

EVOLUTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY OF SCOPUS DATA

Lailatun Nazar¹, Mochamad Nursalim², Budi Purwoko³

Universitas Negeri Surabaya

lailatunnazar01@gmail.com

Abstract

This research examines the shortcomings of prior studies on global inclusive education trends and patterns. The main objective is to explore and visualize scientific publications on Inclusive Education for Children, as recorded in the Scopus database from 2020 to 2024, using a bibliometric approach. The methodology used is descriptive quantitative analysis through bibliometric techniques. Data were collected by conducting a literature search using the keywords "inclusive education" and "children" in Scopus. These data were then analyzed using VOSviewer software to identify publication patterns, citation trends, and dominant keywords. A significant upward trend in publication output is evident in the results, most notably seen between 2021 and 2022. Frequently occurring keywords include "inclusive education," "human," "teachers," "parents," and "childhood." The main conclusion of this study is that research related to autism spectrum disorders in children has experienced substantial growth in recent years. These findings underscore the need for stronger collaboration among countries to promote a more inclusive approach. This study also contributes to building a foundation for continued scientific research on Inclusive Education for Children.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Children; Bibliometrics; Scopus; Vosviewer

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a major focus in international discourse around the right to equal and equitable access to education for all individuals, regardless of their background or abilities. Since the issuance of the Salamanca Statement in 1994, the emphasis on inclusive education has progressively intensified across policy development and scholarly research. However, the social, cultural, and political complexities that accompany the implementation of inclusive education make it a dynamic and evolving research issue (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2022).

Researchers in various countries have responded to this issue with a variety of contextual and methodological approaches. Much attention has been paid to teacher training (Cretu & Morandau, 2020), the role of technology (Sáiz-Manzanares et al., 2020), and the influence of policies on the success of inclusive implementation at various levels of education (Pérez-Gutiérrez et al., 2023). This response shows that inclusive education is not only a moral policy but also a strategic scientific research area.

Several previous studies have conducted bibliometric analysis on the theme of inclusion, but the focus is still limited. For example, Kamarullah et al (2024) highlighted English language teaching in inclusive education, while Comarú et al (2021) focused on science and education disabilities. These studies are important, but they do not provide a comprehensive picture of global trends in inclusive education literature.

The gaps found in previous studies lie in the lack of systematic studies that identify collaboration patterns, concept evolution, and intellectual maps over a long period, and comprehensive data from large databases such as Scopus. Most large studies also do not recognize the relationship between bibliometric aspects and changes in inclusion paradigms over time (Nurjanah et al., 2024). Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap by presenting an in-depth bibliometric analysis of publications on inclusive education indexed in Scopus over the past two decades. This approach allows the identification of publication trends, key actors, dominant themes, and collaborative networks that shape the inclusive research ecosystem.

Theoretically, this research is based on an inclusive pedagogy framework and a critical disability studies approach that views inclusive education not only as a technical effort to include students in regular classes but as a paradigm transformation in education (Tsai & Wu, 2024). The bibliometric approach is also inspired by the Price and Lotka

scientific analysis model, which maps the distribution of scientists and knowledge production. This study utilizes bibliometric methods with the help of software such as VOSviewer to map the network of keywords, authors, and institutional affiliations. Data are taken from the Scopus database, which is widely known for its coverage and reliability in documenting global scientific publications (Methlagl, 2022).

This article aims to explore the development and patterns of research in inclusive education, highlighting the most frequently published work and core themes that have shaped the field over time. Accordingly, this research not only outlines existing developments but also critically assesses the prospective focus and agenda of future scholarly inquiry. The main focus of this article is the global research trend in inclusive education based on Scopus bibliometric data from 2000 to 2024. In addition, this study will also analyze the contribution of scientists from developing countries and the collaborative relationships that exist in the international academic community.

By conducting a comprehensive analysis of inclusive education publications based on Scopus data, this article is expected to provide significant contributions to the development of the literature, policymakers, and education practitioners. The results of this analysis can also be used as a basis for compiling a more contextual and collaborative future research agenda.

