



Full length article

Research on Corporate Parenting Styles in Higher Education: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This mini literature review examines the concept of corporate parenting styles (CPS) and their relevance for higher education institutions (HEIs) that increasingly operate across multiple campuses and international borders. Using the key phrase “corporate parenting style,” 13 publications were retrieved from Google Scholar, including journal articles (8), working papers (4), and a conference proceeding (1). The analysis focused on classification schemes, publication outlets, and leading contributors in the field. Three dominant classification schemes were identified: mythology-based, value addition–value extraction, and planning and control, along with several minor typologies. Among these, the planning and control framework (strategic planning, financial control, and strategic control) emerged as the most widely applied, reflecting its empirical utility, although significant overlaps were found across schemes. The findings also reveal a concentration of CPS scholarship within a narrow authorship base, particularly Gurkov, and within specific outlets such as *Progress in International Business Research*. While this points to authoritative voices in the field, it also highlights limited diversity and the risk of conceptual fragmentation. Overall, CPS research appears to remain in an emergent stage, with opportunities for broader empirical application and theoretical integration. For HEIs, particularly in Africa, CPS offers a useful lens for understanding governance and strategy as institutions expand regionally and globally. Future research should move towards more interdisciplinary engagement, integrative frameworks, and application in non-traditional multinational contexts such as higher education.

1. Introduction

The present study reviews literature on the implications of corporate parenting styles for team-based organising, with a particular focus on their impact on multi-campus institutions of higher education (IHEs). Corporate parenting refers to the relationship between a parent organisation and its subsidiaries, shaping how resources,

strategies, and governance are aligned across multiple units (Gurkov, 2015). While traditionally discussed in the context of multinational corporations (MNCs), the concept has increasing relevance for higher education institutions that have expanded across national borders.

The importance of this topic is underscored by the growing internationalisation of higher education. According to UNESCO (2022), the number of students enrolled outside their home country has more than doubled in the last two decades, reaching over 6.3 million globally. This trend has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the establishment of international branch campuses (IBCs). Data from the Cross-Border Education Research Team (2021) shows that there are now over 300 IBCs in more than 80 countries, with countries such as the United Arab Emirates, China, and Malaysia hosting the highest concentrations. These developments illustrate how universities have increasingly adopted organisational models similar to multinational enterprises, managing multiple campuses across diverse regulatory and cultural environments.

In this context, the concept of corporate parenting takes on strategic importance. Just as MNCs must balance control and autonomy across subsidiaries (Drogendijk, van Tulder, & Verbeke, 2015), multi-campus IHEs face similar challenges in ensuring consistency in quality, brand identity, and governance while adapting to local demands. The literature notes that traditional hierarchical structures, while still prevalent, often struggle to meet the demands of globalised operations, leading to inefficiencies and rigidity (Abdulla & Mehmood, 2013). This has prompted the rise of more flexible organisational forms such as network-based structures, born-global organisations, and team-based approaches (Zander et al., 2015).

Team-based organising has attracted particular attention as a means of fostering collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and innovation across geographically dispersed units. In higher education, where academic work is increasingly collaborative and interdisciplinary, this approach has the potential to strengthen institutional performance and global competitiveness. For example, successful IHEs such as New York University and the University of Nottingham have adopted team-based and network governance mechanisms to integrate their international campuses. However, the effectiveness of such arrangements depends significantly on the corporate parenting style adopted by the parent institution, whether it is developmental, strategic planning-oriented, or financial control-driven.

