Information Research Communications, 2027; 4(1):124-131.
https://inforescom.org

Research Article

Trends and Trajectories in Arena Theatre Scholarship: A Longitudinal Bibliometric Study

Kishore Dey

Librarian, Karunamoyee Library, Barasat, West Bengal, INDIA.

ABSTRACT

Background: Arena theatre is an important area of performing arts research, yet its scholarly development and publication patterns have not been comprehensively mapped. **Objectives:** To examine the longitudinal growth, productivity, collaboration patterns, institutional contributions, prolific researchers, and major publication outlets in arena theatre research from 2001 to 2025. **Methodology:** A total of 1,183 documents were retrieved from the OpenAlex database covering 2001–2025. Biblioshiny, based on the Bibliometrix R package (version 5.0), and Microsoft Excel were used for bibliometric analysis of annual publication trends, country-wise performance, Single-Country Publications (SCP), Multiple-Country Publications (MCP), institutional affiliations, prolific researchers, and prominent publication Sources. **Results:** Arena theatre research demonstrated an annual growth rate of 4.34%, with considerable variation in publication output, a peak during 2020-2021, and a recent decline. The UK and USA were the leading contributors, although their publications were predominantly single-country studies, indicating limited international collaboration. Institutional and author-level analyses revealed a dispersed and non-core research structure. Major publication outlets included Theatre Journal and Theatre Topics, along with Cambridge University Press and Palgrave Macmillan. Open-access platforms such as Zenodo also contributed to dissemination. The absence of keywords and references in the retrieved records limited detailed thematic and citation analyses. **Conclusion:** Arena theatre research has shown gradual growth but remains geographically and institutionally fragmented, with limited international collaboration. Strengthening cross-country research networks, improving bibliographic metadata, and promoting standardized indexing may enhance the visibility, connectivity, and future development of this research field.

Keywords: Biblioshiny, India, OpenAlex, PRISMA, Scientometrics.

Correspondence:
Mr. Kishore Dey
Librarian, Karunamoyee Library, Barasat, West Bengal, INDIA.
Email: kishore.ju29@gmail.com

Received: 21-08-2026;
Revised: 11-09-2026;
Accepted: 08-10-2026.

INTRODUCTION

Arena theatre or theatre-in-the-round is a unique form of performance whereby the stage is located at the center of the venue, with the audience surrounding it from all sides (Theatre-in-the-round, n.d.). Arena theatre deviates from traditional proscenium performance and places significant emphasis on the role of audience members as integral parts of the play itself, hence being an essential topic to investigate within performance and theatre studies. Previous scholars have investigated various aspects of arena theatre, such as its structure and promotion, in their earlier publications (Myers, 1969; Mielziner, 1970). For instance, Edström (1990) discussed how theatre spaces could be designed for optimal audience participation and access. Additionally, the development of arena theatre has been closely associated with other forms of experimental and people-oriented theatres, as exemplified by the contributions of Boal (1998), Piscator (1980) and Rolland (1980).

From an Indian and international perspective, the connection between arena theatre and alternate theatre practices such as folk theatre and Third Theatre, mentioned by Gargi (1991), Raha (1978), Mukhopadhyay (1997), and Bhattacharya (1992), is relevant to the present research. The emphasis in these theories is on moving away from centralized theatre production to decentralized, inclusive, and communal theatre practices. In this regard, Roychowdhury (1999, 2005) provides additional insight into audience participation and the evolution of theatrical spaces, supporting the need for arena theatre performances. Recent developments in technology have contributed to arena theatre performances, incorporating virtual and geographically located spaces within performances (Rogers *et al.*, 2009). While these theories and frameworks contribute to arena theatre, there is a need for empirical evidence to provide insight into the growth and development of this field.

In order to fill the identified research gap, the current study uses the method of bibliometrics, which has gained worldwide

DOI: 10.5530/irc.4.1.11

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recognition as a useful tool for performing quantitative analysis of scientific literature and research trends (Pritchard, 1969; Broadus, 1987). Such bibliometric instruments as Bibliometrix facilitate more complete performance and science mapping analysis (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017). By performing analysis of publications listed in the OpenAlex database between 2001 and 2025, the current research aims at offering a systematic description of the development trends and the features of arena theatre research. The described bibliometric research is necessary for the identification of existing research gaps and new areas of interdisciplinary inquiry.