METHODS

This study uses bibliometric analysis and visualization methods. Bibliometric analysis, as a quantitative technique, uses evaluative and descriptive approaches to describe trends and characteristics of certain publications, while bibliometric visualization provides a structural representation of a particular research area (Garfield, 2009). The steps required are identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Moher et al., 2009). The sample in this study was 131 publications obtained from the Scopus database that matched the selected keywords. Researchers chose Scopus in this study because of several significant advantages. Scopus summarizes more than 24,000 scientific journals from various fields, allowing for a more comprehensive and accurate analysis. In addition, Scopus's reputation as a trusted source of scientific data and the international standards applied in indexing articles are also advantages.

This study focuses on the keywords “inclusive education” and “children”. Among the 131 publications, most were articles, with some coming from review books. The selected publications, covering the years 2020 to 2024, were analyzed using VOSviewer software, which offers three visualization methods: network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization. This analysis uses indicators such as the number of publications, inter-publication citations, and the total strength of the visualized objects. The stages of the bibliometric analysis are presented below:

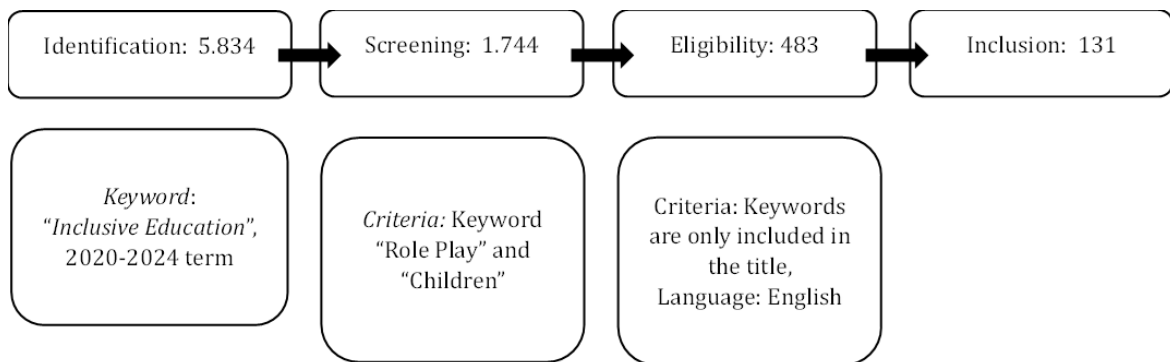


Figure 1 Data refinement stages

The initial step involved identifying relevant publications using specific search strings and eliminating duplicate or identical entries. The researcher entered keywords related to the research theme, “inclusive education,” into the Scopus database, focusing on metadata from the period 2020 to 2024. After this process, a total of 5,834 documents were successfully retrieved.

The second stage is screening, where the researcher screens the 5,834 publications obtained in the previous stage. At this stage, the researcher sets specific criteria based on the research requirements. The selected criteria stipulate that only articles published in reputable journals and related to early childhood will be considered. As a result, 4,080 documents from the initial document pool do not meet these criteria and will be excluded from the next stage. The remaining 1,744 publications, which pass the screening, will proceed to the next stage.

Eligibility is the third step in the process. At this stage, the researchers assessed whether the 1,744 publications met the criteria required to proceed to the final stage. The criteria set included the requirement that the publications must be written in English, as non-English publications were excluded from further analysis. English was chosen because it is the most widely used language in international scholarly communication. Another

criterion was that the type of document must be an article. After this screening, 1,261 publications were excluded because they did not meet these criteria, leaving 483 publications. At the final stage, 352 publications were removed due to their lack of relevance to inclusive education research trends, leaving the final number at 131 publications. This study aimed to investigate the trends and landscape in inclusive early childhood education research, with the exclusion of 352 publications to ensure objectivity of the results.

The analysis technique used in this study is deductive, starting with general findings and narrowing down to more specific details, such as country-library combinations and author keyword development. This structure allows the reader to follow the development from general to specific information (Ersozlu & Karakus, 2019; Lee et al., 2014).

RESULTS

In presenting the results of the analysis, the researcher uses a deductive approach. The bibliometric analysis is presented deductively, starting with general findings and gradually moving towards more specific details, such as publication trends, citation trends, country bibliographic pairs, and co-occurrence of author keywords. This allows the reader to follow the information from broad insights to more detailed insights (Colin et al., 2019; Ersozlu, 2019).

