

Bullying and academic performance in public schools: A bibliometric approach



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Abstract School bullying has become an increasing concern due to its adverse effects on students' emotional well-being, mental health, and academic performance. This phenomenon has triggered a significant rise in scientific production, particularly since 2019, reaching its peak in 2023, reflecting a growing global interest in the topic. The aim of this study was to analyze, using a bibliometric approach, the evolution of research on bullying and academic performance between 2014 and 2024. Bibliometric techniques were applied using the Scopus database and the Bibliometrix package in R, allowing the identification of publication trends, the most influential authors, international collaboration networks, and keyword co-occurrence. Visual mapping tools facilitated the detection of emerging topics and thematic clusters within the literature. The results indicate sustained growth in scientific productivity, with countries such as the United States, China, and Spain leading research efforts, and a strong concentration of publications in educational psychology and public health journals. The most cited studies focus on the psycho-emotional impact of bullying, highlighting variables such as anxiety, self-esteem, and school belonging. Furthermore, new research lines have emerged, addressing cyberbullying, ethnic-cultural harassment, and mental health in vulnerable contexts. The conclusions emphasize the need to continue advancing these areas, particularly in multicultural and vulnerable environments, in order to develop more effective, sustainable, and evidence-based educational interventions that consider students' psychosocial contexts. In addition, the findings underscore the importance of guiding the development of comprehensive public policies aimed at preventing school bullying, promoting emotional well-being, and ensuring educational equity from an inclusive perspective, while contributing to both academic knowledge and institutional decision-making.

Keywords: mental health, bibliometric analysis, emotional well-being

1. Introduction

In recent decades, bullying has become a central topic of study because of its considerable effects on students' emotional welfare, psychological health, and educational performance. The number of publications containing terms like "bully," "bullying," and "bullied" has significantly increased in academic databases such as PsycINFO and Scopus. Slonje et al. (2025) found that the number of bullying-related articles in Scopus has doubled every five years since 1990, reflecting an annual growth rate of approximately 15% over the past two decades. While from 1976 to 1995 there were, on average, only 10 publications per year, between 2016 and 2020, the annual output surged to nearly 1,400 articles, signaling a growing global interest in the issue.

This increase reflects a growing awareness of the educational and psychological consequences of bullying. Victimized students frequently experience depression, low self-esteem, behavioral issues, and a diminished sense of school belonging, all of which negatively impact their socioemotional development and academic performance (Álvarez Marín et al., 2022; Samara et al., 2021). In contrast, those students assuming a defender role usually show stronger emotional regulation and achieve higher academic performance (Riffle et al., 2021). Emotional intelligence has also been identified as a protective factor that helps mitigate the negative effects of bullying (Martínez-Martínez et al., 2022).

However, despite the growing number of studies, certain contexts remain insufficiently explored. Research conducted in the Peruvian Amazon has shown that school bullying frequently intersects with cultural, ethnic, or linguistic discrimination, creating complex forms of victimization that have not yet been adequately addressed (Martínez-Santiago et al., 2023). These realities highlight the need for more localized and culturally sensitive analyses in vulnerable and multicultural settings.

This study aims to analyze the progression of scientific output on school bullying and its connection to academic performance from 2014 to 2024, relying on Scopus as the main source. Bibliometric methods implemented through the Bibliometrix package in R will allow the identification of publication trends, leading authors, international collaborations, and key thematic areas. It was hypothesized that the number of publications on school bullying and academic performance would



show a steady increase over the past decade, particularly in response to growing global awareness and the emergence of digital forms of aggression.

2. Materials and Methods

Bibliometric analysis has become an essential tool for examining the evolution and characteristics of scientific production across different fields of knowledge. In this research, the methodology was applied to analyze studies on peer harassment and how it influences students' academic outcomes during the period 2014–2024. Data were obtained exclusively from the Scopus database, including scientific articles published in both Spanish and English. For data processing, the R statistical language was used, specifically the Bibliometrix package and its graphical interface Biblioshiny, which facilitated the generation of visualizations and thematic maps. Through this approach, it was possible to map prevailing publication dynamics, highlight the foremost scholars and institutions, and determine the countries leading in scientific productivity, along with the most influential journals and the most frequently recurring keywords in academic studies on the topic.