Related Works

The topic of arena theatre and its development have been analyzed from various disciplines, such as theatre studies, cultural theory, and technology. Historical texts include studies on the structure and promotion of arena theatres by Myers (1969) and Mielziner (1970), as well as the importance of people-centered design by Edström (1990). There is also theoretical work on the socio-political aspect of performances, especially those that involve the participation and involvement of the people, which are mentioned in the writings of Boal (1998), Piscator (1980), and Rolland (1980). Within India, there are studies on folk and street theatre, with links to ideas about Third Theatre, as seen in the publications of Bhattacharya (1992) and Roychowdhury (1999, 2005).

These advances can be traced even in the digital world and interaction, as seen in Rogers *et al.* (2009). Methodologically, bibliometric principles established by Pritchard (1969) and Broadus (1987), as well as new techniques such as Bibliometrix (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017), create solid grounds for research. Taken together, all these papers constitute both theoretical and methodological bases for conducting a study on arena theatre.

Objectives Of The Study

The main objective of the current study is to assess the academic evolution of arena theatre literature through a longitudinal bibliometric investigation. The following are the key goals of the study:

- To evaluate the yearly increase in the number of papers published on arena theatre from 2001 to 2025.
- To determine the top countries that produce papers on arena theatre research, including their SCPs and MCPs.
- To investigate the leading affiliations that participate in arena theatre studies.
- To evaluate the most productive authors in the area.
- To list the central journals/sources that publish papers on arena theatre.

METHODOLOGY

The bibliometric research methodology is adopted in the current study to examine the trends and patterns in arena theatre research. The bibliographic data are collected from the OpenAlex database, an open access scholarly metadata database, by the use of the term "arena theatre," between the years 2001 and 2025 with a total of 1,183 articles. The obtained data were converted to CSV and JSON files and then preprocessed, which involved eliminating duplicate and inconsistent data, along with standardizing the names of the authors, affiliations, and countries. The entire data screening and selection process is documented through the provided PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1). For data analysis, Biblioshiny, a software for bibliometric and performance analyses (Bibliometrix R package, Version 5.0), and Microsoft Excel were employed for organizing and arranging data. Nevertheless, the current research is confined to bibliographic data available in the OpenAlex database based on the specified keywords "arena theatre" from the year 2001 to 2025.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Overview of the Dataset

Descriptive statistics of the dataset offer an extensive analysis of the research done in the arena theatre discipline between 2001 and 2025. 1,183 publications are documented in 559 sources, revealing a broad distribution of scientific output. With a growth rate of 4.34%, it is possible to see that scholarly activity on the issue is growing steadily. At the same time, the average age of a document is 11.3 years, meaning that the literature is relatively developed. An average citation rate per document reaches 4.237, suggesting that the academic impact of the literature is rather high. However, some limitations are observed, such as the lack of Keywords Plus and author keywords, as well as references.

Authorship analysis suggests that there were 1,490 authors who contributed to the literature; moreover, a substantial number (857) contributed in single authorship papers. The latter is also confirmed by a large number (938) of single authorship documents and an indicator of collaboration equal to 1.38 co-authors/document suggesting an individually oriented culture of research. At the same time, the level of international cooperation continues to remain low, as only 1.775% publications involve collaboration of authors from various countries. As for the document types, journals predominate (782); then go book parts (221) and books (62), which implies that publication in journals and scholarly books prevails (Figure 2).

Annual Growth and Publication Trends

The publication timeline of arena theatre between 2001 and 2025 depicts a progressively growing trend but not without some fluctuations, as illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 3. The research starts with a fairly low number of 13 articles published in 2001

followed by a steady increase until the end of 2005 when 33 articles have been produced. A period of steady growth is noted until 2009 where 47 papers have been produced. The production level surges in 2010 with 62 articles before experiencing a dip in 2011 and 2012. However, a resurgence in article production is evident in the succeeding years up to 2014 when the highest number of 67 articles was recorded. Relatively good levels of output are maintained up to 2015. From 2016 to 2019, there appears to be stabilization in the output as well as some fluctuations along the way. A spike in output is observed between 2020 and 2021, achieving a maximum of 69 papers in 2021. Thereafter, however, a declining trend is observed with only 36 articles being published in 2025.

