

## A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF TOURISM POLICY IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH

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**Abstract:** Policy implementation is a significant process in tourism destination management that facilitates translating regulations into practice. However, there is a paucity of research on this process in the context of tourism. This study sought to assess research trends on tourism policy implementation to establish the existing trends and identify gaps for future studies. A bibliometric review approach was adopted. The study found that extant research focused on identifying policy implementation barriers, whilst a few addressed implementation process evaluation and stakeholder implementation frameworks. Most barriers emanated from governance and sustainability issues. The findings imply that geographical, theoretical and practical gaps exist.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Policy, Planning, Implementation, Sustainable Development

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism policy is critical to tourism destination management and its overall sustainability agenda (Pandy and Rogerson, 2021). It is the cornerstone of most tourism destination management practices, translating intention into the desired changes to solve problems (Davidescu et al., 2024). Tourism policy is largely part of public policy that guides the course of action of industry stakeholders (Aguinis et al., 2023), solves the resultant impacts of tourism, and improves stakeholders' quality of life (Baptista et al., 2019). Though policy is the vehicle for change as goals and objectives are turned into reality (Khan and Khandaker, 2016), a well-formulated policy does not guarantee successful implementation (Muangasame and McKercher, 2015). Policy implementation has been defined as the “process through which policy ideas and plans are translated into practice” (Dredge and Jenkins, 2007:170).

In reality, policy implementation is influenced by many complex, multifaceted and multilevel factors (Ariyani and Fauzi, 2022; Hudson et al., 2019; Zulkefli et al., 2022). In many instances, the implementation of policy is often marred by challenges such as bureaucracy and public dissatisfaction (Hayat, 2023), conflict of interests among stakeholders (Aditya et al., 2023), lack of leadership goodwill, lack of finances, poor coordination, lack of integration between different policies and public organisations, lack of commitment and lack of capacity among implementers (Andriotis et al., 2018; Khan and Khandaker, 2016; Trein et al., 2021). These barriers call for attention towards research on effective policy implementation (Arbolino et al., 2021).

Policy implementation poses a challenge for many sectors (Li, 2023). Whilst most policy studies focus on the formulation process, studies on implementation and how to improve it remain scant (Novato et al., 2024; Khan and Khandaker, 2016; Maxim, 2015; Sun et al., 2024). This is especially so in the case of tourism, where policies are often either not implemented or partially implemented (Guo et al., 2019; Krutwaysho and Bramwell, 2010). Implementation is critical because it facilitates change, helps address negative impacts by providing solutions to challenges, enhances governance and accountability, enforces compliance, facilitates stakeholder engagement, and helps build the destination's reputation and image. Thus, the lack of attention to research focused on implementation has implications for the efficacy of translating policy into tangible change. Policy implementation research helps to identify challenges and best practices, hence improving the efficacy of implementation (Androitis et al., 2018). It also provides the basis for monitoring and evaluation, thereby generating feedback that informs future policies and further improves existing ones (Mumtaz and de Oliveira, 2023; Connelly and Sam, 2018). Failure in policy implementation is not only a waste of time and resources but may also result in the persistence of problems meant to be addressed by the policy (Androitis et al., 2018; Hall, 2013; Ramaano, 2021). Above all, effective implementation justifies all other forms of research outputs that inform policy. These practical and theoretical gaps inform the focus and rationale of this study.

This study sought to assess the state of research on tourism policy implementation to establish the existing trends and identify gaps for future studies. The following objectives guided this study:

- i) Establish the publication and citation trends of tourism policy implementation research articles from 2014 to 2023.
- ii) Identify countries and regions that contributed the most to the body of knowledge on research on tourism policy implementation.

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- iii) Highlight the top 10 most influential journals in tourism policy implementation research.
- iv) Examine the nature of collaborations existing in tourism policy implementation research.
- iv) Analyse the intellectual structure of the tourism policy implementation research knowledge base.
- v) Determine the main emergent themes from tourism policy implementation research.

