Celebrating *Higher Education’s* 50 years: trends, absences, and opportunities

Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela¹ · Andrés Rojas-Murphy Tagle¹ · Diego Palacios²

Abstract

The journal, *Higher Education* (*HE*), was established in 1972 and is currently one of the leading international journals in higher education studies. By using bibliometric techniques, a systematic review, and a social network analysis, this review article provides an overview of the main patterns of publications in *HE* during its history. The findings show that (i) the volume of articles has been continuously increasing, with a particular marked uplift since 2007; (ii) while single-authored articles have dominated the publication pattern, collaborative articles have shown a particular growth over the last decade; (iii) the USA, the UK, and Australia have dominated the journal in terms of the number of articles, international collaboration, and the most prolific authors; (iv) while Chinese authors have become more evident, there has been a near-absence of contributions from Latin America, Eastern Europe, and most of Africa; (v) in the entire history of *HE*, there has been a gender imbalance (in favour of male authors) across the most cited articles, but this pattern has changed in the last decade and; (vi) both teaching and learning and system policy have been key research themes in the journal although internationalisation and the student experience have recently gained traction. These patterns of publication in *HE*, with their imbalances and absences, suggest several challenges ahead.

Keywords Higher Education · Review article · Bibliometrics · Social network analysis · Systematic review

Introduction

Higher education, as a field of study, can be traced back to the 1960s in North America (Altbach, 2014) and the 1980s in Europe (Kehm, 2015; MacFarlane & Grant, 2012; Teichler, 2000; Tight, 2015, 2019). According to Rumbley et al. (2014), in 2014, there were 217 centres or institutes for the study of higher education around the world, 50 of which were in the USA, 45 in China, 18 in the UK, and 11 in Japan. In terms of article
publications, higher education research has been steadily growing, especially since 2007 onwards (Fu et al., 2022; Kwiek, 2021; Vleegels and Huisman, 2021).

The field of higher education is considered to be ‘a multiple series of intersecting cognate fields rather than one that is discrete’ (MacFarlane & Grant, 2012: 621) that mainly draws on disciplines in both the social sciences (Altbach, 2014) and the humanities. Much of the literature highlights its practitioner nature (Clegg, 2012), tackling practical issues at different levels. This includes higher education systems globally, nationally (MacFarlane, 2022), and institutionally (Shay, 2012).

Higher education research involves diverse arenas or large themes such as teaching and learning processes or policy systems (Brennan & Teichler, 2008; MacFarlane, 2012; Tight, 2003, 2019). By using a deductive approach, Tight (2003) identified the main themes in research in higher education over a considerable timespan across different specialised journals in higher education, namely, teaching and learning, course design, student experience, quality, system policy, institutional management, academic work, and knowledge. His work has been influential in higher education research until now, especially in the UK (Clegg, 2012; MacFarlane, 2012, 2022) but also in Australia (Kandlbinder, 2014), Asia (Horta & Jung, 2014), and Europe (Daenekindt & Huisman, 2020; Kosmützky & Krücken, 2014).

Inspired by Tight (2003) and in analysing the practical nature of higher education research, MacFarlane (2012) produced an intuitive map that distinguished between two ‘big islands’ in research in higher education, the island of teaching and learning and the island of systems policy. The author noted that these two islands did not often talk to each other and that researchers within these islands would not even know about each other. Later, in Asia, Horta and Jung (2014) confirmed that the teaching and learning island broadly ‘encompasses the themes of course design, teaching and learning, as well as student experience [while the island of policy system] encompasses the themes of system policy, institutional management, academic work, quality, knowledge, and internationalisation’ (2014:117). They also noted that there were some connections among the themes of student experience, system policy, and internationalisation. Interrelatedly, by deploying an inductive analysis of article published between 1991 and 2018, Daenekindt and Huisman concluded that research topics vary over time, and while some themes in the literature stand out (for example, teaching and learning), specific subtopics dominate the landscape in certain periods with the following topics being on the rise: ‘international mobile students, … feedback on assessment… educational technology…doctoral students and supervision… leadership… knowledge society… and globalization’ (Daenekindt & Huisman, 2020: 580).

Amid this uneven development across countries and regions, journals have become the most significant and prestigious outlet for higher education research (and, indeed, most disciplines) (Kwiek, 2021; Tight, 2008), being one of them Higher Education (Kwiek, 2021; Tight, 2014).

Higher Education (HE) is currently one of the leading journals in higher education studies (Tight, 2014). For the last 8 years, the journal has occupied the quartile 1 in the Journal Citation Report as a result of its high impact factor (in 2021, HE occupied position 47 out of 267 with an impact factor of 3.94 (Journal Citation Report, 2021)). Recent studies (Akbaritabar & Barbato, 2021; Fu et al., 2022) have found that HE is the most prolific journal in higher education research in terms of total number of publications followed by Studies in Higher Education.

Since its creation, HE aimed to become an international journal (Ross, 1982). Interestingly, in an editorial note published in 1979, Ross indicated that the main editors worked closely with other editors in the USA and in continental Europe (especially France and
Austria), which reinforced the will of the founding editors to boost the international character of the journal (Ross, 1979). Over the years, HE increased the number of volumes and issues which reflects a higher flow of, and reception of, articles in the field.

By using bibliometric techniques, a systematic review of a selection of articles, and a social network analysis, this article presents the main patterns of publication of HE. The following questions are covered in this review: What are the main patterns of publication in Higher Education since its foundation? Which are the main themes in the articles? Have these patterns and themes changed over the years? If so, in which directions? This article provides a bird’s-eye view of the main trends across documents and articles in Higher Education and its most salient features.

Method

The Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases were used to retrieve all the documents published in HE since its foundation in 1972. First, all the documents published between 1975 — the year when WoS was initiated — and December 2021 were identified (4156 documents; see Table 1). Second, the Scopus tool allowed us to retrieve all the documents published between 1972 and 1974 (128 articles). Finally, the total number of documents identified in these two databases (4,284 documents) was consolidated and checked several times (the last check was conducted on 21 June 2022). The final set of data contained titles, authors’ affiliations, keywords, abstracts, and other metadata.

