Mapping the Intellectual Landscape of Inclusive Islamic Religious Education: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to systematically map the scholarly landscape of inclusive Islamic education, particularly Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for children with special needs (CWSN), by identifying trends, key themes, influential authors, and patterns of collaboration in the literature.

Design/methods/approach – A bibliometric analysis was conducted on 154 Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2003 and 2025. The data were extracted on July 19, 2025, at 8:50 p.m., using a refined Boolean search strategy. The corpus was limited to Scopus-indexed journal articles published in English, and only journal articles were included based on the document filter. The extracted data were analyzed using R, RStudio, VOSviewer, and Microsoft Excel to assess publication metrics, co-authorship networks, and keyword evolution.

Findings – The results show a significant increase in research output after 2019, with Southeast Asian countries—particularly Indonesia and Malaysia—leading in contributions. Dominant themes include inclusive education, Islamic pedagogy, and children with special needs, while emerging themes such as pluralism, citizenship, and social justice reflect a shift toward more justice-oriented and contextually grounded discourse. However, international collaboration remains limited, and the theoretical integration between Islamic epistemology and inclusive education principles appears underdeveloped.

Research implications – The findings highlight the need for more interdisciplinary and globally collaborative research in this domain. Future studies should bridge Islamic theological principles with inclusive pedagogical frameworks and expand beyond English-language and Scopus-indexed publications to achieve a more holistic understanding of inclusive Islamic education.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is a systemic approach that emphasizes the importance of providing equitable learning opportunities for all children, including children with special needs (CWSN) (Minsih et al., 2019). According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2023), of the 2,197,833 children with disabilities in Indonesia, only 146,205 (6.65%) are enrolled in inclusive schools, and only 12.26% attend special schools (*Sekolah Luar Biasa*, SLB) (Hakiman et al., 2021). These figures indicate the persistently low level of participation in formal education among CWSN. On the other hand, *madrasahs*, as Islamic educational institutions widely spread across Indonesia, hold significant potential to serve as key actors in the implementation of inclusive education based on religious values (Lisyawati & Setyaningrum, 2022).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), teaching inclusive students presents unique challenges. Religious education does not merely convey doctrine; it also plays a pivotal role in shaping students' values, attitudes, and character (Anandal et al., 2024; Fitri, 2022). However, numerous studies suggest that PAI instructional practices have yet to be fully responsive to the needs of students with learning barriers. Research by Hanani (2020), for example, reveals that the presence of special education companion teachers can significantly enhance the comprehension of PAI material among CWSN. Meanwhile, Mareta et al. (2024) identify structural obstacles—such as an inflexible curriculum and insufficient teacher training—as major challenges in implementing inclusive Islamic education in *madrasahs*. These studies indicate that, while the issue has received academic attention, the body of research remains dominated by case studies that are local in scope and have yet to provide a comprehensive overview of the scholarly structure or global discourse development in this field (Afrianty, 2023; Novrizal & Manaf, 2024).

The integration of Islamic values such as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib* into inclusive education practices holds great potential for reconstructing a more adaptive and humanistic Islamic pedagogy (Azizah et al., 2025; Rahiem, 2024; Ru'iya et al., 2023). However, there remains a significant gap in systematic mapping of the development of PAI for inclusive children within academic literature. Specifically, there is a lack of a comprehensive, field-level overview of publication trends, institutional and national contributions, as well as dominant and emerging research themes. This gap is marked by fragmented, case-heavy research and a lack of global discourse on the topic. This study addresses these gaps by offering both conceptual and empirical mapping of the development of inclusive Islamic education research through a bibliometric approach.

As a quantitative method within information science, bibliometrics enables the tracking of publication trends, relationships among researchers and institutions, and the identification of dominant and emerging research themes (Lu et al., 2022; Suárez-Gargallo & Zaragoza-Sáez, 2023; Sun et al., 2021). Situated within the broader framework of scientometrics, bibliometric analysis offers deep insights into the dissemination patterns of knowledge, intellectual structures, and collaborative networks within a field of study (Apriantoro et al., 2023). By examining Scopus-indexed publications from 2003 to 2025, this study aims to uncover the dynamics, developmental trajectories, and scholarly landscape of PAI for inclusive children.

This study contributes in several key ways: (a) it reveals the thematic evolution within the field, identifying both established and emerging clusters of research, (b) it diagnoses gaps in international collaboration, and (c) it proposes a research and policy agenda aimed at advancing inclusive PAI. In this context, bibliometric indicators—such as publication counts, citation metrics, h-index, keyword mapping, and network visualization—are critical for assessing the intellectual structure and impact of the field (Al Mubarok et al., 2025). These indicators will aid in strategic decision-making for research development, policy formulation, and resource allocation in the educational and academic sectors. Ultimately, this study serves not only as a scientific mapping exercise but also as a significant contribution to strengthening the intellectual foundation for a more inclusive and transformative Islamic Religious Education in the future.

2. Methods

This research adopts a bibliometric approach as its primary methodology (Al Mubarok et al., 2024; Amien et al., 2024; Cuéllar-Sánchez et al., 2024; Yanhao et al., 2024). Data spanning from 2003 to 2025 was retrieved from the Scopus database on July 19, 2025, at 8:50 p.m., utilizing a Boolean search strategy. Analytical tools including R, RStudio, VOSviewer, and Microsoft Excel were employed to examine citation metrics, document content, and interrelationships within the dataset. The analysis followed a structured three-phase procedure to ensure systematic data processing.