This article comprises five sections. The first section is the introduction, followed by the methodology in section two. The third section presents the study findings. These findings are further discussed in section four. The fifth section provides the conclusion and recommendations for further studies based on the findings.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Bibliometric analysis was used to review studies on tourism policy implementation. This methodology has been used in various recent tourism studies to identify gaps and prevalent and future trends (Aji et al., 2024; Bekele, 2024; Dube, 2024; Julio Guerrero and Dias, 2023; Martínez-Navarro et al., 2024; Sutiksno et al., 2024, Zheng et al., 2023). The data was retrieved from the Scopus database because it covers a wide range of journals that contain many tourism publications (Visser et al., 2021). A search string "tourism policy" AND implement\* was used to guide the search within the title, abstract, and keywords of documents on Scopus. The last search for the study was run on the 2nd of February 2024.

The Boolean search query used for the study was:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "tourism policy" AND implement\* ) AND PUBYEAR > 2013 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA, "BUSI" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA, "SOCI" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA, "ENVI" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE, "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( EXACTKEYWORD, "Tourism Policy" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( EXACTKEYWORD, "Policy Implementation" ) )

The document search and screening process is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

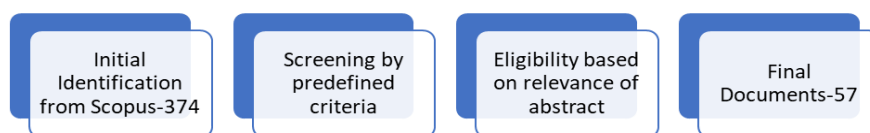


Figure 1. Identification, Screening and Eligibility Criteria Flowchart (Source: Authors)

The search was limited to documents published from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2023 to ensure the inclusion of contemporary issues in the discipline. The initial search yielded 374 documents. It was further restricted to studies in business management and accounting, social sciences, environmental sciences, and arts and humanities, as these are the disciplines in which tourism is mainly located. This restriction reduced the number of documents to 213. The next exclusion criteria removed documents that were not journal articles, resulting in 161 articles. Out of these, articles not in English were excluded, resulting in 145 articles. Lastly, to further refine the search for the study topic, the keywords “tourism policy” and “tourism implementation” were applied within the search, resulting in a final sample of 57 documents, which were then considered for the study. Citation, co-authorship, co-citation, and co-occurrence analyses were conducted using Vos Viewer software. Descriptive analysis using Excel was also done. The study findings were then presented in the next section.

**RESULTS**

**Publication and Citation Trends over the past decade**

The study sought to establish the publication and citation trends of tourism policy implementation research publications from 2014 to 2023. As illustrated in Figure 1, the study findings demonstrate a fluctuating trend in the number of publications and citations throughout the previous decade. Nevertheless, it appears that the years 2018 and 2020 account for a considerable contribution. In addition, there is a noticeable rising trajectory starting from 2021.

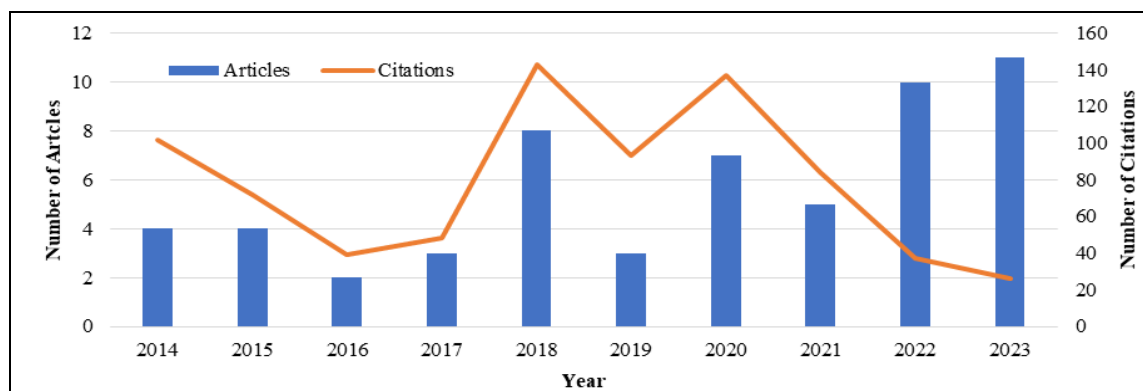


Figure 2. Volume of publications and citations over ten years

**Contribution by Country and Region**

Citation analysis was conducted to establish the most influential country in tourism policy implementation research. Based on the results presented in Figure 2, the United Kingdom (UK) was the most influential country in tourism policy

implementation research. The UK took the lead in terms of both the number of articles and citations. The other top five primary contributors in terms of volume of publications were Spain, China, Indonesia, and Norway. China, Italy, Canada, and the United States were among the top five most influential countries in terms of citations. South Africa was the only African country among the top 20 influential countries.