2.1. Sources, extraction procedures, and study screening

The bibliometric analysis was performed exclusively through the Scopus database, given its extensive international coverage of peer-reviewed scientific literature. The search strategy focused on the keywords "school bullying" and "academic performance," applying filters to select scientific articles published in Spanish or English between 2014 and 2024. Data collection and processing were carried out with the Bibliometrix software and its graphical interface, Biblioshiny, within the R environment. This approach enabled the generation of bibliometric indicators, visualizations of publication patterns, thematic networks, and author impact metrics. The selection procedure is outlined in a PRISMA flow chart (Figure 1), which illustrates the stages of inclusion and exclusion applied to the database. This methodological approach has been validated in similar studies that analyze school bullying from a rigorous bibliometric perspective (Slonje et al., 2025).

2.2. Search Strategy

This study focused on school bullying and its influence on students' academic achievement, analyzed from a multidisciplinary perspective encompassing psychology, education, social sciences, and health. Data collection was carried out in May 2025 using the Scopus database. To ensure the relevance of the findings, a search strategy was developed based on key descriptors combined with Boolean operators. The search equation applied was:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (bullying OR "acoso escolar") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("academic performance" OR "rendimiento académico" OR "desempeño académico")

The inclusion criteria considered scientific articles published in English and Spanish between 2014 and 2024. After applying the filters, 116 articles were selected that met the defined thematic and methodological criteria. Duplicate documents and those that did not meet the established conditions were excluded. All selected articles had undergone a peer-review process, ensuring the quality and reliability of the data. These documents were organized and prepared for a detailed bibliometric analysis using statistical and visualization tools, with the aim of identifying trends, publication patterns, co-authorships, and emerging areas in research on school bullying and academic performance.

2.3. Data analysis and visualization

The document selection process adhered to the PRISMA model, organized into four phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the first phase, 404 articles were retrieved using the Scopus search equation. During the screening stage, 288 documents were discarded as they did not fulfill the established inclusion criteria, such as belonging to a publication type other than a scientific article, being written in languages not considered (other than English or Spanish), or falling outside the 2014–2024 time range. In the final stage, 116 articles were retained and incorporated into the bibliometric analysis using the Bibliometrix software in R. This procedure ensured that the analysis focused exclusively on publications relevant to the study of school bullying and its effects on students' academic outcomes.

3. Results

3.1. Bibliometric analysis

The temporal analysis of scientific production, as illustrated in Figure 2, reveals clear patterns in the evolution of research on school bullying and academic performance between 2014 and 2024. During the first years of the period, publication activity remained modest and somewhat irregular, showing limited consolidation of this topic within the academic community. A sharp increase appeared in 2017, followed by a brief decline in 2018; however, from 2019 onward, a steady upward trajectory became evident, signaling a growing global commitment to the subject. This trend culminated in 2023, the most productive year of the decade, reflecting both the expansion of research groups and the diversification of methodological approaches. The slight

decrease observed in 2024 may be related to temporary delays in data indexing or shifts in thematic focus, rather than a genuine decline in scientific interest.