While bibliometrics helped in managing and analysing this large dataset (Donthu et al., 2021), a systematic review (Gough et al., 2017) was conducted on the most cited articles in the history of HE and in the last 10 years (2012–2021). The systematic review revolved around the main topic addressed by each article, its classification following Tight’s themes (i.e. teaching and learning, course design, student experience, quality, system policy, institutional management, academic work, and knowledge) (Tight, 2003, 2019) plus the theme of ‘internationalisation’ (Horta & Jung, 2014), the year of publication, authorship (whether single-authored, and whether single country (domestic) or on the basis of international collaboration), and the authors’ sex. Finally, social network analysis (Knoke & Yang, 2019) allowed the examination of international collaboration according to the authors’ country affiliations.

The analyses contained here are organised in six sections: (i) patterns of all types of publication over the years (number and type of publications and country/region of

| Document type                  | No of publications |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Article                        | 3086              |
| Article; Retracted Publication  | 1                 |
| Book Review                    | 1098              |
| Correction                     | 21                |
| Editorial                      | 70                |
| Letter                         | 3                 |
| Note                           | 5                 |
| Total                          | 4284              |

Table 1 Number of publications (all types of documents) 1972–2021
affiliation); (ii) authorship (singled-authored articles and joint articles within a single country, i.e. domestic collaboration); (iii) author’s country of affiliation; (iv) patterns of international collaboration; (v) classification of articles according to themes (Jung & Horta, 2013; Tight, 2003, 2019); (vi) salient features (the most prolific authors, the most cited articles in the whole history of the journal and the most cited articles in the last ten years). In this last section (vi), a combined analysis of themes, top-cited articles, and the most prolific authors is provided.

Patterns of publication

Table 1 shows the number of publications including all types of documents with articles being the most frequent type of publication (3086) followed by book reviews (1098). It is worth noticing that all except 4 publications were published in English (3 were published in French with 2 being book reviews published in 1975 and 1984 and 1 article co-authored by Bourdieu, Grignon, and Passeron published in 1973, while 1 book review was published in German in 1985).

Figure 1 shows the total number of publications between 1972 and 2021, with an uneven increase in the number of publications over the years, reaching two peaks, in 1979 and 2021. In 1979, there was a peak in article publications but also, since that year, the number of issues contained in each volume increased from 4 to 6.

Generally, articles were the most common type of document published in the journal. However, this was not always the case. In its first decade (see Fig. 2), and specifically between 1978 and 1984, the number of book reviews was higher than articles, reaching a peak in 1979. Between 1983 and 1990, articles and book reviews were published in similar numbers. Interestingly, there was no book review in 2007. It is, therefore, only from the
1990s that articles became the dominant type of document published in the journal. That book reviews were the most common form of publication in earlier decades reflects the importance that books had as an outlet in higher education, even up to the 1990s (Tight, 2008), an importance that has since been surpassed by article publications.

Now, we turn just to articles (see Fig. 3). 3086 articles were published between 1972 and 2021. There was a systematic increase in the number of articles with spikes in 1973, 2009, 2015, and 2021. A demand for publishing articles in prestigious journals broadly and specifically in HE as well as in other prestigious journals of higher education since 2007 onwards has been well documented in the literature (Kwiek, 2021; Vlegels & Huisman,
In turn, the increase in the number of articles in 2021 might be understood as an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic (King & Frederickson, 2021; Shalaby et al., 2021), but this would deserve further exploration.

**Articles’ authorship**

Regarding authorship patterns, of the 3086 articles, 1714 (55.5%) were joint or collaborative (with at least two authors). The remaining 1372 articles (44.5%) were single-authored articles. Out of the 1714 joint articles, 1376 (80.3%) were authored within a single country and only 338 (19.7%) were international collaborative articles (by scholars from two or more countries).

These authorship trends have been changing over time, though. Figure 4 shows that single-authored articles have maintained a relatively stable pattern over the years (with a striking peak in 1973). Domestic collaboration (i.e. within a single country) has been increasing unevenly, especially between 2007 and 2012 and then from 2017 onwards, with a marked increase in 2021 so becoming the most frequent type of publication. Although more modestly, international collaborative articles have also been growing, especially from 2008 to 2009 onwards. Interrelatedly, in examining collaborative patterns in *Studies in Higher Education*, Calma and Davies (2015) found that more articles were published by single authors in the 1980s but pointed to ‘a trend away from solo- to multiple-author research in recent decades’ (2015:10). Other studies have also confirmed a trend to collaborate more in publications in higher education research (Akbaritabar & Barbato, 2021; Avdeev, 2021; Fu et al., 2022; Vlegels & Huisman, 2021).

The authorship patterns in *HE* suggest that research has been especially nationally oriented and strongly rooted in national higher education systems (especially in the USA, the UK, and Australia, see next section), a feature that was noted even by the first editor of the journal in 1982 (Ross, 1982) and later by Tight (2014) in the broad field of higher education.

![Fig. 4 Patterns of authorship in Higher Education 1972–2021](image-url)
education studies. However, this pattern might change given the importance attributed to international collaboration broadly and in higher education research specifically (Akbari-tabar & Barbato, 2021; Avdeev, 2021; Fu et al., 2022; Vlegels & Huisman, 2021). These international collaboration patterns are discussed further in “International collaboration.”

**Country’ affiliations**

Most of the single-authored and joint domestic articles were authored by scholars in Europe (794/25.7%), followed by North America (673/21.8%), UK (513/16.6%), Oceania (469/15.2%), Asia (448/14.5%), Africa (138/4.5%), and South America (51/1.7%). (see Fig. 5 and Annex 1 for detailed information according to geographic areas). A notable presence of the UK in the first years of the journal had to do with its beginnings and their founding editors. The presence of Europe (even without considering the UK) since 2007 onwards seems spectacular.

Authors’ affiliations (in both single-authored and domestic articles; see Annex 1) show a clear predominance of English-speaking countries with the USA (473 articles), the UK (467), and Australia (397) being the most prominent (see annex 1). This is not surprising given that HE publishes in English. Also, authors affiliated to institutions in Canada (131), China (95) (including Hong Kong (49)), the Netherlands (120), South Africa (89), and Germany (87) followed by Israel (74), Finland (60), Sweden (60), Spain (59), Norway (52), Japan (51), and Italy (45) deserve to be mentioned (interestingly, in 1992, Ross (1992) had already noted the salient presence of Israel, Japan, and China in the journal). Others include New Zealand (34), France (32), Denmark (30), Portugal (29), and Belgium (25). These results are partly aligned with Tight’s study (2014) who found that across articles published in HE in 2010, there was a well-proportionated presence of authors from the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, and Europe compared with USA-based journals (such as the Journal of Higher Education, Research in Higher Education, and Review of Higher Education) which tended to publish mainly from authors based in the USA.