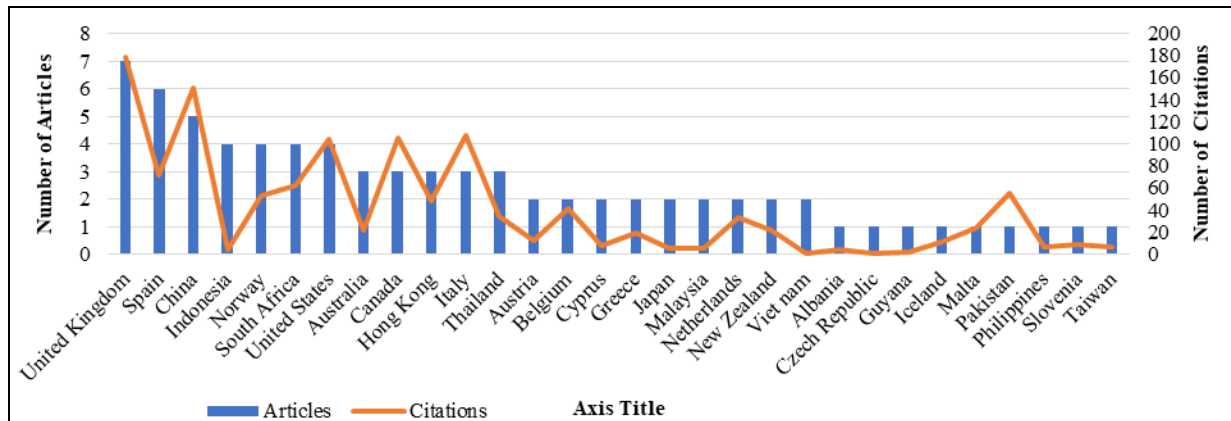


Figure 3. Volume of Articles and Citations per Country

**The Top Ten Most Influential Journals**

A citation analysis was performed to ascertain the journals with the greatest impact. Citation analysis helps determine the impact of a study by identifying the most cited author or journal (Durieux and Gevenois, 2010). In addition to the number of publications and citations, cite score, SNIP and SJR matrices were used to determine the impact of the journals. Of 34 journals, 28 met the minimum threshold of 1 article and 1 citation per journal. The results, as presented in Table 1, indicate that the most influential journal in policy implementation research was the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, followed by the Journal of Travel Research, Current Issues in Tourism, Journal of Environmental Management, Tourism Management Perspectives and Tourism Review. Notably, policy-specific journals are not among the top five most influential. This indicates a preference for interdisciplinary journals.

Table 1. Citation analysis of journals

Journal Name	TP	TC	CPP	Cite Score <sup>a</sup>	SNIP <sup>a</sup>	SJR <sup>b</sup>
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	7	150	21	18.9	3.148	2.966
Journal of Travel Research	1	58	58	16.6	3.062	3.249
Current Issues in Tourism	2	24	12	13.7	2.547	2.062
Journal of Environmental Management	1	32	32	13.4	1.849	1.678
Tourism Management Perspectives	1	46	46	12.8	2.312	1.92
Tourism Review	2	39	20	12.8	2.13	1.878
Tourism Recreation Research	2	27	14	8.9	1.515	1.066
Sustainability (Switzerland)	4	199	50	5.8	1.198	0.664
Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events	3	27	9	4.8	1.103	0.561
International Journal of Tourism Policy	5	35	7	1.5	0.392	0.202

Notes: TP=Total Publication; TC=Total Citation; CPP= Citation per Publication; SNIP=Source Normalised Impact per Paper; SJR=Scimago Journal Ranking; Figures for 2022 provided by Scopus; Figures for 2022 provided by ScimagoJR

**Nature of Collaboration among Countries**

Co-authorship analysis was conducted to establish the nature of collaborations among countries. Based on a minimum threshold of 1 article and 1 citation per country, co-authorship analysis showed that only 15 countries out of a total of 38 countries had co-authorship links and collaborations with other countries. As presented in Figure 4, the countries with collaborations were clustered into four. The circles represent the countries, while the lines represent the relationships. The size of the circles indicates the number of collaborations per country, while the thickness of the lines and the distance between them show the strength of the collaborations (Liao et al., 2018).