In Africa, the relevance of this issue is especially pronounced. Many IHEs, initially founded through strong national policy support, have in recent decades expanded beyond national borders in response to both growing demand and saturated domestic markets. Examples include universities from South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria establishing regional and international branch campuses, as well as offering blended and distance-learning platforms. This rapid transformation has effectively turned such IHEs into educational MNCs, creating new challenges related to governance, leadership, and institutional identity. Understanding the corporate parenting styles that underpin these transitions is therefore critical to ensuring both operational efficiency and the preservation of educational quality.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to synthesise existing literature on corporate parenting styles and examine their implications for team-based organising in multi-campus IHEs. In doing so, it addresses a growing gap in higher education management research, where the parallels between corporate strategies in multinational enterprises and governance models in higher education institutions remain underexplored.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Corporate Parenting Styles and their Classifications

Corporate parenting style refers to the approach taken by a parent organisation to manage, support, and extract value from its subsidiaries (Gurkov, 2014; Caldart & Ricart, 2006). In multinational corporations (MNCs), this style defines the balance between control and autonomy, as well as the degree to which the parent adds or subtracts value in its subsidiaries. Over the years, scholars have proposed different typologies to conceptualise and classify corporate parenting styles, reflecting varying emphases on culture, value creation, or governance mechanisms. The following subsections present the main classifications, highlighting their logic, characteristics, and points of convergence.

2.1.1 Mythology-based Classification

One of the most creative typologies draws on Greek mythology to capture the symbolic essence of parenting approaches within MNCs (Gurkov & Morley, 2022). Here, parenting styles are likened to mythological figures:

- **Cronus** represents a style centred on exploitation and continuous extraction of value from subsidiaries.
- **Rhea** reflects a value-adding, nurturing relationship between parent and subsidiaries.
- **Zeus** embodies a model where subsidiaries are encouraged to demonstrate heroism and initiative, though value extraction still occurs.
- **Athena** symbolises wisdom, where the parent emphasises knowledge development, long-term collaboration, and mutual value creation.
- **Hypos**, later added, represents neglect, where there is minimal value exchange between headquarters and subsidiaries, often due to environmental or institutional barriers.

This framework highlights the diversity of relationships possible within global organisations, from exploitative to nurturing, and provides a symbolic language for understanding how corporate culture influences subsidiary management.

2.1.2 Value addition or Value Subtraction Classification

Another influential classification examines the corporate parent's impact on subsidiaries in terms of **value added** or **value extracted** (Gurkov, 2014). Here, four possible styles emerge:

- **Supportive**: high value addition, low value extraction.
- **Neglectful**: low value addition, low value extraction.
- **Authoritative**: high value addition, high value extraction.
- **Exploitative**: low value addition, high value extraction.

This framework has the advantage of being measurable, as both value addition and extraction can be assessed through performance outcomes. Notably, Gurkov (2014) found that the **authoritative style** was the most common in practice, suggesting that many MNCs pursue both value creation and capture simultaneously. This scheme overlaps with the mythology-based framework, where Cronus mirrors the authoritative style, and Hypos parallels neglectful parenting.

2.1.3 Planning and control-based classification

From a governance perspective, Caldart and Ricart (2006) identified three corporate parenting styles based on the locus of planning and control:

- **Strategic Planning (SP)**: headquarters set clear strategic objectives, leaving subsidiaries to plan within these parameters.

- **Financial Control (FC):** subsidiaries are given autonomy, but their performance is assessed primarily on financial metrics and budgetary discipline.
- **Strategic Control (SC):** a hybrid approach balancing strategic direction from headquarters with financial oversight.

This typology emphasises how decision-making authority and accountability systems shape the parent–subsidiary relationship. The SC style, often described as a “middle-of-the-road” model, reflects attempts to achieve synergy without over-centralisation.

2.1.4 Other Classification Schemes

Additional typologies extend the discussion by considering the parent’s role as:

- **Controller, Coach, or Orchestrator** (Abdulla & Mehmood, 2013), distinguishing between directive, supportive, and integrative roles.
- **Portfolio Manager, Synergy Manager, or Parental Developer** (Abdulla & Mehmood, 2013), highlighting whether parents primarily focus on financial restructuring, synergy creation, or capability development.
- **Authoritarian, Authoritative, Indulgent, and Indifferent** (Krause, Parker, & Covin, 2018), which borrows from psychology to frame corporate parenting in terms of behavioural styles.