**Fig. 5** Authors’ affiliations by continent and the UK in *Higher Education* 1972–202 by 5-year intervals
Broadly, authors from Anglophone countries\(^1\) have published 62.8% of the total articles in the journal without considering international collaboration (for detailed information, see Annex 1). Apart from Hong Kong and South Africa and to a much lesser extent, Nigeria (16) — which are, to a significant degree, English-speaking countries — the limited presence of both India (22 articles), given its size, and Singapore (7) are noticeable. In 1992, the founding editor of *HE* (Ross, 1992) noted that India made regular appearances in the journal. However, this presence has diminished over time. A reason for this might be found by Varghese (2018) who pointed out that research on higher education in that country tended to be conducted by colleagues in social sciences departments who are interested in larger political, social, and economic aspects of higher education while educational research did not deal with teaching and learning processes in higher education. His conclusion was, therefore, that higher education research in India does not constitute a field of study as such. A similar conclusion for Singapore was proposed by Lee (2018) who found that higher education research in that country was considered as part of education policy research so it would not have a status of field of study as such.

Data presented in Annex 1 also denote absences. The low number of authors affiliated to institutions in Africa (with the exceptions of South Africa and Nigeria) and especially Latin America and Eastern-Europe countries is significant, a trend that was early noted by Ross in 1982 and remarked upon ten years later (Ross, 1992). As for Africa, if South Africa and Nigeria are excluded, modest contributions from Ghana and Tanzania (5 articles each), Uganda, and Kenya (4 each) were identified, while the contributions from Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, and Namibia were negligible. This trend was already noticed by Zavale and Schneijderberg (2022) who mentioned that research into higher education is quite recent in the continent. Also, it is likely that much of this research was published in non-indexed journals or other types of document (including the grey literature).

Regarding the modest presence of Latin America, Chile (15 articles in total) stands out, followed by Brazil (11), Mexico (9), Colombia (6), and Argentina (5). Contributions from other Latin American countries were, again, almost negligible. These patterns were already identified by Guzmán-Valenzuela and Gómez (2019) who explained the salience of Chile due to its strong internationalisation policies in a country that encourages publication in leading journals and a fast-growing community in higher education studies. The weak presence of Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina are striking considering the size of these countries and the existence of mega and well-recognised universities. In this respect, in the study conducted by Guzmán-Valenzuela and Gómez, (2019), it was found that both Brazil and Mexico tended to publish more in non-WoS journals. The case of Argentina deserves further investigation.

Broadly, the modest presence of Latin America in *HE*, like Africa, might be explained by the fact that research in higher education has developed belatedly. Although there is a fast-developing higher education research community, research tends to be published in journals of educational research and in local languages (Spanish and/or Portuguese) (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Gómez, 2019). However, and as pointed by Guzmán-Valenzuela and Gómez (op. cit.), publication in specialised higher education journals in English has been growing from 2007 onwards. Interestingly, these authors also found that the highest

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\(^1\) Australia, Botswana, Canada, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, UK, USA, Zambia.
percentage of the total publications in higher education in Web of Science journals from scholars affiliated to Latin American countries was published in HE (16%).

Finally, for Eastern Europe countries, the contribution to HE is negligible with the exception of Poland (17 articles). The low contribution from Russia (9 articles) stands out given its size and capacity, and from Estonia (3 articles) which was identified recently as an important contributor of articles in leading specialised higher education journals (Lovakov and Yudkevich (2021)). Lovakov and Yudkevich (op.cit.) concluded that, in general, the contribution of post-Soviet countries to research in higher education is rather modest, and this is especially so for leading journals with the exception of Estonia, followed some way back by Lithuania, and Russia when adjusted by population. Other countries making rather modest contributions in higher education research, according to these authors, are Ukraine, Latvia, and Kazakhstan (Lovakov and Yudkevich, op. cit). According to these authors, Lithuania and Russia tend to publish in local journals and ‘Estonia and Kazakhstan had the higher share of high-quality output (measured in the share of articles in Q1 journals), whereas Latvia, Ukraine, and Russia had the lowest’ (Lovakov & Yudkevich, 2021: 283).

**International collaboration**

As mentioned, only 338 (19.7%) of the total number of articles were international collaborative articles (by scholars from two or more countries). Broadly, data show that both the total number of collaborations and the total number of countries with which each country collaborated have been increasing over three periods of time (1972–2009, 2010–2015, and 2016–2021).

In Figs. 6, 7, and 8, the total number of collaborations is shown, ranging from the lowest collaboration up to highest number of collaborations. In the first period (Fig. 6), for most countries, there was only 1 collaboration between countries (dark blue colour) with the exception of the UK with Australia (7 collaborations), followed by collaborations between the USA and both Australia and South Korea (3 collaborations each) and between Australia and Sweden (also 3 collaborations).

In the second period (Fig. 7), the network notably expanded and the collaboration increased. In this period, the number of collaborations between the USA and Taiwan reached 5 (yellow colour), followed by 3 collaborations between the USA and India, South Africa, and South Korea; between the UK and Portugal, Netherlands, Australia, and Norway; and between Canada and Hong Kong.

The complexity and expansion of the network are even more evident in the final period (Fig. 8). In this period, the number of collaborations between the USA and China reached 10 (pale pink colour), followed by ±7 collaborations between the USA and both Canada and the UK and between the UK and China.

Figures 6, 7, 8 and Annex 2 show that for the 1972–2009 and 2010–2015 periods, the country that collaborated the most was the USA, and with the largest number of countries, followed by the UK and Australia. However, in the last period (2016–2021), the UK led both the international collaborations and the number of collaborating countries followed by the USA and Australia. However, while the UK had the highest total number

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2 The division in these three periods was based on the rapid growth of international collaborations since 2008–2009.
of collaborations (129), it collaborated with fewer countries (56) compared with the USA (63), which had 114 international collaborations.

In the evolution of international collaborations over the three periods of time (1972–2009, 2010–2015, and 2016–2021 (Annex 2)), the UK notably increased both the total number of international collaborations (from 20 to 81) and the number of countries...
with which collaborations were formed (from 10 to 29). Although the USA increased the total number of international collaborations (from 25 to 50), the number of countries it collaborated with decreased between the period 2010–2015 (25 countries) and the period 2016–2021 (21 countries).