The red cluster comprised Canada (3 articles, 105 citations), China (5 articles, 151 citations), Italy (3 articles, 108 citations), and Pakistan (1 article, 56 citations). The blue cluster comprised the Netherlands (2 articles, 33 citations), South Africa (4 articles, 63 citations), Belgium (2 articles, 42 citations), and Australia (3 articles, 22 citations). The green cluster comprised the United Kingdom (7 articles, 179 citations), Spain (6 articles, 72 citations), Malta (1 article, 24 citations), and Greece (2 articles, 20 citations). The yellow cluster comprised Norway (4 articles, 52 citations), Austria (2 articles, 13 citations), and Slovenia (1 article, 9 citations).

Out of these, the four leading countries in collaborations were the United Kingdom with a total link strength (TLS) of 7(the lead in the green cluster), Canada with a TLS of 5 (the lead in the red cluster), Netherlands with a TLS of 5 (the lead in the blue cluster), and Norway with TLS of 4 (the lead in the yellow cluster). South Africa (TLS of 4) was the only country from Africa. The collaboration was both intercountry and intercontinental. Though all five continents were represented, Europe was leading while Africa was trailing. Moreover, the United Kingdom was the dominant country.



Figure 4 Co-authorship analysis based on countries  
Co-authorship analysis is based on a minimum threshold of 1 article and 1 citation per country

**Knowledge Structure of Tourism Policy Implementation Research**

Co-citation was conducted to determine the knowledge structure of tourism policy implementation research. The interconnection of the issues among co-cited articles forms a cluster of literature networks, determining the knowledge structure and identifying the authors that made foundation contributions to the domain (Shin and Perdue, 2019). The analysis was based on cited authors with a minimum threshold of 10 citations per author. Of the 4714 cited authors, 26 met this threshold. Among the resulting 26 authors, only 25 were connected, and these are presented as four clusters in Figure 5. The largest cluster (red) had nine authors, led by Dredge, D. (37 citations), who extensively researched tourism policy, planning, and governance. Others, like Bramwell, B. (38 citations), focused on tourism governance and sustainability, while Jenkins, J. (21 citations) focused on tourism policy.

The second largest cluster (green) has seven authors, led by Hall, C.M. (75 citations), who has published in, among other areas, tourism policy, planning, and governance in relation to sustainable tourism. This is also the leading cluster in terms of citations. Other authors in this cluster include Dodds, R. (23 citations), who focused on sustainable tourism policy implementation, and Gossling, S. (24 citations), who focused on COVID-19 and sustainability. The third cluster (blue) has six authors led by Getz, D. (12 citations), who is widely published in, among others, tourism events planning and policy. The last cluster (yellow) has three authors led by Sharpley, R., who has published on tourism development, products such as dark tourism, destination management and its emerging concerns, such as the dynamics of host communities.

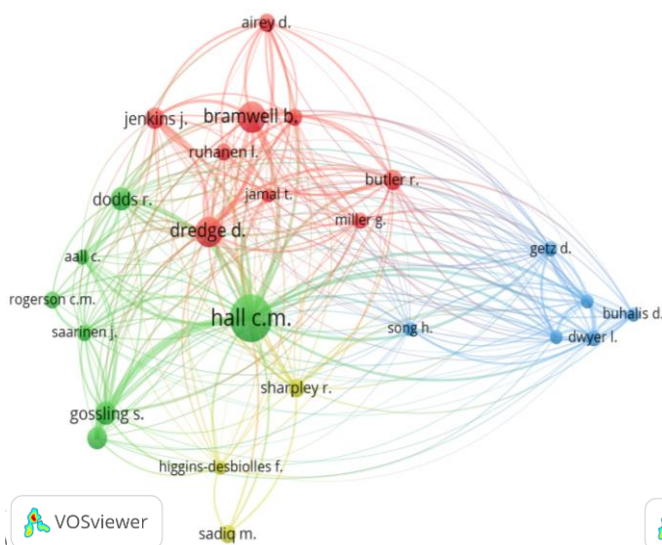


Figure 5. Co-citation based on cited authors. Analysis based on a minimum number of citations per author of 10