While the terminology varies, these schemes share common themes: the extent of value creation versus extraction, the degree of autonomy given to subsidiaries, and the level of integration sought by headquarters.

3.0 Methodology

The study used the key phrase “Corporate Parenting Style” to search for relevant articles on Google Scholar. All articles retrieved with relevant titles and content were noted and included in the study and result analysis regardless of article type (journals articles, conference proceedings, and working papers, etc). The articles were analysed to identify the ways in which authors classified CPS or their preferred CPS classification, article type, publisher, author publishing rate, and publishing trend as measured by publications in each year.

4.0 Results Analysis

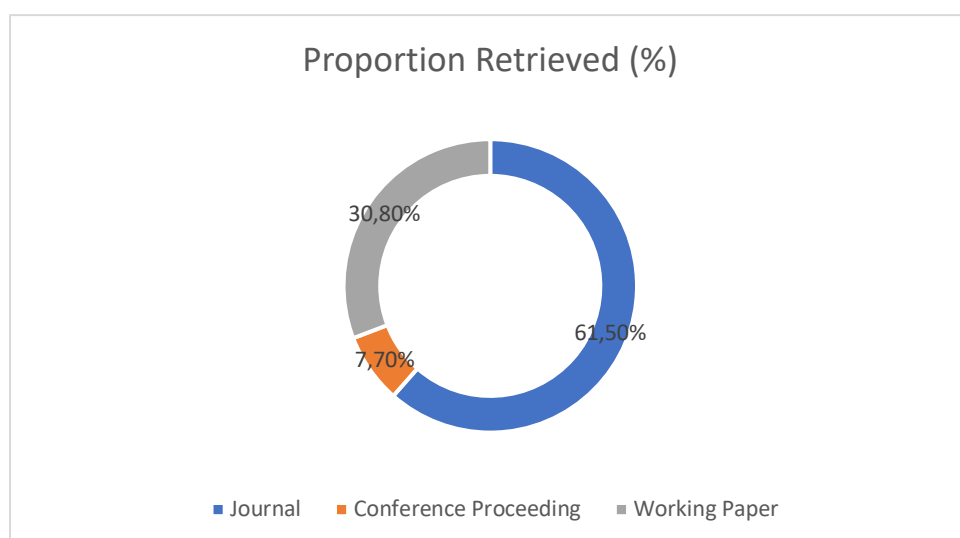


Figure 1. Proportion of articles retrieved by type.

Journal papers were the most consulted articles (61.5%), followed by working papers (30.8%).

