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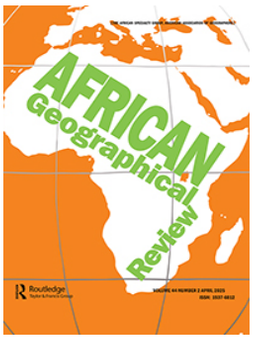

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A historical and analytical timeline of the African Geographical Review

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a comprehensive review of the African Geographical Review (AGR) from 1963 to 2024, highlighting its evolution, thematic shifts, and impact on geographical scholarship within Africa. It explores the journal's historical context, examining its geographical dynamics and how it has adapted to changing socio-political and environmental landscapes over the decades. The analysis draws from an interview with a past editor of the AGR and other secondary sources, including the journal's scope and publications from the 1960s to the present, to provide a historical review of its content and identify key thematic trends across different periods and spaces. The paper also examines how the AGR has addressed pressing socioeconomic and sustainable development issues over time. This historical overview illustrates the AGR's role in fostering a deeper understanding of Africa's complex geographical narratives and its ongoing contribution to global academic discussions.

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African geographical review; history; Africa; African geography; publication trend; thematic trends

Introduction

The African Geographical Review (AGR) is an international peer-reviewed journal that provides geographical scholarship relating to Africa. It publishes research in all fields of geography to promote African geographical scholarship. The AGR was established in 1963 and published its 43rd volume in 2024 after 61 years of its establishment. I argue that by tracing the evolution of the journal, we can shed light on the development of geography scholarship from East Africa to the rest of Africa. This paper takes a historical approach, analyzing the historical timeline and thematic evolution of the African Geographical Review, a leading African Geography journal. Such a historical approach allows us to uncover how the African Geographical Review has shaped and been shaped by broader academic and geopolitical changes across the African continent.

Given the increasing call for decolonization and inclusion of diverse perspectives in geographical archives and scholarship (Esson et al., 2017; Jazeel, 2017; Radcliffe, 2017), understanding how the AGR has transitioned over the years can illuminate the progression of geographical thought and research practices within Africa. As such, this study aims to explore how the thematic trends in the AGR's publication reflect the broader regional landscape and how certain themes resonate more strongly in specific areas due to varying national priorities. Specifically, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of publication trends with qualitative assessment of thematic shifts.

This method allows for a comprehensive understanding of the AGR's impact on African geographical scholarship. The quantitative analysis tracks publication frequencies and geographical distribution over time, while the qualitative analysis explores the content of published articles,

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generating themes for a deeper understanding of the evolving research focus and its alignment with regional and national priorities. This dual approach not only provides a detailed picture of the journal's evolution but also contextualizes its contributions within the broader field of geography.

Furthermore, the study traces the changes in the geographical coverage of the AGR's publications from East African in the 1960s and 1970s to the broader African continent over the past three decades. It also explores how scholars from various African countries contributes diverse perspectives to African scholarship based on their varied regional priorities and experiences. This is in line with the call for the diversification of historical and archival research in the discipline (Craggs & Neate, 2019; Ferretti, 2020; Livingstone, 2019). Examining how geographical scholarship within the AGR has evolved across diverse African countries contributes to a diversification of historical research in Geography and enriches the discipline with varied regional narratives. As noted by Craggs and Neate (2019), individuals across different regions contribute varying experiences to the discipline of geography based on their location. Their experiences and perspectives have shaped geographical theories and methods; therefore, they are crucial for understanding geography's history.

Historical overview

The AGR, named initially East African Geographical Review (EAGR), was founded by the Ugandan Geographical Society at Makerere University in 1963 with the view of promoting geographical scholarship and showcasing the rich African culture and identity with an emphasis on Uganda and the East African Community [EAC] (Yeboah et al., 2011). As a result of colonial influence in Uganda post-independence, geography departments were dominated by Western geographers, including the EAGR's founding editor, Brain Hoyle, who led the EAGR from 1963–1966 (Yeboah et al., 2011). It was not until 1973 that the EAGR had its first African editor, Joe Muwonge.

During the first decade of its establishment, the journal published one issue per year on diverse topics, including population geography, historical geography, trade and industry, regional inequalities within the Ugandan economy, and other aspects of human geography. The journal also published aspects of physical geography such as climate, hydrology, and geomorphology of Uganda and the East African region. Geographical research from other East African countries, including Tanzania, Malawi, and Kenya, was also largely published, including a review of rural settlement studies in Tanzania by Mckay (1968), a study of infant mortality in Tanzania by Thomas ((1972), temporal efficiency of the rural market system in Kenya by Wood (1973) and the effects of the Dambo drainage on Land use in Malawi by Agnew (1973). However, the journal's publication was disrupted in the 1980s and early 1990s. Yeboah et al. (2011) explain that this resulted from political and economic instability in Uganda, creating a challenging environment for the editors of the EAGR. The authors added that the editors grappled with several constraints due to the political unrest, including financial constraints, journal marketing, publishing quality manuscripts, and meeting publication deadlines.

Rebirthing the EAGR

In 1997, the board voted to move the EAGR's office to North America (USA), where it has been ever since. The relocation of the EAGR to North America gave it 'a second lease of life' through the significant efforts of individuals like Bakama BakamaNume and Ezekiel Kalipeni, who solicited manuscript submissions and sold copies of the journal at the African Specialty Group sessions of the AAG (Yeboah et al., 2011, p. 7). However, there was a question of what such a move would mean for African geographers regarding the time and cost constraints of mailing their manuscripts to an American-based EAGR since the journal at the time depended on hardcopy manuscript submissions and publications. This begs the question of whether the journal could continue to engage with African geography and African-based geographers. The fear was that the relocation of the EAGR to

North America would mark the shift from African-based- authors to those in the U.S. who were mostly members of the Association of American Geographers [AAG] (Yeboah et al., 2011).

In 2000, the EAGR was formally adopted by the Africa Specialty Group of the AAG. This adoption brought some notable changes, including renaming the EAGR to African Geographical Review to better reflect its position as the journal of the ASG. Additionally, the accounts of the AGR and ASG were merged, facilitating a more streamlined financial structure. The merger exposed the AGR to a wider community of supporters, including institutions like Miami University and Macalester College. These institutions provided crucial support in the form of assistantships and grants, which were instrumental in the development and sustainability of the journal (Yeboah et al, 2011). Despite these positive changes and increased support, the first decade following the merger saw a notable decline in the volume of publications. For instance, in 2001, the journal published only five articles, failing to publish any in 2002. This trend of low publication numbers continued, with six articles in 2003 and 2004 and a decline to five in 2005. Several factors could have contributed to this decline, including the challenges of transitioning to a new organizational structure, the need to establish new editorial processes, and the ongoing efforts to attract high-quality manuscript submissions from a broader geographic and academic community. Despite the initial decrease in publication, the merger ultimately positioned the AGR for future growth and development, helping it expand its reach and influence.