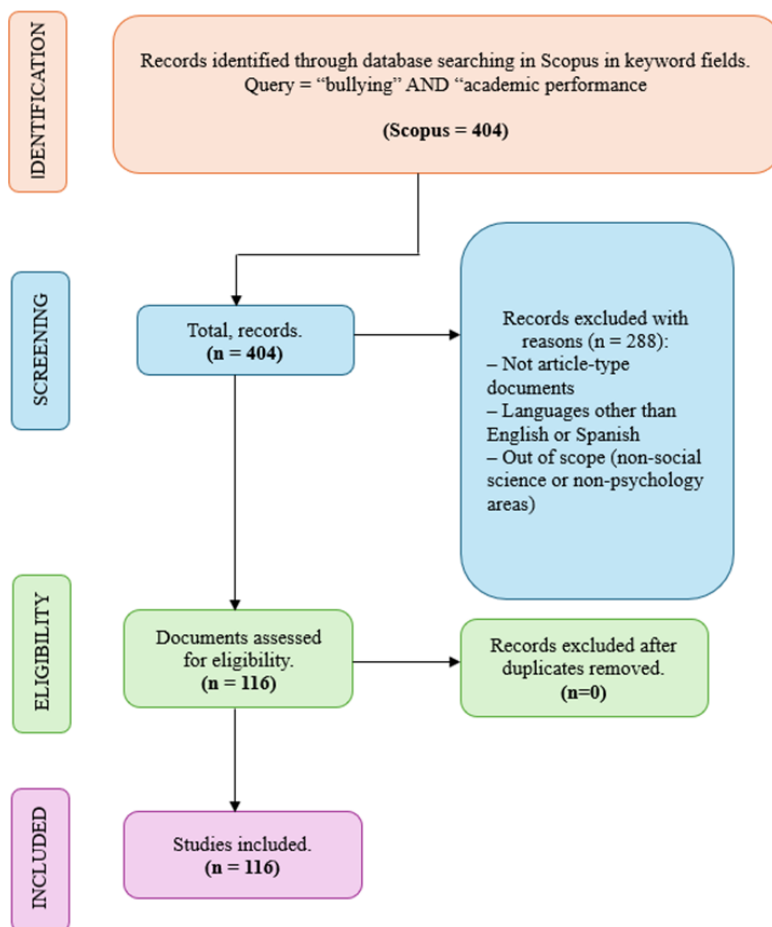


Figure 1 PRISMA flowchart illustrating the selection process of scientific articles on school bullying and academic performance for bibliometric analysis.

Overall, the sustained growth of publications demonstrates how the study of school bullying has evolved from a marginal topic to a consolidated research domain that integrates educational, psychological, and social perspectives. These findings connect directly with the thematic consolidation described in the following sections, where countries, institutions, and keywords are examined to reveal how academic collaboration and conceptual focus have co-evolved. This continuous expansion also reflects the growing sensitivity of academic communities toward students’ emotional well-being and the educational consequences of peer aggression.

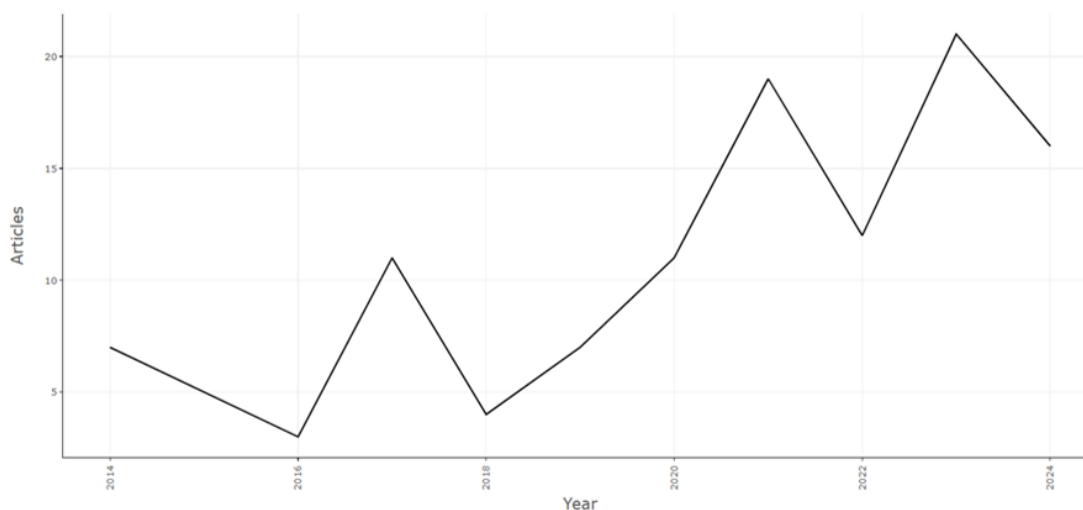


Figure 2 Annual evolution of scientific publications on school bullying and academic performance (2014–2024). *Source:* Scopus Database.



3.2. Relationship between countries, affiliations, and keywords

Building on the temporal trends described above, the analysis now shifts to explore how geographical and institutional dimensions interact with thematic focus. Figure 3 connects countries, affiliations, and core keywords to show how production and research interests have co-evolved across the academic landscape. The three-field plot provides a broad visualization of the interconnections between countries, academic institutions, and key thematic keywords within studies on school bullying and academic performance. This representation reflects how national research initiatives align with institutional productivity and thematic specialization, illustrating the collaborative networks that sustain this scientific domain.

The analysis reveals that the United States and China lead the field in publication output, followed by Canada and Spain, which together account for a substantial proportion of global production. These countries maintain strong institutional linkages with highly productive universities, such as Southeast University, Southern Medical University, and the University of Maryland School of Medicine. Such relationships demonstrate the presence of consolidated research hubs that foster the dissemination of knowledge through cross-institutional and international partnerships.

In terms of thematic structure, the most frequent keywords—school bullying, academic performance, adolescent, and mental health—reveal a consistent scientific focus on the psychosocial and educational consequences of bullying among young populations. This overlap indicates a multidisciplinary convergence that integrates perspectives from educational psychology, social sciences, and public health, giving the field both diversity and conceptual unity. Together, these elements highlight how the growth in publication output (Section 3.1) is mirrored by a strengthening of international collaboration and thematic coherence, confirming the field’s maturation.

