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MAPPING GLOBAL RESEARCH ON GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) have become fundamental pillars of sustainable development, equitable governance, and inclusive societal progress. Despite the increasing volume of research in this field, the scientific literature remains fragmented across multiple disciplines, making it challenging to identify global research trends and emerging knowledge domains. This study aimed to map the global research landscape on gender equality and social inclusion through a multidisciplinary bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed publications. Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database, and after applying predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 613 English-language articles and review papers published between 1970 and 2026 were included in the analysis. Bibliometric performance indicators were generated using the Bibliometrix package through the Biblioshiny interface, while VOSviewer (version 1.6.21) was employed to visualize keyword co-occurrence networks and thematic relationships. The findings revealed a sustained increase in scientific production, particularly after 2018, reflecting growing international interest in gender equality and social inclusion. The analysis identified influential publication sources, productive authors, collaborative research networks, and major thematic clusters centered on gender equality, diversity, inclusion, empowerment, education, health, and sustainable development. Overall, the study demonstrates the multidisciplinary and rapidly evolving nature of GESI research and provides valuable insights into its knowledge structure and emerging research directions. These findings

can inform researchers, educators, practitioners, and policymakers in advancing evidence-based strategies and fostering more inclusive and equitable societies.

Keywords: *bibliometric analysis, gender equality, Scopus, social inclusion, VOSviewer, Bibliometrix*

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) have become central priorities in global efforts to promote sustainable development, human rights, and equitable access to opportunities across education, employment, healthcare, governance, and community development. The adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), has intensified international attention toward eliminating discrimination, empowering marginalized populations, and fostering inclusive institutions (Yang et al., 2024). Increasingly, governments, international organizations, and academic institutions recognize that achieving sustainable and inclusive societies requires addressing structural inequalities through evidence-based policies and interdisciplinary research (Peralta-Jaramillo, 2025; Guamán-Llongo et al., 2026).

Over the past several decades, research on gender equality and social inclusion has expanded considerably, reflecting its multidisciplinary nature. Studies have explored diverse topics, including gender-responsive public policies, women's empowerment, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), educational equity, healthcare accessibility, labor participation, digital inclusion, and leadership development (Beretta et al., 2025; Hanson, 2025; Liu et al., 2025). Emerging areas such as information technology and artificial intelligence have further broadened the research landscape by investigating both the opportunities and challenges these technologies present in reducing or, in some cases, reinforcing gender disparities (Kumari & Tiwari, 2025; Zambonino-Torres et al., 2026). Likewise, increasing attention to intersectionality has encouraged researchers to examine how gender interacts with race, socioeconomic status, culture, disability, and other social identities in shaping experiences of inclusion and exclusion (Liu et al., 2025).

Despite the rapid expansion of the literature, research on gender equality and social inclusion remains fragmented across multiple disciplines and publication outlets. Existing studies span the social sciences, education, psychology, healthcare, business, tourism, environmental studies, and information technology, making it challenging to develop a comprehensive understanding of the field's intellectual structure and thematic evolution (Guamán-Llongo et al., 2026; Pinto-López & Montaudon-Tomas, 2025). Furthermore, much of the published research originates from developed countries, while the perspectives and experiences of the Global South remain comparatively underrepresented, limiting the development of context-specific and globally inclusive policy recommendations (Guamán-Llongo et al., 2026; López et al., 2026).

Bibliometric analysis has emerged as an effective approach for systematically evaluating scientific knowledge by identifying publication trends, influential authors, collaboration networks, citation patterns, and emerging research themes. Through science mapping techniques such as keyword

co-occurrence, co-authorship analysis, and thematic clustering, bibliometric methods provide a comprehensive understanding of the development and knowledge structure of a research field (Kumari & Tiwari, 2025; Sicuan et al., 2026). The increasing application of software such as Bibliometrix, Biblioshiny, and VOSviewer has enhanced the visualization and interpretation of complex bibliographic data, enabling researchers to identify research hotspots and future directions more effectively (Guamán-Llongo et al., 2026; Sicuan et al., 2026).