The increase in the number of international collaborations exhibited by China (including Hong Kong) over these periods of time is notable. While its international collaborations for the first two periods of time (1972–2009 and 2010–2015) were low (Figs. 6 & 7 and Annex 2), there was a definite increase in the last period (2016–2021; Fig. 8 and Annex 2).

Other increments in terms of collaborating countries worth noting across Europe include Norway (from 1 country in the period 1972–2009 to 11 countries in the period 2016–2021), Finland (from 3 to 13 countries in the same periods), Denmark (from 1 to 9 countries), Italy (from 0 to 10 countries), Germany (from 2 to 14 countries), and Belgium (from 2 to 11 countries). These patterns confirm a trend of rising international collaborations in higher education research (Akbaritabar & Barbato, 2021; Avdeev, 2021; Fu et al., 2022; Vlegels and Huisman, 2021).

It is not possible to analyse the international collaborative patterns in HE for each country here. However, countries’ volumes of articles in HE is worthy of mention. Across all three periods of time — and discounting the major players (USA, the UK, Australia, and China) — other countries played important roles notably the Netherlands and Germany, followed by Canada, Finland, Norway, Spain, Denmark, Portugal, Belgium, Sweden, South Africa, Italy, and New Zealand.

The case of Israel exhibits an unusual pattern. Although its total volume of articles in HE is high compared with other countries (39 single-authored articles and 35 domestic articles; see Annex 1), its international collaboration is low (a total of 5 international collaborations and 4 countries with which it collaborated; see Annex 2). This pattern is also broadly evident in Japan, with its 40 single-authored articles and 11 domestic articles (see Annex 1) but just 11 international collaborations (Annex 2). The countries with the

![Fig. 8 Cross-country authorships between 2016 and 2021](image_url)
lowest international collaborations in terms of total international collaborations and collaborating countries are Poland and Nigeria (the latter with no international collaboration whatsoever).

Following Fu et al. (2022), who examined international collaboration in research in higher education across the most well-known journals in the field, the following network measures were calculated: average path length, average degree, network diameter, density, and clustering coefficient (see Table 2).

First, the average number of country collaborations (average degree) has been growing across periods (1972–2009 = 2.78; 2010–2015 = 4.04, and 2016–2021 = 4.86\(^3\)). Also, the average number of international collaborations has grown from 3.7 in the period 1972–2009 to 5.5 in 2010–2015 and to 8 in 2016–2021 (Annex 2). Second, the average path length (i.e. how close countries are to each other in terms of collaboration) confirms that collaborations between countries have become slightly tighter (1972–2009 = 3.35; 2010–2015 = 3.08 and 2016–2021 = 3.11). Third, the diameter of the network (i.e. the maximum geodesic length between two nodes in the graph) exhibits a decrease from the two first periods to the last period (1972–2009 and 2010–2015 = 7 to 2016–2021 = 6). This indicates that, over time, researchers from all contributing countries have been gradually collaborating more. Fourth, although it is observed an increase in collaboration among countries, the density measure (i.e. the proportion of all possible ties that are presented) is systematically low across the three periods (Density average = 0.08). This measure indicates that while more countries have joined the network in co-authoring HE articles, there is not much variation in collaboration propensity across the entire network. All these measures are similar to those found by Fu et al. (2022).

Finally, the clustering coefficient (i.e. the tendency of countries to cluster together in triads) shows an increase among periods (1972–2009 = 0.14; 2010–2015 = 0.22, and 2016–2021 = 0.30) which means that close collaboration in triads of countries has been increasing over time (in other words, countries tended to collaborate with countries with which they collaborated in the past). However, this clustering coefficient is relatively low (when comparing with the clustering coefficients found by Fu et al. (2022)) which means that international collaboration is still limited.

To sum up, the patterns of international collaboration show a predominance of English-speaking countries (with the UK and the USA leading, followed by Australia) with a noticeable emergence of China (including Hong Kong). In Europe, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, and Finland stood out, while in Africa, the role of South Africa was particularly evident. Finally, and similar to Fu et al. (op.cit.), international collaboration has

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\(^3\) The division in these three periods was based on the rapid growth of international collaborations since 2008–2009.
been growing but it is dominated by a small group of countries while most of the collaborator countries gravitated around these core countries so keeping a peripheral position.

**Tight’s themes of research in higher education**

As mentioned in the methodology section, Tight’s themes of research in higher education (2003, 2019) plus the theme of ‘internationalisation’ (Horta & Jung, 2014) were used to organise the articles of the Journal (3,086 articles). Table 3 shows that the number of articles in the theme of ‘system policy’ had the highest number of articles and the second highest numbers of citations. The themes ‘teaching and learning’ and ‘the student experience’ were also strong in terms of the number of articles but even more in the number of citations. In other words, while there were fewer articles in these two topics compared with ‘system policy’, the number of citations is higher, a finding that underlines the saliency of these two large themes.

Figure 9 offers a longitudinal overview of articles organised by the Tight’s themes. It shows that the theme of ‘system policy’ was predominant but was also surpassed by the theme of ‘student experience’ during the last decade. The theme of teaching and learning has been continuously growing since 1991 with spikes in 2007 and 2015, 2018 and 2021. Also, the theme of ‘internationalisation’ has gained traction since 2013.

**Salient features**

**The most prolific authors**

Figure 10 shows the most prolific authors (with at least 8 articles) contributing to the journal. The two most prolific authors have been Jan Meyer (17 articles) and David Kember (15). Next comes David Boud, Michael Prosser, and John Richardson (who recently died), each of them with 12 articles. Coincidentally, Calma and Davies (2015) found that Richardson, Kember, Boud, and Meyer were among the most published authors in the journal *Studies in Higher Education* between 1976 and 2013. While some of the most prolific authors of *HE* are retired or emeritus professors, most of them are currently active and

| Tight’s themes                | Nº of articles | %   | Nº of citations | %   |
|------------------------------|----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| System policy                | 694            | 22.5| 9318            | 13.0|
| The student experience       | 536            | 17.4| 10,463          | 14.6|
| Teaching and learning        | 416            | 13.5| 14,652          | 20.4|
| Institutional management     | 321            | 10.4| 6142            | 8.6 |
| Academic work                | 306            | 9.9 | 6518            | 9.1 |
| Quality                      | 225            | 7.3 | 5431            | 7.6 |
| Knowledge                    | 215            | 7.0 | 5985            | 8.3 |
| Internationalisation         | 214            | 6.9 | 6772            | 9.4 |
| Course design                | 159            | 5.2 | 6448            | 9.0 |
| Total                        | 3086           | 100.0| 71,729          | 100.0|

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Fig. 9  Articles organised by Tight’s themes plus the theme ‘internationalisation’, over time (1972–2021)

Fig. 10  The most prolific authors of Higher Education between 1972 and 2021 and their gender (masculine (M) or feminine (F))
highly productive (for example, Meyer, Marginson, Kember, Prosser, Boud, Pascarella, Lindblom-Ylänne, Huisman, Brew, Shin, Horta, and Sa, the last two being the youngest academics in the list).