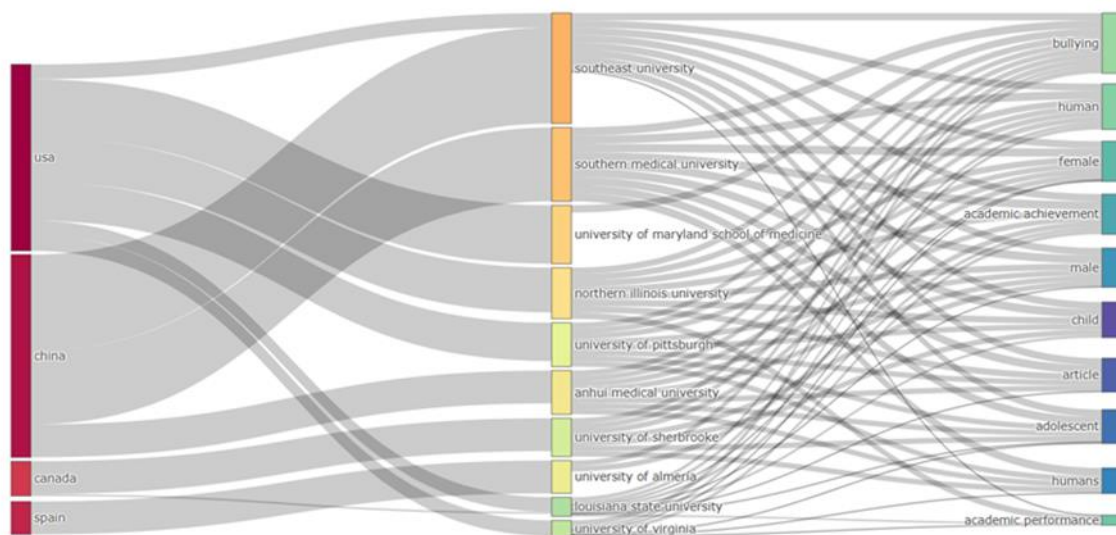


Figure 3 Three-field plot linking countries, academic institutions, and keywords. *Source:* Scopus Database.

3.3. Most relevant sources

Figure 4 shows how journal productivity has evolved alongside the field’s maturation. The analysis of source dynamics, presented in Figure 4, reveals the evolution of journal productivity on school bullying and academic performance between 2014 and 2024. Throughout the decade, Journal of Interpersonal Violence emerged as the leading and most influential outlet, followed by Frontiers in Psychology and the Journal of Youth and Adolescence. This concentration of publications in specialized journals demonstrates the progressive institutionalization of the field, showing that bullying research has matured into a consolidated and interdisciplinary area of inquiry. This editorial consistency also suggests that studies addressing the intersection between bullying and academic outcomes are gaining scientific legitimacy within mainstream psychology and education journals, reflecting a broader acceptance of socioemotional topics in empirical educational research.

Moreover, this editorial pattern is closely mirrored by the global distribution of publications, as the countries contributing the largest number of studies also host the journals and research institutions with the highest output. Such correspondence between editorial activity and geographic productivity reflects how knowledge production and dissemination are increasingly interconnected at the international level. These overlapping trends highlight the emergence of a well-defined academic ecosystem in which authors, institutions, and journals from leading countries cooperate to shape the research agenda on bullying and education. These editorial patterns are mirrored by the global distribution of publications, as detailed next.