Country-wise Research Productivity

The analysis of the distribution of publications about arena theatre across various countries shows an evident predominance

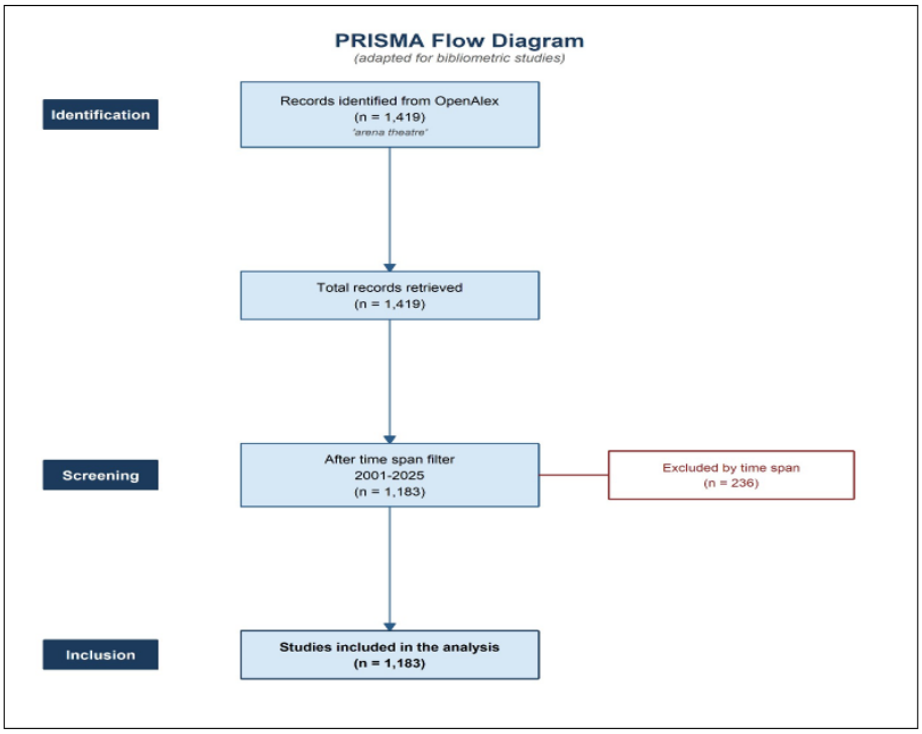


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram Showing the Data Selection and Screening Process.