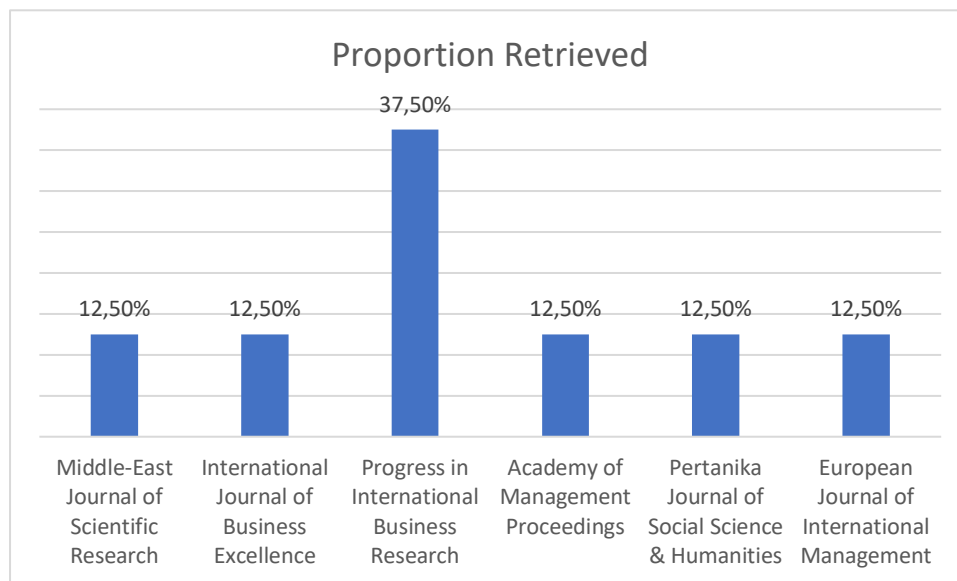


Figure 2a. Proportion of articles retrieved by publisher (journals)

The journal “Progress in International Business Research” had the highest number of articles on CPS retrieved (37.5%). The rest of the publishers of the journal articles retrieved published only one (12.5%) CPS article.

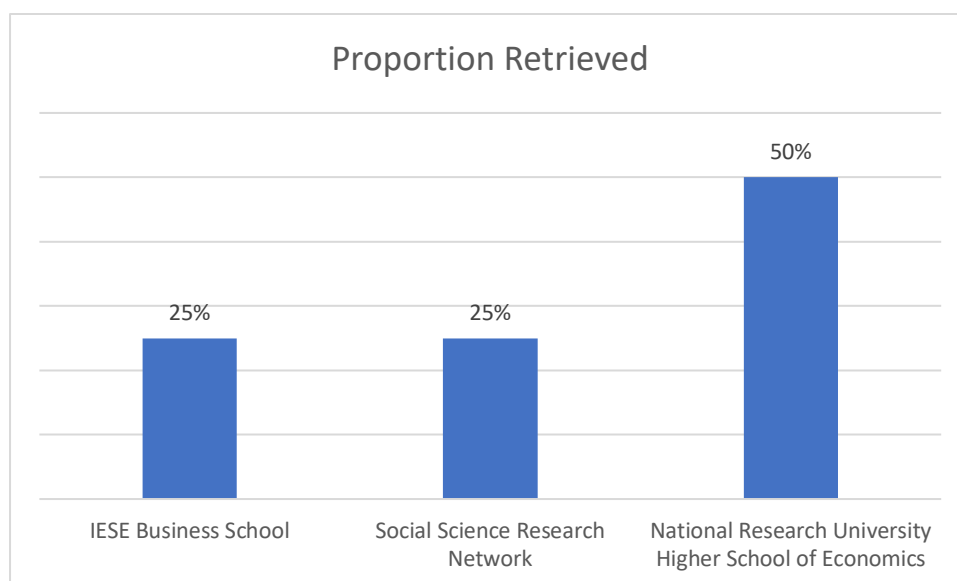


Figure 2b. Proportion of articles retrieved by publisher (working papers)

The National Research University Higher School of Economics published the highest proportion of working papers (50%). The rest of the publishers published only 1 (25%) working paper.

Only 1 proceeding was retrieved which was published by The Institute for Business and Finance Research.