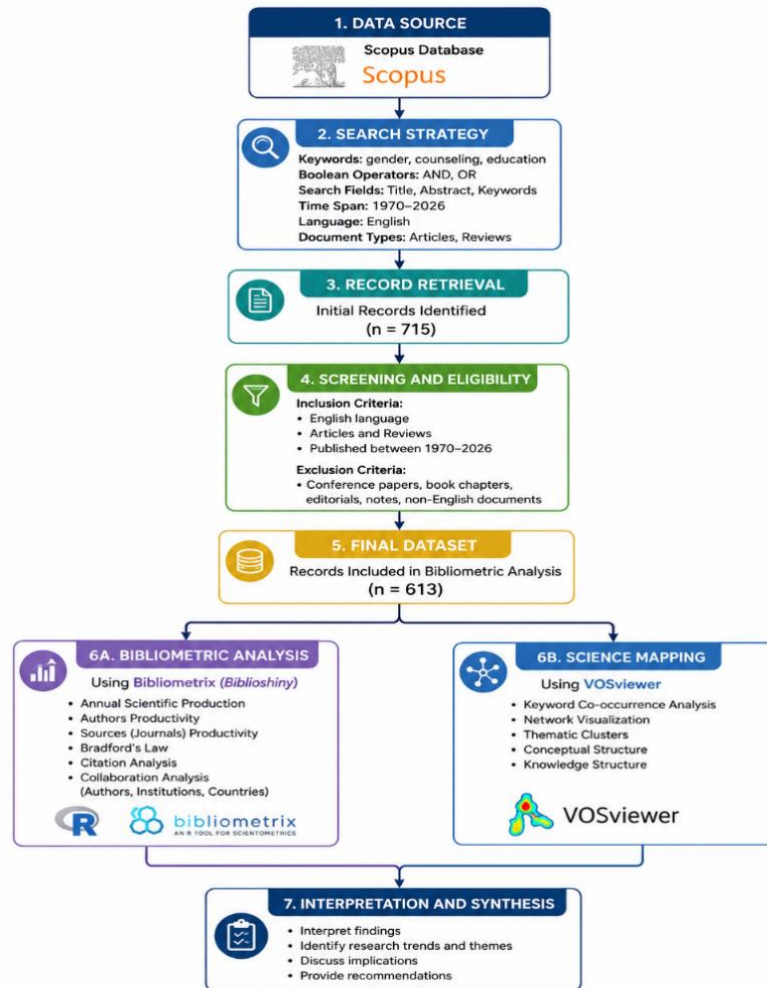
Although several bibliometric studies have examined specific dimensions of gender research including gender equality in information technology (Kumari & Tiwari, 2025), women in STEM (Ramírez-Alfaro & Ramírez-González, 2025), diversity and inclusion in tourism (Liu et al., 2025), gender-sensitive education (Sicuan et al., 2026), and SDG 5 research (Yang et al., 2024) which is a comprehensive multidisciplinary assessment integrating the broader literature on gender equality and social inclusion remains limited. A holistic understanding of this research landscape is essential to identify collaboration patterns, thematic developments, and knowledge gaps that can guide future interdisciplinary research and evidence-based policymaking.

Therefore, this study aims to map the global research landscape on gender equality and social inclusion through a multidisciplinary bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed publications. Specifically, it examines publication growth, influential journals and authors, collaboration networks, citation performance, and the conceptual structure of the field through keyword co-occurrence analysis. By providing a comprehensive overview of the evolution and knowledge structure of gender equality and social inclusion research, this study contributes valuable evidence to support researchers, educators, practitioners, and policymakers in advancing more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative bibliometric research design to examine the global scientific landscape of gender and counseling research in education. Bibliometric analysis was used to systematically evaluate publication patterns, scientific productivity, collaboration networks, influential sources, and the conceptual structure of the field. Bibliographic records were retrieved exclusively from the Scopus database in June 2026, selected for its comprehensive coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed literature and standardized bibliographic metadata. A structured search strategy was developed using keywords related to gender, counseling, and education, combined with Boolean operators. The search was limited to English-language articles and review papers published between 1970 and 2026. Conference papers, book chapters, editorials, notes, errata, and other non-article document types were excluded to ensure dataset consistency. The initial search yielded 715 records, which were subsequently screened according to the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following the screening process, 613 publications were retained for bibliometric analysis.