By 2011, the journal had grown tremendously, having 48 institutional and 390 individual subscribers. The same year, the AGR celebrated its thirtieth anniversary and signed a 7-year contract with Taylor and Francis, which was to take effect in 2012 (Yeboah et al., 2011). As a result of the contract, all prior volumes from 1997 were published online. This shift from hardcopy to online publication – according to a past editor of the AGR – resulted in a significant increase in the journal's submission rate. It also prompted the rebranding of the journal's scope to publishing 'the highest quality research in all fields of geography, including human, nature – society, physical and the techniques' (African Geographical Review, n.d., para. 1). With this new scope, the AGR set out to enhance the standing of geography in Africa, promoting better representation of African scholarship and facilitating lively academic conversations regarding the African continent.

During the thirtieth anniversary, several future goals were established (Yeboah et al., 2011), most of which have been met. Firstly, the AGR sought to increase the publication rate from 2 to 3 issues per year, which began in 2015, rising to 4 issues in 2019. Secondly, the journal anticipated a broader coverage of scholarship and editorial board. This was necessary as the majority (78%) of prior editorial boards were based in the United States and Canada. To this effect, the composition of the journal's editors was modified to reflect diversity across Francophone and Anglophone African countries. In addition to diversifying the editorial board, a past editor of the AGR – in an interview – opined that for the journal to be a true African journal, there is a need for a holistic representation of African scholarship. One of the past editors noted the journal's continued commitment to improving the journal's diversity. This commitment also included the publication of French and Chinese abstracts of its article and other African languages, including Swahili, which has been constrained by financial limitations, as mentioned by the editor. The editor also lamented the lack of adequate reviewers to handle the rising submission rate. However, this challenge is not peculiar to the AGR as several journals are experiencing a scarcity of reviewers, especially post-COVID-19.

In sum, the AGR has navigated significant shifts from its roots in East Africa to its current base in North America, reflecting broader changes within the field of geography itself. This journey from a regionally focused publication to a journal with a global reach while retaining its core mission of highlighting African geographical scholarship sets the stage for a detailed examination of its contributions and ongoing relevance. In the next section, the article will assess how the thematic shifts within the AGR's publications align with broader trends in African geography. It will also evaluate the implications of its relocation on its connection with African scholars and scrutinize how it has adapted to address critical geographical and

socioeconomic developments. This analysis aims to evaluate how effectively the journal promotes meaningful academic discussions that contribute to advancing geographical knowledge in both African and global contexts. We seek to determine whether the journal provides a valuable platform for sharing research, insights, and developments that enrich the field of geography and support the growth and dissemination of knowledge across different regions and topics.

Data and methodology

This paper employs textual analysis to investigate thematic trends and geographic associations in the published works of the AGR from 1963 to 2024. The data for this analysis were sourced from Sabinet African Journals[1] and Taylor and Francis using an adapted CrossRef API.[2] Quantitative textual analysis was applied to the titles of publications to analyze thematic trends across different periods. The textual analysis was carried out in several stages, identifying subfields and thematic areas through a comprehensive literature review, which guided the creation of keywords corresponding to major themes and subfields in geography. Using these predefined keyword lists, the researcher programmatically scanned the titles of the publications – using Python codes written by the researcher – to assign them to relevant thematic areas, allowing for a systematic categorization of articles from 1963 to 2024. This classification enabled us to quantify the research focus over time and assess shifts in thematic emphasis, which were visualized using a series of bar charts and maps. These visualizations highlighted the volume of research per theme and illustrated temporal trends and shifts in the geographical focus within the African continent. All data analysis and visualization were conducted using QGIS and Python Jupyter Lab. Various tools and libraries were utilized to process and visualize the data, including those for text analysis, pattern recognition, and creating charts and graphs. Specifically, the researcher used libraries for natural language processing and different types of data visualization to present our findings. Additionally, specialized libraries were used to handle and analyze geographical data.

Details of the textual analysis

In the first stage, the researcher generated keywords to identify the subfields of geography with the most publications. For this study, the keywords were broadly categorized into three subfields of geography, including human, physical, and environmental geography, following established divisions (see Appendix I for the list of keywords under each subfield). In the second stage of the thematic analysis, the researcher thoroughly read the titles of the articles and generated keywords to systematically determine prevalent themes and their evolution. Themes generated include agriculture, health, trade/industry/economics, education, development and governance, transportation, population and demographics, resources and environment, cultural geography, sustainability/MDGs/SDGs, and GIS and spatial analysis (see Appendix II for the definition and list of keywords under each thematic area.).

Next, countries of author's affiliation were analyzed to examine the spatial coverage of the AGR's publications and understand its impact on African geography. This was achieved by extracting affiliations from author details and examining the titles of articles for mentions of African countries. If either of these sources mentioned an African country, it was recorded and added to the country variable. Papers without country data were assigned 'None.' Countries of publication were analyzed from 1963 to 1974, 1997 to 2006, 2007 to 2016, and 2017 to 2024. Further, a co-occurrence network was constructed to analyze and visualize the relationships between the identified themes and mentioned countries. This network analysis helped understand themes' interconnectedness and geographic relevance, providing insights into the regional focuses of research within Africa.

Results and discussion

Trends in publication from 1963 to 1974

The thematic focus of the EAGR from 1963 to 1974 shows a moderate mix of studies across the three subfields, namely, human, physical, and environmental geography (Figure 1). In the first period, from 1963 to 1966, both human and environmental geography had the highest representation in the publications, accounting for over 80% of papers published during this period. Across all periods, from 1963 to 1974, human geography received consistently substantial attention, from 42.1% in the first period to 54.6% in the second and 52.63% in the third. The relatively high and increasing interest in human geography can be attributed to the significant societal and economic changes occurring during this time, such as decolonization, urbanization, and shifts in economic development across many African nations. Eyita-Okon (2022) noted that, post-colonial Africa was characterized by rapid urbanization, with the urban population rising exponentially from 28 million in the 1950s to 125 million in the 1980s (World Bank, 1986). In line with such rapid urbanization, the AGR's scholarship centered around urban dynamics, food production, migration, and socio-economic shifts (Belshaw, 1963, 1964; O'Connor, 1965).

Similar to human geography, physical geography, while less emphasized, maintained a significant and steady focus. It initially accounted for 15.8% of the research, peaking at 22.73% in the middle period and slightly decreasing to 21.05% by the early 1970s. This highlights the relevance of natural landscapes and processes in the context of development pressures. Key studies, such as Kenworthy (1966) and Jackson (1969) were instrumental in enhancing understanding of regional climatic variations and their impact on agricultural productivity and water resource management. Conversely, environmental geography saw some level of fluctuation and decline, starting at 42.1% from 1963 to 1966, dropping to 22.7% from 1867 to 1970, and experiencing a slight increase to 26.3% from 1971 to 1974. This reflects an evolving interest in natural environmental resources in the early post-colonial era, driven by the perceived notion that urbanization was a mark of development (Mabogunje, 1995). Due to such notions of urban development, overexploitation of natural resources and the eventual environmental degradation were inevitable. The slight rise in environmental studies in the later periods also highlights the rising recognition of environmental issues that arose from over-exploiting natural resources (Mabogunje, 1995). Overall, studies from 1963 to 1974 maintained a balance between human, physical, and environmental geography, with most publications focusing on Uganda and other East African countries, authored by British educators.