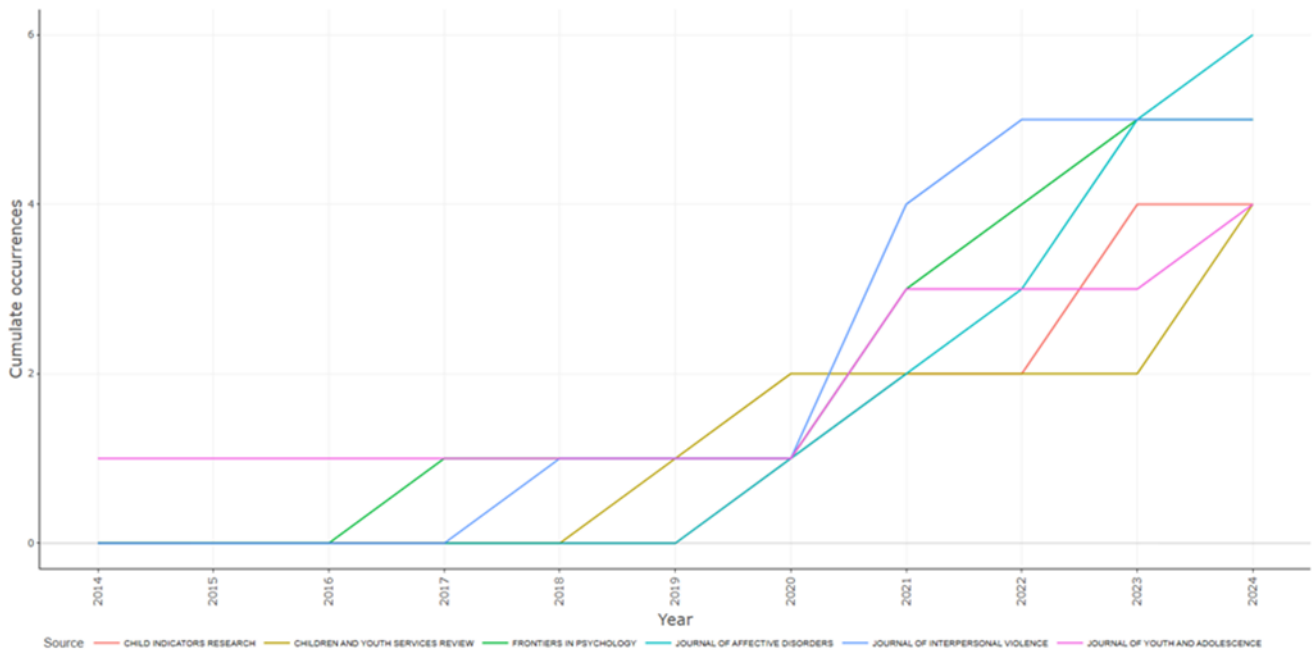


Figure 4 Most relevant journals publishing on school bullying and academic performance (2014–2024). Source: Scopus Database.

3.4. Scientific production by country

As shown in Figure 5, the United States, China, Spain, and India stand out as the primary contributors to global research on school bullying and academic performance. These nations not only dominate publication volume but also maintain active networks of collaboration with other regions, reinforcing the worldwide visibility of the field. The strong ties among North America, Europe, and Asia complement the editorial prominence of journals based in these same regions, illustrating how journal productivity and international cooperation evolve in parallel.

In contrast, countries with limited research infrastructure remain underrepresented, especially in parts of Latin America and Africa, where social and cultural realities would greatly enrich global understanding of bullying and academic performance. These disparities reveal the coexistence of well-established research hubs and emerging areas that are still developing their academic visibility. Such concentration of research in high-income regions highlights the need to strengthen scientific collaboration and local research capacity in developing contexts, ensuring a more balanced and culturally grounded understanding of the phenomenon worldwide. Overall, the combination of the editorial and geographic analyses highlights the dual process of consolidation and diversification that defines the current stage of the field. Overall, editorial concentration and international cooperation advance in parallel, reinforcing visibility while revealing gaps in underrepresented regions.