2.1. *First Stage*

The initial stage involved a preliminary literature review to establish the relevance of the research topic within the broader context of bibliometric studies (Abad-Segura et al., 2020). This step helped align the study with its thematic focus and facilitated the identification of precise keywords representing the research domain.

2.2. *Second Stage*

In the second stage, an advanced Boolean query was applied to the Scopus database using the string TITLE-ABS-KEY (special needs AND inclusive education AND Islamic education), which initially returned 214 documents. The results were then refined to include only journal articles classified under the social sciences and arts and humanities subject areas. The final query—(TITLE-ABS-KEY(inclusive education) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(islamic education)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "ARTS"))—yielded 154 relevant publications for analysis.

2.3. *Final Stage*

In the final stage, the selected literature underwent comprehensive evaluation. Tools such as Scopus Analyser, R, and RStudio were used to assess trends in publication frequency, author productivity, institutional contributions, and geographical distribution. Additionally, co-authorship and keyword networks were visualized using VOSviewer, while Excel was used for data organization and extended analysis.

It is important to acknowledge certain methodological limitations (Abbas et al., 2021). The reliance on keyword-driven searches introduces the risk of bias, as some pertinent studies might have been excluded due to the use of alternative terminology. Furthermore, the analysis was confined to English-language articles indexed in Scopus, potentially omitting relevant literature published in other languages or databases. These constraints should be considered when interpreting the generalizability and completeness of the study's findings. A visual summary of these procedural steps is provided in the this figure below:
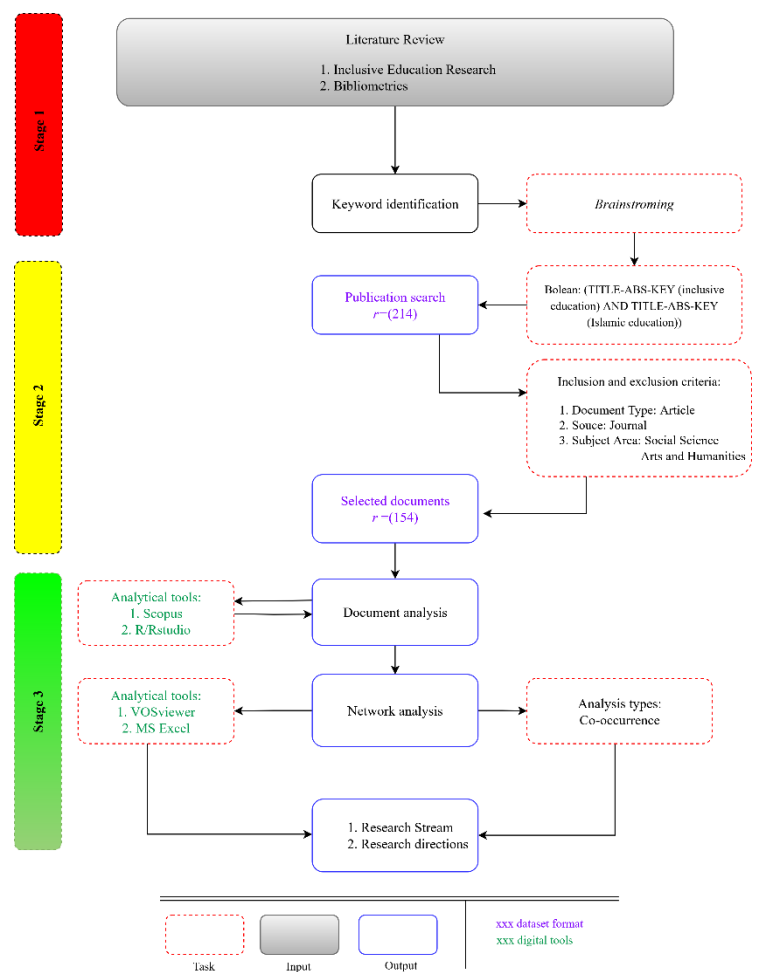
Figure 1. Research Workflow

3. Results

3.1. *Main Data Information*

Table 1 summarizes a total of 154 academic documents published over a 22-year period. These publications were authored by 404 individuals, including 45 single-author contributions, highlighting both individual and collaborative scholarly efforts. The international co-authorship rate stands at 19.48%, indicating a moderate level of global research collaboration. Collectively, the documents reference 7,651 sources and have received an average of 4.79 citations per paper, reflecting growing academic attention to the topic.

Table 1. Main Information About Data

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	2003:2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc**)**	109
Documents	154
Annual Growth Rate %	17,54
Document Average Age	2,72

Average citations per doc	4,792
References	7651
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	62
Author's Keywords (DE)	584
AUTHORS	
Authors	404
Authors of single-authored docs	45
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	47
Co-Authors per Doc	2,71
International co-authorships %	19,48
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	154

3.2. *Documents by Year*

Based on the annual publication graph below, it is evident that research on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for inclusive children experienced slow development in its early stages, with only 1 to 3 publications per year from 2003 to 2014. Subsequently, there was a gradual increase beginning in 2017, and this trend has continued to strengthen, particularly since 2019. A significant surge occurred in 2024, with 53 publications—the highest peak to date. Although there was a slight decline in 2025 (34 publications), this figure remains substantially higher compared to previous years, indicating a sustained interest in this topic.