I took a step further by grouping the emerging themes into more specific areas to better understand the nuanced shifts in specific research focus and better identify underrepresented or emerging topics. This refined categorization – presented in Figure 2 allows for tracing the

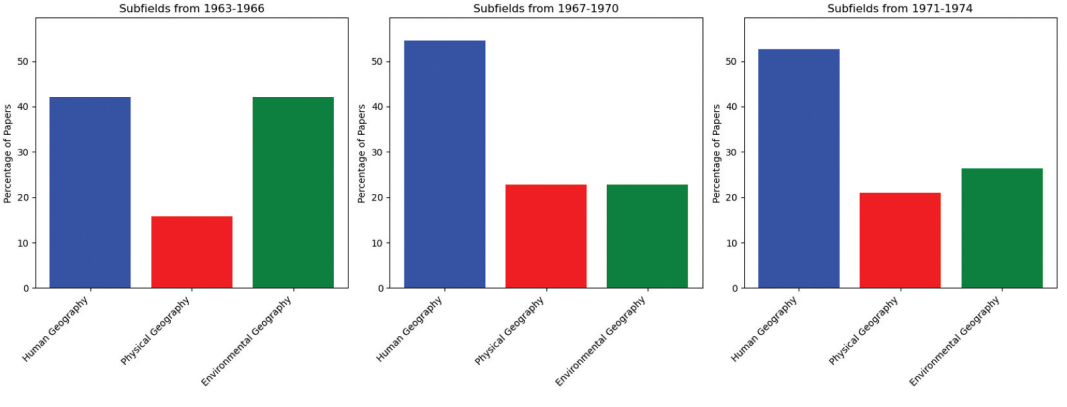

Figure 1. Publications in the subfields of geography between 1963 and 1974.

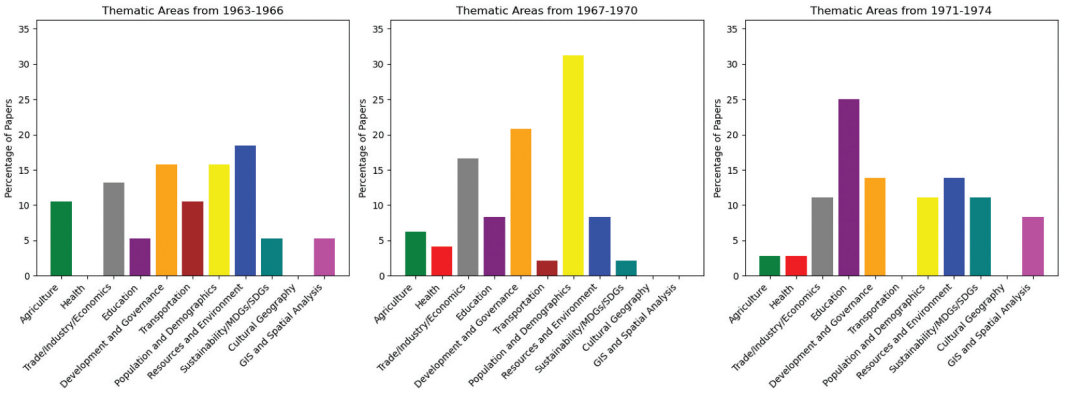

Figure 2. Thematic areas from 1963 to 1974.

development of geographical scholarship in relation to broader socioeconomic and environmental trends and for assessing how the journal has responded to and reflected the changing priorities and challenges faced by the African continent.

The results reflect a moderate coverage across nearly all the thematic areas, with 'population and demographics' and 'education' standing out in the middle and final periods, respectively. Agriculture, traditionally a staple in geographic research due to the region's agrarian-based economies, decreased from 10.53% in the early periods to 2.78% by 1974. This downward trend reflects regional economic strategies shifting from traditional agriculture toward industrialization and diversified economic activities. The drive for industrialization, central to developmentalism, led to a shift from agriculture to manufacturing as the primary strategy for advancing Africa's development and enhancing its position in the global political economy (World Bank, 2021). Industrialization was expected to bring about a new era of prosperity, including enhanced regional cooperation and integration. It promised the development of robust road, rail, sea, and air infrastructure to facilitate intra- and inter-regional trade and movement (Eyita-Okon, 2022) – hence, the shift from agrarian studies.

Studies related to sustainable development were initially less prominent at 5.2% but increased to 11.1% by the final years. This growth can be attributed to several factors, including the increasing recognition of the region's environmental challenges and resource management issues. During the 1960s and 1970s, scholars began to understand the long-term impacts of unsustainable practices on both local and global scales. Influential studies, such as those by Turner (1967) on the ecological problems of cattle ranching, highlighted the urgent need for sustainable approaches to development. Additionally, the early work of Jamal (1972) on the provision of social facilities in Uganda and Gould (1974) on school children and the provision of secondary school emphasized the importance of integrating social development with environmental sustainability. These studies demonstrate that the interest in sustainable development within African countries dates back to the 1960s, well before the more recent emphasis on MDGs and SDGs (Gould, 1974; Jamal, 1972; Langlands, 1967; Turner, 1967).

A notable trend is the consistent rise in education-related themes from as low as 5.3% in the early periods to 25% in the final years. This rise was driven by the quest for decolonizing education in Africa. According to Ndille (2018), the pioneers of African nationalism emphasized the importance of creating socioeconomic and cultural institutions that would uniquely define African states and assert their equal standing with formal colonial powers. Consequently, most African nations called for policy reforms that focused on the Africanization of African education (Ndille, 2018), leading to an increase in education-related scholarship. For example, the works of Ocitti in 1971 and 1973 focused on revolutionizing the geography syllabus in East Africa (Ocitti, 1971, 1973).

Similarly, population and demographics-related studies grew from 15.8% in the first period, peaking at 31.3% in the middle period before reducing to 11.1%. The spike may reflect increased interest in demographic changes, urban migration, and their implications on urban planning and resource management (Eyita-Okon, 2022; World Bank, 2021). Studies such as Charsley (1968), Hirst (1969), and Millman (1969) provide detailed insights into how demographic shifts influenced regional development and urbanization strategies. Similarly, development themes consistently attracted significant focus, peaking at 20.8% in the middle period, highlighting the importance of development studies in a post-colonial context grappling with nation-building and socioeconomic restructuring.