In checking the affiliations of the most prolific authors, most of them were and have been affiliated to universities in Anglophone countries (namely, the UK, Australia, South Africa, Hong Kong, Canada, and the USA) and less frequently to universities in Europe (Netherlands, Belgium; Norway, Finland, Germany) and one in South Korea (Shin). Also, with three exceptions (Lindblom-Ylänne, Brew, and Lonka), they are male authors. Finally, the most prolific authors of \textit{HE} tended to publish joint articles in the journal with the exceptions of Simon Marginson and Phillip Altbach who tended to publish single-authored articles.

The top-cited articles in the history of the journal

The most cited article (‘Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment’) by far was authored by Biggs in 1996, followed by one by Trigwell, Prosser, and Waterhouse (1999) (see Table 4). A paper by Topping (1996) appears in the third position. In comparing four journals in higher education (\textit{Higher Education}, \textit{Studies in Higher Education}, \textit{Teaching in Higher Education,} and \textit{Higher Education Research & Development}), Kandlbinder (2012) found that the most cited author was Biggs, while another well-cited author was Entwistle (jointly with Marton, and Ramsden). Later, in a study conducted by Calma and Davies (2015) on \textit{Studies in Higher Education}, Entwistle appeared as the most cited author (followed by Marton and Ramsden), while Biggs was in the fourth position and Boud in the sixth position.

In relation to gender patterns (authors’ sex), 8 out of 11 single-authored articles were written by male authors. For domestic joint articles, there was more of a gender-balanced collaboration with 8 out of 10 articles being written by both male and female scholars, while for international joint papers, only 1 article involved just men. This is not surprising in academia and, specifically in higher education studies. The cited work by Calma and Davies (2015) found a similar gender pattern in \textit{Studies in Higher Education}.

Regarding Tight’s themes, most articles (12) were devoted to teaching and learning issues, while 3 other articles were devoted to curricula and course design. In combining teaching and learning articles with those on course design, 15 of the 25 top-cited articles dealt with issues related to learning. In turn, 3 articles were devoted to system policy, 2 to institutional management, 2 to internationalisation, 2 to the student experience and 1 to academic work. These results, again, reflect the broad distinction made by Tight (2008) and MacFarlane (2012, 2022) about the two predominant clusters of higher education research, namely, teaching and learning on the one hand and institutional, systems, and policy matters on the other hand.

The most cited articles in the last decade (2012–2021)

The 10 most cited articles in the last 10 years (2012–2021) (Table 5) were mostly domestic joint articles (6, light orange colour), followed by international joint articles (3, light grey colour), and there is only one single-authored article although it is the most cited article in the last decade (by Marginson, light blue colour). This trend contrasts with the authorship patterns in the top-cited articles of \textit{HE} which (Table 4) where there was a significant
Table 4 Top-cited articles in *Higher Education*’s history and their main features (single-authored articles (light blue), domestic joint articles (orange), and international joint articles (light grey))