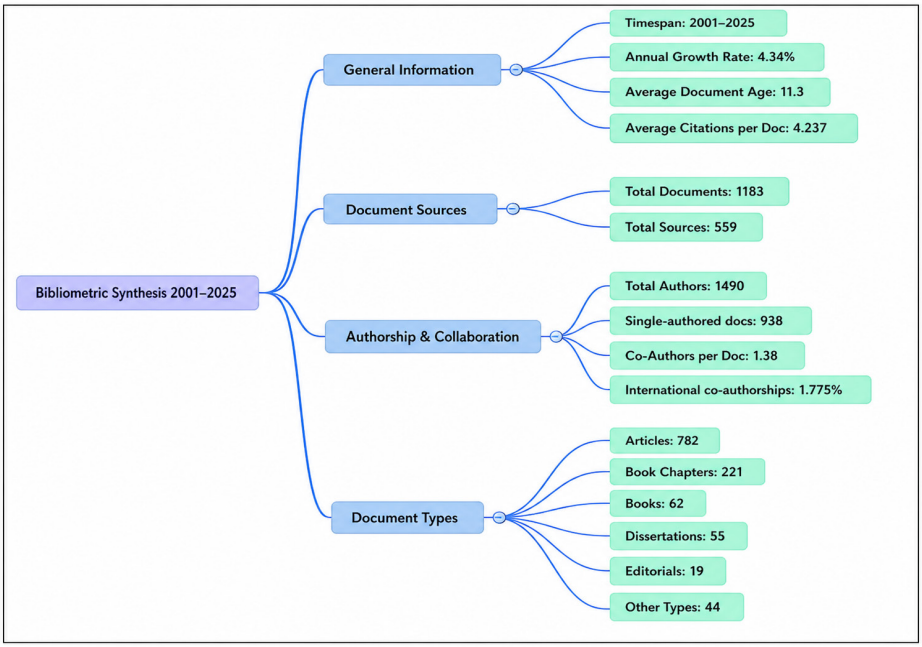


Figure 2: Descriptive Overview of the Dataset.

Table 1: Annual Growth and Publication Trends of Arena Theatre Research (2001-2025).

Year	Articles
2001	13
2002	25
2003	25
2004	25
2005	33
2006	32
2007	33
2008	39
2009	47
2010	62
2011	54
2012	44
2013	58
2014	67
2015	64
2016	50
2017	61
2018	58
2019	58
2020	67
2021	69
2022	53
2023	61
2024	49
2025	36

of a few leaders among the rest, which is demonstrated by the results provided in Table 2. In this case, the UK takes the first place, having produced 91 publications, followed by the US, which is a close second with 83 works on the subject. After the two countries mentioned above, there is a notable difference in the number of articles published, and then there are several countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including Australia (22), and India (20), being other major contributors to this topic. Some other contributors to the study include Canada (15), Brazil (13), and some European countries like Germany, Italy, and Poland (11 each).

There are numerous other countries that contribute to the field less than those mentioned above; thus, it can be seen that there is a certain balance between the developed and underdeveloped research community. For example, Norway contributes 10, Indonesia - 9, and New Zealand - 6. However, there are several more countries, including Ireland, the Netherlands, Nigeria, China, France, Spain, and Turkey, among others, contributing relatively modestly.

Leading Institutional Affiliations

In affiliation-wise analysis of arena theatre research, several institutions are involved from various parts of the world and there is not any overwhelming involvement of any particular institution, as mentioned in the form of Table 3. The highest number of articles published by an institution in relation to arena theatre has been published by the Hasanuddin University in Indonesia, with a total of 10 publications. This shows a very high emphasis of research being carried out at the institutional level in theatre related research in this part of the world.

On the other hand, Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Ukraine also has a very high contribution of 8 publications towards arena theatre research. In addition to this, the institution that contributed to 7 publications is the Griffith University, Australia. Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft (Germany), National Institute of Technology Meghalaya (India), Newcastle University (UK), University of Cambridge (UK), and Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology (India) have all equally contributed to research work on arena theatre with 6 publications each. Gian Sagar Medical College and Hospital (India) and University College London (UK) have also contributed 5 publications each.

Authorship Productivity and Key Contributors

Firstly, the distribution of researchers within the area of arena theatre (Table 4) seems quite fragmented, as there is not any one researcher who dominates the field. At this regard, it is worth noting that the top organization in terms of the number of publications is Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga, which has 6 papers published (the fractional count is 0.5). Hence, this can be a case of authorship of an institution or some problems in the data indexing. In addition, it is possible to highlight that Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima is the most productive author with 5 papers published, and all of them are fractionalized (the fractionalized score equals 5). Moreover, it is possible to identify several authors, such as Dfovea, Donatella Galella, Littlemixlm5Theto, and Marcelina Gorni, who produced 4 publications.

In turn, Christina Parolin, Elizabeth A. Osborne, Jeffrey Ullom, and Kathleen Gallagher produced 3 papers. Overall, the fragmentation in terms of the number of publications produced by leading authors demonstrates that there are no dominant researchers in the analyzed area of knowledge. Thus, one can conclude that arena theatre is characterized by the presence of multiple contributors with similar levels of productivity.

Country-wise Research Productivity

Analysis of the publications per country for Single Country Publications (SCP) and Multiple Country Publications (MCP) (Table 5 and Figure 4) reveals significant domination in terms of domestic research with little international cooperation. The UK

Table 2: Country-wise Research Productivity in Arena Theatre Studies.