Trends in Publication

The publication trends are illustrated by categorizing the number of publications by their year of release. Figure 2 presents the trends in publications from 2020 to 2025 concerning Inclusive Education for children.

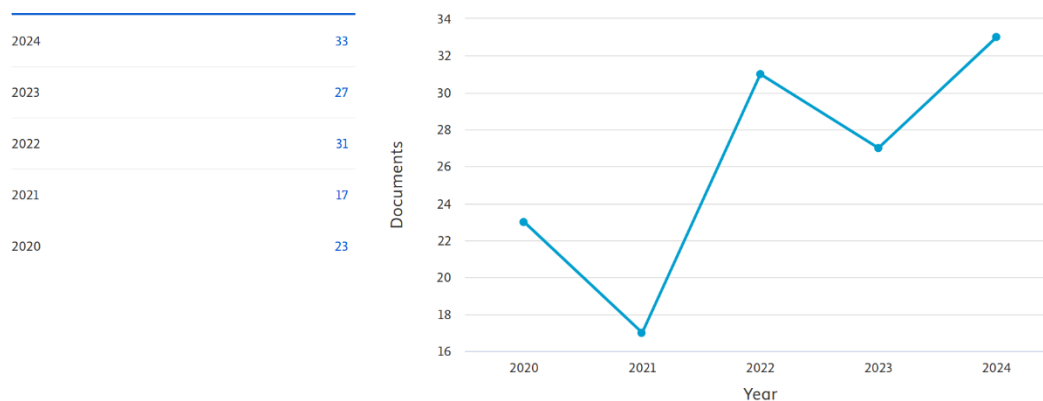


Figure 2 Trends in Publication

Figure 2 above shows that 2024 recorded the highest number of publications, namely 33 documents. The largest increase occurred in 2021 to 2022, namely 14 publications. In contrast, the number of publications decreased slightly in 2023, namely only 17 documents. In 2024, it increased again to 33 published documents. Next, we examine the citation trends related to inclusive education for early childhood from 2020 to 2024. In general, the number of publications on this topic shows a consistent increase over the past five years. There are variations in the number of publications each year, but overall, there has been a significant increase.

Quote Trends

The trend of citations related to inclusive education for children from 2020 to 2024 can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Trends in Citations

Years	TP	NCP	Tc	H	G
2024	33	20	49	3	5
2023	27	14	96	6	8
2022	31	27	210	8	13
2021	17	13	70	5	7
2020	23	21	139	6	10

TP: number of publications; NCP: number of citations to the paper; TC: number of citations; H: h-index; G: g-index

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the highest NCP was in 2022. Although there were only 17 publications in 2021, the total citations reached 70. The lowest total citations were in 2024, with 49 citations, and the highest total citations were in 2022, with 210 citations. In 2022, the h-index and g-index values reached their peak. This shows that 2022 had a major impact on research on inclusive education for early childhood. This means that these articles receive many citations from other researchers and are therefore considered important contributions to the development and understanding of the topic. This shows that the 2022 research makes an important contribution and has a major influence in advancing knowledge and understanding of inclusive education for early childhood. Table 2 presents the top ten studies based on the number of citations in 2022.

Table 2. Most cited publications in 2022

Authors	Title	Journal Publication	Cites	Refs
Eleanor Warnes, Elizabeth J. Done and Helen Knowler	Mainstream teachers' concerns about inclusive education for children with special educational needs and disability in England under pre-pandemic conditions	Journal of Research in Special Education Need	39	(Warnes et al., 2022)
Kathy Cologon	Is inclusive education really for everyone? Family stories of children and young people labelled with 'severe and multiple' or 'profound' 'disabilities'	Research Papers in Education	28	(Cologon, 2022)
Xiao Qu	Structural barriers to inclusive education for children with special educational needs and disabilities in China	Journal of Education Change	21	(Qu, 2022b)
Xiao Qu	A critical realist model of inclusive education for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities	International Journal of Inclusive Education	18	(Qu, 2022)
Guy Le Fanu, Elena Schmidt, Bhavisha Virendrakumar	Inclusive education for children with visual impairments in sub-Saharan Africa: Realising the promise of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	International Journal of Education Development	14	(Le Fanu et al., 2022)
Bolajoko O Olusanya, Nem	Child health, inclusive education	Bulletin of the World Health	14	(Olusanya et al., 2022)