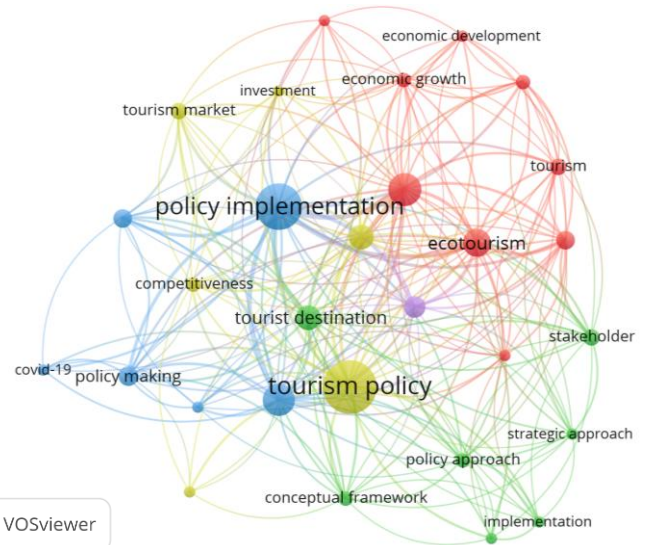


Figure 6. Network visualisation. Of Co-occurrence analysis based on all keywords. The analysis is based on a minimum occurrence of 3 keywords

**Emergent themes from tourism policy implementation research**

Co-occurrence analysis was conducted to identify the themes that characterised extant studies on tourism policy implementation. Co-occurrence refers to words that appear together in the same article. The analysis helps identify a discipline's topical trends, themes and emerging issues (Garrigos-Simon et al., 2018). Network visualisation was employed to depict the themes, while overlay visualisation was used to show their evolving trends over time. The circles represent the keywords, while the thickness of the lines and the distance between them show the connectivity between them. The larger the circle, the higher the frequency of occurrence. The closer the circles and the thicker the lines, the stronger the relationship between the terms. The analysis was based on all keywords (author and index) set at a minimum threshold of 3 occurrences a keyword. Of 344 total keywords, 29 met the threshold. The findings from the study based on network visualisation are illustrated in Figure 6 below. Five clusters of keywords emerged from the study. The leading keywords in each cluster in descending order were as follows; tourism policy (yellow), policy implementation (green), tourism development (red), tourist destination (blue), and sustainable tourism (purple).

The largest cluster (Red) was focused on research on sustainable tourism development policies with a bias towards tourist product development, economic perspective and governance factors. Several studies focused on sustainable tourism

models such as ecotourism. The cluster comprised nine keywords, namely tourism development (16), ecotourism (12), sustainable development (6), Tourism (5), sustainable tourism policy (4), economic growth (4), economic development (3), governance approach (3), and tourist attraction (3). The second largest cluster (green) focused on tourism policy and planning frameworks and tourism destination stakeholders. It was made up of seven keywords, namely tourist destination (10), stakeholder-5, conceptual framework (4), policy approach (4), strategic approach (3), implementation (3) and tourism planning (3). The third cluster (blue) focused on policy formulation and implementation challenges, including those meant to counter the COVID-19 crisis. It had six keywords: policy implementation (28), tourism management (15), policymaking (7), tourism economics (6), COVID-19 (3), and policy development (3). The fourth cluster (yellow) focused on tourism policy in the context of various destination issues. It had six keywords: tourism policy (35), sustainability (10), tourism market (5), competitiveness (4), investment (3), and destination management (3). The last cluster (purple) focused on sustainable tourism and had only one keyword: sustainable tourism (8).

The findings on trends and evolution of the research topics are presented via overlay visualisation in Figure 7, using coloured clusters. The study topics evolve from the purple cluster, which has the oldest topics, to the green, then the yellow cluster, which shows the latest research areas. The results show that the oldest topics (purple cluster) before 2018 included policy approach, competitiveness, stakeholders, sustainable development, destination management and tourist destination.

Studies on tourism management, tourist markets, and sustainable tourism followed these from around 2019. These were, in turn, followed by a focus on sustainable tourism policy formulation and tourism policy implementation around 2020. Within these, the focus was on governance and tourism development issues, with studies adopting an economic perspective. Studies during this period also focused on the use of frameworks. Lastly, after 2020, we had the most recent studies based on the COVID-19 crisis and investment issues in tourism and tourist attractions. Sustainability, especially from an economic perspective, was still popular.