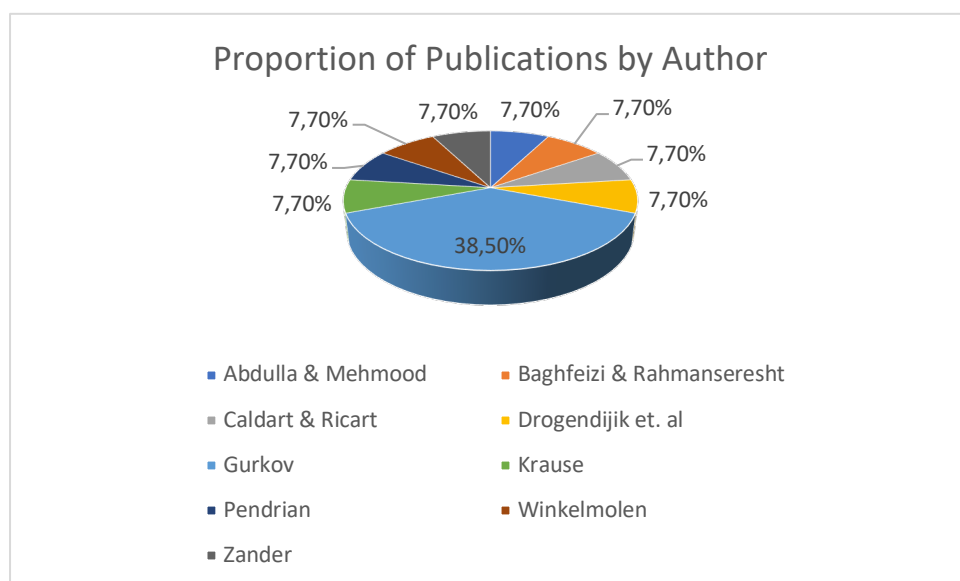


Figure 3. Proportion of publications by author

Gurkov had the most articles retrieved (5) on CPS. He was also the only author with more than one journal article retrieved.

The only conference proceeding that was retrieved was written by Winkelmolen, Ltda, & Buss (2013).

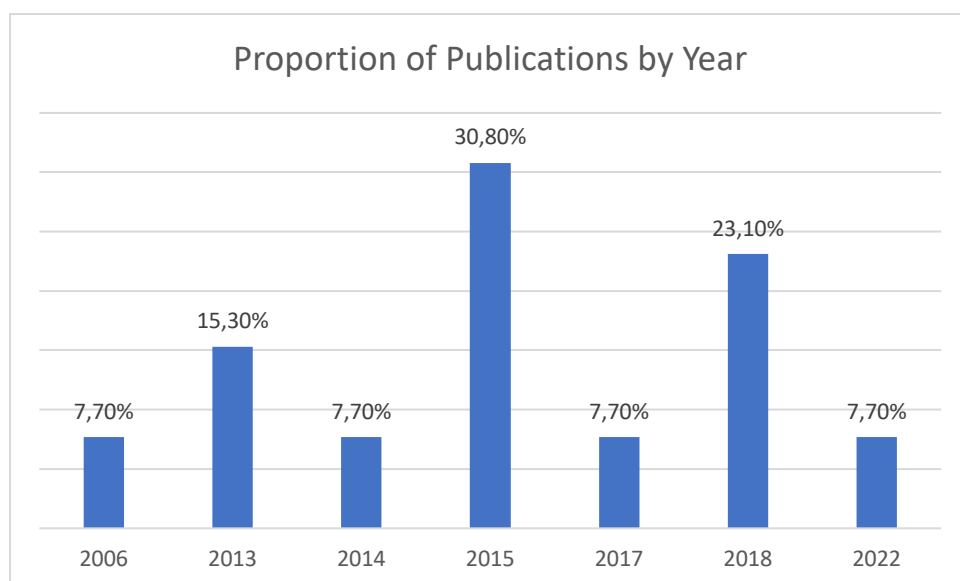


Figure 4. CPS research activity

CPS research activity was highest in 2015, 2018, and 2013 with 4, 3, and 2 publications respectively.