This phenomenon reflects a growing academic attention to issues of inclusivity in PAI instruction, especially over the past five years. The increase may be related to a heightened awareness of the importance of equitable and inclusive education for all children, including those with special needs. Furthermore, global circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic likely contributed to the emergence of new studies addressing the challenges and innovations in inclusive education. These findings are consistent with the relatively young average age of the documents, suggesting that this topic is both current and rapidly evolving.
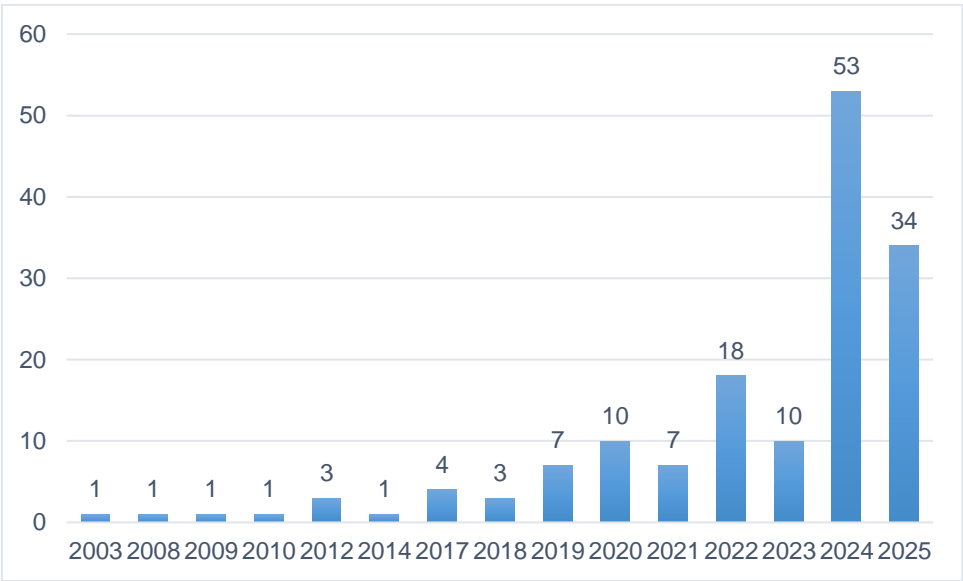
Figure 2. Graphical representation of publications from 2003 to 2025

3.3. *Author Productivity*

Figure 3 presents the top 10 most productive authors contributing to the topic of inclusive Islamic education. The most prolific author is Maskuri, with a total of three publications, followed by nine other authors—such as Abbaria A., Black A., Mariyono D., and Minsih M.—each contributing two publications. These figures indicate a relatively even distribution of scholarly output among leading researchers in this field.

The absence of a dominant author with a significantly higher number of publications suggests that research on this topic is being developed collectively by various scholars from diverse backgrounds. This pattern reflects a growing interest and shared responsibility in exploring inclusive approaches within Islamic education. Moreover, the presence of multiple active contributors, even with modest publication counts, highlights opportunities for future collaboration and the potential to build stronger research networks focused on inclusive PAI practices.
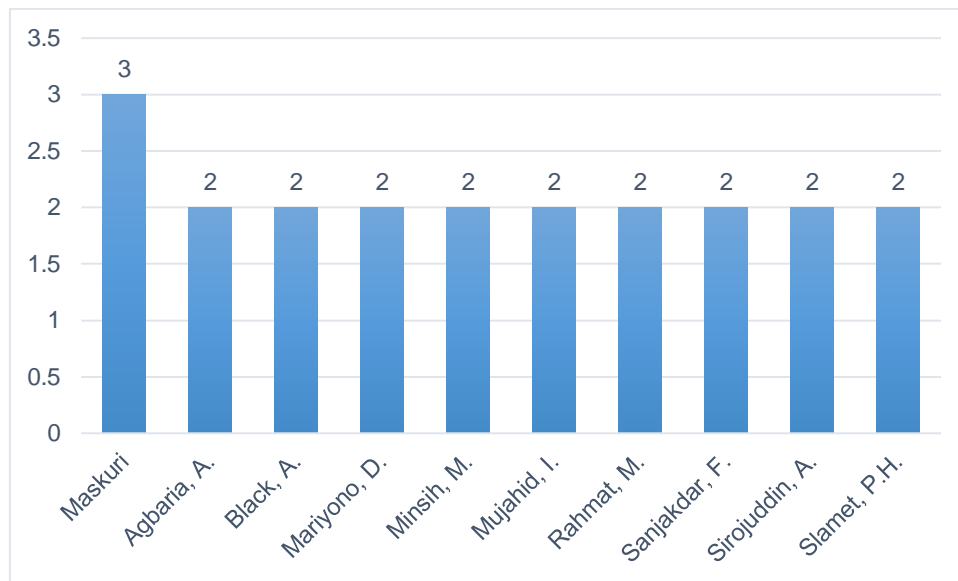
Figure 3. Most relevant authors

Table 2 highlights the scientific impact of key authors in the field of inclusive Islamic education, using bibliometric indicators such as h-index, g-index, m-index, total citations (TC), and number of publications (NP). Among the contributors, Rahmat M emerges as the most influential author, with a total of 27 citations across two publications. His h-index and g-index of 2 indicate consistent scholarly performance, while his m-index of 0.286 reflects a moderate citation rate since his first publication in 2019.

Another noteworthy contributor is Mariyono D, who, despite only beginning to publish on this topic in 2024, has already achieved an h-index and g-index of 2 and holds the highest m-index (1.0) among all authors—suggesting a rapidly growing academic influence. Additionally, Abdullah MA stands out for accumulating 23 citations from a single publication, reflecting high citation efficiency. Most of the remaining authors are relatively new, with publication activity beginning in or after 2021 and having h-index and g-index scores of 1, indicating early career impact. These patterns underscore the emerging nature of this research area and highlight the presence of authors with strong potential to shape future developments in inclusive PAI scholarship.