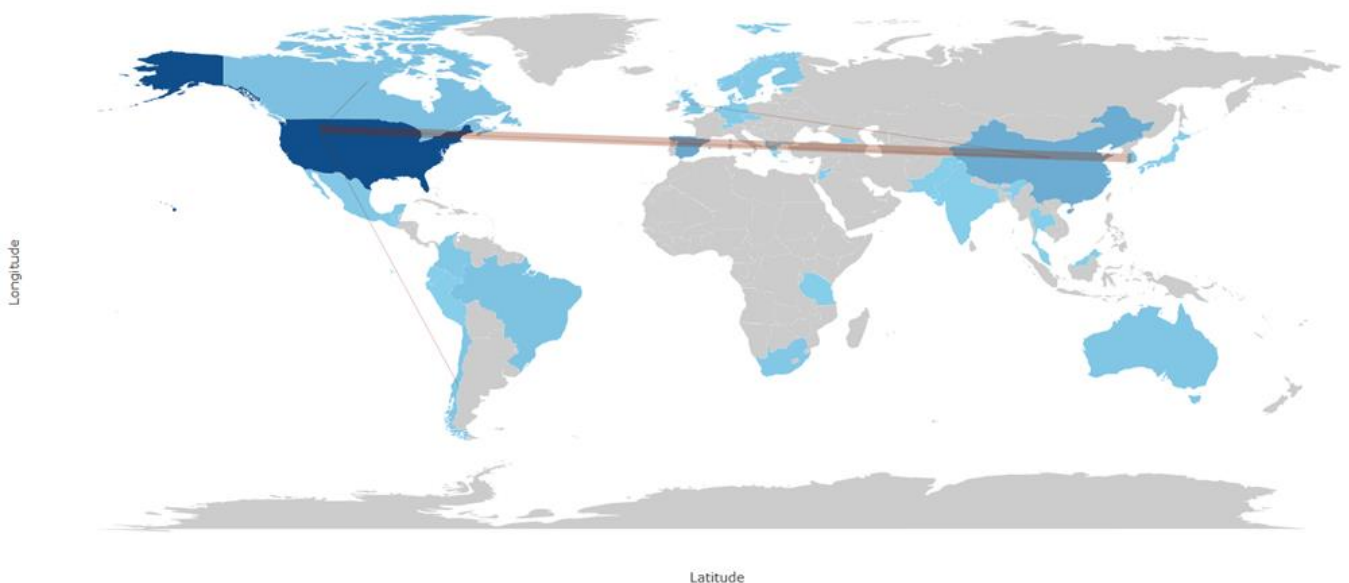


Figure 5 Scientific production and international research collaborations by country. Source: Scopus Database.



3.5. Temporal evolution of research production

The temporal progression of scholarly activity, illustrated in Figure 6, shows how research trajectories have evolved among the most influential authors studying school bullying and academic performance between 2014 and 2024. Each node in the visualization corresponds to an author’s annual publication record, with its size reflecting productivity and its color intensity indicating the average citation rate. Together, these metrics offer a dual measure of scientific output and academic influence, allowing a clearer understanding of how leadership in this field has developed over time.

The data reveal that researchers such as Hong J.S. and Espelage D.L. maintained steady productivity throughout the decade, consolidating their roles as cornerstone contributors whose work anchors the theoretical and methodological progress of the discipline. In contrast, newer authors such as Mgyue N.J. and Omondan B.I.—although less prolific—achieved comparatively high citation averages, demonstrating the visibility and growing relevance of emerging perspectives. This evolution indicates a generational renewal of academic leadership, where established figures coexist with new researchers introducing innovative approaches and culturally diverse insights.

Overall, Figure 6 portrays a dynamic and interconnected authorship landscape that balances continuity and innovation. The coexistence of long-term contributors and rising scholars reflects the maturation of the research community and reinforces the cumulative nature of scientific advancement. This dynamic evolution also links to the thematic structures analyzed in the following section, where authorial collaboration and keyword patterns converge to shape the intellectual architecture of the field. This balance between long-standing contributors and recent voices underscores a cumulative, yet renewing, authorship landscape.



Figure 6 Temporal evolution of research activity among the most relevant authors. Source: Scopus Database.

3.6. Conceptual and thematic structure of the field

Following the previous analyses, this section explores the conceptual and thematic structure of the field. After examining the geographical and temporal dimensions, the next step investigates the conceptual structure through keyword co-occurrence, frequency distribution, and thematic mapping. These complementary techniques reveal how the main research topics on school bullying and academic performance are interrelated, forming a cohesive intellectual framework that integrates psychological, educational, and social dimensions.

The mapping of keyword relationships, illustrated in Figure 7, reveals the thematic structure of research on school bullying and academic performance between 2014 and 2024. The network organizes co-occurring terms into four main clusters, each representing a distinct yet interconnected conceptual dimension of the field. The red cluster integrates core concepts such as school performance, adolescence, gender, and human development, illustrating the link between personal traits and academic results. The green cluster emphasizes the school environment, highlighting the roles of students, teachers, and institutions as key agents in shaping preventive and intervention strategies. The blue cluster encompasses methodological and psychological descriptors, indicating the predominance of experimental and behavioral approaches in understanding bullying dynamics. Finally, the purple cluster focuses on mental health and emotional well-being, incorporating key terms such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, which expose the severe psychological risks tied to victimization. Together, these clusters delineate the main conceptual axes of the field, linking personal, institutional, methodological, and emotional dimensions.

