Exploring Global Perspectives on Income Inequality Research

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Income inequality remains a pressing global issue, particularly in developing nations, emerging economies, and even advanced countries where wage gaps, wealth concentration, and social context challenges develops. Consequently, this paper conducts a bibliometric analysis of income inequality research to identify the key trends, influential authors, productive countries, and significant publications. Using data from Scopus and tools like Harzing Publish or Perish, VOSviewer and Biblioshiny, we examined 456 publications from 1982 to 2025 through performance analysis and science mapping. Findings reveal a significant rise in re-search output after year 2015, with strong relationships between income inequality with public policy, health, and sustainability.

1. Introduction

The income inequality gap between the rich and the poor, as determined by decile ratios and the Gini coefficient based on the Lorenz curve, is notably high and still growing in both developed and emerging nations [1]. Inequality causes vary by country, but some frequent ones are the skill premium from technology advancement and globalisation, diminishing labour protections, and lack of financial inclusion in poorer nations [2]. Excessive wealth inequality worsens social frustration and heightens the risk of instability in society and politics [3]. Significant issues have surfaced in recent years, leading to political and eco-nomic unpredictability on a worldwide scale. Global uncertainty has increased as a result of a series of events that followed the 2007 financial crisis, including the "Arab Spring", Brexit, the Trump's Administration's trade war with China, the COVID-19 epidemic, and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Uncertainty is more significant and prevalent now than it has ever been. Education and the economic and social policies implemented by nations determine how uncertainty affects the income inequality [4].

The study of income inequality is important since it has worsened over time, affecting global stability and economies. Despite growing attention to the issue, there is a noticeable gap in comprehensive bibliometric analysis on this topic, especially regarding the evolution of research trends, significant themes, and the impact of various economic and social policies. Few research has employed bibliometric tools to analyse the academic discussion surrounding income inequality, despite its causes and implications being widely studied. This lack of analysis makes it hard to find effective policy solutions and knowledge gaps, as well as how different study disciplines overlap and progress. Hence, a detailed bibliometric study could help visualise the path of income inequality research and its connection to political instability, education, economic, and other relevant policies. Furthermore, tracking income inequality tends is much more important due to the dynamic and interconnected global landscape. The lack of comprehensive bibliometric study on this topic makes it difficult to judge how aca-demic though is evolving in reaction to existing global events, such as economic crises and geopolitical tensions. Policymakers, economists, and social scientists can utilise the trends to create better methods to reduce inequality's negative impact on the society.