Table 2. Author's Impact

Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
Mariyono D	2	2	1	6	2	2024
Rahmat M	2	2	0,286	27	2	2019
Abdiramanova AT	1	1	0,111	2	1	2017
Abdullah FD	1	1	0,5	7	1	2024
Abdullah I	1	1	0,2	23	1	2021
Abdullah MA	1	1	0,25	5	1	2022
Abiddin NZ	1	1	0,5	3	1	2024
Abu Bakar NA	1	1	0,5	1	1	2024
Afandi I	1	1	0,5	1	1	2024
Affani S	1	1	0,5	1	1	2024

3.4. *Documents Based on Affiliations*

Based on the data presented in Figure 4, institutional contributions to publications on the theme of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for inclusive children are predominantly made by higher education institutions in Indonesia. Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta emerges as the most productive institution, with eight publications, underscoring its central role in advancing scholarship on inclusivity in Islamic education. This is followed by Universitas Islam Malang, Universiti Malaya, and the International Islamic University Malaysia, each with five publications, indicating that not only Indonesian institutions but also universities in Malaysia are actively engaged in this discourse.

Six other institutions—such as UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, UIN Alauddin Makassar, and Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta—have each contributed four publications, reflecting a relatively even distribution of contributions among various Islamic universities. The dominance of Indonesian institutions highlights a national focus on inclusive education issues, particularly within religious contexts, while the participation of Malaysian universities points to a growing regional dimension in the development of research in this field.
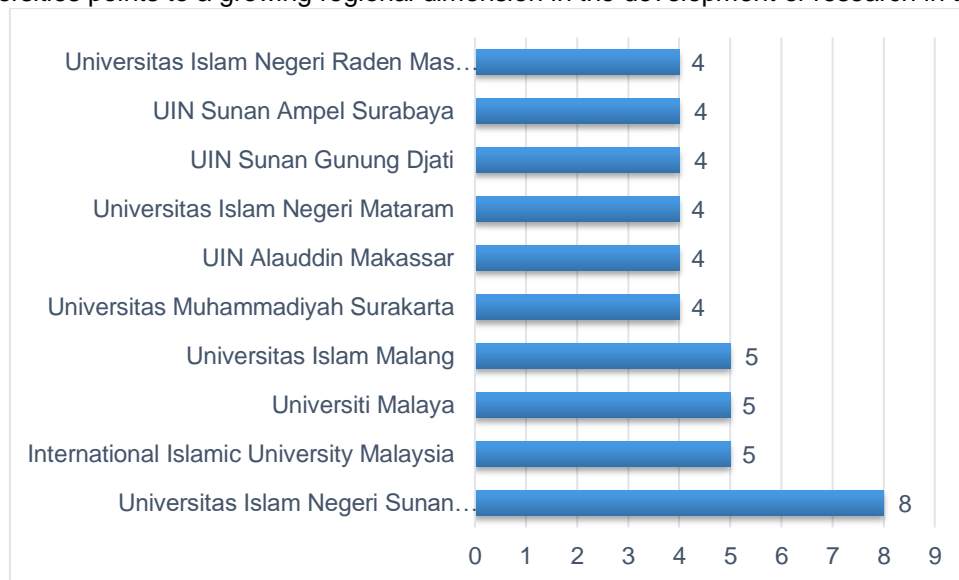

Figure 4. Publications by affiliation

3.5. *Country Contribution*

Figure 5 displays the distribution of publications on inclusive Islamic education across the top 10 contributing countries. Indonesia dominates the field with a substantial margin, accounting for 79 publications, or more than half of the total output. This is followed distantly by Malaysia with 18 publications and Australia with 10. Other contributing countries—such as the United States (7), Canada (5), Turkey (5), and several others—show lower but still notable engagement with the topic.

The dominance of Indonesia reflects its strong academic and policy interest in inclusive religious education, which aligns with the country's large Muslim population and increasing emphasis on inclusive educational practices. Malaysia's significant contribution also points to a regional focus on integrating inclusive values within Islamic pedagogy. The presence of Western countries such as Australia, the United States, and Canada suggests growing global awareness and academic interest in the intersection of Islam and inclusive education, although still limited in

volume. This distribution highlights Southeast Asia as the leading region in advancing scholarly discourse on this topic, while also signaling emerging contributions from global academic communities.
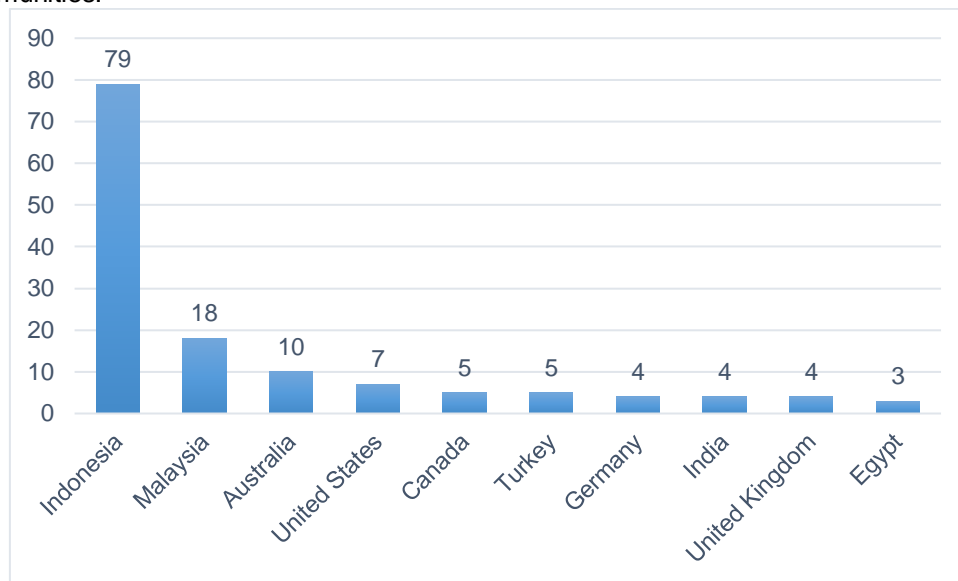