Complementarily, the word cloud presented in Figure 8 visualizes the frequency and prominence of these main keywords, reinforcing the centrality of concepts already identified in the network. Terms such as bullying, adolescent, female,



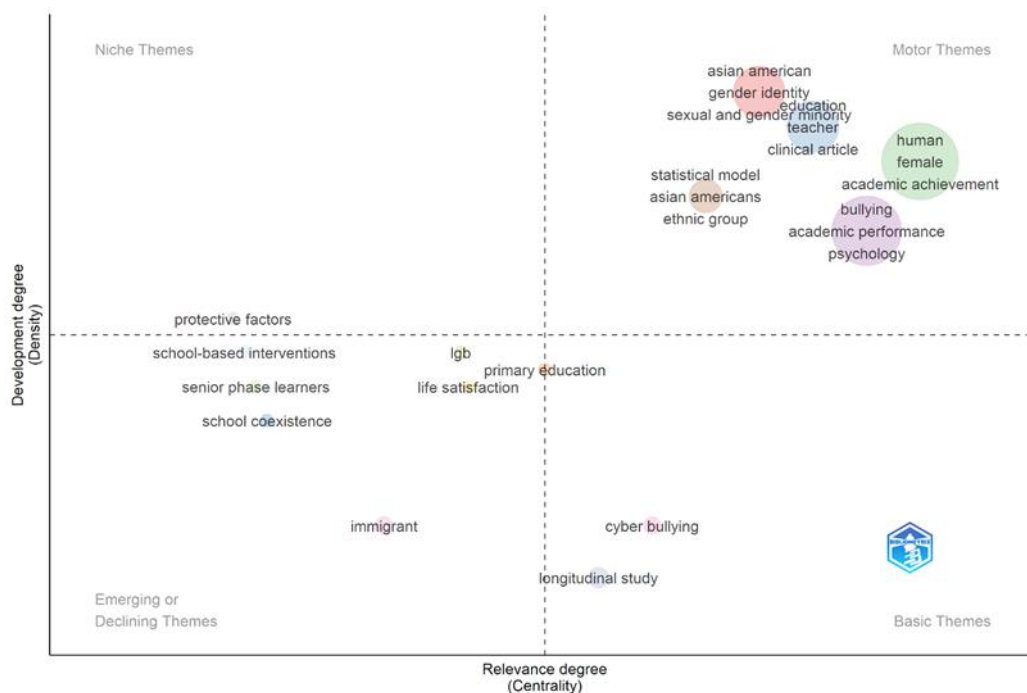


Figure 9 Thematic map of research areas in studies. Source: Scopus Database.

4. Discussion

Achieving a thorough understanding of school bullying and its impact on academic performance requires a systematic review of the accumulated scientific literature. By applying bibliometric techniques to Scopus data through the Bibliometrix package in R, this study maps the evolution of research from 2014 to 2024, identifying thematic structures, leading contributors, and emerging areas of inquiry (Samara et al., 2021).

The annual output reveals a growing trajectory of publications on school bullying and academic performance, particularly from 2019 onward. Although variability was observed in the early years, a peak was reached in 2023, followed by a slight decline in 2024, possibly due to indexing delays. This trend reflects the increasing academic consolidation of the topic. These findings are consistent with studies reporting school victimization as a factor strongly associated with depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, and behavioral difficulties, all of which negatively affect academic achievement (Álvarez Marín et al., 2022; Martínez-Santiago et al., 2023). Other scholars, using administrative data, confirm this relationship by evidencing a significant negative link between bullying and academic achievement (Martínez-Santiago et al., 2023; Martín-Pérez & Gascón-Cánovas, 2023). Likewise, research underscores how bullying undermines peer cooperation and school belonging, two essential conditions for effective learning. Overall, these results support the notion that the consequences of bullying extend beyond emotional harm, exerting a direct impact on the academic domain.

The analysis further indicates that scientific production is geographically concentrated. The United States leads in publication volume, followed by China, Spain, and India. These countries also display robust collaborative networks, particularly across North America, Europe, and Asia (Wang & Chen, 2024; Jiang et al., 2024). Institutions such as Southeast University, Southern Medical University, and the University of Maryland School of Medicine stand out for their high productivity and research connectivity. At the author level, scholars such as Hong J.S. and Espelage D.L. demonstrate sustained contributions and significant citation impact, whereas more recent voices, including Mguye N.J. and Omondan B.I., have quickly emerged as influential contributors. This diversity illustrates a dynamic and expanding field, strengthened by multidisciplinary approaches and international collaboration.