2. Methodology

Bibliometric analysis for this study was conducted using three software tools, Harzing Publish or Perish, VOSViewer and Biblioshiny altogether to leverage their complementary strengths in citation analysis, network visualisation, and comprehensive bibliometric statistics, providing a well-rounded perspective on research trends, impact, and collaboration patterns [5]. The data was extracted from Scopus database through the EzAccess UiTM website on 15 February 2025, and 465 articles were initially found. Scopus is chosen as it has a wide range of sources for several fields and it is a reputable database due to its extensive evaluated articles and bibliographic data [6-8]. The articles are from the year 1982 up to year 2025 and language preference selected to English. The search and screening strategy process is as shown in Figure 1 which includes three stages, the topic, scope, and eligibility identification, followed by the screening procedure, and lastly the documents included for the analysis [9].
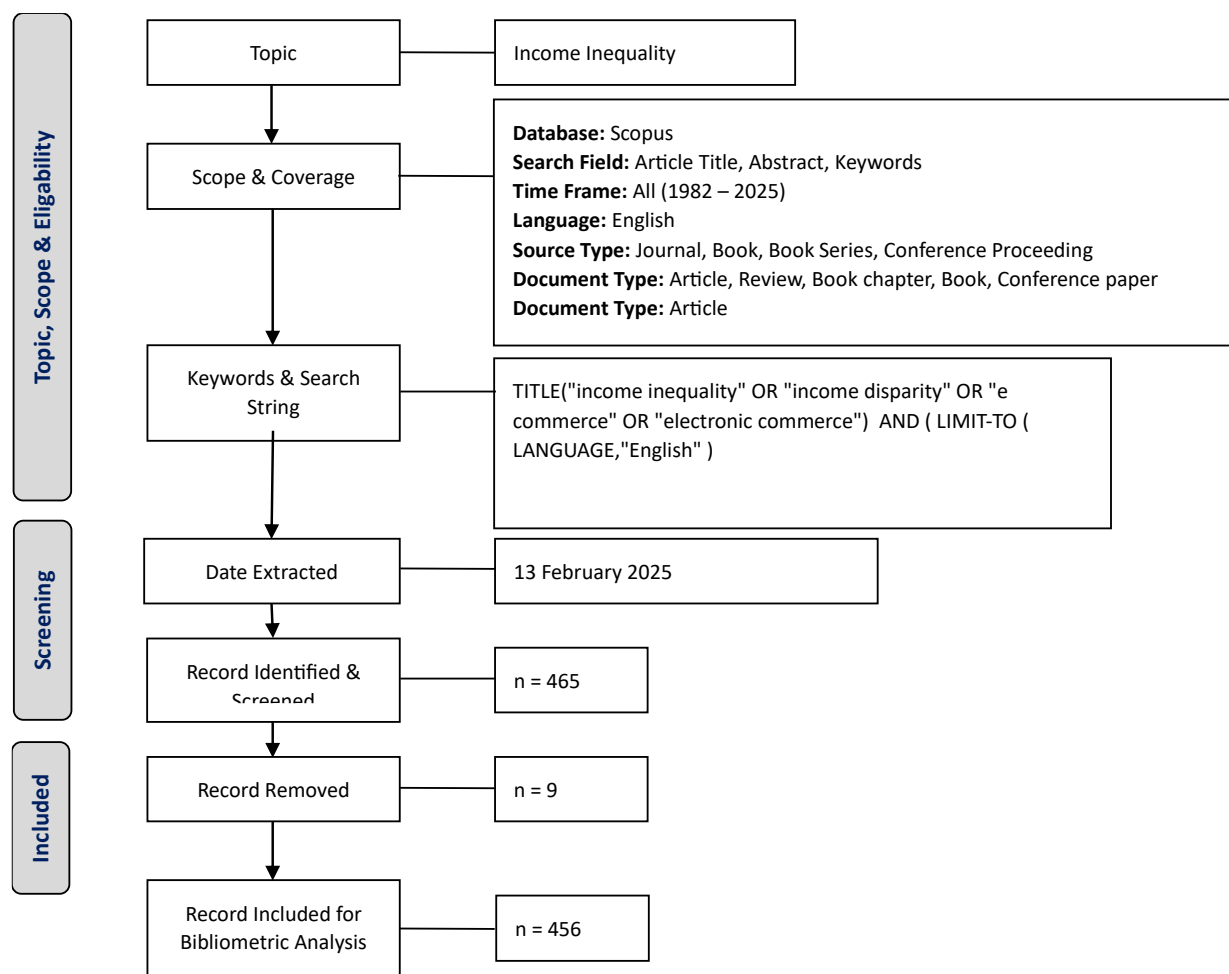
Fig. 1. Flow diagram of the search strategy

This study employs performance analysis and science mapping as its analytical strategies. Descriptive performance analysis considers the contributions of research elements, such as authors, institutions, countries, and journals, whereas science mapping emphasises the relationships among these research elements. Science mapping comprises three primary components which are citation analysis, which focuses on identifying the most influential publications and examining the relationships among them within a research field; co-word analysis, which explores the connections between topics by analysing the content of the publications; and the co-citation analysis, which investigates the thematic similarities between publications based on their frequent citation together, revealing the intellectual structure and thematic clusters of a research field [10,11].

3. Results and Discussions

Table 1 presents the citation metrics, which indicates a total of 456 publications between year 1982 and 2025, accumulating 7104 citations over 43 years, with an average of 165.21 citations per year and 15.58 citations per paper. The author's contribution is reflected in 239.67 papers per author, with an average of 2.70 authors per paper. Also, based on Table 2, the publication record consists of 89.47% journal articles (408 items), 3.07% book chapters (14 items), 3.51% reviews (16 items), 2.41% books (11 items), 1.32% conference papers (6 items), and 0.22% single note (1 item).

3.1. Performance Analysis

This performance analysis involves identifying the key journals and key authors, all of which consists of the most productive and most influential journals, and the most productive countries.

Table 1
Citation metrics result

Citation metrics		
Publication years	:	1982 – 2025
Citation years	:	43 (1982 – 2025)
Papers	:	456
Citations	:	7104
Cites/year	:	165.21
Cites/paper	:	15.58
Cites/author	:	3773.56
Papers/author	:	239.67
Authors/paper	:	2.70
h-index	:	38
g-index	:	72
hI,norm	:	27
hI,annual	:	0.63
hA-index	:	12
Papers with ACC >= 1,2,5,10,20	:	233,153,50,18,3

Table 2
Document type

Document Types	Number of items
Article	408
Book	11
Book chapter	14
Conference paper	6
Note	1
Review	16