Rank	Country	Frequency
1	UK	91
2	USA	83
3	Australia	22
4	India	20
5	Canada	15
6	Brazil	13
7	Germany, Italy, Poland	11
8	Norway	10
9	Indonesia	9
10	New Zealand	6
11	Ireland, Netherlands, Nigeria	5
12	China, France, Panama, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine	4
13	Israel, Pakistan, Singapore, South Africa	3
14	Argentina, Czech Republic, Egypt, Malaysia, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Sweden	2
15	Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Ghana, Greece, Iran, Japan, Kosovo, Luxembourg, Morocco, Mozambique, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovakia, South Korea, Sudan	1

takes first place with a total of 84 articles (7.10%), 82 out of which were SCP and just 2 articles as MCP, hence a very low collaboration rate of 2.38%. In the second position comes the USA, where there are 75 publications (6.34%) out of which 74 were SCP and just 1 as MCP (1.33%). This shows a high self-reliant attitude towards research. Australia, which contributes 21 articles and Canada, with 15 articles, show higher percentages of MCP at 14.29% and 13.33% respectively, hence comparatively more international engagement. India and Brazil also contribute 20 and 12 articles respectively but with very few MCP publications. Among the European contributors like Poland, which contributed 11 articles, Italy with 10 and Germany, with 9, it can be seen that Germany tops other countries with an MCP percentage of 22.22%. While Indonesia also contributed 9 articles, its MCP was zero, implying its complete reliance on domestic research.

Core Journals and Sources

Arena theatre publications source-wise analysis illustrates a wide range of publication media from various fields, as shown in Table 6. The source "Unidentified" is ranked first among all sources with the maximum h-index of 233, implying that many publications do not have their source clearly indicated. Nevertheless, the source Theatre Journal published by Johns Hopkins University Press stands out for having the highest h-index (30) and the number of articles (46) alongside the SJR (2024) score of 0.212, indicating the high academic influence of this source.

Book-based sources are prominent in this field, such as Cambridge University Press Ebooks with 31 articles and Palgrave Macmillan UK Ebooks with 23 articles. Also, open-source repositories such as Zenodo managed by CERN account for 20 documents, demonstrating the emergence of the open access

