frontiers in Psychology and the Journal of Nursing Administration, and prominent authors contribute to shaping the field, reflecting a multidisciplinary approach to understanding self-leadership and career performance.

Emerging themes, including leadership dynamics, gender considerations, and personal training, provide valuable directions for addressing the unique challenges freelancers face in managing their careers. The thematic map analysis further emphasizes the importance of foundational topics like teaching and academic performance, while niche themes such as "engineers" and "surveys and curricula" suggest areas of untapped potential.

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges several limitations, including geographical imbalance, data source bias, and the lack of longitudinal analysis. These gaps present opportunities for future research to broaden the scope and deepen the

understanding of self-leadership in freelancing contexts. Overall, self-leadership remains a vital mechanism for empowering freelancers to navigate the complexities of their careers, offering a pathway to sustained professional growth and performance.

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