Figure 2 shows that the research output has gradually increased from 1982 to 2025, with a significant increase in recent years. Early contributions were small, with only a few publications between 1982 to 2000. From the mid-2000s, publication frequency increase substantially, reaching 10 articles annually in 2008. The most significant growth occurred after 2015, with a sharp rise in output from 20 articles in 2019 to 109 in 2024, indicating a peak in the research activity particularly on this topic. This finding corresponds with Picchi and Aimee [12], who indicated that income inequality has increasingly concerned policymakers in recent decades. Also, in year 2015, he wrote that the United Nations instituted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include the objective of "reducing inequality within and among countries" by year 2030.
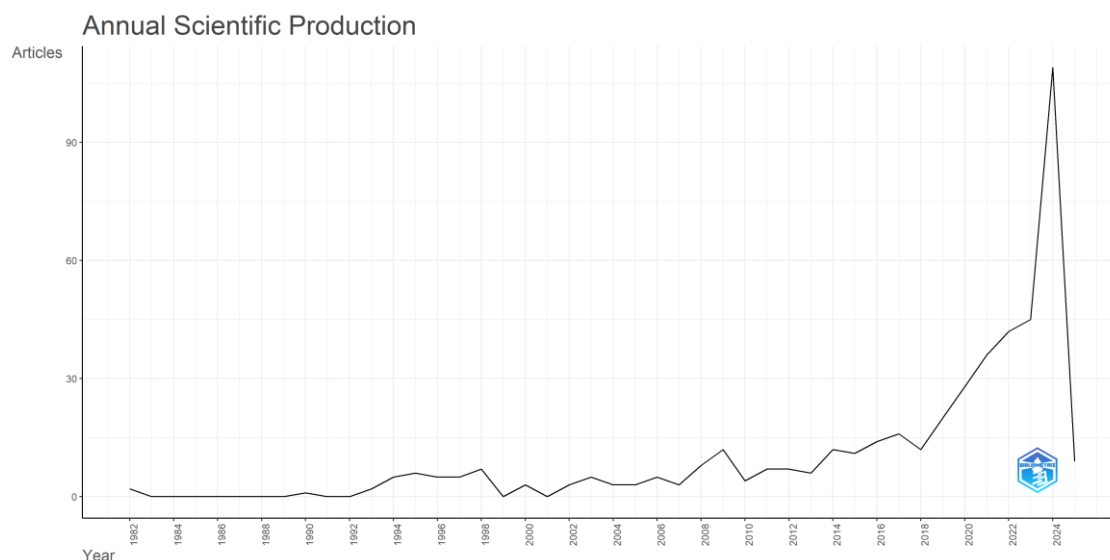
Fig. 2. Publication frequency (1982 – 2025)

Authors that have made significant contributions to the field of income inequality research are well-known scholars in economics and social sciences as shown in Figure 3, such as Parente S.L. and Prescott E.C. (591 citations each) for their work on economic growth and income distribution, which are closely tied to inequality studies. Deaton A. and Paxson C. (383 citations each) have also extensively worked on income distribution, consumption, and welfare, with Deaton's work on poverty and inequality earning him the Nobel Prize [13]. Jenkins S.P. (230 citations) is known for contributions to income inequality measurement and labour economics, followed by other authors like Gunatilaka R., Knight J., and many others (199-171 citations at most), all of which focuses on inequality studies related to regional disparities, social mobility, and policy impacts.