| N citations | Author & gender (Male (M) or Female (F)) | Title | Year | Authors' country affiliation | Article type | Tight’s themes |
|-------------|----------------------------------------|-------|------|-------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1,235       | Biggs, J. (M)                          | Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment | 1996 | Australia                      | Single-authored | Teaching & learning |
| 680         | Tripolli, K. (M); Pressey, M. (M); Waterhouse, F. (F) | Relations between teachers’ approaches to teaching and students’ approaches to learning | 1999 | Australia                      | Joint article (domestic) | Teaching & learning |
| 531         | Topping, KJ (M)                         | The effectiveness of peer tutoring in further and higher education: A typology and review of the literature | 1996 | United Kingdom                 | Single-authored | Teaching & learning |
| 467         | York, M. (M)                           | Formative assessment in higher education: Moves towards theory and the enhancement of pedagogic practice | 2003 | United Kingdom                 | Single-authored | Teaching & learning |
| 396         | Scoular, K. (F)                        | The influence of assessment method on students' learning approaches: Multiple choice question examination versus assignment essay | 1998 | Australia                      | Single-authored | Teaching & learning |
| 366         | Tripolli, K (M); Pressey, M. (M)       | Improving the quality of student learning: the influence of learning context and student approaches to learning on learning outcomes | 1991 | Australia                      | Joint article (domestic) | Teaching & learning |
| 363         | Biggs, J. (M)                          | Individual-differences in study processes and the quality of learning outcomes | 1979 | Australia                      | Single-authored | Teaching & learning |
| 357         | Vermunt, J.D. (M)                      | Metacognitive, cognitive and affective aspects of learning styles and strategies: A phenomenographic analysis | 1996 | The Netherlands                 | Single-authored | Teaching & learning |
| 294         | Entwistle, N. (M); Tait, H. (F)        | Approaches to learning, evaluations of teaching, and preferences for contrasting academic environments | 1996 | United Kingdom                 | Joint article (domestic) | Teaching & learning |
| 274         | Summerville, K. (F); Bain, JD. (M)     | Revisiting academics' beliefs about teaching and learning | 2001 | Australia                      | Joint article (domestic) | Teaching & learning |
| 255         | Bond, D. (M); Yalchikov, N. (F)        | Quantitative studies of student self-assessment in higher education: a critical analysis of findings | 1989 | United Kingdom - Australia     | Joint article (international) | Teaching & learning |
| 241         | Summerville, K. (F); Bain, JD. (M)     | Conceptualisation of teaching held by academic teachers | 1992 | Australia                      | Joint article (domestic) | Teaching & learning |
| 585         | Meyer, JHF (M); Land, R. (M)           | Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (2): Epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning | 2000 | United Kingdom                 | Joint article (domestic) | Course design |
| 325         | Barrie, S. (M)                         | Understanding what we mean by the generic attributes of graduates | 2006 | Australia                      | Single-authored | Course design |
| 312         | Helle, I. (F); Ytyniska, P. (F); Oikkuna, E. (M) | Project-based learning in post-secondary education: theory, practice and rubber sling shots | 2006 | Finland                        | Joint article (domestic) | Course design |
| 564         | Marginson, S. (M)                      | Dynamics of national and global competition in higher education | 2006 | Australia                      | Single-authored | System policy |
| 371         | Marginson, S. (M); Rhodes, G. (M)      | Beyond national states, market/c, and systems of higher education: A glacial agency heuristic | 2002 | Australia - USA                | Joint article (international) | System policy |
| 249         | Ferlie, E. (M); Maslin, C. (F); Andreassi, G. (M) | The steering of higher education systems: a public management perspective | 2008 | UK - France                    | Joint article (international) | System Policy |
| 347         | Dil, DD (M); Soo, M. (F)               | Academic quality, league tables, and public policy - A cross-national analysis of university ranking systems | 2005 | USA                            | Joint article (domestic) | Internationalisation |
| 315         | Teichler, U. (M)                       | The changing debate on internationalisation of higher education | 2004 | Germany                        | Single-authored | Internationalisation |
| 379         | Jumblaed, B. (M); Enders, J. (M); Salmens, C. (M) | Higher education and its communities: Interconnections, interdependencies and a research agenda | 2008 | The Netherlands - USA          | Joint article (international) | Institutional management |
| 313         | Gampert, PL. (F)                       | Academic restructuring: Organizational change and institutional imperatives | 2000 | USA                            | Single-authored | Institutional management |
| 437         | Lee, J. (F); Rhee, C. (M)              | Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination | 2007 | USA                            | Joint article (domestic) | Student experience |
| 280         | Li, M. (F); Lui, M. (M)                | Cross-border flows of students for higher education: Push-pull factors and motivations of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau | 2005 | Hong Kong - China | Joint article (domestic) | Student experience |
| 381         | Hinkel, M. (F)                         | Academic identity and autonomy in a changing policy environment | 2005 | United Kingdom                 | Single-authored | Academic work |
number of single-authored articles, while in the last decade, collaborative articles, especially domestic collaborative articles, are prevalent. Further, a more gender-balanced pattern is observable (with just 4 articles authored only by men). It is also apparent that teaching and learning (with 4 articles) and system policy lead the themes (3 articles).

In holding in view the salient features analysed here (the top-cited articles in the journal’s history (Table 4), the top-cited articles in the last 10 years (Table 5) and the most prolific authors (Fig. 10), and bringing to bear the main themes in Tight’s classification, several trends emerge.

a) Teaching and learning, and course design

Table 3 shows that the theme ‘teaching and learning’ has the highest number of citations although the number of articles in this theme is much lower compared with that of system policy.

Among the most cited articles in the history of the journal (Table 4), between 1979 and 2005, there was a clear predominance of the teaching and learning approaches topic. This topic comprised a research cluster in which a group of researchers shared a dominant research paradigm. Most of the articles in this cluster were empirical and usually either used inventories and questionnaires to identify teaching approaches or students’ learning styles or conducted interviews with university teachers and students in one or two universities so as to examine teaching and learning in specific disciplines. Many of these studies were led jointly by Trigwell and Prosser, and Samuelowicz and Bain (also jointly) in Australia, Entwistle in the UK, and Vermunt in the Netherlands. Prosser, for example, produced a total of 12 articles of which 7 were published in association with Trigwell, being followed by Vermunt and Entwistle (9 articles each) and Lonka (8), while Samuelowicz and Bain published 3 joint articles (two being among the top-cited articles). Belonging to this cluster is the top-cited article ‘Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment’ by Biggs (1996, Australia). Also, although less cited, is Kember’s prolific work (15 articles) in the same theoretical cluster.

Further, in the same research cluster, other authors have been prolific, notably Richardson (12 articles), Watkins (9), and Lindblom-Ylänne (9). Finally, in this research cluster, mention should be made of the work of Ramsden (UK and later Australia) and Marton (Sweden): although having fewer articles (5 each) published in the journal and not being among of the top highest cited articles, their work was especially influential (Calma & Davies, 2015; Kandlbinder, 2013). Tight also observed that Biggs and Marton (with Gibbs) belonged to a ‘learning style cluster’ (2008:602). In turn, Kandlbinder (2013, 2015) found that the most cited authors in teaching and learning (Marton, Biggs, Entwistle, Ramsden, and Trigwell) can be associated with what he called ‘signature concepts’ defined as those ideas that have become recognised as belonging to a researcher or research tradition to such an extent that authors are more likely to use that ‘concept than any other research in the field’ (2013:2). Kandlbinder associated Biggs with ‘constructive alignment’, Trigwell with ‘conceptions of teaching influence teaching strategies’, Prosser with ‘teaching approaches change according to context’, Entwistle with ‘strategic approach to learning’ (all these authors having most cited articles in the journal) and Marton with ‘surface and deep approaches to learning’.

Somehow disconnected with the aforementioned cluster, 2 top cited articles in the history of HE devoted to teaching and learning (Boud and Falchikov; Yorke) were focused on assessment. Boud’s work deserves special mention, being one of the most prolific authors in the journal and also recognised as one of the most cited authors in the
teaching and learning literature (Kandlbinder, 2013). Finally, 1 top cited article devoted to teaching and learning (Topping, UK) was focused on peer tutoring, an article that seems to be disconnected from all the previous articles.

