International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
Vol. 25, No. 6, pp. 1-22, June 2026
https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.25.6.1
Received Mar 13, 2026; Revised May 5, 2026; Accepted May 11, 2026

Happiness and Creativity in Academic Productivity: A Bibliometric and Systematic Review

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Abstract. While academic productivity is a central concern in higher education, growing performance pressures increasingly threaten faculty well-being and creativity. Rather than producing direct empirical evidence, this study conceptualises existing literature to examine the relationship between happiness, creativity, and academic productivity by combining bibliometric mapping with a qualitative systematic review. Following PRISMA guidelines, 105 Scopus-indexed articles published since 2010 were analysed to map the field's intellectual structure. Results reveal that prior research has largely examined happiness, creativity, institutional resources, and systemic conditions in isolation, yielding fragmented findings. To address this gap, this study proposes an integrative conceptual framework. Within this testable model, happiness acts as a psychological condition enabling creative processes, creativity serves as a mediating mechanism, and institutional and systemic factors operate as crucial contextual moderators. This framework outlines a comprehensive research agenda and offers practical implications, suggesting that fostering faculty well-being may be essential for sustainable research output. A primary limitation is the study's reliance on English-language articles indexed exclusively in Scopus.

Keywords: Happiness; Well-being; Academic productivity; Creativity; Systematic literature review

Citation:
Soto-Pérez, M., & López-Torres, J. F. (2026). Happiness and Creativity in Academic Productivity: A Bibliometric and Systematic Review. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, *25*(6), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.25.6.1

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1. Introduction

In higher education, academic productivity—defined in this study as the capacity of university faculty to consistently generate scholarly outputs, encompassing both the sheer volume of publications and their innovative quality—has grown exponentially. It serves as a primary indicator of university prestige, resource allocation, and faculty career advancement (Abramo & D'Angelo, 2025; Bao et al., 2023). However, faculty members increasingly face intense performance demands. The pervasive 'publish or perish' culture frequently incentivises purely quantitative output at the expense of qualitative originality, discouraging disruptive, high-impact research. This relentless demand for volume over innovation leads to severe psychosocial risks, such as academic burnout among university researchers (Alhuneafat et al., 2025), and a measurable decline in scientific creativity (H. Li et al., 2024).

Crucially for educational institutions, the well-being and creativity of researchers do not only impact their scientific output but are fundamentally linked to the quality of higher education. A sustainable academic ecosystem prevents universities from merely replicating knowledge, empowering faculty as critical generators of innovation that directly enhances teaching profiles and the overall quality of university education (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; López-Hernández et al., 2025; Quickfall & Wood, 2025). While these pressures are global, they manifest with particular intensity in the Global South, where academic productivity is often conflated with national development goals.

In these contexts, researchers face the dual burden of competing in international publishing arenas with limited institutional resources while navigating rigid evaluation systems that may not account for local socio-economic realities and the broader need for decent work conditions to sustain well-being (Briseño et al., 2024). This tension often leads to a 'wicked problem' where the drive for quantitative output further marginalises creative, context-specific research. To understand the complexity of intellectual work amidst these challenges, this study adopts Csikszentmihalyi's (2014) Systems Model of Creativity as its primary foundational framework. This theory proposes that creativity is the result of the interaction between the person (the generator), the domain (the symbolic rules of the discipline), and the field (the social gatekeepers who select innovative work). Within this system, psychological states such as 'flow' and autonomous motivation—grounded in self-determination theory—are essential personal factors for success.

Furthermore, the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions explains how happiness functions as a psychological condition that enables the creative processes required for a researcher to navigate the demands of their field (Fredrickson, 2001). However, the literature presents mixed evidence regarding creativity's direct influence on productivity; while some studies link it to higher output (Asif et al., 2025), others suggest that quantitative evaluation systems and institutional pressures actually suppress disruptive creativity (H. Li et al., 2024; Krskova & Breyer, 2023).

1.1 Research Gap and Objective

Despite growing interest—recently accentuated by the impact of COVID-19 on faculty careers—the literature remains highly fragmented. Previous research has largely examined the productivity–happiness and productivity–creativity relationships in isolation, addressing individual, institutional, and systemic factors in a scattered manner. Unlike prior reviews that focus narrowly on isolated metrics, the unique theoretical contribution of this study lies in bridging psychological well-being and structural academic demands through the mediating lens of creativity.

To address this theoretical gap, this study employs a bibliometric-systematic literature review (B-SLR) to map the evolution of these research streams and identify theoretical tensions. Consequently, this study pursues three specific research aims:

1. To map the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of the literature connecting academic productivity with happiness and creativity.
2. To critically synthesise the isolated causal mechanisms and contextual factors affecting faculty performance.
3. To propose an integrative conceptual framework that harmonises researcher well-being, creative capacity, and institutional management practices, guiding universities toward more sustainable and qualitative academic productivity (Marzi et al., 2025).

2. Methodology

2.1 Search Strategy and Data Collection

Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a systematic search strategy was implemented to identify relevant literature, minimize selection bias, and ensure the replicability of the study (Briseño et al., 2021; Page et al., 2021). Scopus was selected as the sole database for this study because it is one of the largest and most comprehensive peer-reviewed literature databases, providing highly structured metadata that is optimal for ensuring quality and consistency in science mapping and co-occurrence network analysis using the *Biblioshiny* software (Nga et al., 2025; Nurazmi et al., 2025).

Furthermore, recent studies in educational research emphasize the robustness of bibliometric approaches to map not only performance trends but also socio-emotional factors affecting academia, such as faculty and student well-being (Le et al., 2024). The objective of the search strategy was to identify articles published in the last fifteen years that addressed the topics of academic productivity in combination with happiness or creativity. For the keywords academic productivity, happiness, and creativity, approximate and equivalent concepts were used in order to broaden the results obtained (see Table 1).