Stephen L. Parente and Edward C. Prescott are important researchers in the study of income inequality, primarily through their exploration of economic growth and income distribution. Their influential work such as Barriers to Riches suggests that institutional barriers and resistance to technological adoption significantly contributes to disparities in income levels across nations. This research has been extensively cited, highlighting its impact on the field. Additionally, their collaborative studies such as "Technology Adoption and Growth" and "A Unified Theory of the Evolution of International Income Levels" provide comprehensive frameworks for understanding how policy induced constraints and technological factors influence economic development and income inequality. These contributions have been essential in shaping the discussions and policies that addressed on global income disparities.
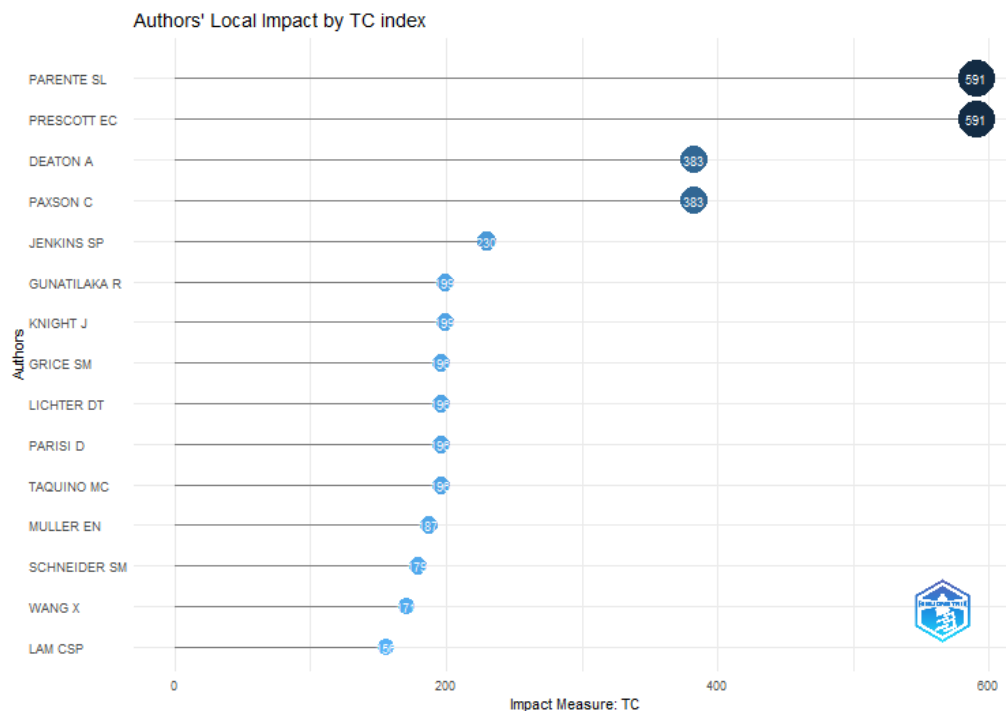
Fig. 3. Most influential authors

As for Figure 4, it shows the bibliometric data on the most productive countries based on the number of published articles, divided into Single-Country Publications (SCP) and Multiple-Country Publication (MCP). China and USA lead with 68 articles each, but the USA has a higher share of international collaborations with MCP value of 11 articles compared to China with MCP value of 15. Korea, India, and South Africa followed, with 18, 14, and 11 articles respectively, all of which mostly conducted within their own countries. Smaller research contributions made by Japan with 10 articles, Italy with 9 articles, Poland and United Kingdom with 8 articles, and Indonesia with 7 articles. Poland has a fully SCP value indicating a more domestically focused research approach. In contrast, UK and Indonesia exhibit higher collaboration rates, with half of their publications being international, based on MCP value of 4 and 3 respectively.

US and China are seen dominated the research on income inequality particularly due to their emerging economic wealth issues and them being one of the highest levels of income disparity among other developed nations. The China's Statistical Bureau assessed income inequality from national household surveys, compensated for top income underestimates using tax administration data, and integrated wealth and national account data for tax exemption capital income [13]. Chinese wealth inequalities were measured using the China Household Income Project and China Family Panel Study wealth surveys and annual Hurun rankings for China's wealthiest households. As for the US, their wealth inequalities are measured using the Gini coefficient, a single statistic that summarises the complete income distribution generated from the Lorenz curve. The US Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) provides the income statistics for several indicators Growing inequality is one of the key challenges for both China and US. It lists weaker social networks, more crime, and weaker democracy as consequences of a growing wealth division among society [14].
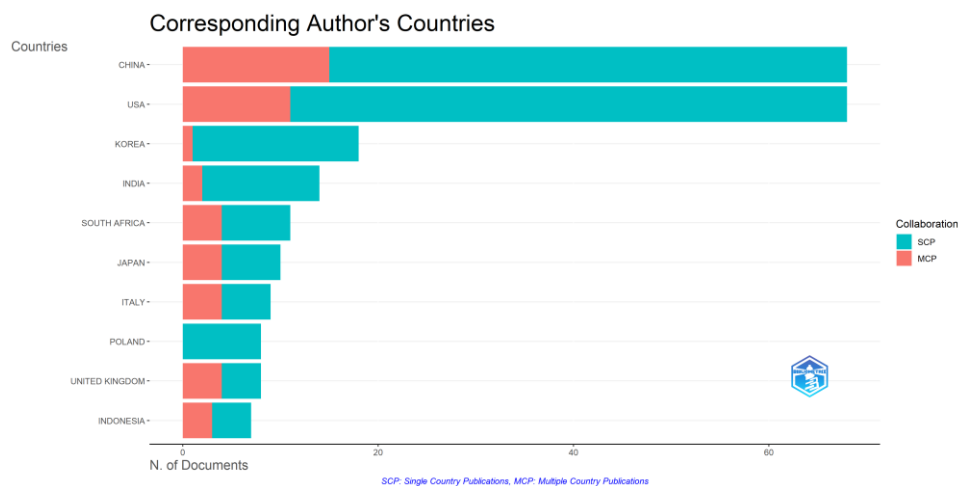
Fig. 4. Most productive country