Trends in publication after the re-establishment of the AGR from 1997 to 2024

Results from 1997 to 2024 show that the early periods, from 1997 to 2006, experienced a significant shift in the publication focus from a hybrid of human, physical, and environmental geography in the early years of the EAGR to an increased focus on human geography. Topics ranged from politics, health, and waste management to other aspects of African socioeconomic development. The paucity of physical geography research in earlier periods is not unique to the AGR. A similar trend was reported by Manser (2019), who noted a shift in focus from physical to human geography in publications within the Geoforum journal. Historically, the marginalization of physical geography has been discussed within the geographic community. According to Rhoads (2004), physical geography publication in the AAG declined from 50% in 1911 to 21% in 2003. Rhoads noted that physical geography nearly faded between the 1920s and 1950s but was revived by the quantitative revolution.

This staggering nature of physical geography publications can be attributed to the fact that physical geographers often prefer to publish in interdisciplinary journals rather than general geography journals (Castree, 2005; Viles et al., 2005). Its entanglement with specialized fields like geomorphology, hydrology, ecology, and quaternary (Castree, 2012; Castree et al., 2009; Pidwirny, 2006) often means that the nuanced and specialized nature of these studies leads to a distribution of physical geography research across a wider array of specialized scientific journals. Consequently, general geography journals like the AGR may see a relatively lower proportion of purely physical geography papers as the field's researchers opt for journals whose scope more closely aligns with the specialized nature of their work. Nevertheless, scholars like Castree have advocated for a more integrated approach between physical and human geography, emphasizing that while each branch holds substantial independent value, their combined efforts possess an aggressive force (Castree, 2005). Accordingly, environmental geography, which explores the intersection between human and physical geography, saw a consistent increase in AGR's publications from 1997 onwards (Figure 3).

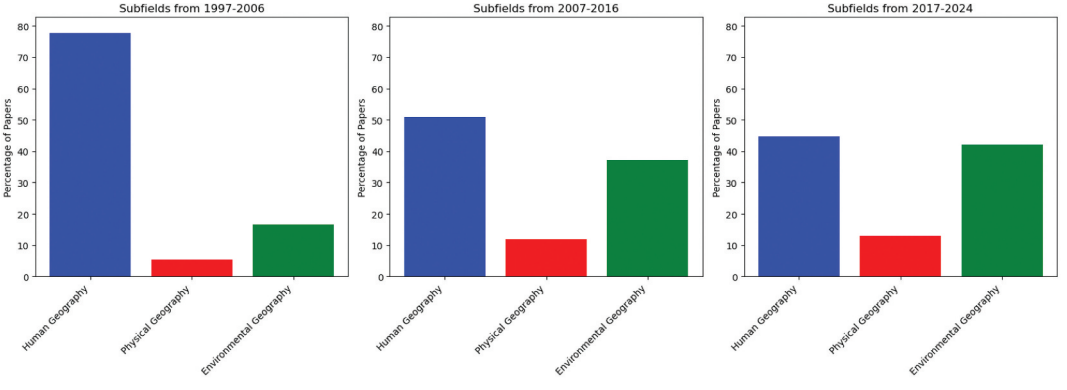

Figure 3. Publications in the subfields of geography between 1997 to 2024.

The increasing interest in physical geography in the AGR, particularly from 2007 onward, indicates a renewed interest and integration of physical geography within the broader geographic discourse in line with Castree's call for engaged pluralism (Castree, 2005). Also, the rise of Environmental Geography during these periods, with percentages significantly increasing from 16.6% in 1997–2006 to 37.1% in 2007–2016 and reaching 42.2% by 2017–2024, demonstrates an effort to bridge the gap between physical and human geography. This integration underlines a holistic understanding of geographic issues requiring combined insights from human, physical, and environmental perspectives. Such integration is crucial given the pressing environmental challenges facing the world and the African continent, such as climate variability, water scarcity, and biodiversity conservation, making this research timely and essential. These issues and the increasing Brentwood funding for SDGs have drawn the attention of African scholars toward environmental and sustainable development courses. For example, Bruckmann et al. (2022) explored how indigenous knowledge systems and local observations of climate variability are crucial for creating effective, community-based adaptation strategies. This research illuminates how the marriage between physical and human geography can facilitate a better understanding of environmental impacts on vulnerable ecosystems and communities. Similarly, the increased focus on environmental geography highlights the interconnectedness of human actions and physical geographic processes, providing comprehensive insights vital for devising effective management and conservation strategies.

A closer look at the specific thematic areas showed an even spread of publications across four major themes, especially in the middle and final periods, including development and governance, population and demographics, resources and environment, and sustainability/MDGs/SDGs. Collectively, these four themes represented about two-thirds of the publications in the middle and final periods. For obvious reasons, development and governance remain a cornerstone of geographic inquiry throughout the observed periods despite a decreasing trend in its relative emphasis. Rising from 17.6% of the thematic focus from 1997 to 2006, interest in development and governance issues peaked at 19.7% in the subsequent decade and declined to 14.3% by 2017–2024. The decline may reflect a maturation in the field's approach to development, transitioning from broad, overarching initiatives to more nuanced or specialized sub-themes as foundational challenges are progressively addressed or redefined within newer global contexts.

Conversely, studies on population demographics, resources, and environment exhibit consistent increases. The emphasis on population and demographics increased steadily from 11.8% in the early period to 16.8% in the last period. This increase likely corresponds with global concerns such as urbanization, migration, and the socioeconomic impacts of demographic shifts, highlighting the critical role of geographic analysis in understanding and planning for these dynamics. Similarly, resources and the environment also exhibit a marked increase in attention, particularly in the last two periods. With an initial focus of 2.9%, which escalated to over 18.9% by 2017–2024, this theme captures the growing urgency of environmental issues. The substantial rise in prominence aligns with the global surge in environmental awareness driven by climate change, resource depletion, and sustainability.

Another remarkable trend is seen in the rise of studies related to sustainability, millennium development goals (MDGs), and sustainable development goals (SDGs). The trajectory of research in this thematic area aligns with the increasing emphasis of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals from their establishment in 2000 to their conclusion in 2015. Along this line, the sustainability/MDGs/SDGs thematic area received significant attention in the early periods of 1997 to 2006 (17.6%), peaking at 22.5% in the middle periods of 2007 to 2016, and subsequently dropping to 13.1% in the final periods of 2017 to 2024. This highlights the global shift toward integrating sustainable development into international and local policies, reflecting the period of active implementation of the MDGs and the transition to the SDGs.