Authors	Title	Journal Publication	Cites	Refs
Yun Boo, Olaf Kraus de Camargo, Mijna Hadders-Algra, Donald Wertliebe & Adrian C Davisf	and development	Organization		
Natallia Bahdanovich Hanssen and Irina Erina	Parents' views on inclusive education for children with special educational needs in Russia	European Journal of Special Needs Education	10	(Bahdanovich Hanssen & Erina, 2022)
Marta B. Esteban	Children's Participation, Progressive Autonomy, and Agency for Inclusive Education in Schools	Social Inclusion	9	(Esteban, 2022)
Sultan Kilinc	Mothers of children without disabilities' conceptions of inclusive education: unveiling an exclusionary education system privileging normality and ableism	Disability and Society	8	(Kilinc, 2022)
Thomas M. Crea, Elizabeth K. Klein, Oladoyin Okunoren, Maria Paula Jimenez, Greg St. Arnold, Truphena Kirior, Eric Velandria & Daniela Bruni	Inclusive education in a refugee camp for children with disabilities: How are school setting and children's behavioral functioning related?	Conflict and Health	7	(Crea et al., 2022)

One of the most impactful articles in this area of research in 2022 was a study by Eleanor Warnes, Elizabeth J. Done, and Helen Knowler, entitled “Mainstream teachers’ concerns about inclusive education for children with special educational needs and disabilities in England under pre-pandemic conditions” (Warnes et al., 2022). This article, cited 39 times, examines teachers’ concerns in England about inclusive education for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), particularly in the period before the pandemic. Through a survey conducted in April 2020, the authors found that teachers had diverse understandings of inclusive education and noted key concerns around resources, such as funding for support staff and adequate infrastructure. Most respondents felt that children with SEND were often seen as an additional burden on an already demanding teaching task. The research also revealed that while there was a need for additional support, attention to systemic issues such as the distribution of resources was often overlooked. The results suggest the need to shift the focus from individual teacher deficiencies to wider challenges within the education system to achieve more effective inclusion.

The second widely cited study is the one conducted by Kathy Cologon on "Is inclusive education really for everyone? Stories of families of children and youth labeled with 'severe and multiple' or 'profound' disabilities" (Cologon, 2022). The findings of this study draw attention to the issue of inclusive education, highlighting that inclusive education should be considered a human right. While the benefits of inclusive education are widely recognised, there is still a prevailing view that some students are too ‘disabled’ to be included, creating a gap in education policy. The authors focus on the experiences of ten Australian parents whose children were labelled as having “severe and multiple” or “profound” disabilities, highlighting the importance of inclusion for families. The parents emphasized that inclusion means a sense of belonging, equal opportunity, and recognition of differences as strengths. They also shared experiences of discrimination and exclusion, both in schools and in the community, revealing the challenges they face in advocating for their children’s rights. Despite the barriers, parents remain optimistic and committed to creating inclusive environments for their children. This study demonstrates that inclusive education is not only possible but also beneficial for all children, including those labeled as having “severe disabilities.” In addition, the authors emphasize the need for systemic change in education to achieve true inclusion, as well as the importance of listening to parents’ perspectives in dialogues about inclusive education.

Trends in Cross-Country Collaboration

Figure 3 illustrates international collaboration in research on inclusive education for early childhood. Countries that have contributed to scientific publications on the subject are represented by circles. This analysis only includes countries that have at least two publications, as determined by the two-document threshold.

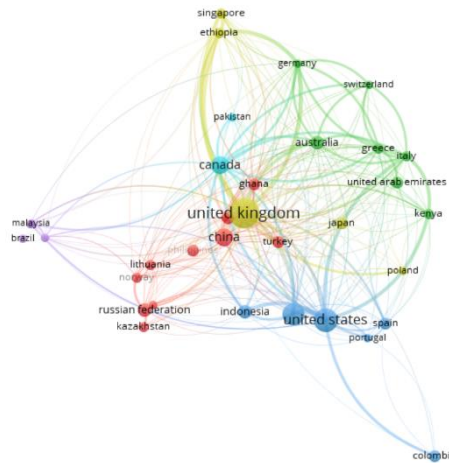


Figure 3 Network visualization of country bibliographic pairs

Figure 3 shows the existence of cooperation between countries, as evidenced by the existence of links or relationships between the country circles in the image. This relationship reflects the research collaboration that occurs between researchers from different countries in studying inclusive education in early childhood. Figure 3 shows the existence of six clusters that can be distinguished based on the color of the circles, namely, clusters with red, green, blue, yellow, purple, and light blue circles. This cluster shows that certain groups of countries demonstrate higher levels of collaboration in the field of inclusive early childhood education research.