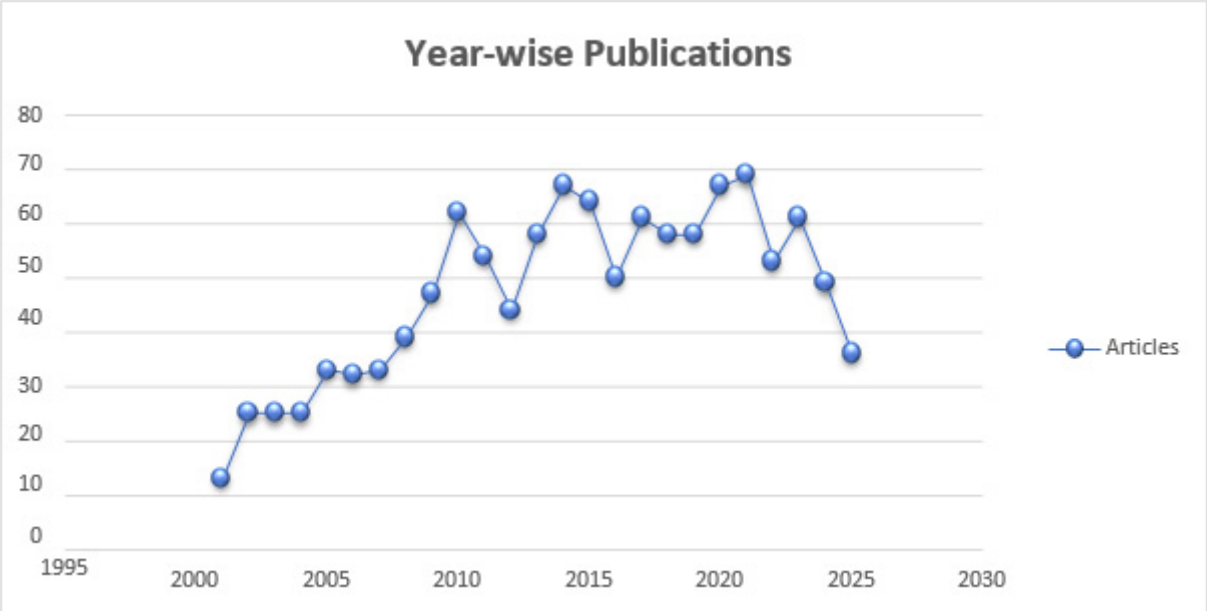


Figure 3: Annual Growth and Publication Trends of Arena Theatre Research (2001-2025).

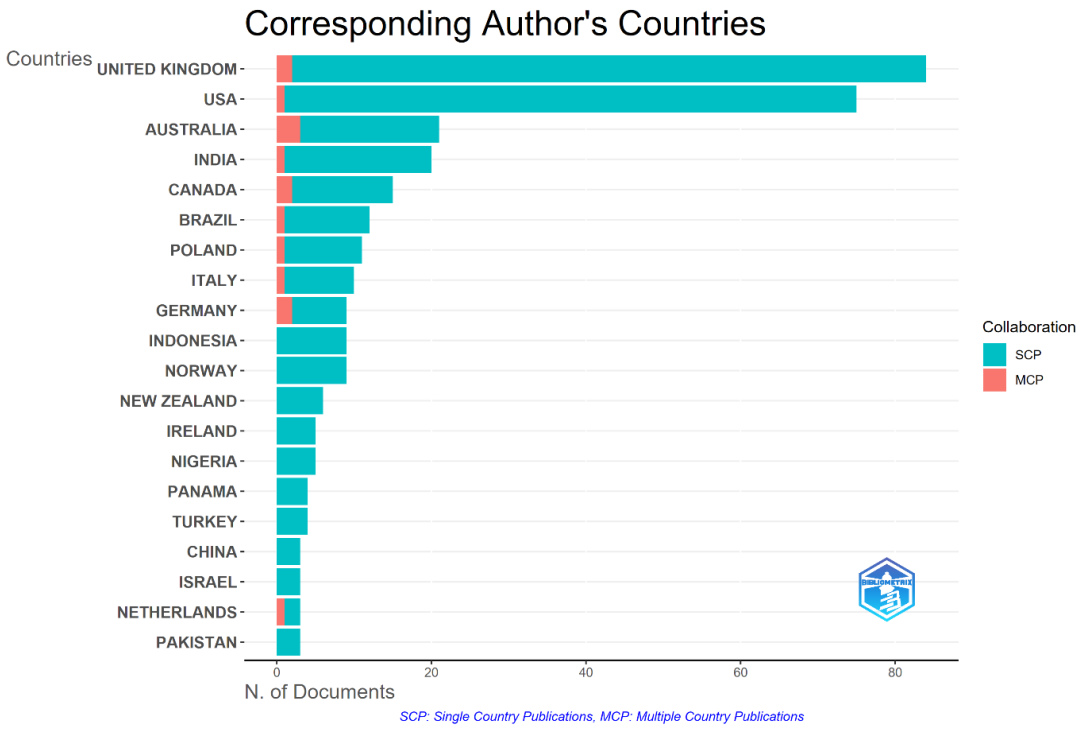


Figure 4: Corresponding Author Countries and their Research Contributions in Arena Theatre Studies.

Table 3: Top Ten Leading Institutional Affiliations in Arena Theatre Research.

Rank	Affiliation	Country	Articles
1	Hasanuddin University	Indonesia	10
2	Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts	Ukraine	8
3	Griffith University	Australia	7
4	Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft	Germany	6
5	National Institute of Technology Meghalaya	India	6
6	Newcastle University	United Kingdom	6
7	University of Cambridge	United Kingdom	6
8	Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology	India	6
9	Gian Sagar Medical College and Hospital	India	5
10	University College London	United Kingdom	5

Table 4: Top Ten Authorship Productivity and Key Contributors in Arena Theatre Research.