The thematic areas of health, GIS, and spatial analysis exhibit an interesting trend over the years, showing a dip in focus during the middle period (2007–2016) and a subsequent rise in the final

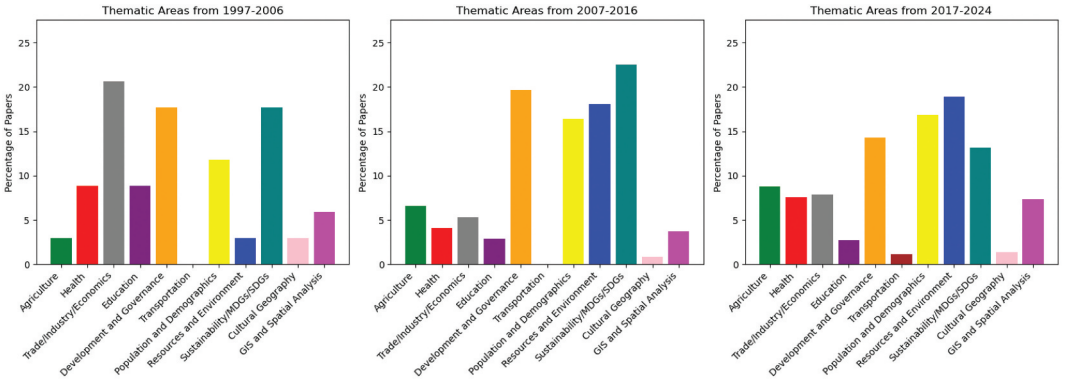

Figure 4. Thematic areas from 1997 to 2024.

periods (2017–2024). This pattern suggests a dynamic shift in research priorities and methodologies that align with broader technological advancements and evolving public health challenges. Starting with a relatively high focus in the early period (1997–2006) at 8.82%, interest in health-related studies decreased to 4.10% in the middle period. The dip in health-related studies during the middle period could be attributed to several factors. One possible reason is the increasing attention to other pressing issues, such as economic development, environmental sustainability, and political stability, temporarily overshadowing health-related research. For example, during this time, studies explored Africa in the neoliberal-globalized world (Negi, 2008; Oberhauser & Hanson, 2007), agricultural policy and trade (Ledermann & Moseley, 2007; Tewolde, 2010), and food, livelihood, and sustainable resource management (Lane et al., 2012; Njeru, 2012; Stern, 2012).

However, the final period shows a resurgence to 7.60%, likely due to global health crises such as the Ebola and Zika outbreaks and, later, the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the need for geographical research to track disease patterns, understand health resource distribution, and plan public health interventions. The notable increase in GIS and spatial analysis in the final period could be attributed to advancements in GIS technology and increased accessibility of spatial data, which have expanded the scope and depth of geographic research. The rising prominence of climate change, urbanization, and resource management has also likely driven the need for more sophisticated spatial analytical tools to address complex geographical questions Figure 4.

Contribution of the AGR to African scholarship

To understand the contribution of the AGR to African scholarship over time, we started by carrying out a spatiotemporal analysis of publications from 1963 to 2024. The result shows that during the initial period from 1963 to 1974, when the focus of the then EAGR was essentially on East African countries, Uganda dominated the publications, accounting for nearly half of the articles (49.02%). This significant concentration is likely because it was home to the EAGR then. This was followed by Kenya and Tanzania, with 15.69% and 13.73%, respectively, indicating a robust East African focus in the scholarly output. Other countries such as Sudan, Zambia, Malawi, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Burundi had notably lower percentages, ranging from 5.88% to 1.96%, suggesting a lesser but still notable focus on these regions.

Following its adoption by the African Specialty Group (ASG) and its subsequent rebranding as the African Geographical Review, there was a significant expansion in the range of countries studied and a notable intensification of research interest in several key regions, particularly West Africa. From 1997 to 2006, there was a modest representation of various African countries, with Ghana and Nigeria showing slightly higher representation than other African countries at 3 and 4 publications, respectively. South Africa and Eritrea were also affiliated, with 2 publications each. This period

marked the beginning of more extensive coverage of African geography, with 8 countries represented in the publications. The subsequent period from 2007 to 2016 shows an increased diversity in the countries covered, with about 21 African countries covered. Notably, Ghana and Nigeria began to stand out more clearly with 12 and 5 publications, respectively. This is consistent with growing academic interest in West Africa, likely reflecting an acknowledgment of these countries' rising geopolitical and economic significance.

The most notable expansion is seen in the recent period from 2017 to 2024, with the journal featuring articles from 31 different African countries. The period also showed a surge in focus on Ghana, which leaps to 73 publications, and Nigeria, which increased to 29. South Africa also emerges as a significant focus area, affiliated with 28 publications. This surge indicates a concentrated effort to engage with regions experiencing rapid economic changes, urban expansion, and significant social challenges. The broadening of the journal's geographic coverage enhances the richness of its academic contributions and aligns with Africa's multifaceted challenges and opportunities. By extending its reach to encompass a wider array of African experiences, the African Geographical Review significantly contributes to a deeper understanding of the continent's complex geographical narratives, supporting a more nuanced and comprehensive portrayal of Africa's development, environmental issues, and social transformations.