Figure 5. Publications contributed by several countries

Figure 6 presents the distribution of documents by corresponding author's country, focusing on the top contributors to the theme of inclusive Islamic education. Indonesia emerges as the leading country, with 58 documents (37.7% of total publications). Of these, 42 are single-country publications (SCP) and 16 are multi-country publications (MCP), reflecting both strong national productivity and a moderate level of international collaboration (MCP rate: 27.6%).

Malaysia follows with 7 documents (4.5%), consisting of 6 SCP and 1 MCP, indicating a relatively lower but still notable engagement in international partnerships (MCP rate: 14.3%). Australia is next with 5 publications (3.2%), all of which are domestic (SCP = 5; MCP = 0), showing no recorded collaboration across borders.

Other contributing countries such as Turkey (4 articles; MCP = 1; MCP rate: 25%), Canada (3 articles; MCP = 0), India (3 articles; MCP = 0), Israel (3 articles; MCP = 0), and USA (3 articles; MCP = 0) are primarily engaged in single-country research. Kuwait, however, stands out with 2 articles, where one was produced via international collaboration (MCP = 1; MCP rate: 50%), indicating stronger reliance on international co-authorship.

Overall, the data show that research in inclusive Islamic education is concentrated in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia and Malaysia. While most countries conduct research independently (SCP-dominated), some nations—despite low output—are engaging in international collaboration, suggesting growing global academic interest and emerging cross-border research networks in this field.
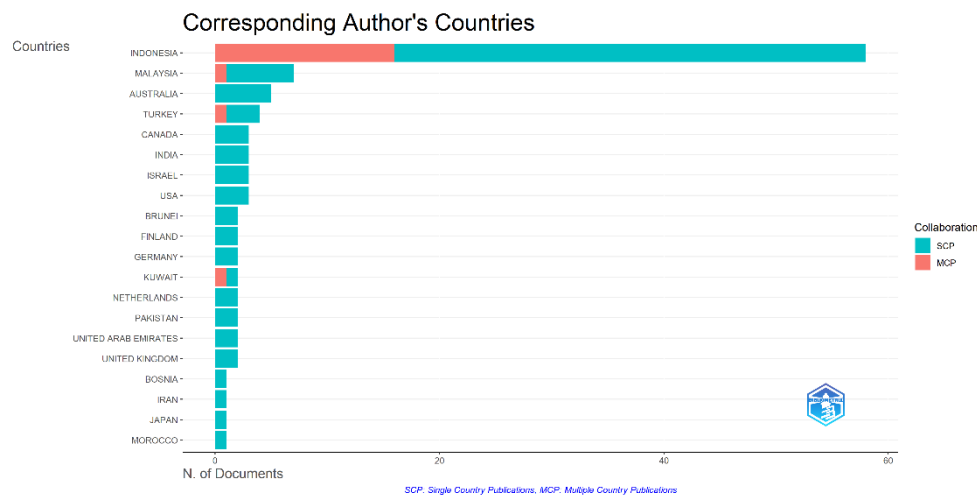
Figure 6. Distribution of corresponding authors by country based on collaboration

3.6. *Most Globally Cited Documents*

Table 3 below presents the ten publications with the highest global citation counts in the study of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for inclusive children. The most highly cited article is Buijs AE (2009), published in *Landscape and Urban Planning*, with a total of 271 citations and an average of 15.94 citations per year. This indicates that the publication has had a long-term influence within the literature. Conversely, some other publications—such as Desker R (2003) and Alborno NE (2017)—have significantly lower total citations (26 and 25, respectively), yet are included in the list due to their contributions and relevance.

However, when examined from the perspective of TC per Year (average citations per year), the article by Rahmat M (2022) stands out, with 4.75 citations per year, despite having only 19 citations in total. Similarly, Ali N (2021) with 4.60 citations per year and Rissanen I (2020) with 3.17 citations per year demonstrate that although the total citation counts are not high, some recent publications exhibit a more immediate and intensive impact over a shorter time span. Thus, it can be concluded that a high total citation count does not always correlate with a high TC per Year. Articles with relatively low total citations may have a high TC per Year if their impact is quickly realized after publication.

Moreover, the year of publication does not directly determine the number of citations. For example, the article by Desker R (2003) has a TC of 26, which is lower than that of Rahmat M (2022), which has 19 citations, despite the considerable gap in publication years. This indicates that newer articles can receive more attention and citations than older ones, depending on the relevance of the topic and research context. Therefore, neither total citation count nor publication year should be viewed as the sole indicators of academic strength; citation velocity (TC per Year) and the contextual relevance of the research also play crucial roles in determining a publication's scholarly impact.