The most productive journal in income inequality research is depicted as in Figure 5, ranked by the number of published articles, indicate the primary publication sources in this field. *Applied Economics* leads with 9 published articles, followed by *Sustainability (Switzerland)* with 8 articles. *PLOS ONE* and *Social Indicators Research* both published 7 articles, while *Economies, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *Singapore Economic Review*, and *World Development* each contributed 5 articles. These findings suggest that income inequality research is frequently published in economics, sustainability, and interdisciplinary social science journals. Also, *Applied Economics* and *Sustainability* emerged as leading journals in income inequality research due to their commitment to publishing extensive, high-quality studies on the subject. *Applied Economics* offers a platform for empirical research that addresses pressing economic issues, including income distribution and policy impacts, thereby contributing significantly to the discussions regarding income inequality. Similarly, *Sustainability's* topical collection on "Economic Inequality, Regional Disparities and Sustainable Development", examines income inequalities' complex issues and solutions Moreover, the presence of *Sustainability (Switzerland)* and *Journal of Cleaner Production* highlights a growing intersection between economic inequality and environmental concerns. *World Development* occurrence in the list shows that there are focuses on development studies and global economic issues, reinforcing its role as a mediator for inequality-related research.
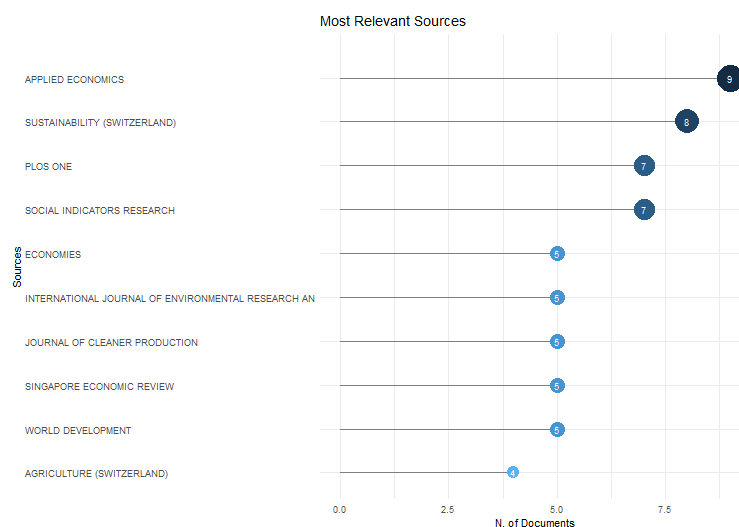

Fig. 5. Most productive journal

Figure 6 focuses on the most influential journals, which provide insights into the academic impact of research in this field. *Journal of Political Economy* is the most cited journal, with accumulation of 974 citations, indicating its foundational influence on income inequality research. *Economica* follows with 338 citations, while *Social Science Research* with 202 citations, *Journal of Development Studies* with 199 citations, and *American Sociological Review* with 187 citations also display significant impact. *World Development* appears in both Figure 5 and Figure 6, confirming its dual role as both a highly productive and widely cited journal.
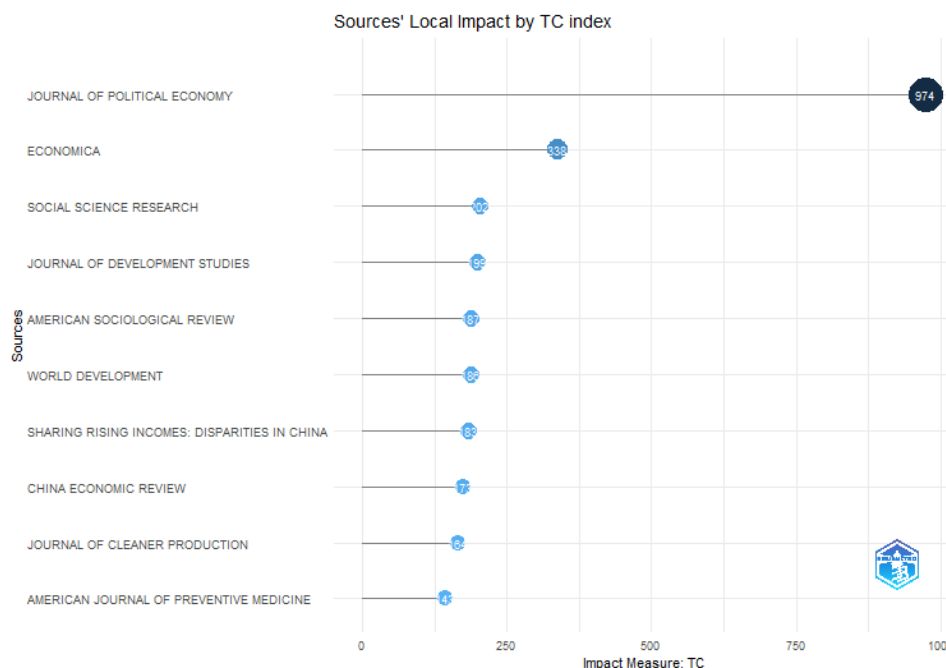