Table 1: Search Syntax for the literature review

Database	Syntax	Results
Search strategy #1: Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("academic productivity" OR "research production" OR "research productivity" OR "scientific production" OR "scientific productivity" OR "research performance" OR "research output") AND(scholar* OR faculty OR teacher* OR professor* OR lecturer* OR scientist*) AND ("happiness" OR "subjective well-being" OR "subjective wellbeing" OR "flourishing" OR "life satisfaction" OR "positive psychology" OR wellbeing or "well-being")) AND PUBYEAR > 2010 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))	113 *Consulted October 15, 2025*
Search strategy #2: Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("academic productivity" OR "research production" OR "research productivity" OR "scientific production" OR "scientific productivity" OR "research performance" OR "research output") AND (scholar* OR faculty OR teacher* OR professor* OR lecturer* OR scientist*) AND ("creative process" OR "creative cognition" OR "creative thinking" OR "idea generation" OR creativity OR disruptive OR "academic innovation"))AND PUBYEAR > 2010 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))	73 *Consulted October 15, 2025*

To specify the inclusion criteria, documents had to meet the following conditions: 1) Indexed in the Scopus database; 2) Containing the key concepts of Academic Productivity-Happiness or Academic Productivity-Creativity (or equivalent concepts) in the title, abstract, or keywords; 3) Written in English; 4) Published after 2010; and 5) Focused on the topic of research professors or faculty members.

As shown in the PRISMA flowchart (Figure 1), the two initial search strategies yielded 113 documents (happiness) and 73 documents (creativity). Five additional articles, identified through the reference lists of core papers, were manually added. After removing six duplicate records, the remaining 185 articles underwent an independent screening by both authors, who assessed titles and abstracts against the predefined inclusion criteria. Any discrepancies regarding article eligibility were resolved through direct discussion and joint re-evaluation to reach a consensus. This process excluded 80 articles because they did not explicitly analyse the academic productivity of faculty members in relation to happiness or creativity, resulting in a final sample of 105 articles for analysis.

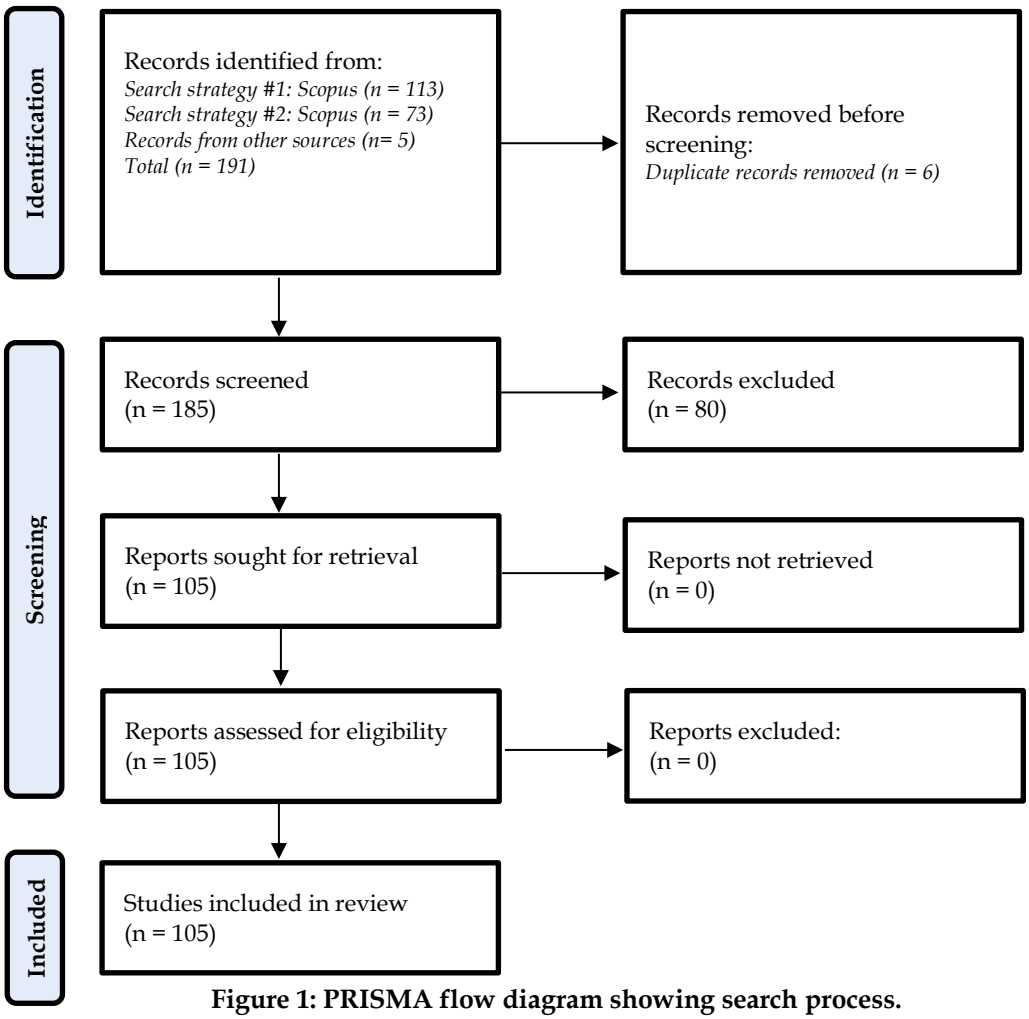


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram showing search process.

Source: self-elaboration from the template shared on the PRISMA 2020 statement site.

2.2 Analysis Design: A B-SLR Approach

To provide a comprehensive overview of the field, this study combined bibliometric mapping with a qualitative systematic review, adopting a Bibliometric-Systematic Literature Review (B-SLR) approach as recommended by Marzi et al. (2025). The bibliometric phase was performed using the Biblioshiny interface for the bibliometrix R package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). First, a descriptive analysis was conducted to compare the evolution of the two approaches (academic productivity-happiness vs. academic productivity-creativity) over the last 15 years.