Figure 1
Workflow of the bibliometric analysis



The methodological workflow adopted in this study is illustrated in Figure 1. The retrieved bibliographic records were exported in CSV format and analyzed using the Bibliometrix package (version 4.3) through the Biblioshiny web interface in the R statistical environment. Bibliometrix was used to generate descriptive and performance indicators, including annual scientific production, average citations, author productivity, source productivity, Bradford’s Law, collaboration patterns, and citation metrics. To complement the performance analysis, VOSviewer version 1.6.21 (Centre for Science and Technology Studies [CWTS], Leiden University, The Netherlands) was employed to construct and visualize keyword co-occurrence networks, revealing the conceptual structure and thematic organization of the research field. In the generated network maps, node size represents the frequency of keyword occurrence, link thickness indicates the strength of co-occurrence relationships, and colors represent distinct thematic clusters. The combined use of Bibliometrix and VOSviewer enabled a comprehensive assessment of both the performance and knowledge structure of gender and counseling research in education, providing a robust and reproducible overview of its global development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

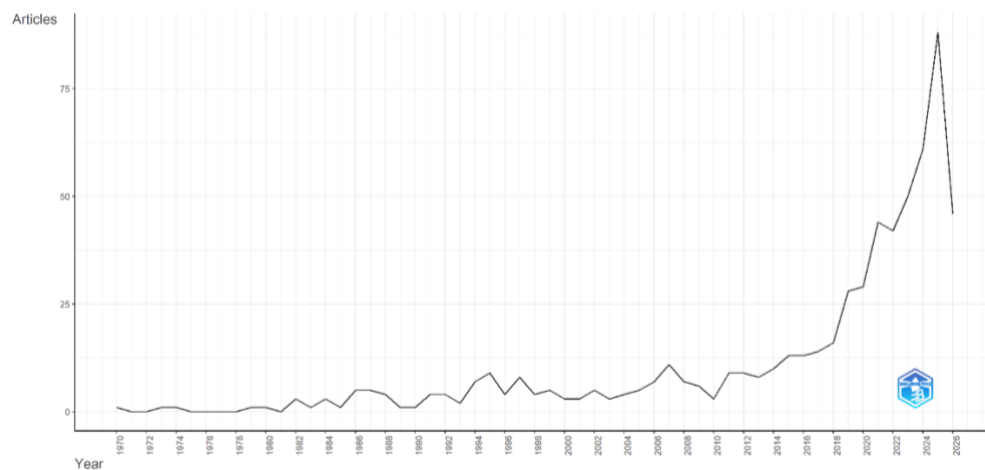
Annual Scientific Production

Figure 2 illustrates the annual scientific production of Scopus-indexed publications on gender and counseling research in education from 1970 to 2026. The publication trend demonstrates a gradual but sustained increase over the study period, reflecting the growing recognition of gender and counseling as interconnected fields within educational research. During the early decades (1970–1990), annual publication output remained relatively low, indicating that scholarly attention to these topics was still emerging. Between 1991 and 2017, research productivity increased steadily as issues related to gender equity, inclusive education, student well-being, and school counseling gained prominence in educational policy and practice. This upward trajectory became more pronounced after 2018, culminating in a peak of nearly 90 publications in 2025, highlighting the expanding global interest in promoting inclusive, equitable, and supportive learning environments.

The remarkable growth observed in recent years reflects the influence of international initiatives advocating gender equality, mental health, diversity, and inclusive education, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). The increasing emphasis on gender-responsive counseling, social inclusion, and psychological support in educational institutions has encouraged multidisciplinary collaboration among researchers from education, psychology, counseling, sociology, and related fields. Although the number of publications appears to decline in 2026, this should be interpreted cautiously because the bibliometric data were collected before the completion of the publication year, resulting in incomplete indexing. Overall, the observed publication pattern confirms that gender and counseling research in education has evolved into a rapidly growing and internationally relevant area of scholarship, consistent with the dataset's annual growth rate of 7.08%.

Figure 2.