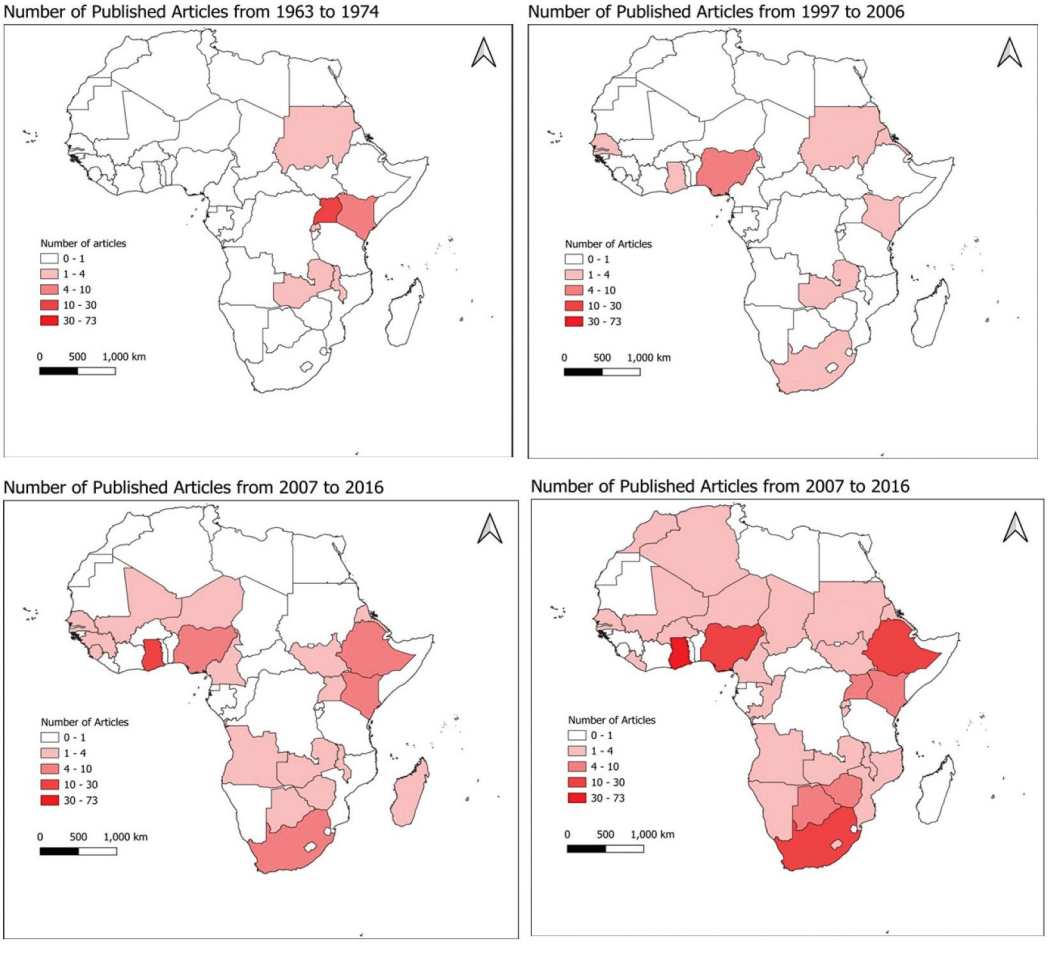

Figure 5. Changes in publication locations over time.

A co-occurrence analysis (see Appendix III) revealed that Ghana was prominent across nearly all thematic areas, particularly agriculture, development, population and demographics, and resources and environment. The strong emphasis on development (21 occurrences) and population and demographics (30 occurrences) signals a deep interest in urban and socioeconomic dynamics, which is crucial for understanding Ghana's rapid urbanization and demographic transformations. The significant mentions in Resources and Environment (26) also illustrate a comprehensive approach to addressing complex geographical and environmental challenges. Countries like Nigeria focused more on areas like Population and Demographics, GIS, and Spatial Analysis, highlighting the country's complex urban and socioeconomic systems. In contrast, South Africa is noted for its balanced attention across Development, Education, and Population and Demographics. This mirrors ongoing national efforts to tackle educational reforms and socio-economic inequalities Figure 5.

Besides the spatial coverage of the AGR, The AGR has contributed significantly to African scholarship since its inauguration in 1963. According to Google Scholar's top publication list[4], the AGR is ranked the 10th most influential journal in African Studies and History. Its contribution has grown tremendously in the last half of the past decade, as evident in the citation level of the journal articles by African scholars, recording a total of 995 citations since 2009 and 720 in the last five years (https://research.com/journal/african-geographical-review). Among the most cited articles are those on urban food security, climate change adaptation practices, sustainable development, and millennium development goals.

Overall, the AGR has experienced significant growth since its adoption by the ASG and the subsequent acquisition by Taylor and Francis, which provided additional resources and professional support for its development. In particular, the journal has published articles on contemporary issues in Africa and other parts of the world. Even though its impact factor is relatively low at 1.7, with a Scopus impact factor of 3.8, it has recorded a 506.1% growth rate since it was adopted by the ASG, with an annual growth rate of about 56.2%. The AGR records a total of about 33,000 downloads and views annually. According to the Taylor and Francis website, the AGR is also ranked Q2, which places it in the second quarter of most cited journals within the discipline of geography.

Conclusion

The historical and thematic analysis of the African Geographical Review (AGR) over the past six decades has provided invaluable insights into the evolution of geographical scholarship in Africa. From its inception in 1963 to its most recent publications in 2024, the AGR has played a pivotal role in shaping and reflecting the continent's geographical discourse. Its journey from the East African Geographical Review, with a strong focus on East African issues, to a globally recognized journal that encompasses many African perspectives highlights its importance and resilience in the academic landscape. Throughout its history, the AGR has adapted to significant socio-political and economic changes within Africa and globally. The shift in thematic emphasis from primarily human and physical geography to include more pronounced coverage of environmental issues and sustainability reflects broader global trends toward addressing urgent environmental challenges and sustainable development goals. This shift is particularly noteworthy, as it coincides with global environmental awareness and the strategic implementation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

The journal's relocation to North America and subsequent adoption by the ASG of the AAG has expanded its reach and influence, allowing it to attract a broader array of scholarly works from across the globe. This move and the acquisition by Taylor & Francis have arguably enabled the AGR to maintain its publication standards and relevance in a competitive academic publishing environment. The increase in the diversity of its articles, which now cover a vast range of topics from across all African regions, attests to its success in capturing the complexities of the continent's geographical issues. The AGR's commitment to inclusivity and diversity, as demonstrated by its expanding

editorial board and the inclusion of articles in multiple languages, positions it as a crucial platform for promoting African geographical scholarship. The journal's efforts to provide a voice to African scholars and address local and regional issues within a global context have enriched the academic community and provided practical insights that influence policy and development strategies across the continent. As the AGR continues to evolve, its role in fostering a deeper understanding of African geographies still needs to be improved. Its ability to adapt to the changing academic and geographical landscapes will be crucial in maintaining its relevance and continuing to contribute to the global discourse on geography. With ongoing challenges such as climate change, urbanization, and socioeconomic disparities, the insights provided by the AGR will be vital for developing effective strategies to address these issues, ensuring that geographical scholarship continues to play a critical role in shaping Africa's future.

Notes

1. The Sabinet Journal houses a host of historical African publications: https://journals.co.za/loi/eagr
2. The CrossRef API was created by Nick Santos and published on the Git Hub website for public use at https://gist.github.com/nickrsan/487fa512050f8eb66b7cccd6dc5624da.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendices

Appendix I: Definition of Subfields

Human geography is concerned with the economic, political, social, cultural, and historical aspects of geography (Castree et al., 2009).

Keywords: population, demographic, migration, urbanization, fertility, mortality, birth rate, death rate, cultural, heritage, tradition, language, religion, identity, cultural landscape, ethnicity, customs, societal norms, economic, trade, industry, commerce, market, globalization, development, wealth, poverty, urban economies, agricultural economies, urban, city, metropolis, urban planning, infrastructure, housing, land use, gentrification, neighborhood, urban sprawl, politics, geopolitics, governance, borders, nations, diplomacy, conflict, war, international relations, food security, nutrition, diet, food policy, agribusiness, agricultural trade, GIS, spatial analysis, mapping, data visualization, land use planning.

Physical Geography: This is concerned with the natural environment and the spatial characteristics of various natural aspects, such as the hydrosphere, lithosphere, atmosphere, and biosphere. Physical geography describes a group of specialisms whose diverse practitioners exist in geography departments but also cognate locations of schools of ecology, earth sciences, environmental sciences, and geoscience departments, among others (Castree, 2012). It encompasses various subfields like geomorphology, hydrology, ecology, quaternary, and climatology (Castree, 2012; Castree et al., 2009; Pidwirny, 2006).