Keyword analysis revealed a pronounced thematic emphasis on adolescence, gender, and human development, with frequently occurring terms such as bullying, academic performance, female, male, and adolescent. Word clouds and co-occurrence networks highlighted dimensions including psychology, peer group, depression, anxiety, aggression, and crime victim, confirming the predominance of a psychosocial perspective in current research. Thematic clustering indicates that personal variables and academic outcomes are closely intertwined, while the school environment serves as a key contextual factor. Experimental-psychological methods are widely applied, and mental health risks such as suicidal ideation and emotional distress emerge as recurrent topics. These thematic strands are further supported by studies showing, for example, that social anxiety and short-video addiction can mediate the link between bullying and low academic outcomes. Additional research has highlighted both the protective role of emotional intelligence and the impact of peer group dynamics on adolescents' performance and well-being. Although quantitative methods dominate the field, recent studies have highlighted the value of



qualitative approaches, particularly in exploring culturally specific forms of bullying within vulnerable populations (Riffle et al., 2021).

The thematic map enabled the classification of research lines according to their centrality and level of development. Motor themes include well-established concepts such as bullying, academic performance, psychology, and human development, which constitute the theoretical backbone of the field (Rusteholz et al., 2023). Basic themes, such as cyberbullying and school climate, exhibit strong potential but require further conceptual and empirical refinement. Niche topics, including gender identity and sexual minorities, are gaining increasing academic attention, particularly within research on inclusive education (Arhuis-Inca et al., 2021). Emerging or underdeveloped areas—such as migration, school coexistence, and protective factors—highlight promising directions for addressing bullying in diverse and vulnerable educational contexts. These findings underscore critical gaps that future research should explore with greater depth and cultural sensitivity.

This bibliometric review highlights the growing global concern surrounding school bullying and its academic consequences. Although central themes such as mental health, psychology, and school performance dominate the literature, marked disparities in geographic representation persist. The United States, China, and Spain lead in publication output, whereas regions such as Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia remain underrepresented (Rusteholz et al., 2023).

This gap does not imply a lack of relevance in these contexts, but rather underscores the need for research grounded in local cultural and social realities. For instance, studies conducted in the Peruvian Amazon have documented forms of ethnic-cultural bullying that remain largely invisible within mainstream literature (Martínez-Santiago et al., 2023). These results highlight the need to broaden research in multicultural, rural, and underserved contexts.

Moreover, several studies highlight that psychological and emotional factors—such as social anxiety, emotion regulation, and digital addiction—mediate the relationship between bullying and academic performance (Jiang et al., 2024). This highlights new interdisciplinary avenues for analysis and policy intervention. Similarly, attention to protective factors, such as emotional intelligence and school belonging, is critical for designing effective prevention strategies (Riffle et al., 2021). Future research should promote qualitative and mixed-method approaches that capture the lived experiences of students—both victims and witnesses—particularly in marginalized communities. Comparative analyses of educational systems and institutional responses to bullying across regions may also provide valuable insights into effective interventions. Finally, collaboration across disciplines such as education, psychology, public health, and the social sciences will be essential to develop inclusive, evidence-based solutions aimed at improving school climate, emotional well-being, and academic achievement.

5. Conclusion

The sustained increase in scientific production on school bullying and its impact on academic performance between 2014 and 2024 reflects the growing global concern regarding the educational and psychosocial consequences of this phenomenon. Using bibliometric tools such as Scopus, Bibliometrix, and its Biblioshiny interface, this study identified consistent trends in publication growth, geographic concentration of research, leading institutions and authors, and the most prominent thematic lines.

The findings confirm that research in this field has intensified, particularly since 2019, reaching a peak in publications in 2023. Mental health, anxiety, school belonging, and academic performance emerged as central areas of study, while new lines of inquiry—such as ethnic-cultural bullying, school climate, and protective factors—indicate an expansion of the field into more contextualized and socially relevant dimensions. These emerging topics represent key opportunities for future research, particularly in multicultural and vulnerable educational settings.

From a geographical perspective, the field is led by countries such as the United States, China, and Spain, while regions like Latin America and Africa remain underrepresented. This imbalance underscores the importance of promoting locally grounded research that reflects the specific cultural, social, and educational conditions of these regions. Addressing the phenomenon from diverse perspectives will enhance the relevance and impact of the scientific evidence produced.

Methodologically, the dominance of quantitative approaches reflects a high degree of systematization and statistical rigor in the field. However, the integration of qualitative and mixed-method approaches is essential to explore the lived experiences of students, particularly in contexts marked by inequality or marginalization. These approaches may yield a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which bullying influences academic performance and emotional well-being.

Overall, this bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the current research landscape and offers a robust foundation for guiding future studies, educational policies, and school interventions. Addressing school bullying from an interdisciplinary and multicultural perspective will be essential for developing inclusive, context-sensitive, and evidence-based strategies that promote student safety, equity, and academic development in diverse learning environments.

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Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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