Annual scientific production of Scopus-indexed publications on gender and counseling research in education (1970–2026).



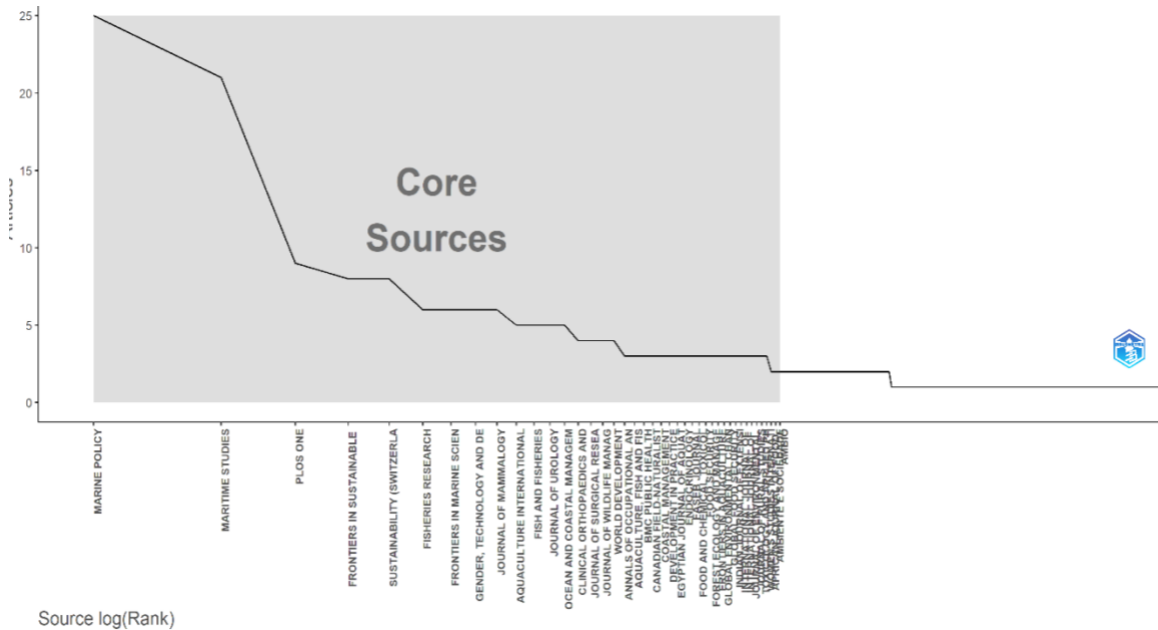
Note. The figure shows a gradual increase in publication output over time, with rapid growth after 2018 and a peak in 2025. The lower count for 2026 reflects partial database indexing at the time of data collection.

Core Sources by Bradford's Law

Figure 3 presents the distribution of journals according to Bradford's Law, identifying the core publication sources in gender and counseling research in education. The results reveal a highly concentrated pattern of scholarly communication, in which a relatively small group of journals accounts for a substantial proportion of the published literature, while a much larger number of journals contribute only a few articles each. The leading sources include Marine Policy, Maritime Studies, PLOS ONE, Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems, and Sustainability (Switzerland), followed by other journals publishing fewer contributions. This distribution is consistent with Bradford's Law, which states that scientific output is typically concentrated within a limited number of highly productive journals, with the remaining literature dispersed across numerous peripheral sources.

Figure 3.

Core publication sources identified using Bradford's Law for Scopus-indexed research on gender and counseling in education (1970–2026).



Note. The figure illustrates the concentration of publications within a small group of highly productive journals (core sources), followed by a progressively larger number of journals publishing fewer articles, demonstrating the characteristic Bradford distribution of scientific literature.

The presence of a distinct core zone indicates that researchers preferentially publish in journals with established reputations, broader readership, and strong interdisciplinary coverage. At the same time, the wide dispersion of publications across peripheral journals reflects the multidisciplinary nature of gender and counseling research in education, drawing contributions from fields such as education, psychology, sociology, public policy, sustainability, and health sciences. This diversity demonstrates that issues of gender equality, inclusion, and counseling are increasingly being examined from multiple disciplinary perspectives, expanding the field's scholarly influence and fostering broader international collaboration. The Bradford distribution therefore highlights both the central publication outlets that shape the field and the growing dissemination of research across diverse academic disciplines.