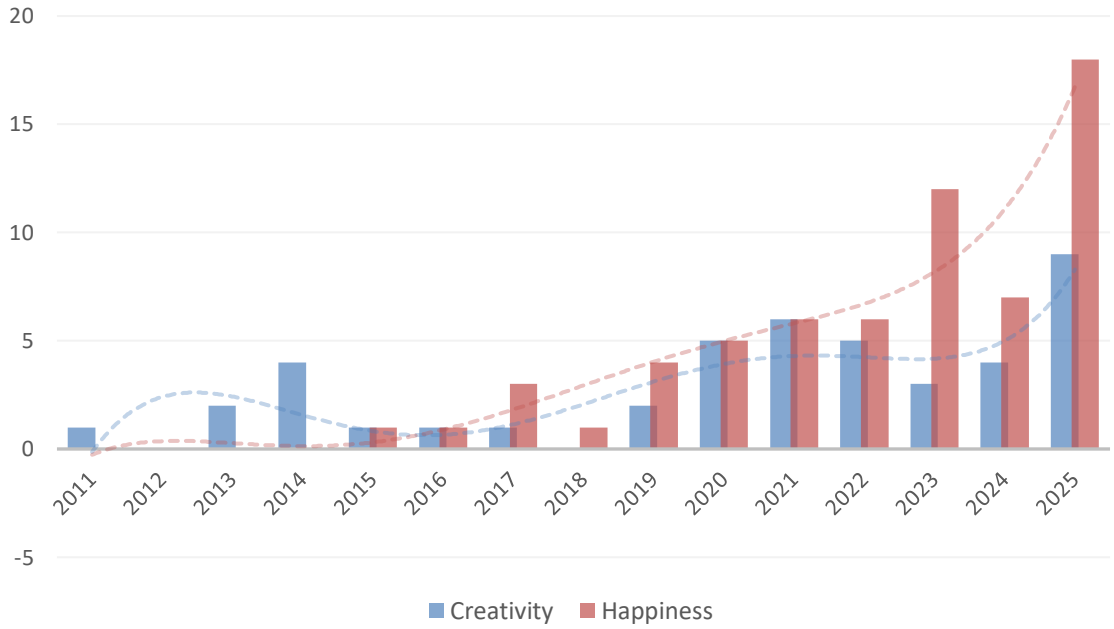
Subsequently, a co-citation analysis was carried out to identify the foundational lines of thought within each approach, as this technique allows for the identification of conceptual schools based on the frequency with which sources are cited together (Beltrán & Soto-Pérez, 2025). In the next step, the two databases were merged, accounting for duplicates. Prior to generating the conceptual co-occurrence network and thematic map, a data harmonisation process was conducted within Biblioshiny; synonymous terms (e.g., 'subjective well-being' and 'subjective wellbeing') and morphological variations were standardised to

prevent node fragmentation and ensure accurate network metrics. Building on these bibliometric results, the systematic review phase involved a qualitative, in-depth analysis of the core clusters identified in the co-occurrence network. Representative articles from each cluster were examined to extract theoretical arguments, causal mechanisms, and contextual factors, culminating in the proposal of an integrative conceptual framework (Marzi et al., 2025).

3. Bibliometric results

3.1 Descriptive Analysis of the Research Streams

To map the intellectual evolution of academic productivity, the literature was first analysed through its two primary conceptual lenses: happiness and creativity. Figure 2 illustrates the annual scientific production for both approaches indexed in Scopus from 2011 to 2025. While the creativity approach has experienced steady but fluctuating growth, the happiness perspective has surged rapidly over the last decade, surpassing creativity in scholarly interest during the last four years.



Source: self-elaboration on Excel

Figure 2: Number of publications per year, according to the search strategies in Table 1

Table 2 compares the main bibliometric indicators of both search strategies. The happiness approach demonstrates a significantly higher annual growth rate (33.5% compared to 17.0% for creativity), a larger pool of contributing authors, and a higher degree of international collaboration (21.9% vs. 13.6%). Geographically, the United States leads both streams. In terms of impact, the most cited work in the happiness-productivity stream is Hafsteinsdóttir et al. (2017) with 101 citations, which highlights how structured leadership mentoring increases workplace well-being and scholarly output. Conversely, in the creativity stream, Hedjazi and Behravan (2011) lead with 61 citations, providing early

empirical evidence that an institutional environment fostering individual creativity is a significant predictor of higher academic output.

Table 2: Main information for the collected documents separated for approach.

Timespan > 2010	Search strategy #1: Research productivity - Happiness	Search strategy #2: Research productivity - Creativity
Documents	64	44
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	58	36
Annual Growth Rate %	33.5	17.0
Document Average Age	2.7	4.4
Average citations per doc	7.9	7.7
References	618	392
Average references per doc	9.7	8.9
Author's Keywords (DE)	218	178
Authors	462	232
Authors of single-authored docs	0	0
Single-authored docs	0	0
Co-Authors per Doc	11.1	7.2
International co-authorships %	21.9	13.6

Note: *The final number of documents analysed in the study (n = 105) comprises the accepted records from both search strategies alongside the five manually identified sources. The sum of the individual columns (n = 108) differs from the total due to three duplicate articles overlapping between the 'Happiness' and 'Creativity' streams. These duplicates were merged prior to the bibliometric analysis to ensure a unique sample.*

3.2 Co-citation Networks: Foundational Schools of Thought

Co-citation analysis identifies foundational schools of thought by mapping sources that are frequently cited together. Importantly, while the primary systematic search was restricted to post-2010 publications, the co-citation algorithm naturally surfaces older foundational texts (such as Boyer, 1994 or Bland & Ruffin, 1992). These seminal works were intentionally retained in the qualitative synthesis to appropriately anchor the theoretical framework. The happiness co-citation network (Figure 3) reveals two distinct clusters. The first cluster (e.g., Andersen et al., 2020; Kotini-Shah et al., 2022) focuses on personal and systemic shocks, particularly how the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted work-life balance and highlighted gender inequities in academic productivity. The second cluster (e.g., Boyer, 1994; Henkel, 2005) focuses on external institutional factors, such as university policies and governance structures.