Table 3. Most global cited documents

Paper	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
Buijs Ae, 2009, Landsc Urban Plann	271	15,94	1,00
Desker R, 2003, Contemp Southeast Asia	26	1,13	1,00
Alborno Ne, 2017, Br J Spec Educ	25	2,78	3,57
Usman Lm, 2010, Int J Soc Econ	24	1,50	1,00
Ali N, 2021, Islam Christmuslim Relat	23	4,60	3,16

Sabic-El-Rayess A, 2020, Int J Educ Dev	22	3,67	2,89
Sakai M, 2012, Austr J Soc Iss	20	1,43	2,31
Rissanen I, 2020, Scan J Educ Res	19	3,17	2,50
Rahmat M, 2022, Int J Instr	19	4,75	4,38
Elbelazi Sa, 2020, Qual Inq	14	2,33	1,84

3.7. *Network Analysis*

Figure 7 illustrates a visualization of the keyword network in studies on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for inclusive children, analyzed using the VOSviewer software. By setting a minimum cluster size of 10, four main thematic clusters emerged: Cluster 1 (21 items), Cluster 2 (16 items), Cluster 3 (12 items), and Cluster 4 (10 items). The most prominent keyword is *"Islamic education"*, which appears 18 times and has a link strength of 33, positioning it as the central node connecting various key concepts within the literature.

Each cluster represents a distinct research focus. Cluster 1 contains philosophical and ideological themes such as *education*, *religion*, *secularism*, *epistemology*, and *Islamism*, indicating that conceptual aspects still dominate the discourse on inclusive Islamic education. Cluster 2 centers on practical and social values such as *tolerance*, *integration*, *Islamic law*, and *entrepreneurial spirit*, highlighting attention to the real-world implementation of inclusivity. Meanwhile, Cluster 3 emphasizes issues of social justice, including *pluralism*, *gender equality*, and *citizenship*, reflecting the interconnection between Islamic education and democratic values and human rights. Finally, Cluster 4 forms a nexus linking the terms *inclusive education*, *culture*, and *curriculum*, suggesting an integration between cultural concepts and general inclusive pedagogical approaches.

These findings indicate that research on inclusive Islamic education is developing in a multidimensional manner, simultaneously encompassing ideological, social, and practical dimensions. *"Islamic education"* serves not only as a starting point but also as a meeting ground for various interconnected scholarly approaches aimed at building a more open and responsive Islamic education system that embraces diversity.
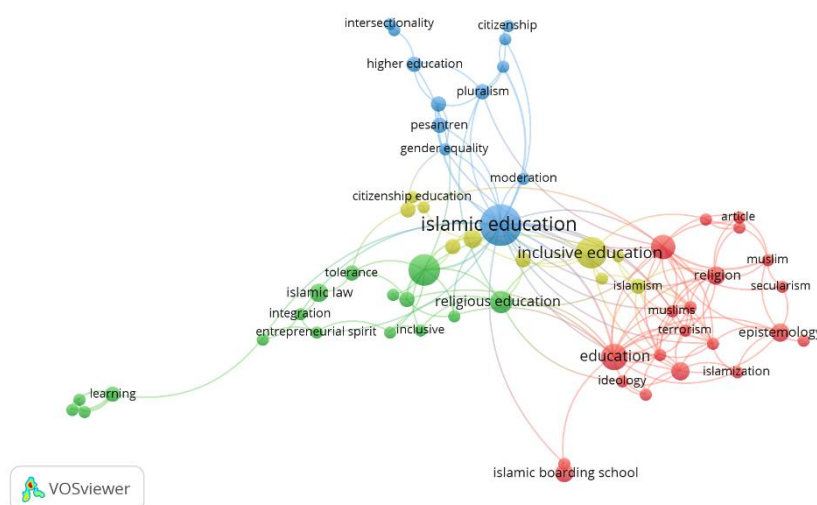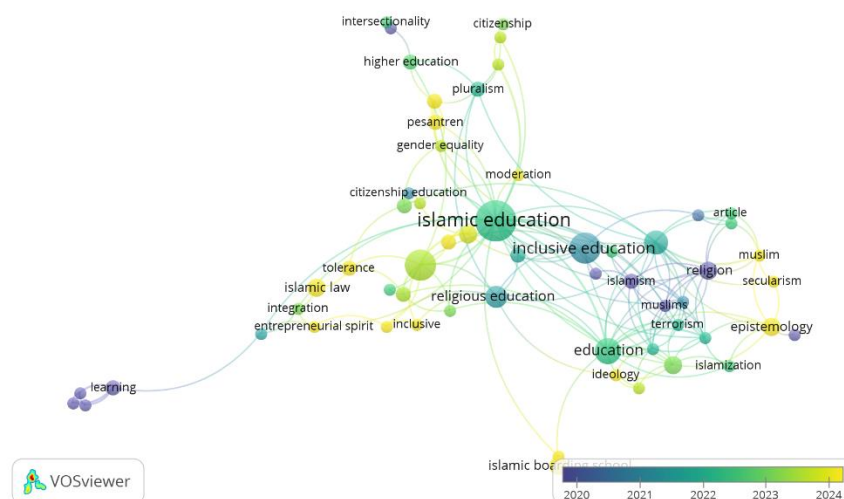

Figure 7. Keyword Network Distribution Based on Occurrence

Figure 8 presents an overlay visualization of keywords used in the literature on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for inclusive children, with a focus on temporal dimensions. The colors in the visualization reflect the dominant year of a keyword's appearance, ranging from dark blue (2020) to bright yellow (2024). Core keywords such as *"Islamic education"* and *"inclusive education"* are located at the center of the map in greenish hues, indicating that these terms have remained consistent focal points in recent years and continue to be relevant.