Keywords: climate, mountain, river, hills, valleys, plate tectonics, erosion, landforms, glaciers, soil, weather, temperature, precipitation, wind patterns, storms, droughts, heat waves, global warming, climate change, ecosystems, habitats, biodiversity, flora, fauna, conservation, species distribution, ecological niches, food chain, water bodies, lakes, oceans, aquifers, watersheds, water cycle, rainfall, groundwater, agricultural land use, irrigation, soil fertility, topography, terrain analysis.

Environmental Geography: Environmental geography, sometimes called the "human-environment or the man-land tradition of geography" (Castree et al., 2009: 2), is concerned with bridging the gap between human and physical geography. It is concerned with the relationship between the human and physical aspects of the environment. It serves as the common ground where all sub-fields and traditions of geography (not only human and physical geography), including regional geography and GIS, connect with each other and with other environmental studies carried out outside the field of geography as a whole (Castree et al., 2009).

Keywords: sustainable development, renewable, conservation, carbon, carbon footprint, green economy, eco-friendly, recycling, environmental policy, resource management, waste, planning, greenhouse, green house, sea-level, resource management, land use, environmental planning, pollution, waste management, environmental conservation, mitigation, adaptation, global warming, greenhouse gases, sea-level rise, environmental impact, climate policies, deforestation, urban sprawl, natural resource exploitation, exploitation, degradation, land degradation, agricultural practices, pollution, sustainable farming, permaculture, regenerative agriculture, agroecology, environmental monitoring, conservation mapping, ecological footprint, landscape, disaster, green, erosion, flood, fire, region, hydroclimate, climate, geology, topography, geomorphology, weather, terrain, atlas, forest degradation, land cover, land use, hydrology, geological, resources, environment, greenhouse, mining, ghg, ecology, drought, water, soil, exosystem, forest, waste, waste management, vegetation.

Appendix II: Definition of thematic areas

Agriculture: This thematic area focuses on all issues related to agriculture and food producers, including smallholders.

Keywords: agriculture, livelihood, farm, cropping, smallholder, crop, cultivation, agricultural, agro, horticulture, farmers, irrigation, farming, harvest, yield, drought, fertilizer, soil, and farmer.

Health: Health encompasses studies related to physical, mental, and social well-being. It involves research on diseases, public health interventions, healthcare systems, and epidemiology.

Keywords: covid, wellbeing, well-being, hiv, anemia, diarrhea, Ebola, polio, vaccine, medical, health, malaria, disease, mortality, wellness, hospital, nutrition, aids, epidemic, diabetes, hypertension, pandemic, outbreak, treatment, and healthcare.

Trade/Industry/Economics: This area covers the commercial exchange of goods and services, industrial production processes – including tourism, and economic theories and practices influencing market dynamics.

Keywords: trade, tourism, tourist, economic, economics, industry, factory, manufacturing, industrial, mining, extraction, commerce, market, trader, production, goods, economy, and business.

Education: Education involves the systems and methods for teaching and learning. It includes formal institutional learning and the pedagogical strategies used to impart knowledge.

Keywords: school, schooling, education, research, scientific methods, methodology, field notes, learning, archives, high school, syllabus, curriculum, classroom, teaching, students, academic, institution, college, university.

Development and Governance: This theme explores the processes involved in the improvement of social, political, and economic conditions. It includes studies on public policies, urban planning, and the roles of governance in societal progress.

Keywords: public policy, leader, leaders, china, chinese, public, policy, governance, politics, political, development, planning, modernization, settlement, policies, infrastructure, housing, urbanization, growth, progress, reconstruction.

Transportation: Transportation studies focus on systems, services, and technologies for moving people and goods from one location to another. This includes research on logistics, infrastructure, and mobility solutions.

Keywords: transport, railway, airfreight, dhow, shipping, logistics, freight, port, import, export.

Population and Demographics: This area examines the characteristics of populations, including size, growth, density, distribution, and various demographic variables. Studies often address migration, urbanization, and demographic shifts.

Keywords: population, asylum, refugee, refugees, settlement, census, migration, distribution, demographic, birthrate, death rate, ethnicity, community, urban, rural, sprawl, slum, urbanization.

Resources and Environment: This theme covers the natural and built environments and the interactions between humans and their ecological settings. It often focuses on sustainability, conservation, and resource management.

Keywords: landscape, disaster, green, erosion, flood, fire, region, hydroclimate, climate, geology, topography, geomorphology, weather, terrain, atlas, forest degradation, land cover, land use, hydrology, geological, resources, environment, greenhouse, mining, ghg, ecology, drought, water, soil, exosystem, forest, waste, waste management, vegetation.

Sustainability/MDGs/SDGs: Studies in this area focus on sustainable development goals and millennium development goals. They involve research aimed at promoting an equitable, sustainable future for all.

Keywords: poverty, SDGs, MDGs, sustainable livelihood, female, sdg, mdg, hunger, food, security, food security, food sovereignty, universal primary education, gender, women, girl, children, sustainability, sustainable, equality, empower, empowerment, water, clean, sanitation, education, good health, affordable, gender inequality, inequalities, peace, justice, food system.

Cultural Geography: Cultural geography is concerned with the study of cultural products and norms and their variations across and relations to spaces and places.

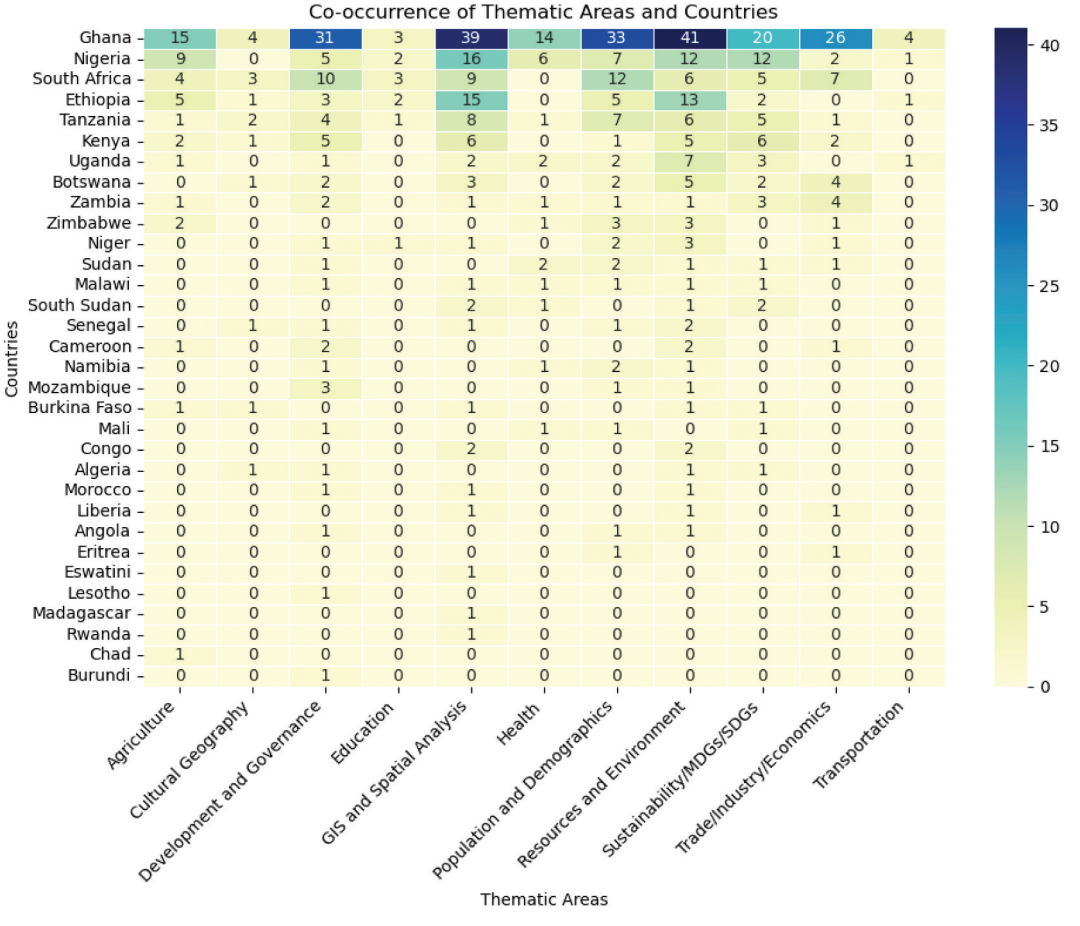
Keywords: heritage, tradition, culture, customs, society, identity, diversity, arts, language, folklore.