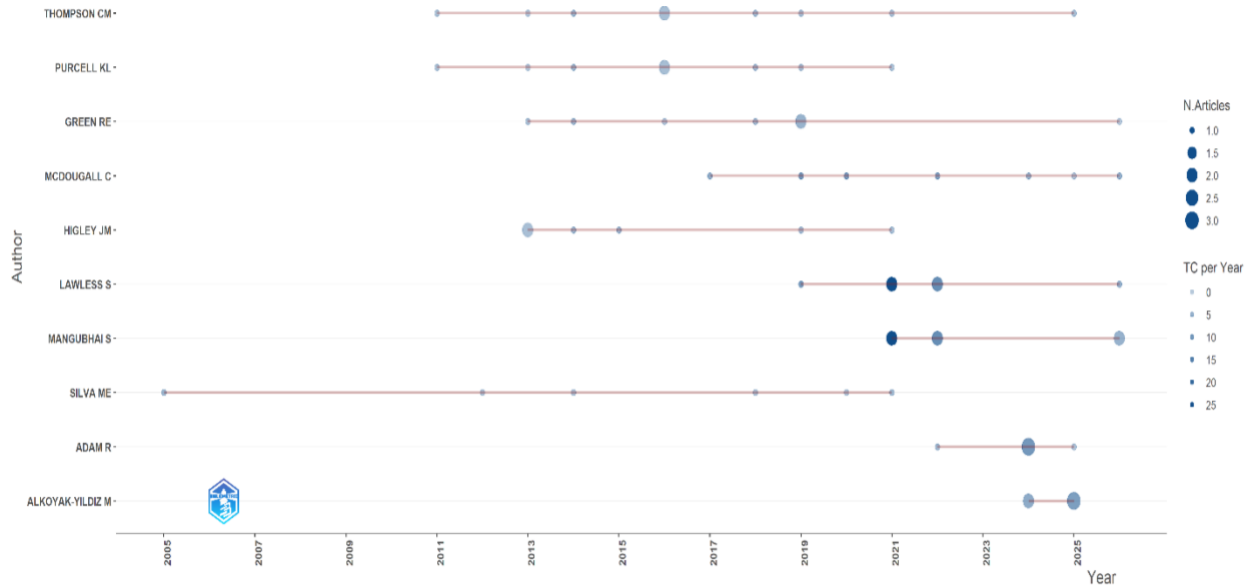
Authors' Production over Time

Figure 4 illustrates the publication trajectories of the most productive authors in gender and counseling research in education over time. The results show that scholarly contributions are distributed across multiple researchers rather than being dominated by a single author, reflecting the collaborative and evolving nature of the field. Authors such as Thompson C.M., Purcell K.L., Green R.E., Higley J.M., and McDougall C. maintained sustained publication activity over several years, indicating continued engagement with the topic. In contrast, authors including Lawless S., Mangubhai S., Adam R., and Alkoyak-Yildiz M. emerged more recently, with larger bubbles in later years suggesting higher publication output and citation impact during those periods. The varying bubble sizes indicate differences in annual productivity and citation performance, highlighting periods of increased scholarly influence among individual researchers.

The temporal distribution of author productivity also demonstrates the dynamic expansion of the research field. Earlier contributors established the foundational literature, while newer authors have increasingly shaped contemporary discussions on gender equality, inclusion, counseling services, and educational well-being. The emergence of highly productive authors after 2020 corresponds with the rapid increase in annual scientific production, suggesting renewed global attention to gender-responsive education, mental health, and inclusive counseling practices. Overall, the figure reflects a healthy and expanding research community characterized by sustained contributions from established scholars alongside the growing influence of emerging researchers, reinforcing the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of gender and counseling research in education.

Figure 4.

Authors' production over time in Scopus-indexed gender and counseling research in education (1970–2026).