Fig. 6. Most influential journal

Next, *Sharing Rising Incomes: Disparities in China* with 183 citations and *China Economic Review* with 173 citations emphasized the importance of China-focused studies in global income inequality research. Lastly, the presence of *Journal of Cleaner Production* with 164 citations in both lists highlights the increasing recognition of sustainability and inequality as interconnected fields. The *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* with 143 citations also emerges, indicating increasing concerns or interests in the health dimensions of economic inequality.

The Journal of Political Economy and *Economica* are respected economics journals known for their robust peer-reviewed research and contributions to income inequality studies. The Journal of Political Economy was founded back in 1892, has published significant publications on income distribution and inequalities. While *Economica* founded in year 1921 has long published high quality economic research, including many on income inequalities. The strong impact factors and frequent citation of these journals' articles in academic field demonstrate their importance in comprehending income inequality.

3.2 Science Mapping

This section involves depicting and analysing the structure and dynamics of scientific knowledge within a specific field or discipline. For this paper, it highlights on the income inequality topic area. Science mapping includes various methods such as citation analysis, co-citation analysis, and co-word analysis to identify the patterns of relationships among scientific papers, topics, institutions, and

authors. Researchers can use scientific mapping to create visual representations like maps, networks, and clusters to identify trends, active publications, key authors, emerging themes, and interdisciplinary linkages. Visualisations help uncover research gaps, guide strategic decision-making, and promote collaboration and creativity in the sector.

Table 3 presents a list of influential academic publications, ranked by total citations and total citation per year that focuses on theme related to income inequality. The most cited paper, *Barriers to Technology Adoption Development* (1994) by Parente S.L., has accumulated 591 citations, with an annual citation rate of 18.47, highlighting its lasting impact on economic growth studies. Other significant publications include Deaton's *Intemporal Choice* and *Inequality* (1994) and Jenkins' *Accounting for Inequality Trends* (1995), both contributing significantly to the understanding of economic inequality. Recent papers, such as by Wang X. (2019) and Tromp J. (2020), show high annual citation rates with value TC per year of 20.57 and 23.00 respectively, indicating growing interest in urban-rural income disparities and health inequalities linked to income levels.

Table 3
Most influential articles

Paper	Article Title	Total Citations	TC per Year
Parente SL, 1994, Journal of Political Economy, 102(2)	Barriers to Technology Adoption and Development	591	18.47
Deaton A, 1994, Journal of Political Economy, 102(3)	Intertemporal Choice and Inequality	383	11.97
Jenkins SP, 1995, Economica, 62(245)	Accounting for Inequality Trends: Decomposition Analyses for the UK, 1971- 86	230	7.42
Knight J, 2010, Journal of Development Studies, 46(3)	The Rural–Urban Divide in China: Income but Not Happiness?	199	12.44
Lichter DT, 2010, Social Science Research, 39(2)	Residential segregation in new Hispanic destinations: Cities, suburbs, and rural communities compared	196	12.25
Muller EN, 1995, American Sociological Review, 60(6)	Economic Determinants of Democracy	187	6.03
NA, 1997,		183	6.31
Wang X, 2019, China Economic review Vol. 55	Agricultural inputs, urbanization, and urban-rural income disparity: Evidence from China	144	20.57
Auchincloss AH, 2011, American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 40(3)	An Agent-Based Model of Income Inequalities in Diet in the Context of Residential Segregation	143	9.53
Tromp J, 2020, Lancet Global Health, 8(3)	Post-discharge prognosis of patients admitted to hospital for heart failure by world region, and national level of income and income disparity (REPORT-HF): a cohort study	138	23.00