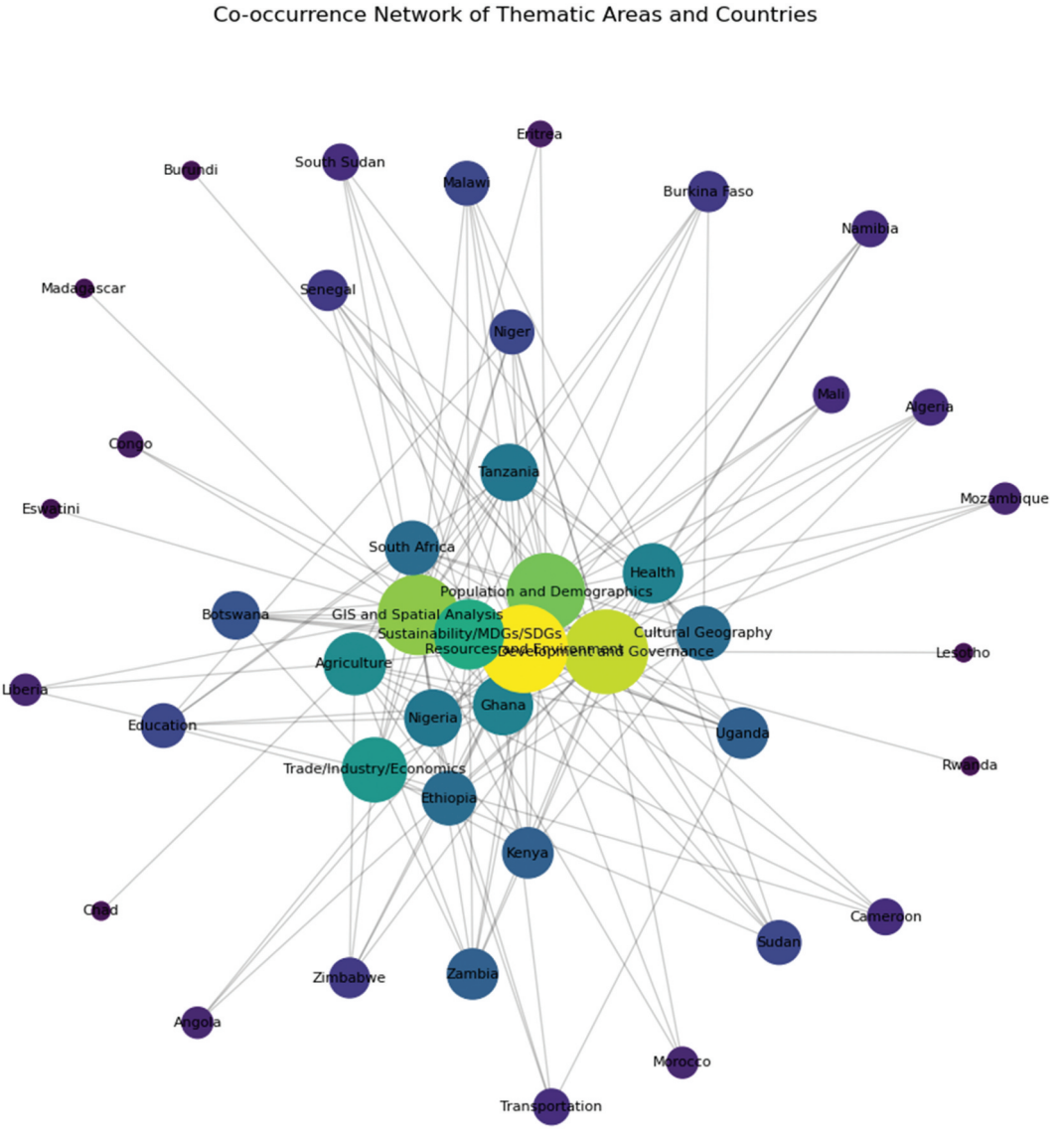
GIS and Spatial Analysis: This field involves the use of geographic information systems and remote sensing technologies to collect, analyze, and interpret location-based data to understand various patterns, trends, and conditions.

Keywords: gis, rs, geospatial, spatial, spatial analysis, mapping, remote sensing, satellite imagery, geocoding, geoinformation, data visualization, land cover change, spatio, spatio-temporal, spatial metrics.

Appendix III: Co-occurrence analysis

To understand the geographical focus and thematic emphasis of contemporary research in Africa, we carried out a co-occurrence analysis between countries and thematic areas in the African Geographical Review. This mapping of thematic concentrations reveals how specific countries dominate certain areas of geographic research, reflecting both regional priorities and global concerns.




Co-occurrence Network of Thematic Areas and Countries
Eritrea
South Sudan
Burundi
Malawi
Burkina Faso
Namibia
Madagascar
Senegal
Niger
Mali
Algeria
Congo
Tanzania
Mozambique
Eswatini
South Africa
Health
Population and Demographics
Botswana
GIS and Spatial Analysis
Sustainability/MDGs/SDGs
Cultural Geography
Resources and Environment
Development and Governance
Lesotho
Agriculture
Liberia
Ghana
Nigeria
Education
Uganda
Trade/Industry/Economics
Rwanda
Ethiopia
Kenya
Chad
Cameroon
Sudan
Zimbabwe
Zambia
Angola
Morocco
Transportation