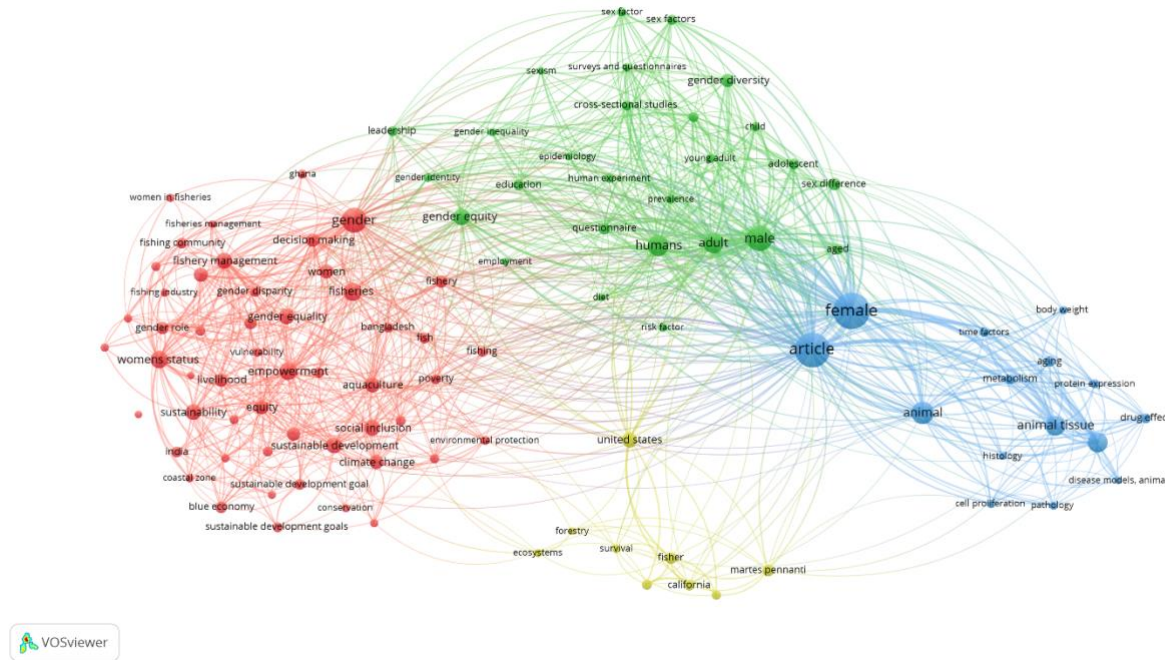
Note. The horizontal lines represent the active publication period of the most productive authors, while the size of the circles indicates the number of publications produced in a given year and the color intensity reflects the annual citation impact of their publications.

Keyword Co-occurrence Network

Figure 5 presents the keyword co-occurrence network generated using VOSviewer, illustrating the conceptual structure of gender and counseling research in education. The network is organized into several interconnected clusters, each representing a major research theme within the field. The red cluster centers on topics such as gender, gender equality, empowerment, social inclusion, livelihood, and sustainable development, highlighting the strong emphasis on equity, women's empowerment, and inclusive educational and community development. This cluster also connects with terms related to fisheries, aquaculture, and environmental sustainability, demonstrating the interdisciplinary application of gender research beyond traditional educational contexts. The green cluster focuses on humans, male, adult, gender diversity, gender equity, education, and adolescent, reflecting research on demographic characteristics, educational settings, and psychosocial dimensions of gender. Meanwhile, the blue cluster is dominated by terms such as female, article, and animal, indicating that a substantial proportion of the literature originates from biomedical and health-related studies where gender differences are examined in experimental or clinical contexts.

Figure 5.

Keyword co-occurrence network of gender and counseling research in education.



Note. Node size indicates keyword frequency, line thickness represents co-occurrence strength, and colors denote thematic clusters generated using VOSviewer.

The dense interconnections among keywords indicate that gender and counseling research is highly interdisciplinary, integrating perspectives from education, psychology, public health, sociology, environmental studies, and social policy. Central nodes such as female, gender, humans, gender equity, and education serve as important bridges linking multiple thematic areas, suggesting that these concepts underpin much of the existing literature. The network also demonstrates an increasing emphasis on diversity, inclusion, mental well-being, and gender-responsive educational practices, while maintaining strong connections to sustainability and community development. Further, the keyword co-occurrence map reveals that the field has evolved from a narrow focus on gender equality toward broader discussions of inclusion, diversity, empowerment, and multidisciplinary collaboration, supporting the study's overarching theme of "From Equality to Inclusion."