Rank	Author	Articles	Articles Fractionalized
1	Universidad Autónoma De Bucaramanga	6	0.5
2	Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima	5	5
3	Dfovea	4	4
4	Donatella Galella	4	4
5	Littlemixlm5Theto	4	4
6	Marcelina Gorni	4	4
7	Christina Parolin	3	3
8	Elizabeth A. Osborne	3	3
9	Jeffrey Ullom	3	3
10	Kathleen Gallagher	3	3

Table 5: Top Ten Country-wise Research Productivity and Collaboration Patterns (SCP & MCP).

Rank	Country	Articles	Articles %	SCP (Single Country Production)	MCP (Multiple Country Production)	MCP %
1	United Kingdom	84	7.10	82	2	2.38
2	USA	75	6.34	74	1	1.33
3	Australia	21	1.78	18	3	14.29
4	India	20	1.69	19	1	5.00
5	Canada	15	1.27	13	2	13.33
6	Brazil	12	1.01	11	1	8.33
7	Poland	11	0.93	10	1	9.09
8	Italy	10	0.85	9	1	10.00
9	Germany	9	0.76	7	2	22.22
10	Indonesia	9	0.76	9	0	0.00

Table 6: Top Ten Core Journals and Sources of Arena Theatre Publications.

Rank	Sources	Publisher	h-index	Articles	SJR (2024)
1	Unidentified			233	
2	Theatre Journal	Johns Hopkins University Press	30	46	0.212
3	Cambridge University Press Ebooks	Cambridge University Press		31	
4	Palgrave Macmillan UK Ebooks	Palgrave Macmillan		23	
5	Zenodo (Cern European Organization for Nuclear Research)	Operated by the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN)		20	
6	Theatre Topics	Johns Hopkins University Press	12	15	
7	Latin American Theatre Review	Kansas Geological Survey	5	13	0.101
8	Shakespeare Bulletin	Johns Hopkins University Press	4	12	0.142
9	Theatre History Studies	Mid-America Theatre Conference	6	12	0.105
10	Choice Reviews Online	Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)		11	

phenomenon in scholarly publishing. Moreover, journals such as Theatre Topics (15 articles; h-index 12), Latin American Theatre Review (13 articles; SJR 0.101), Shakespeare Bulletin (12 articles; SJR 0.142), and Theatre History Studies (12 articles; SJR 0.105) also play important roles in this discipline. The source Choice Reviews Online (11 articles) demonstrates the contribution of review-based publications.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis presents an extensive overview of academic research on arena theatres between 2001 and 2025 based on OpenAlex. The results show that there has been a consistent growth in the number of papers produced; however, there have been significant fluctuations, with spikes observed at the beginning of the 2020s and subsequent drops. The most productive nations in the field have been identified as the UK

and the US; still, collaboration trends are underdeveloped, with an overwhelming tendency towards national publications. Furthermore, institutional and authorship assessments confirm a dispersed research community, with a multitude of organizations and authors contributing across the globe instead of a tightly knit core. This work also confirms the relevance of journals and books as two major forms of publication, illustrating the interdisciplinary nature of theatre studies. Nevertheless, some shortcomings are noteworthy, such as the lack of keywords and citations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author acknowledges the use of the OpenAlex database for providing open-access scholarly metadata that enabled the successful completion of this study. No additional support or assistance was received for this research work.

ABBREVIATIONS

SCP: Single Country Publication; **MCP:** Multiple Country Publication; **PRISMA:** Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses; **SJR:** SCImago Journal Rank; **CERN:** European Organization for Nuclear Research; **ACRL:** Association of College and Research Libraries.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

SUMMARY

The current bibliometric analysis covered 1,183 scientific works on arena theatre published in OpenAlex during the years 2001 to 2025. The analysis included an evaluation of the number of works published per year, productivity across various countries, collaboration patterns, influential institutions, top authors, and sources in this area of research. This paper provides an analysis of some trends in this area and discusses important findings related to those trends.

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Cite this article: Dey K. Trends and Trajectories in Arena Theatre Scholarship: A Longitudinal Bibliometric Study. Info Res Com. 2027;4(1):124-31.