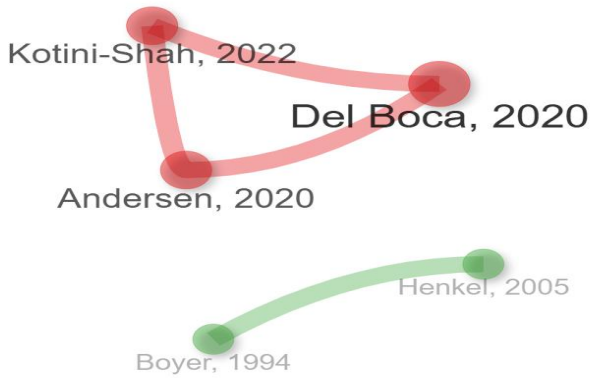


Figure 3: Intellectual structure of the happiness–productivity research stream: Co-citation network of foundational sources. *Source:* Compiled by authors using Biblioshiny

The creativity co-citation network (Figure 4) generated three clusters. The dominant cluster (e.g., Amabile, 1983; Clauset et al., 2015) shares the view that academic creativity and productivity are not solely innate individual traits, but are deeply embedded in social, organizational, and structural contexts. A second interconnected cluster rigorously examines the empirical determinants of these structural effects (e.g., Dundar & Lewis, 1998). Together, these networks validate that academic productivity is a multifaceted outcome influenced by individual psychological states, institutional resource management, and relational capital.

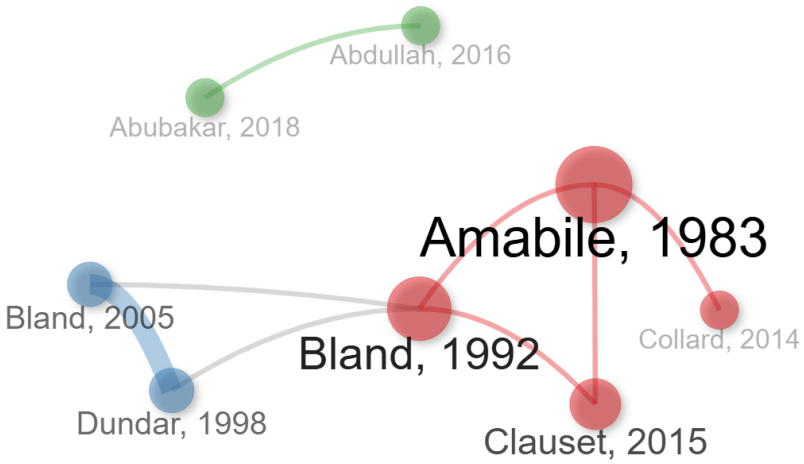


Figure 4: Intellectual structure of the creativity–productivity research stream: Co-citation network of foundational sources and conceptual clusters. *Source:* Compiled by authors using Biblioshiny.

3.3 Co-occurrence Network and Thematic Evolution

To integrate both streams, the datasets were merged (n=105 articles) to generate a conceptual co-occurrence network (Figure 5). The algorithm identified five distinct thematic clusters mapping the current landscape. The largest node integrates research productivity, happiness, career, and COVID-19, representing the dominant post-pandemic focus on academic well-being. A second crucial cluster links motivation, workload, and perception, directly tying individual efficiency to institutional demands. Another key cluster centres around creativity

and interdisciplinary communication, emphasizing collaborative environments. Finally, a distinct cluster features university, organization, and management, underscoring the critical role of faculty administration. These interconnected clusters serve as the analytical domains for the subsequent qualitative systematic literature review.

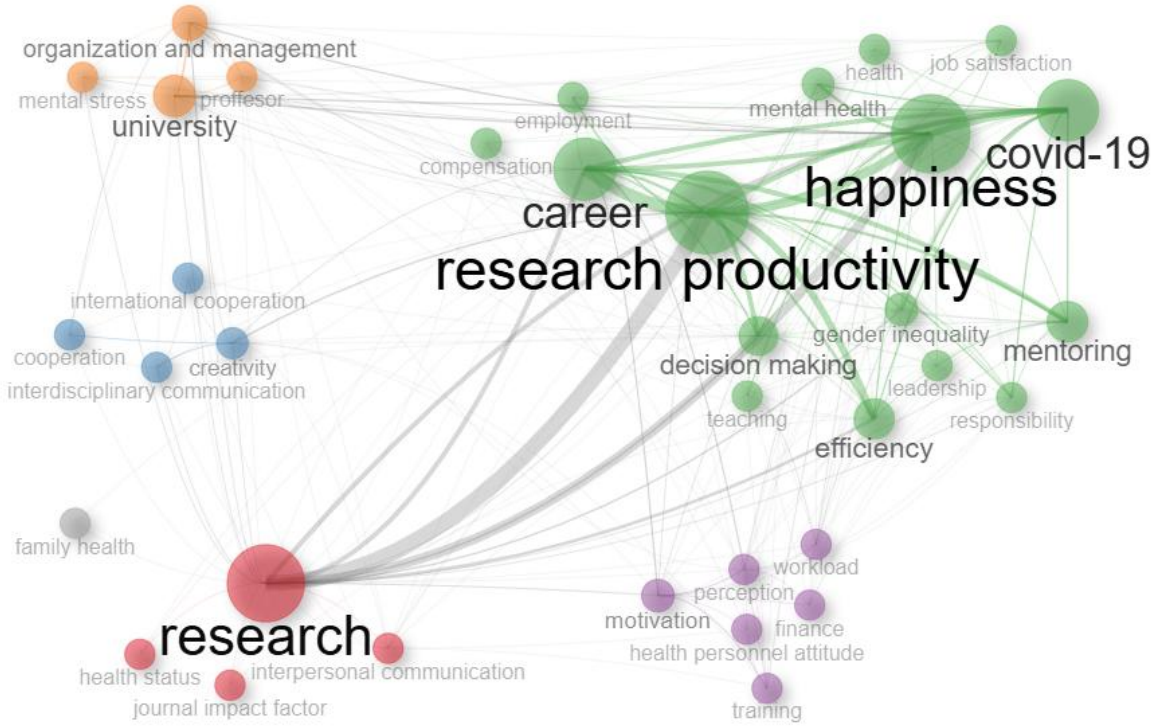


Figure 5. Conceptual co-occurrence network of the aggregated dataset: Thematic clusters integrating happiness, creativity, and academic productivity. ***Source:*** **Compiled by authors using Biblioshiny**

Furthermore, the thematic map (Figure 6) classifies these topics based on their density (internal development) and centrality (external relevance). Currently, research productivity, job satisfaction, and professional development act as "motor themes" driving the field, indicating that researchers and higher education administrators must prioritize the interconnection of these elements in the short term. Meanwhile, topics like creativity and faculty career paths emerge as evolving themes, representing strategic opportunities for future institutional innovation.