Several earlier-emerging terms, such as *learning* and *religion*, appear in dark blue and purple, suggesting that these themes were dominant in the early stages of research development. In contrast, more recent keywords such as *"intersectionality"*, *"citizenship"*, *"pluralism"*, and *"moderation"* are shown in bright yellow, indicating that these issues have only recently begun to gain attention in academic discourse. This reflects a shift or expansion in research focus—from normative and ideological approaches to more inclusive, socially grounded, and contextual perspectives.

These findings highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of research on inclusive Islamic education. The emergence of new topics over the past two years demonstrates the literature's responsiveness to global issues such as social justice, diversity, and moderation, as well as ongoing efforts to integrate these values into an adaptive, inclusivity-oriented Islamic education system.

Figure 8. Keyword Network Distribution Based on Overlay

3.8. *Thematic Map Analysis*

Figure 9 illustrates the thematic distribution of research into four quadrants, based on two dimensions: degree of development (density) and degree of relevance (centrality). This visualization facilitates the identification of the position of each keyword within the structure of the literature, thereby aiding in the formulation of research directions and strategic priorities. In the *Motor Themes* quadrant (upper right), keywords such as *education*, *learning*, *elementary school*, *equality*, *citizenship*, *Islamophobia*, *ideology*, and *Islamic studies* are prominent. These themes exhibit both high relevance and a high level of development, making them central to a well-established body of literature. Researchers are encouraged to prioritize these themes, as they represent key driving forces in the evolution of academic discourse.

In contrast, the *Niche Themes* quadrant (upper left) includes keywords such as *Islamic family law*, *Muslim minority*, *disabilities*, *citizenship education*, and *tolerance*. While these themes

are well-developed structurally, they demonstrate lower relevance to the broader field. These topics are particularly suitable for more specialized or in-depth investigations, especially within technical or context-specific subfields.

The *Emerging or Declining Themes* quadrant (lower left) features keywords like *Islamic boarding school* and *education quality*, which currently have low levels of both development and relevance. These themes may reflect areas experiencing a decline in scholarly interest, or conversely, they may represent emerging topics with potential for further development in future research. Meanwhile, the *Basic Themes* quadrant (lower right) contains foundational terms such as *Islamic education*, *inclusive education*, *Islamic religious education*, *Islam*, *religion*, and *epistemology*. These themes are highly relevant as theoretical foundations but still require further development within more complex academic frameworks.
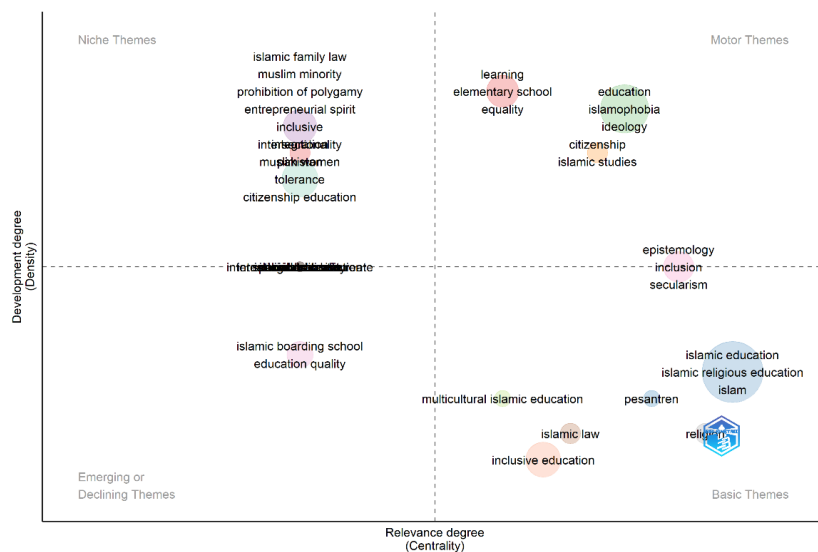

Figure 9. Thematic Map

4. Discussion

The bibliometric analysis on the theme of *Islamic Education for Inclusive Learners* reveals a dynamic and steadily growing research landscape, particularly in the post-2020 period. This growth coincides with an increasing global and regional push toward equity and access in education, as advocated by frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education) and the Salamanca Statement, which collectively call for the mainstreaming of children with special needs in regular educational settings (Minsih et al., 2019; Nurdin et al., 2024). The increased scholarly output from countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nigeria — where Islamic education systems are strongly embedded in national culture — reflects the growing need to contextualize inclusive education within faith-based institutions (Karasu, 2019).

From a theoretical standpoint, the research aligns with multiple intersecting paradigms. Constructivist learning theory, which underscores the importance of learner-centered approaches, intersects with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework that promotes flexible curriculum delivery to accommodate a diversity of learners (Aghasafari et al., 2025; Dickinson & Gronseth, 2020; Irvan et al., 2023). These are complemented by Islamic pedagogical principles rooted in *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all creation), *adl* (justice), and *ta'lim* (teaching with compassion) (Andri Nirwana et al.,

2025; Rapi et al., 2024; Suddahazai, 2023). These principles serve as both ethical imperatives and pedagogical strategies, supporting the argument that inclusive education is not a foreign imposition but rather intrinsic to Islamic values (Alotaibi et al., 2020).

Thematic cluster analysis further affirms this interpretation. The prominence of terms such as *Islamic education*, *inclusive education*, and *children with special needs* within the motor themes quadrant (high centrality and density) indicates a mature and integrated research area. The keywords *justice*, *curriculum*, and *citizenship* emerging in more recent publications (as shown in the overlay visualization) suggest an epistemological shift — from mere access and inclusion to deeper concerns about equity, recognition, and democratic participation within Islamic educational institutions (Ansari Ricci et al., 2021; Connor, 2025; Watson, 2023). This aligns with theories of recognition and social justice advanced by scholars such as Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, which emphasize not only distributive justice but also cultural and symbolic representation (Wren et al., 2021).