The findings of this bibliometric analysis demonstrate a substantial and sustained increase in global research on gender equality and social inclusion, particularly during the past decade. The marked growth in publication output after 2018 reflects increasing international recognition of gender equality as a fundamental component of sustainable development, inclusive governance, and social justice. This trend is consistent with previous bibliometric studies, which reported a

significant acceleration in gender-related research since the mid-2010s across education, public policy, technology, business, and the social sciences (Pinto-López & Montaudon-Tomas, 2025; Sicuan et al., 2026; Valero-Ancco et al., 2025). The growing body of literature also mirrors the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), which has stimulated multidisciplinary research addressing gender equity within broader sustainability frameworks (Yang et al., 2024).

The Bradford's Law analysis revealed that scientific publications are concentrated within a relatively small number of core journals, while the remaining literature is dispersed across numerous multidisciplinary sources. This distribution reflects the broad scope of gender equality and social inclusion research, which encompasses education, psychology, sociology, public health, technology, environmental sciences, and organizational studies. Similar publication patterns have been observed in previous bibliometric investigations, demonstrating that gender-related research has become increasingly interdisciplinary and collaborative (Peng & Li, 2025; Sicuan et al., 2026). The presence of multidisciplinary journals among the leading publication outlets further indicates that gender equality is no longer confined to a single academic discipline but is increasingly recognized as a cross-cutting issue influencing multiple sectors.

The keyword co-occurrence network further illustrates the evolving conceptual structure of the field. Central themes such as gender equality, social inclusion, education, empowerment, diversity, and sustainable development occupied prominent positions within the network, indicating their central role in contemporary scholarship. Moreover, the emergence of keywords related to digital inclusion, information technology, artificial intelligence, and STEM reflects the expanding research agenda toward addressing gender disparities in technologically driven societies (Kumari & Tiwari, 2025; Kilitci Calayir et al., 2026). These findings support previous studies reporting a thematic shift from traditional discussions of gender equality toward broader concepts of intersectionality, digital transformation, ethical artificial intelligence, workplace resilience, and inclusive innovation (Camila Francisco de Castro et al., 2026; Imran et al., 2025).

Despite the remarkable expansion of the literature, the findings also reveal persistent challenges. Previous studies consistently report continuing gender disparities in leadership positions, higher education, STEM disciplines, digital access, and professional advancement, particularly among women and marginalized groups (Camila Francisco de Castro et al., 2026; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). Furthermore, geographical imbalances remain evident, with research production continuing to be dominated by developed countries, while the Global South remains comparatively underrepresented (Ernada et al., 2026; Valencia et al., 2025). These disparities highlight the importance of strengthening international collaboration, promoting inclusive research agendas, and supporting context-specific studies that address regional social, cultural, and economic realities. Future research should continue integrating interdisciplinary perspectives, emerging technologies, and evidence-based policy approaches to advance gender equality and social inclusion and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the global research landscape on gender equality and social inclusion, demonstrating the sustained growth, multidisciplinary nature, and increasing international relevance of the field. The findings reveal evolving research trends, influential publication sources, collaborative networks, and emerging thematic areas that reflect the expanding integration of gender equality and social inclusion across education, governance, public policy, health, sustainability, technology, and community development. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the field's intellectual structure and offer valuable insights for researchers, educators, practitioners, and policymakers in advancing inclusive and evidence-based initiatives. Future studies should expand bibliometric analyses by incorporating multiple bibliographic databases, exploring underrepresented regions and populations, strengthening international and interdisciplinary collaborations, and examining emerging issues such as digital inclusion, artificial intelligence, climate resilience, and intersectionality to further support the achievement of equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development worldwide.

DECLARATION ON THE USE OF AI TOOLS

ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used solely to assist with language refinement, grammar checking, and improving readability. The authors were responsible for the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and final approval of the manuscript.

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