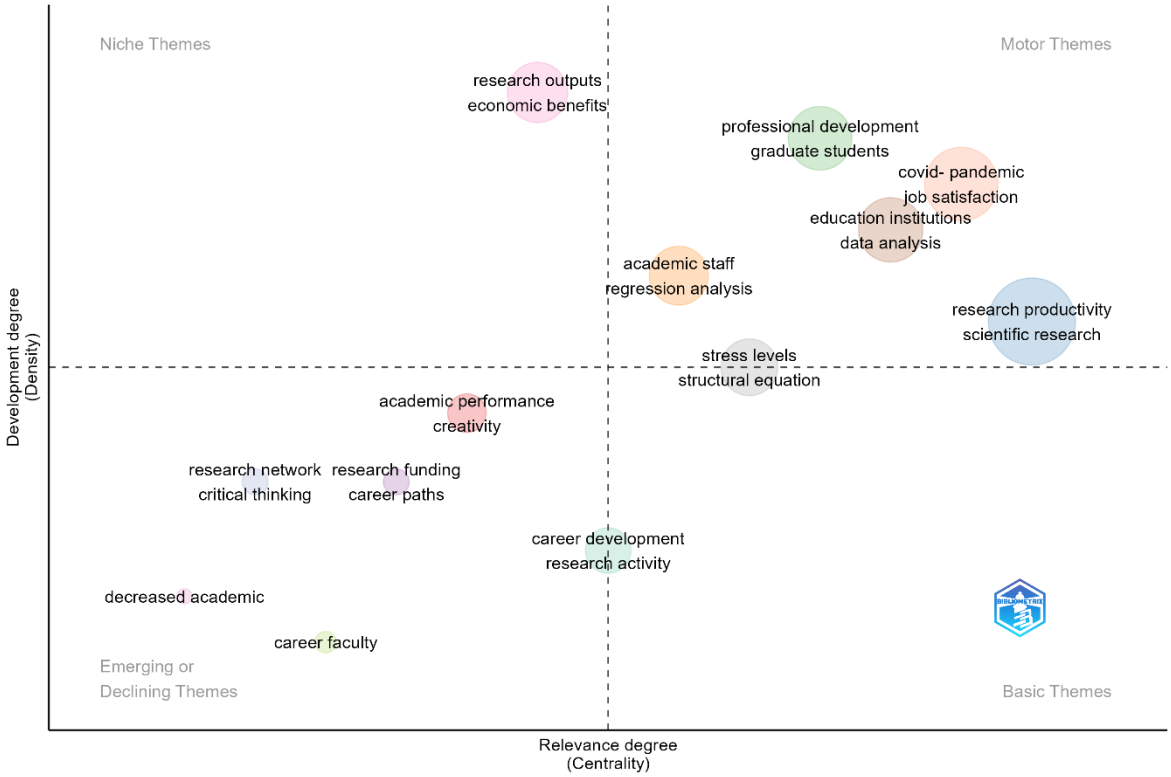


Figure 6: Thematic map of the field's evolution: Classification of research topics based on centrality (relevance) and density (development). ***Source:*** **Compiled by authors using Biblioshiny**

Beyond merely describing the frequency of keywords, these bibliometric patterns reveal a crucial conceptual shift in the field's trajectory. The transition of 'job satisfaction' and 'professional development' into motor themes indicates that the academic community no longer views productivity as a purely mechanical output. Instead, there is a growing consensus that sustainable research performance is fundamentally dependent on the psychological and structural support provided to faculty. Furthermore, the positioning of 'creativity' as an evolving theme suggests an impending paradigm shift: future institutional evaluations may increasingly prioritise the originality and disruptive nature of research over traditional, purely quantitative metrics.

4. Systematic Literature Review

The systematic literature review builds upon the bibliometric analysis to advance from a descriptive mapping of the literature toward an interpretative and theory-oriented synthesis. While the co-occurrence analysis identifies the main conceptual clusters, it does not account for the theoretical arguments, methodological choices, or causal mechanisms developed within individual studies. To address this limitation, the present section undertakes a cluster-based systematic literature review, examining the most representative scholarly contributions associated with the main analytical domains emerging from the bibliometric results.

To enhance analytical clarity, the five software-generated clusters were conceptually condensed into three core analytical domains. This aggregation was theoretically informed by the systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) and subjective well-being literature (Zelenski et al., 2008). Specifically, clusters pertaining to post-pandemic well-being and motivational perceptions were merged into the 'Happiness and well-being' domain. The cluster centred on interdisciplinary communication and innovation formed the 'Creativity and collaboration' domain.

Finally, clusters dealing with university management, workload, and organisational efficiency were consolidated into the 'Institutional resources and university context' domain. Systemic conditions (e.g., evaluation metrics and external shocks) were treated as transversal factors influencing all domains. This conceptual mapping is detailed in the synthesis matrix (Table 3). Consequently, the subsequent qualitative review extracts representative literature directly aligned with these structured domains.