Figure 4 provides a more detailed and clear insight into cross-country research collaboration in the context of inclusive education. This figure provides a more detailed and detailed mapping of the relationship between countries, the level of collaboration, and the clusters formed in the research collaboration. This information offers a more comprehensive understanding of patterns of research collaboration between countries in the field of inclusive early childhood education.

Selected	Country	Documents ▼	Citations	Total link strength
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	united kingdom	24	182	1141
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	united states	14	69	789
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	india	13	24	394
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	canada	8	65	516
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	china	8	65	119
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	australia	5	41	364
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	indonesia	5	15	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	russian federation	5	15	109
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	spain	4	19	108
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ghana	4	19	103
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	south africa	4	6	84
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	colombia	4	4	70
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	united arab emirates	4	18	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	turkey	4	7	62
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	japan	4	12	50
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	philippines	4	1	18
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ethiopia	3	11	486
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	italy	3	25	458
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	greece	3	26	301
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	singapore	3	5	248

Figure 4 Bibliographic coupling country

Figure 4 illustrates international research collaboration in the field of inclusive education for young children. The threshold used for inclusion was a minimum of two publications, meaning that only countries with at least two publications are shown in the figure. A total of 35 countries met this criterion. It is clear that the UK leads with the highest number of publications, 24, and the highest number of citations, 182. This shows that research from the UK is widely recognized and frequently cited by academics in various countries. Furthermore, the UK also has the highest total link strength, 1,141 total link strength, highlighting its important role in inclusive education research for young children. The United States is in second place with the largest number of publications, 14 and 69 citations. Both the UK and the United States have considerable influence and are key players in the field of inclusive education research for young children. Research from both countries makes important contributions and is well-regarded in the academic community, as reflected in the high number of publications and citations. This information helps to better understand the relationship between international collaboration and global influence in inclusive education for young children.

Research Concentration

Figure 5 illustrates the focus of research related to inclusive education in early childhood education (PAUD). The novelty of the research is shown in Figure 6. The image

future research and make important contributions to solving challenges in developing better inclusive education. Collaboration in research between countries is also important in inclusive education research. There are clusters of collaborations that show a high level of cooperation between several countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States. This shows that global collaboration can produce research of higher quality and greater impact in the field of inclusive education.

Keyword analysis reveals key research areas that inform relevant inclusive education programs. The main focus group in this study includes inclusive education, highlighting the importance of understanding this concept. Concerning research novelty, the presence of keywords that have only emerged in recent years, such as developmental disabilities and thematic analysis, indicates that this field is still developing, and there are still many opportunities for new and innovative research in the field of inclusive education. Inclusive education is a growing field with the potential to offer meaningful solutions and innovations in addressing future challenges.

In this bibliometric analysis study, the results obtained were not much different from previous research conducted by Awaliyah et al (2024), namely, there were differences in the title of the study; the study conducted by Awaliyah et al. discussed inclusive education in the digital era, but the similarity of the study was from the keywords. In Awaliyah et al.'s research, the keywords 'inclusive' and 'digital inclusion' were often identified. Meanwhile, this study uses similar keywords, especially 'inclusive education'.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that inclusive education for early childhood has experienced substantial growth over the past five years. The increasing number of publications indicates a growing interest in research on inclusive education in early childhood. Several studies have had a significant impact, reflected by the high number of citations, and this influences the direction of future research in inclusive education. Collaboration between countries also plays a critical role in advancing this research, resulting in high-quality studies with broad impact. The main research focus includes inclusive education, as well as teaching, which serves as a guideline for further research. In addition, the emergence of new keywords shows that this field continues to grow and offers potential for more innovative research. Overall, research on inclusive

education in early childhood has an important impact on understanding, developing, and implementing inclusive education, which is very relevant in preparing individuals for an increasingly developing future.

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