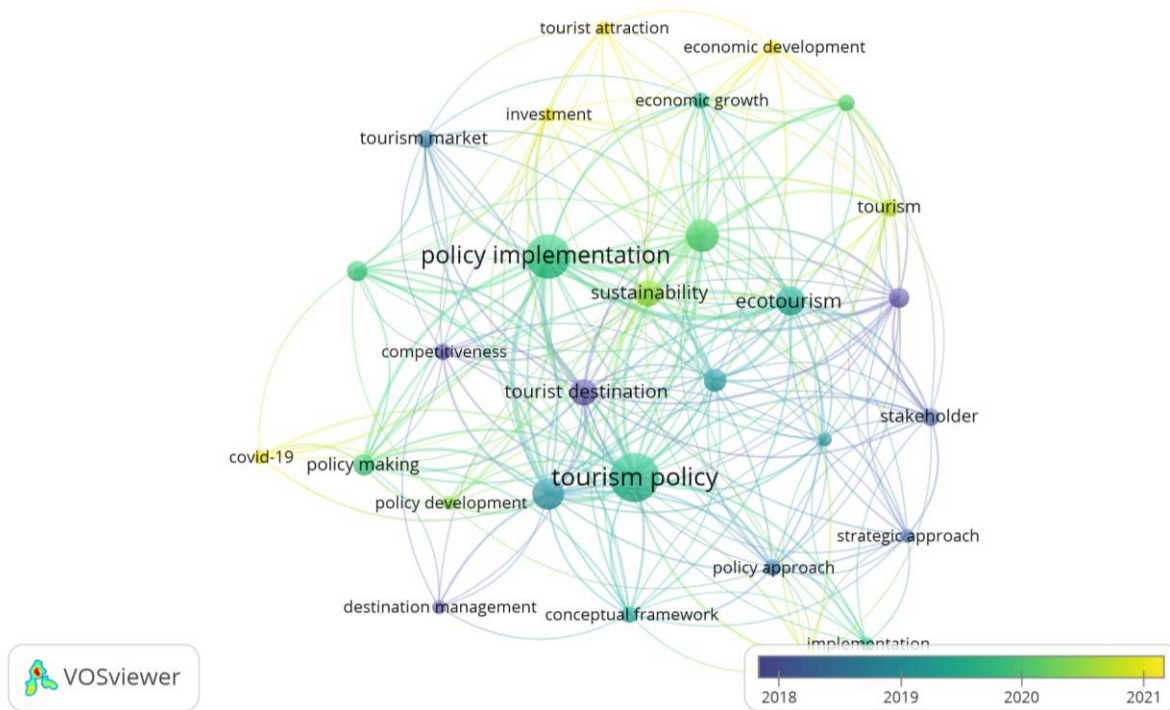


Figure 7. Overlay visualisation of Co-occurrence analysis based on all keywords. The analysis is based on a minimum occurrence of 3 keywords

## DISCUSSION

Research on tourism policy implementation has evolved over the past decade. However, there is still a paucity of studies in this discipline. Findings from this study show that the volume of publications is low, and geographical gaps exist, especially in the global South. These findings align with previous studies by (Khan and Khandaker, 2016; Maxim, 2015; Novato et al., 2024). As posited by Dodds and Butler (2010), most policy studies concentrate on what should be done rather than what has been done and why. Given the complexity of policy implementation, context-specific policy implementation research within tourism destinations is critical. This is particularly necessary for regions that face policy implementation challenges but are highly dependent on tourism, such as Africa (Adu-Ampong and Kimbu, 2019; Androit et al., 2018; Cobbinah and Darkwah, 2016; Tichaawa and Kimbu, 2020). The study also revealed that multidisciplinary journals had higher impacts than policy-specific journals, supporting the findings by Abramo et al. (2018) and Payumo et al. (2021). A multi-disciplinary scope avails opportunities for collaborations and wider citation, thereby increasing the impact of research.