Table 3: Synthesis Matrix: Mapping bibliometric clusters to analytical domains

Bibliometric Clusters (Core Nodes) / Themes	**Theoretical Rationale for Grouping**	**Assigned Analytical Domain**
Happiness, career, COVID-19; Motivation, perception	Captures individual psychological states, personal motivation, and mental health.	Cluster 1: Happiness & Productivity
Creativity, interdisciplinary communication	Relates to idea generation, disruptive thinking, and collaborative innovation.	Cluster 2: Creativity & Productivity
University, organisation, management; Workload, efficiency	Encompasses structural support, leadership, and administrative demands.	Cluster 3: Institutional Resources & Productivity
Transversal themes (Evaluation systems, shocks, inequality)	Dictates the macro-level rules and patterns influencing all other domains.	Systemic conditions (transversal)

4.1 Selection of Representative Articles for Cluster-Based Review

Given that clusters reflect conceptual structures rather than individual studies, it was necessary to examine the scholarly contributions that most strongly underpin each analytical domain. From the final pool of 105 articles, a subset of representative papers was selected for the qualitative systematic review based on three rigorous criteria: (1) conceptual centrality, prioritising documents located in the core nodes of the co-occurrence network; (2) scholarly impact, selecting the most-cited works within each software-generated cluster; and (3) theoretical density, ensuring the inclusion of articles that explicitly proposed causal mechanisms or conceptual frameworks. This targeted selection allowed for a deep-dive analysis of the foundational arguments that define each thematic domain. Table 4 summarizes the articles included in the systematic literature review across the analytical domains and the system-level context.

Table 4: Representative articles included in the cluster-based and system-level systematic review

Analytical domain	Article	Main focus	Methodology	Reason for inclusion
Cluster 1: Happiness & Productivity	Fang et al. (2025)	Happiness and productivity	Longitudinal	Core causal evidence
	Kokol et al. (2019)	Well-being and output	Panel data	Foundational longitudinal study
	Yukhymenko-Lescroart and Sharma (2019)	Passion and Subjective well-being	Survey	Representative well-being operationalization
	Zelenski et al. (2008)	Happiness and performance	Experimental	Theoretical foundation
	Chang et al. (2025)	Well-being & motivation	SEM	Links happiness to motivation
	Weinreich et al. (2023)	COVID & well-being	Survey	Systemic shock illustration
	Tan and Main (2021)	Mental health and performance	Survey	Individual psychological mechanisms
	Lavoie and Main (2024)	Flow and cognitive focus	Experimental	Motivational–cognitive process
Cluster 2: Creativity & Productivity	Amabile et al. (2005)	Affect & creativity	Experimental	Conceptual bridge
	Csikszentmihalyi (2014)	Systems model of creativity	Conceptual	Foundational framework
	Krskova and Breyer (2023)	Creativity in academia	Conceptual	Links creativity to outcomes
	Asif et al. (2025)	Creativity & output	Quantitative	Empirical academic evidence
	Hedjazi and Behravan (2011)	Creativity & productivity	Survey	Early empirical support
	H. Li et al. (2024)	Publish or perish & creativity	Quantitative	Explains negative effects
	Clauset et al. (2015)	Career structure	Network analysis	Structural creativity effects
	Bland and Ruffin (1992)	Research productivity	Review	Integrative determinants
Cluster 3: Institutional Resources & Productivity	Boyer (1994)	Scholarship roles	Conceptual	Institutional foundation
	Henkel (2005)	Academic identity	Qualitative	Governance perspective
	Paul et al. (2017)	Organizational culture	Survey	Empirical institutional effects
	Sezen-Barrie et al. (2023)	Institutional resources	Qualitative	Resource-based view
	Kato-Nitta and Maeda (2016)	Leadership & mentoring	Survey	Support mechanisms
	Zhou et al. (2022)	University policies	Quantitative	Policy-level influence

	Castelló et al. (2017)	Writing demands and anxiety	Qualitative	Organizational pressure
Systemic conditions (transversal)	Csikszentmihalyi (2014)	Field & gatekeeping	Conceptual	System-level creativity control
	Abramo and D'Angelo (2025)	Research evaluation	Bibliometric	Publish-or-perish logic
	M. Li et al. (2024)	Performance pressure	Quantitative	Systemic creativity suppression
	Clauset et al. (2015)	Career constraints	Network analysis	Structural system effects
	Kotini-Shah et al. (2022)	COVID shock	Survey	External systemic disruption
	Del Boca et al. (2020)	Gender & institutions	Survey	Structural inequality
	Renouw et al. (2025)	Prestige systems	Quantitative	Stratification effects

4.2 Systematic Literature Review of Clusters

4.2.1 Cluster 1: Happiness, Well-being, and Academic Productivity

The first cluster focuses on how psychological well-being influences academic productivity, which is characterised by high pressure for results, high autonomy, and the need for sustained performance, where work-life balance emerges as a critical determinant of research output, particularly among female faculty (Fathalizadeh et al., 2026; Weinreich et al., 2023).

Within the academic workplace, the focus of positive psychology has shifted from mere job satisfaction to holistic psychological well-being. This well-being is defined through various lenses, including the accumulation of positive emotions (Fang et al., 2025), life satisfaction (Zelenski et al., 2008), and overall mental health (Chang et al., 2025; Tan & Main, 2021). Although this set of articles consistently highlights a positive relationship where prior happiness predicts subsequent productivity (Fang et al., 2025; Kokol et al., 2019), significant gaps remain. Few studies address how this relationship is generated in cognitive or creative terms, leaving it unclear exactly how and under what institutional conditions well-being is transformed into tangible research output.

Furthermore, recent integrative reviews emphasize that academic well-being is a multidimensional construct—encompassing psychological, social, and organisational dimensions—that cannot be sustained by personal resilience alone but requires compassionate leadership and institutional justice (Setiyowati et al., 2026). Consequently, motivation and institutional support have been shown to act as powerful mediators; strong organisational backing not only mitigates the negative impacts of heavy administrative workloads but directly enhances the research productivity of faculty members (Syaifulloh et al., 2025).

4.2.2 Cluster 2: Creativity and Academic Productivity

The second cluster addresses the relationship between creativity and productivity. Here, academic creativity is understood as the generation of novel, useful ideas and the process of disruptive thinking, requiring structured models

to foster innovation within higher education environments (Clauset et al., 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Thi Phuong et al., 2026). In this context, the focus shifts from the quantity of production to its quality, application, and educational impact (M. Li et al., 2024).