Empirical studies reinforce this shift. For example, Hanani (2020) documented that the use of dedicated special needs teachers in inclusive Islamic schools significantly improved religious understanding among students with disabilities. Meanwhile, Mareta et al. (2024) highlight the persistence of systemic barriers such as untrained teachers and insufficient facilities in madrasahs across Indonesia. These insights resonate with Rawlsian justice theory, which asserts that fairness is achieved not through equal treatment, but through equitable strategies that consider each individual's specific circumstances (Arce et al., 2022). In this sense, Islamic inclusive education must move beyond surface-level integration and toward structural transformation that considers spiritual, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Al Hadi et al., 2025; Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020).

However, the bibliometric findings also expose contradictions and gaps. While publication counts are increasing, collaboration networks remain relatively fragmented, with many high-output authors and institutions operating within single-country boundaries. This limits epistemic diversity and slows the emergence of universal frameworks. Similarly, while total citation counts (TC) offer insight into influence, they do not consistently align with citations per year (TC/year), indicating that newer, more contextually relevant work may surpass older foundational papers in terms of impact. This nuance is important, especially in a rapidly evolving field that must respond to socio-political, technological, and cultural changes.

Institutionally, the dominance of Islamic universities such as UIN Sunan Kalijaga and IIUM reflects the strategic role of higher education in embedding inclusivity within the religious curriculum. Yet, as highlighted in the thematic mapping, many foundational topics (e.g., epistemology, Islamic law) remain in the *basic themes* quadrant — relevant but underdeveloped. This implies that while the discourse on inclusion is progressing, its integration into Islamic epistemology, legal reasoning (fiqh), and teacher training is still in formative stages (Connor, 2025; Dryer et al., 2016; Glenn, 2022; Silva & Motti, 2024). Future research should, therefore, not only refine pedagogical tools but also critically interrogate the theological and jurisprudential assumptions that shape Islamic education.

This bibliometric review reveals that the integration of inclusive education within Islamic contexts is both a theoretical and moral imperative. Grounded in global education policy, Islamic ethical traditions, and social justice theory, this evolving research domain presents a critical site for innovation and reform (Alothman et al., 2024; Sözeri et al., 2021; Syarifuddin et al., 2024). To advance the field, future scholarship must address empirical gaps, strengthen international collaboration, and develop interdisciplinary approaches that honor both spiritual and practical dimensions of inclusive education. Only through such efforts can Islamic education truly embody the Qur'anic vision of *li-kaum yatafakkarun* — an education that nurtures reflection, dignity, and universal human flourishing.

Despite its comprehensive scope, this study presents several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the data is limited to articles indexed in the Scopus database and published in

English. This scope may exclude relevant studies published in other reputable databases or in local and regional languages, particularly Indonesian or Arabic, which are highly relevant to Islamic education contexts. Consequently, the global representativeness of the dataset may be affected. Second, the reliance on specific Boolean keywords such as "special needs", "inclusive education" and "Islamic education" may introduce selection bias, potentially omitting publications that use alternative or synonymous terms not captured by the search string. Third, while bibliometric methods effectively map publication trends, authorship networks, and keyword evolution, they do not evaluate the depth or quality of the research content itself. Hence, qualitative nuances, theoretical contributions, or pedagogical innovations may remain underexplored. Finally, although visual tools such as VOSviewer offer insight into research clusters and themes, they do not fully capture the dynamic and contextual challenges encountered in real-world inclusive Islamic educational settings. These limitations suggest the need for future research that integrates bibliometric analysis with qualitative content review and field-based investigations for a more holistic understanding.

5. Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis of 154 Scopus-indexed, English-language journal publications maps the evolution of inclusive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) research from 2003 to 2025. The results indicate a marked increase in scholarly output in recent years, particularly after 2020, signaling rising academic interest in inclusive pedagogical practices within Islamic education. Contributions are concentrated in a small number of countries, notably Indonesia and Malaysia, and the co-authorship patterns suggest that single-country publications remain prevalent, while international collaboration is comparatively limited. Thematic mapping positions foundational topics, such as Islamic education, inclusive education, and special needs education, as central to the field. It also identifies emerging areas, including citizenship and the inclusive curriculum, which point to a widening conceptual agenda.

Taken together, these findings provide a structured baseline for understanding how the field is developing and where it can be strengthened. Future research could build on the mapped themes by expanding comparative and cross-national studies, deepening interdisciplinary engagement, and more explicitly connecting Islamic ethical-theological orientations, such as justice and compassion ('adl and rahmah), with established inclusive education frameworks. Broader collaboration networks and greater representation of under-researched regions, alongside multi-database and multilingual evidence where feasible, may help advance a more holistic and transformative scholarship on inclusive Islamic education.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Nurul Latifatul Inayati initiated the research topic, formulated the core research questions, and coordinated the overall manuscript preparation. Fahmi Ulum Al Mubarok contributed to the development of the theoretical framework and provided guidance on the research methodology. Annas Fajar Rohmani supported the data collection process and assisted in managing research implementation and logistics. Silvani Yuzarni conducted the data analysis and contributed to the interpretation and synthesis of the research findings. Zaim Hilmi Musyaffa' contributed to refining the discussion, strengthening the conceptual coherence, and reviewing the final version of the manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interest's statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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