Keyword co-occurrence analysis based on Figure 7 was generated using VOSviewer, highlights key themes in research related to income inequality and other aspects. The most significant terms are income (103 occurrences), income inequality (94 occurrences), and income distribution (87 occurrences), indicates that much of the research focuses on economic or income disparities. The presence of female (86 occurrences), male (80 occurrences), and human (79 occurrences) suggests a strong focus on demographic and gender-related aspects of income inequality. Adult (66 occurrences) and China (61 occurrences) indicate that a significant portion of the studies centres on

adult populations and possibly China as a case study. The clusters represent different thematic areas, whereby, the red cluster focuses on income distribution, disparity, and employment; green cluster relates income inequality to demographic factors, public health, and controlled studies, and blue cluster highlights clinical studies and health disparities linked to income levels. The analysis shows that the income inequality research is multidimensional, incorporating economic, demographic, and public health perspectives.
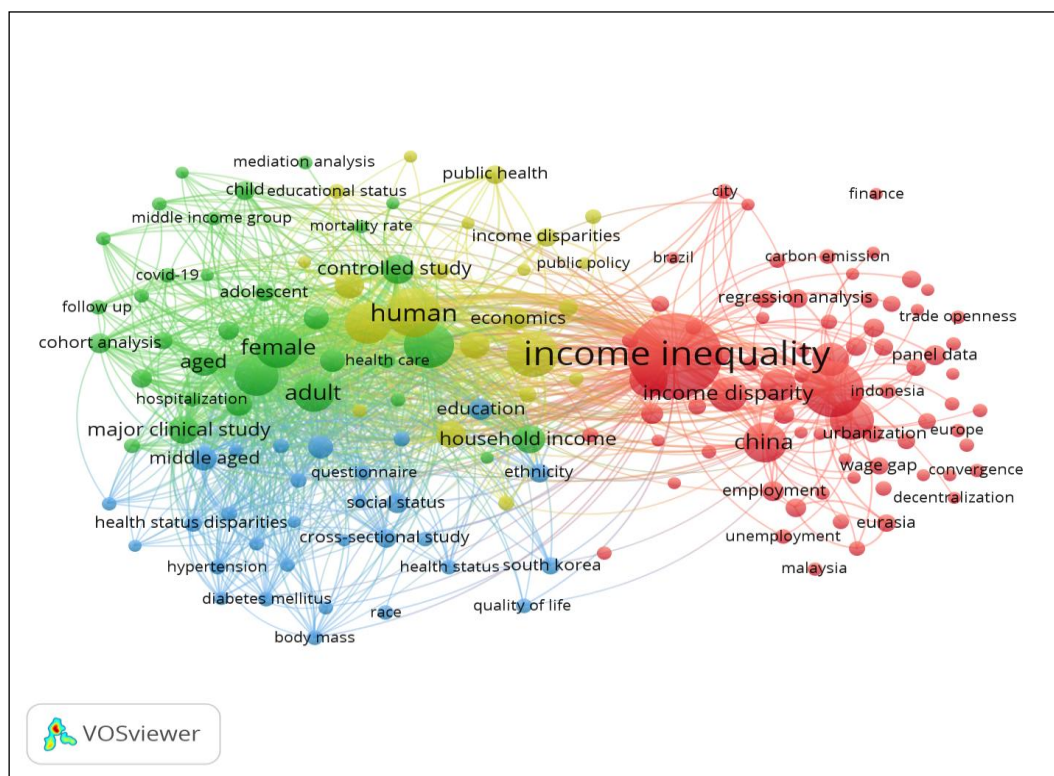