The evidence in this cluster presents a clear ambivalence. On one hand, greater individual creativity positively influences productivity (Asif et al., 2025; Hedjazi & Behravan, 2011), and positive affect acts as a bridge fostering this creative thinking (Amabile et al., 2005). On the other hand, intense pressure to publish can actively diminish a researcher's creativity, leading to higher quantitative output but lower scientific disruption (H. Li et al., 2024). Unresolved tensions persist regarding how higher education systems can balance the demand for quantitative productivity with the need to nurture disruptive, sustained creativity (Krskova & Breyer, 2023).

4.2.3 Cluster 3: Institutional Resources and University Context

The third cluster argues that institutional resources profoundly condition or facilitate research (Bland & Ruffin, 1992; Boyer, 1994). These resources are multidimensional, encompassing material support, organizational culture, leadership, and governance structures (Henkel, 2005).

Empirical studies frequently identify leadership, mentoring, and faculty workload management as primary determinants of productivity, emphasizing that transformational leadership and continuous professional development are essential to unlock faculty creativity (Fadhilah et al., 2026; Kato-Nitta & Maeda, 2016; Zhou et al., 2022). Notably, structural analyses reveal a paradox: universities often demand high research output while imposing teaching and administrative workloads that actively hinder the research process, whereas extrinsic satisfaction and supportive management directly bolster subjective well-being and overall job performance (Castelló et al., 2017; Sezen-Barrie et al., 2023; Soto-Pérez & Briseño, 2026). This cluster highlights a critical gap: few studies integrate how institutional management directly influences the personal well-being and creative capacity of faculty members.

4.2.4 Transversal Theme: Systemic Conditions

While not an isolated cluster, systemic factors appear across all domains and correspond to macro-level rules, evaluation systems, funding policies, and structural inequalities (Abramo & D'Angelo, 2025; Kotini-Shah et al., 2022). The literature argues that systemic conditions dictate the *patterns* of academic productivity rather than just the output itself. A major tension identified is that systems incentivizing purely quantitative productivity can erode both faculty well-being and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; H. Li et al., 2024). Consequently, academic productivity is framed not just as an individual trait, but as a rational response to systemic pressures, underscoring the need for policies that balance production quotas with the holistic flourishing of researchers.

4.3 Toward an Integrative Conceptual Framework of Happiness, Creativity, and Academic Productivity

Having carried out sequential bibliometric analyses and a systematic literature review, it is evident that academic productivity has been extensively studied in relation to happiness, creativity, institutional factors, and systemic factors (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). However, prior research has largely examined academic productivity separately or independently with respect to these elements (Fang et al., 2025). This fragmentation explains why previous findings are sometimes contradictory, inconsistent, or partial (H. Li et al., 2024), leaving theoretical tensions that an integrative framework must address and justify.

The integrative framework proposed in this study seeks to identify and justify the possible interactions between happiness, creativity, institutional factors, and systemic factors to explain academic productivity in a structured manner (Marzi et al., 2025). Given that academic productivity is multifactorial, non-linear, and its sustainability is a complex challenge, identifying the mechanisms that incentivize, mediate, or moderate it is of critical interest to researchers, universities, and educational policymakers alike (Bland & Ruffin, 1992).

Building directly upon the thematic clusters identified in the bibliometric mapping and the synthesis matrix, this study advances theoretical development by integrating these domains into a cohesive, testable model. Consequently, we propose the following formal propositions, visually encapsulated in Figure 7:

Proposition 1: Positive psychological states (e.g., happiness and subjective well-being) act as necessary preceding mechanisms that enable creative cognitive processes. Theoretically grounded in the broaden-and-build theory, positive affect expands a researcher's cognitive repertoire, facilitating the generation of novel ideas (Fang et al., 2025; Zelenski et al., 2008).

Proposition 2: Creative cognitive processes act as a primary mediating mechanism between faculty happiness and sustainable academic productivity. Rather than happiness directly increasing publication counts, it fosters the innovative thinking required to produce high-impact, original scholarship (Amabile et al., 2005).

Proposition 3: The institutional context (including organisational culture, leadership, and workload management) operates as a critical contextual moderator. A supportive institutional environment strengthens the relationship between a researcher's well-being and their creative output, whereas excessive administrative burdens attenuate this creative capacity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Kato-Nitta & Maeda, 2016).

Proposition 4: Systemic conditions (such as macro-level publishing policies and evaluation systems) moderate the relationship between creativity and academic productivity. Evaluation systems that exclusively reward quantitative output suppress disruptive creativity, whereas holistic evaluation metrics facilitate the translation of creative cognition into meaningful academic impact (Abramo & D'Angelo, 2025).

While presented linearly for analytical clarity, this framework acknowledges reciprocity and temporal feedback loops. For instance, achieving sustainable academic productivity can reciprocally enhance subjective well-being, creating a virtuous cycle. Framing these relationships as testable propositions provides a clear roadmap for future empirical validation. This series of relationships is presented graphically in Figure 7. By integrating multiple levels of analysis, the framework helps to explain findings that were previously contradictory, offering a holistic roadmap for faculty management.