The study also revealed some insights into tourism implementation research. According to Dodds and Butler (2010), tourism policy implementation can be viewed from three perspectives: determining barriers to implementation, evaluating policy and its implementation, and creating a framework to guide implementation. This study showed that most policy implementation studies concentrated on identifying challenges, with little focus on evaluating policy implementation

processes and frameworks for stakeholders. From the study, the challenges for tourism policy implementation emerged from planning, governance, sustainability, COVID-19, tourism development, destination management, tourism markets, product development, investment, strategic approach, competitiveness, economic development, and stakeholders. Few studies focused on evaluating actual policy implementation processes and suggesting ways to improve implementation frameworks. This implies a theoretical gap. The findings further indicate that sustainability is a recurrent and popular theme in policy studies. This supports the premise that the overall objective of tourism policy is the quest for sustainable development (Guo et al., 2019; Schönherr et al., 2023). The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines sustainability as “tourism that addresses current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts in a manner that fulfils the desires of tourists, the environment, industry, and local communities” (WTO, 2005:12). Within the sustainability spectrum, studies on policy implementation seem to base most of their evaluations on economic and environmental perspectives, with few addressing the social issues. There is, therefore, a need for more research that addresses this gap.

Other than economic issues, governance emerged strongly from the study. These findings further support the proponents of governance as part of the pillars of sustainability alongside economic, social, and environmental concerns (Draçi and Demi, 2023; Sadikin, 2024). Government systems have been shown to influence policy implementation (Almeida-García, 2018; Krutwayshe and Bramwell, 2010; Rogerson, 2020; Singgalen et al., 2017). Effective tourism governance provides directions and boundaries that guide policy implementation (Ariyani and Fauzi, 2022). The existing studies, however, concentrated on higher-level governance (national and regional), leaving out local or community governance perspectives. Gaps in community or local governance, therefore, exist. Host communities as tourism stakeholders play a significant role in policy implementation (Muganda et al., 2013; Soares et al., 2021; Saarinen, 2019). Additionally, few studies address the evaluation of the efficacy of sustainability instruments such as measurements (monitoring indicators), command and control (e.g. licensing), economic (e.g. taxes), voluntary (e.g. code of conduct) and supporting (e.g. capacity building).

The findings also show increased use of theoretical frameworks in policy implementation research and practical frameworks for practice. Theories such as the destination management theory, stakeholder management framework, complex systems theory, policy implementation theory, modernisation theory and strategic approach narrative policy framework have been used in extant studies. Additionally, the study findings indicate increased use of frameworks to evaluate policy implementation. Frameworks including the environmental policy integration (EPI) framework (Aall et al., 2015), policy networks and Advocacy Coalition Framework (Dela Santa, 2018), causal loop diagram from complex theory (Crabolu et al., 2023), 360 degrees assessment (Muangasame and McKercher, 2015), explanatory structural equation model (Méndez Prada et al., 2023), policy implementation theory (Thao, 2023) were used to assess the implementation of sustainable tourism policy. Frameworks used to inform implementation included the multi-stakeholder involvement management framework (Pham et al., 2023) and the EU Cohesion policy and tourism diversification (Weidenfeld, 2018). However, though these frameworks exist, their usage is low, hence the need for more application in theory and practice. This contradicts the findings of (Sarangan et al., 2022), who argued that there was very low use of theories in policy/tourism studies. The efficacy of these frameworks has also not been adequately evaluated, hence a gap for more research.

## CONCLUSION

The study pointed to the need to move beyond identifying challenges in policy implementation to monitoring and evaluating the implementation processes and frameworks. Monitoring and evaluation are critical in providing feedback that improves policy implementation. Even where implementation challenges have been identified, contextual aspects such as governance, stakeholders' commitment level, and resources within the destination are critical in mitigating the challenges. Though a few studies on the evaluation of policy implementation processes and stakeholder implementation frameworks existed, there was a lack of context-specific studies, especially for Africa. There was also a gap in studies that evaluated sustainable policy instruments. Studies on social-cultural perspectives of tourism policy implementation and community governance were also scant. The study, therefore, identified geographical, theoretical and practical gaps.

## Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to journal articles indexed in Scopus and published in the last ten years. Future studies should widen the scope to include a longer time frame and journals indexed in other databases, such as the Web of Science. Though the bibliometric review was great at identifying gaps and trends, the methodology is limiting. There is a need for qualitative reviews and empirical studies on the subject to unravel more insights and to fill the identified gaps.

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