Fig. 7. Co-word analysis

The co-authorship analysis as depicted in Figure 8 shows distinct clusters of researchers collaborating on related topics. The closeness centrality measures how efficiently a node (Author) can reach others, clusters represent research groups, and PageRank reflects author influence. Chen J. appears as the most central author in Cluster 1, exhibiting the highest betweenness centrality, which means that the author plays a key role in connecting people in the cluster and sharing information. Glauben T. and Li. L. also hold significant connectivity within this cluster. Liu J., in Cluster 2, has the highest closeness centrality (value closeness: 5), which means that it has a faster average path to other nodes and this indicates that information flows more efficiently. Subsequently, Ahmed A., in Cluster 3 is moderately connected but lower overall influence compared to central nodes in Cluster 1 and 2. These findings point to an organised but dispersed research network, with some authors presenting crucial roles in bridging different research subgroups.
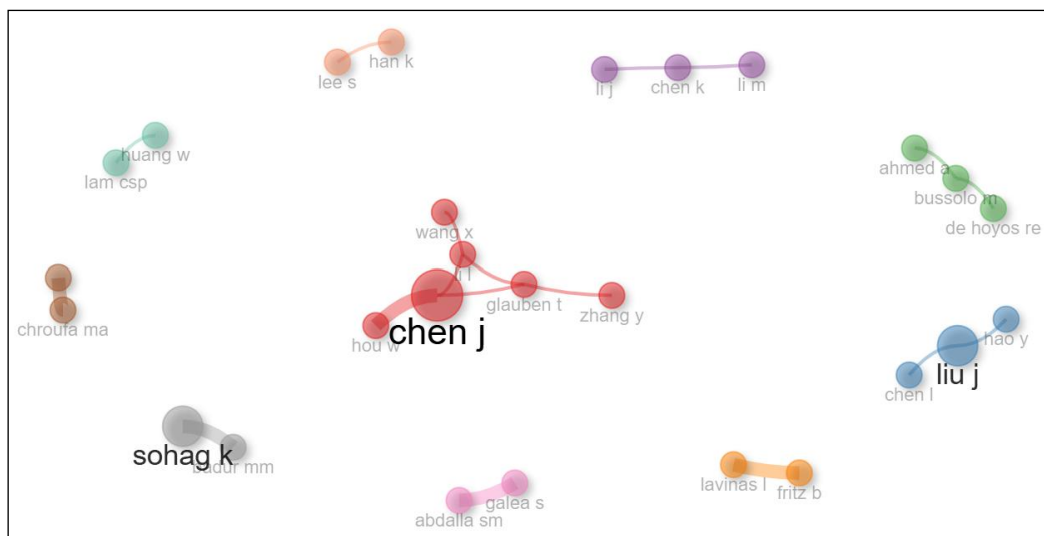
Fig. 8. Co-authorship analysis

While for co-citation analysis based on Figure 9, it visualises the relationships between frequently cited authors in a specific research domain. The size of each node represents the influence of an author based on the number of times they are cited together with the others. Significant figures like Kuznets S., Acemoglu D., Piketty T., and Alesina A. are central, indicating their foundational impact on the field. Clusters of different colours suggest thematic groupings, where researchers within the same colour are frequently cited together, reflecting shared research interests.
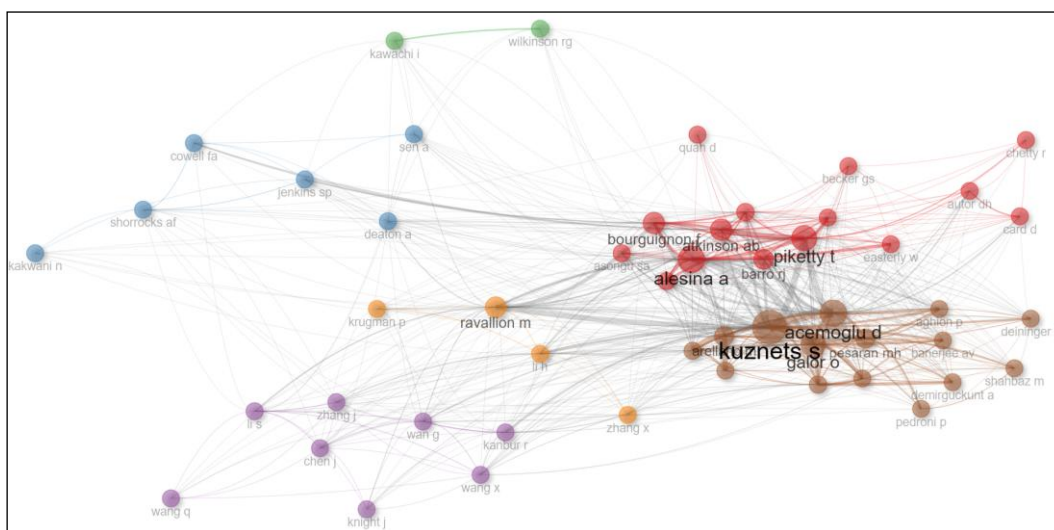

Fig. 9. Co-citation analysis

4. Conclusion

This paper provides a bibliometric analysis of income inequality research, highlighting key trends, influential authors, productive countries, and prominent journals. The findings show a significant increase in research output, especially after year 2015, reflecting growing global concerns over income disparity. The paper contributes by mapping the intellectual structure of income inequality research, revealing its intersection with public policy, health, and sustainability. However, limitation of this paper includes the reliance on Scopus, which may exclude relevant studies from other databases, and potential language bias as only English publications were considered. Future research

should expand to include multiple databases and include non-English literature to provide a more inclusive perspective. Advanced bibliometric techniques such as machine-learning driven text mining and context analysis could provide deeper insights into research trends and emerging debates in the particular field.

Acknowledgement

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