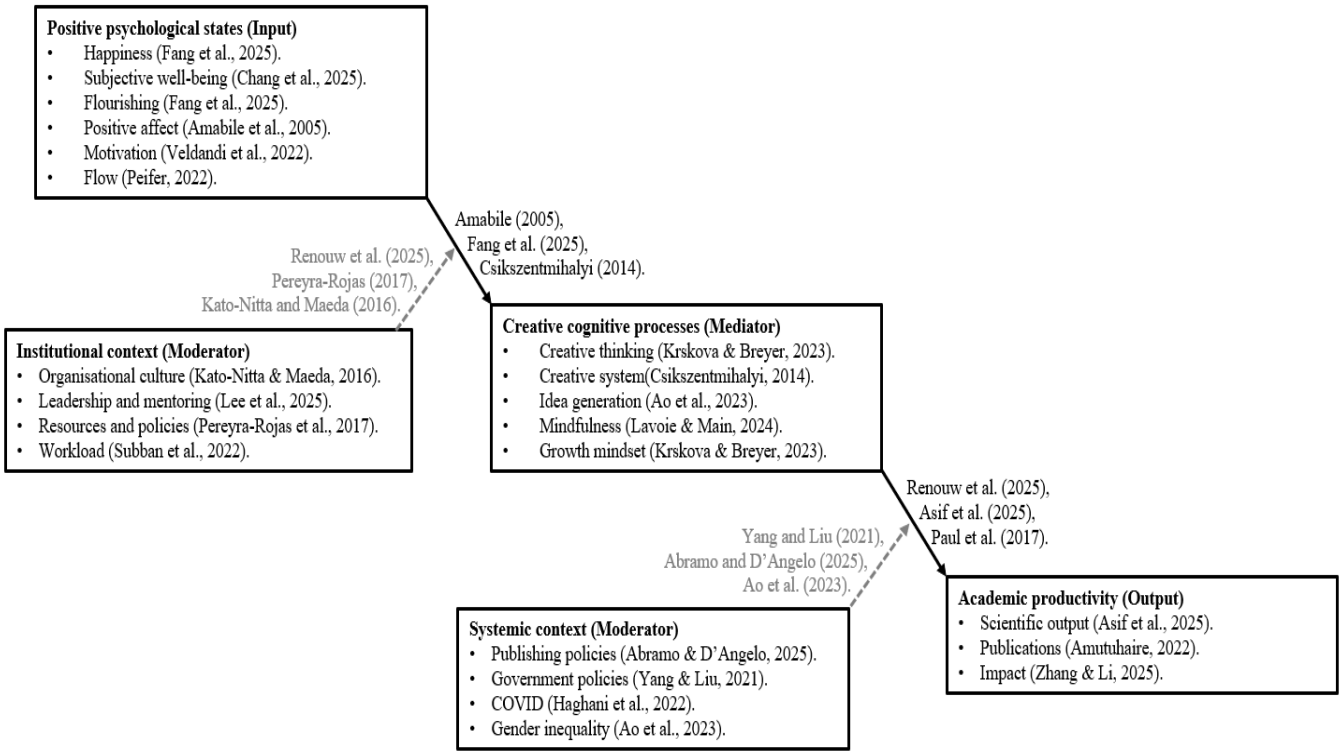


Figure 7: Conceptual framework integrating happiness and creativity in academic productivity. Institutional and systemic conditions operate as contextual moderators

4.4 Research Agenda

Based on the proposed conceptual framework, future research should move from descriptive mapping towards empirical validation. Crucially, future studies must deconstruct psychological well-being into specific dimensions—such as hedonic life satisfaction versus eudaimonic life fulfilment—to isolate their distinct effects on structural academic productivity (Deci & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Soto-Pérez & Rivera-Ramírez, 2025). To rigorously test the proposed model, researchers are encouraged to employ longitudinal panel studies that track these nuanced well-being and productivity metrics over multi-year cycles. This approach is essential to establish temporal causality and verify whether increases in psychological well-being genuinely precede creative outputs.

Furthermore, mixed-methods designs could combine objective bibliometric data—such as citation impact and disruption indices—with in-depth qualitative surveys to capture the nuanced ways in which institutional culture either fosters

or suppresses 'flow' states (Agarwal & Upadhyay, 2026). Finally, future studies should consider quasi-experimental interventions, evaluating academic departments that implement structured 'well-being audits' or workload reduction policies against control groups to directly measure the subsequent impact on faculty creativity and publication quality.

Beyond academic inquiry, this framework offers vital practical implications for university administrators and educational policymakers. For universities, the model suggests that 'well-being audits' should precede productivity drives; identifying and reducing administrative bottlenecks is a prerequisite for fostering the creative capacity required for high-quality research. For policymakers, the framework underscores the need to shift from purely metric-based evaluation systems toward 'holistic impact' assessments. By recognising the mediating role of creativity, national funding bodies can design grants that prioritise disruptive innovation over the mere volume of publications, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability of the academic ecosystem (Kato-Nitta & Maeda, 2016; Zhou et al., 2022).

4.5 Limitations

This study is subject to several methodological and theoretical boundaries. First, the systematic search was confined to English-language articles indexed exclusively in the Scopus database. While Scopus provides robust metadata for bibliometric mapping, this parameter may exclude relevant insights from regional databases or non-English literature, potentially underrepresenting contextual nuances. Second, the proposed conceptual framework is theoretically derived rather than empirically tested in this instance. Consequently, the mediating and moderating relationships outlined in the propositions should be interpreted as theoretically grounded hypotheses awaiting rigorous empirical validation, rather than definitive causal facts.

5. Conclusion

This B-SLR examined how the relationship between happiness, creativity, and academic productivity is addressed in higher education literature. The findings demonstrate that while interest in faculty well-being has grown rapidly, previous research has largely treated psychological states, creative cognition, and institutional factors in isolation. To address this fragmentation, this study proposes an integrative conceptual framework that conceptualises academic productivity as a non-linear, multifactorial outcome. The model suggests that happiness may act as a necessary enabling condition for creative processes, which in turn mediate the path to sustainable productivity, all bounded by the moderating forces of institutional support and systemic evaluation policies.

Practically, the findings suggest that promoting academic productivity should not rely solely on quantitative performance indicators. Institutional practices—such as balanced workload distribution and supportive leadership—appear crucial in cultivating an environment where happiness may translate into sustainable research output. Ultimately, the central contribution of this paper is shifting the theoretical paradigm: it moves beyond viewing faculty productivity as a sheer

metric of volume, repositioning it as a holistic ecosystem where human flourishing and disruptive creativity are fundamental prerequisites for sustained academic excellence.

6. Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence tools, specifically Gemini 3.1 Pro (Google), were used solely to improve the clarity, grammar, and readability of the manuscript written by the authors, who are non-native English speakers. No artificial intelligence tools were used to generate research ideas, formulate the conceptual framework, select or analyse the literature, or draw theoretical conclusions. The authors take full responsibility for the content and integrity of the manuscript.

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