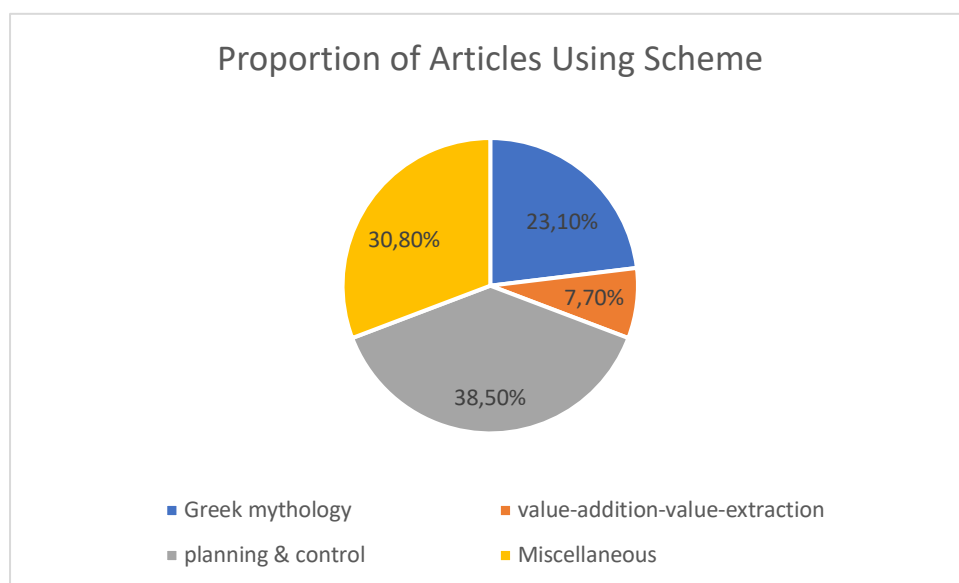


Figure 5. CPS classification scheme usage in publications

5.0 Discussion

This mini review analysed 13 publications (8 journal articles, 1 conference proceeding, and 4 working papers) that directly or indirectly examined corporate parenting styles (CPS). Across these studies, three dominant classification schemes were identified: mythology-based, value addition–value extraction, and planning and control, along with three minor or miscellaneous schemes.

A key finding is that the **planning and control-based classification (SP, FC, SC)** is the most widely applied in empirical work (Caldart & Ricart, 2006; Abdulla & Mehmood, 2013; Baghfeizi et al., 2018; Pendrian et al., 2018; Winkelmolen et al., 2013). This may reflect the scheme’s pragmatic appeal: it directly links parenting style to governance mechanisms (strategic guidance, financial oversight, or hybrid models), which are observable and measurable in practice. In contrast, the mythology-based and value-addition frameworks, while conceptually rich, may be less attractive for empirical research because their categories are more metaphorical or abstract. This suggests a tension between **conceptual sophistication** and **practical applicability**, with researchers prioritising frameworks that lend themselves to operationalisation.

Another critical insight is that some apparent differences between schemes are largely **semantic rather than substantive**. For example, Cronus in the mythology framework parallels the authoritative style in the value-addition framework, both representing high value extraction. Similarly, Hypos resembles the neglectful style, reflecting minimal parent–subsidiary engagement. This overlap raises questions about whether the proliferation of typologies truly advances understanding or whether it risks fragmenting the field. The lack of convergence also suggests the need for **integrative frameworks** that consolidate overlapping categories and provide a more coherent analytical lens.

The review further shows that scholarship on CPS is concentrated among a small group of contributors, most notably Gurkov, who authored five of the thirteen reviewed works. While this positions Gurkov as a leading authority in the field, it also points to a **narrow authorship base**. A field so dependent on a handful of scholars risks limited perspectives, and may benefit from broader empirical validation across different industries, regions,

and methodological approaches. In particular, there is limited evidence of CPS being applied or tested outside traditional multinational corporations, which creates an opening for research in non-traditional MNC-like organisations such as multi-campus higher education institutions.

Finally, the concentration of CPS research in certain outlets reflects a disciplinary bias towards international business studies. While logical, this has two implications: first, it may limit interdisciplinary engagement (e.g., from organisational behaviour or higher education management perspectives); and second, it suggests that researchers in adjacent fields may be overlooking the relevance of CPS to their domains. For instance, in higher education, where universities are increasingly expanding internationally, CPS concepts could provide valuable insights into governance, value creation, and institutional identity.