Regarding the top cited articles in teaching and learning in the last decade (Table 5), these are theoretically somewhat distant from the teaching and learning approaches focus of previous decades and are even disconnected among each other. One of the most cited articles here is a recent one devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic (Watermeyer et al.), and another is about student engagement (Tai et al.), followed by an article on student

| No. citations | Author & gender (male (M), female (F)) | Title | Year | Country/ies | Article type | Tight’s classification |
|---------------|----------------------------------------|-------|------|-------------|--------------|------------------------|
| 186 | Rienties, B (M); Beausaert, S (M); Grohnert, T (F); Nienantsverdriet, S (F); Kommers, P (M) | Understanding academic performance of international students: the role of ethnicity, academic and social integration | 2012 | UK – the Netherlands | Joint article (international) | The student experience |
| 174 | Watermeyer, R (M); Crick, T (M); Knight, C (F); Goodall, J (F) | COVID-19 and digital disruption in UK universities: afflictions and affordances of emergency online migration | 2021 | UK | Joint article (domestic) | Teaching and learning |
| 174 | Tai, J (F); Ajjawi, R (F); Boud, D (M); Dawson, P (M); Panadero, E (M) | Developing evaluative judgement: enabling students to make decisions about the quality of work | 2018 | Australia - Spain | Joint article (international) | Teaching and learning |
| 165 | Kilgo, C. (F); Ezell Sheets, J. K. (F); Pascarella, E (M) | The link between high-impact practices and student learning: some longitudinal evidence | 2015 | USA | Joint article (domestic) | Teaching and learning |
| 157 | Bovill, C (F); Cook-Sather, A (F); Felten, P (M); Millard, L (M); Moore-Cherry, N (F) | Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: overcoming resistance, navigating institutional norms and ensuring inclusivity in student-staff partnerships | 2016 | UK – USA – Ireland | Joint article (international) | Teaching and learning |
| 223 | Marginson, S. (M) | The worldwide trend to high participation higher education: dynamics of social stratification in inclusive systems | 2016 | UK | Single-authored | System policy |
| 135 | Einders, J (M); de Boer, H (M); Weyer, E (F) | Regulatory autonomy and performance: the reform of higher education re-visited | 2013 | The Netherlands | Joint article (domestic) | System policy |
| 130 | Sam, C (M); van der Sijde, P (M) | Understanding the concept of the entrepreneurial university from the perspective of higher education models | 2014 | The Netherlands | Joint article (domestic) | System policy |
| 127 | Wilkins, S (M); Huisman, J (M) | The international branch campus as transnational strategy in higher education | 2012 | UK | Joint article (domestic) | Internationalisation |
| 118 | Hu, GW (M); Lei, J (M) | English-medium instruction in Chinese higher education: a case study | 2014 | Singapore | Joint article (domestic) | Internationalisation |
| 130 | Sam, C (M); van der Sijde, P (M) | Understanding the concept of the entrepreneurial university from the perspective of higher education models | 2014 | The Netherlands | Joint article (domestic) | Knowledge |
assessment (Kilgo et al.) and one on students as partners (Bovill et al.). These articles show an increasing interest in the role of students in their learning experiences and also the current pandemic crises and the migration to on-learning platforms.

The evidence shows, at least in HE, an epistemic turn in the teaching and learning arena between the 1970s-early 2000s and the 2010s onwards. This turn has been characterised by a well-defined and clearly demarcated research cluster on teaching and learning (with a strong tradition in the UK, Australia, Hong Kong, and Nordic countries) that gave way to a less defined cluster that focuses on students’ learning and experiences.

Finally, the three top-cited unconnected articles about curricula and course design are the articles by Meyer and Land, Barrie, and Helle, Tynjala, and Olkinuora. Meyer’s work deserves mention, Meyer being the best published author in the journal (Fig. 10). His joint article with Ray Land about threshold concepts has had a significant impact on the field of higher education, especially on research about students’ learning in specific disciplines.

b) System policy, internationalisation, and institutional management

System policy has the second highest number of citations in the history of the journal (Table 4) but also the highest number of articles in the history of HE. Two conceptual articles by Marginson (one with Gary Rhoades) are noticeable since he is the third most prolific author in the journal (11 articles) (Fig. 10). Much of his work has been devoted to the relationship between higher education systems globally and locally. Also, in Table 4, Teichler’s work, with its focus on internationalisation in a comparative perspective, deserves to be picked out, not only in terms of citations received but also because Teichler has been a significant contributor to the journal (8 articles) and to higher education research more broadly (Tight 2008). The article by Dill and Soo, written from a comparative perspective, examined the role of international rankings in shaping higher education policies and academic work. These articles show the increasing importance given to internationalisation trends (Horta & Jung, 2014). It is worth mentioning here that Marginson, Teichler, and Dill were also recognised as among the top-cited authors in higher education research in a study conducted by Tight (2014). Next, there is the article by Ferlie, Musselin, and Andresani that turned on higher education reform narratives. Finally, the work of Altbach (USA, 8 articles) deserves mention too, most of whose articles addressed system policy issues and, specifically, globalisation and internationalisation, his work also being recognised in the study conducted by Tight (2014).

In the last decade (Table 5), system policy and internationalisation have gained momentum. The 3 top-cited articles in system policy addressed quite different issues (participation and stratification, autonomy and reforms, models of universities, and the entrepreneurial university), while the two on internationalisation focused on branch campuses, and English as a medium of instruction. It is worth noticing here that 3 out of these 4 articles were (co)-authored by three prolific scholars (Fig. 10), namely, Marginson, Enders, and Huisman.

The importance of research on system policy in higher education has been highlighted in the literature (David, 2011; Horta & Jung, 2014). Meanwhile, globalisation and internationalisation trends have become key narratives in higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Further, it is worth also mentioning Creso Sa (Canada, 9 articles) with his work focused on science and technology policies, and Harman (Australia, 8 articles) with research about the Australian higher education system across different dimensions.

Regarding institutional management, there were two top cited articles that address institutional management and governance issues (Table 4). The first article (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno) focused on universities, using a stakeholder analysis to examine
universities’ third mission. Specifically, Enders (first affiliated to a university in Germany, and later the Netherlands and the UK) has been one of the most prolific authors in the Journal (11 articles) (Fig. 10). His work has touched on governance matters, internationalisation, and the academic work. The second article (by Gunport, USA) focused on public universities and colleges in the USA and the pressures that marketisation, consumerism, and managerialism are having on higher education. It is also worth mentioning here the work of Huisman (the Netherlands, the UK, and Belgium, 10 articles) whose work revolved around institutional management (but also policy systems) and Stensaker (Norway, 10 articles) with research mainly on organisational issues.

c) Student experience

The theme ‘student experience’ has been gaining traction in the journal, especially in the last decade with a spectacular increase in 2021 (see Fig. 9). Also, equity and students’ diversity (in their gender or ethnicity dimensions) and inclusive education have become salient topics in higher education research in the last decades (Berrey, 2011; David, 2007). These patterns reflect in part the growing marketisation of higher education across the world in which students as such have become more politically and politically significant (Molesworth et al., 2011).

Two top cited articles were devoted to the student experience and also internationalisation (Table 4). One article (Lee and Rice) is focused on the international students’ perceptions about studying in the USA. The second article (Li and Bray) studied international flows of Chinese students in Macau and Hong Kong. In the last decade (Table 5), there was one top-cited article (UK), which focused on international students and their performance. Also, it is worth mentioning Psacharopoulos’ work (Greece, 9 articles) around labour skills, transitions, and access, Psacharopoulos having been particular influential in the early development of work on the economics of higher education and the labour market.

d) Academic work, quality, knowledge, and other topics

These themes are those with fewest articles in the history of HE and also with the fewest citations (Table 3). The theme ‘academic work’, though, has been fast developing in the last two years (Fig. 9).

Only one top cited article in the journal’s history (Table 4) was devoted to academic work (Henkel, UK), specifically to academic identities and how they have been changing in the light of policy changes. Also, the prolific work by Over (Australia, 8 articles) around the matter of the academic work might be noted.

Other highly prolific authors in the journal’s history (Fig. 10) have been Kyvik (Norway, 11 articles) whose work revolved around academic work, research, and institutional management; Horta (Hong Kong, 9 articles), having focused mainly on system policy and academic work; Pascarella (USA, 9 articles), most of whose work revolved around attainment, critical thinking, and the student experience; and Westerheijden (the Netherlands, 9 articles), with research devoted to quality issues.

A notable lacuna here is that of Tight’s theme of ‘knowledge’ — which includes ‘the nature of research, disciplinarity, forms of knowledge, and the nature of the university’ (2003:7) — with only one article being highly cited in the last decade (Table 5). This absence was also noticed by Horta and Jung (2014) in Asia. This trend might be explained in a number of ways. First, scholars interested in knowledge matters may tend to publish in more disciplinary focused journals (in philosophy, anthropology or sociology, for example). Second, given that the topic of knowledge attracts epistemological, conceptual, and heavily theoretical explorations, and given also the practitioner character of much work in the field of higher education studies, this theme might be less
Conclusions

Over its 50 years of existence, *Higher Education* has grown spectacularly and, of the journals in higher education, published most articles. Doubtless, this expansion of the journal owes much to the growth in higher education as a research field but also to the strength of the Journal itself.

Since its inception, the founding editors of *Higher Education* were determined to make the journal an international outlet in disseminating research on higher education (Ross, 1972), an aim that has been fulfilled to a degree. Although there has been a clear predominance of authors affiliated to Anglophone countries, and especially from the UK, the USA, and Australia, contributions from Asia and especially from China (particularly through Hong Kong) have been expanding the geographical reach of the journal. However, marked absences from Latin America, African (with the exception of South Africa and Nigeria), and Post-Soviet countries are evident.

Single-authored and also domestic collaborative articles have been a key feature of the journal. This trend is indeed a feature that characterises the social sciences broadly. Research in the social sciences tends to be context-dependent on and firmly rooted in specific organisations or countries. This context-specific feature might also — partly — explain why *HE* publishes fewer articles from non-English-speaking countries (with scholars in those countries being keener to publish in their *lingua franca* in regional or home country journals). Another possible explanation for fewer publications from India, Singapore, Africa, Latin America, and post-Soviet countries may have to do with higher education studies being a young research community, the knowledge production of which tends to be published in non-indexed journals or policy reports. This last issue may also have its basis in higher education being — in large part — a practitioner-oriented field.

International collaboration is becoming a significant trend in the last decade broadly and specifically in higher education (Fu et al., 2022; Vlegels and Huisman, 2021). A growth in international collaboration may be seen as a consequence of globalisation and networking facilitated by technologies (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lee & Haupt, 2021). However, as seen, international collaborations patterns show a geopolitical imbalance so that, compared with peripheral countries, core countries (many English-speaking and European countries) have tended to concentrate and strengthen their international collaborations.

Regarding gender patterns, male authors have dominated *Higher Education* in both productivity and citations. This gender imbalance is not only present in this journal but is rather a trend in the academic world that needs specific editorial policies to motivate more publications from female scholars. It might be that a higher representation from female scholars would widen the range of research topics been addressed by the journal.

In terms of themes, teaching and learning have been a key theme investigated by scholars in higher education (MacFarlane, 2012, 2022; Daenekindt & Huisman, 2020). This pattern is not surprising given that the most important task in higher education is that of teaching, with most universities around the world being teaching-oriented. However, system policy combined with internationalisation has also become significant
themes in the journal, especially in the last decade and have surpassed the teaching and learning domain. The theme ‘internationalisation’ is likely to continue growing. In turn, the theme ‘student experience’ is fast gaining traction. Although this theme covers different sub-topics, one could hypothesise that the student experience (educational and non-educational, domestic, or international) will continue to attract attention not least considering that students have become central in higher education policy and management, with institutions seeking to attract students and meet their expectations.

The analysis performed here demonstrates the vitality of the field of higher education studies, with new sub-fields emerging continuously. This reflection suggests that the broad distinction made by MacFarlane (2012, 2022) between the island of teaching and learning and system policy needs to be revisited, for example, so as to enhance the importance of the themes ‘internationalisation’ and ‘the student experience’. Furthermore, Tight’s classification might also be expanded so as to include emerging topics (philosophy of higher education, feminist and postcolonial studies, epistemic (in)justice, sustainability and ecology, future and space studies, among many others) that have become relevant.

It would be worthwhile to continue examining the very nature of the field of higher education studies as reflected in HE. Although many studies have pointed to the practitioner nature of the field (Brennan & Teichler, 2008; Guzmán-Valenzuela & Gómez, 2019; MacFarlane, 2012; Tight, 2003), with some (Tight, 2004, 2007) even claiming that much of the research in higher education is atheoretical, the construction and consolidation of a field necessarily involves the shape and development of grand theories in understanding the world. This constitutes a significant challenge.

A matter of consideration is the space in which Higher Education situates itself given the fast-broadening array of themes and issues being taken up globally in higher education studies. It is apparent that a welter of discourses is newly appearing in and around higher education and universities, the intellectual projects of which are scattered across an increasingly wide range of publications.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00924-7.

Funding This work was supported by ANID-Chile, Fondecyt Project 1200633.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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