Overall, the findings highlight both the progress and limitations in the current CPS literature. Although multiple frameworks exist, their overlaps suggest a need for synthesis rather than further proliferation. The dominance of the planning and control framework reflects its operational clarity, yet it risks narrowing the field if alternative conceptual approaches are underexplored. Future research would benefit from expanding the author base, applying CPS concepts to new organisational contexts such as higher education, and developing integrative models that bridge existing typologies.

6.0 Conclusion

This review examined 13 publications that addressed corporate parenting styles (CPS), identifying three dominant classification schemes; mythology-based, value addition, value extraction, and planning and control, along with three minor or miscellaneous approaches. While the diversity of frameworks demonstrates scholarly interest in capturing the complexity of parent–subsidiary relationships, the overlaps between schemes suggest that some distinctions are more semantic than substantive. For instance, parallels between the Cronus style and the authoritative style highlight a convergence that is not always acknowledged in the literature.

The planning and control framework (strategic planning, financial control, and strategic control) emerged as the most widely used scheme, reflecting its practical measurability and direct applicability to governance processes. However, the heavy reliance on this scheme raises the risk of narrowing the field, particularly if alternative frameworks, such as those emphasising value creation or cultural dimensions, remain underexplored.

Another key observation is the concentration of CPS research within a relatively small author base, most notably Gurkov, and within specific publication outlets. While this indicates strong leadership in the field, it also points to limited diversity of perspectives, which may restrict theoretical and contextual development. Expanding CPS research beyond the international business discipline and applying it to new organisational contexts, such as multi-campus higher education institutions, could enrich both theory and practice.

Overall, this study highlights the need for integrative frameworks that consolidate existing typologies, broaden the empirical base of CPS research, and extend application into underexplored sectors. For higher education, where institutions increasingly resemble multinational corporations in their global expansion, CPS provides a useful lens for analysing governance, strategy, and institutional identity. Future research should therefore move towards interdisciplinary, context-sensitive approaches that not only refine CPS theory but also enhance its relevance to diverse organisational forms.

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Appendix

Table 1. Consulted articles by type

No.	Article Type	# Consulted in the Study
1.	Journal	8 (61.5%)
2.	Conference Proceeding	1 (7.7%)
3.	Working Paper	4 (30.8%)
	Total	13

Table 2. Publishers of the articles consulted in the study

No.	Publisher	# Retrieved in the Study
	Journal Articles	
1.	Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research	1 (12.5%)
2.	International Journal of Business Excellence	1 (12.5%)
3.	Progress in International Business Research	3 (37.5%)
4.	Academy of Management Proceedings	1 (12.5%)
5.	Pertanika Journal of Social Science & Humanities	1 (12.5%)
6.	European Journal of International Management	1 (12.5%)
	Working Papers	
	IESE Business School	1 (25%)
	Social Science Research Network	1 (25%)
	National Research University Higher School of Economics	2 (50%)
	Conference Proceedings	
	The Institute for Business and Finance Research	1 (100%)
	Total	13

Table 3. Author statistics on CPS in the retrieved articles

No.	Author	Article Type			
		Journal	Working Paper	Conference Proceeding	Total
	Abdulla & Mehmood	1			1 (7.7%)
	Baghfeizi & Rahmanseresht	1			1 (7.7%)
	Caldart & Ricart		1		1 (7.7%)

	Drogendijk et. al	1			1 (7.7%)
	Gurkov	2	3		5 (38.5%)
	Krause	1			1 (7.7%)
	Pendrian	1			1 (7.7%)
	Winkelmolen			1	1 (7.7%)
	Zander	1			1 (7.7%)
	Total	8	4	1	13

Table 4. CPS classification schemes

No.	CPS Classification Scheme	Proportion of Articles Using Scheme
1	Greek mythology-based classification	3 (23.1%)
2	value-addition-value-extraction scheme	1 (7.7%)
3	planning & control-based scheme	5 (38.5%)
4	Miscellaneous	4 (30.8%)
	Total	13