

Children's Participation in Decision Making: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Background: Children's participation in decision-making is a crucial aspect of their development, yet its level and impact, particularly in healthcare and family settings, remain underexplored. Understanding the dynamics and scope of this participation is essential for informing policies and practices that promote child agency and empowerment. This study aims to map the research on children's participation in decision-making, identifying key trends, influential contributors, and conceptual developments within literature.

Methods: This bibliometric analysis examines publications on children's participation in decision-making from 2014 to 2025. A systematic search was conducted in Scopus using keywords such as "children's participation," "decision-making," and "child agency." The analysis employed VOSviewer and the Bibliometrix R-package to identify key research trends, influential authors, and the intellectual and conceptual structures within the literature.

Results: Research on children's participation in decision-making has increased significantly, particularly from 2014 to 2025. The findings reveal a significant growth in research activity over the past decade. Four major thematic areas emerged: children's participation in healthcare decisions, family dynamics and shared decision-making, educational involvement, and emerging discussions around children's rights, consent, and protection. While co-citation and co-authorship analyses highlight a core group of influential scholars and journals, the literature also indicates limited methodological diversity and a need for more interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives.

Conclusion: The growing body of literature underscores the importance of children's involvement in decision-making processes across various contexts. Future research should address gaps in understanding the mechanisms of child agency and explore interventions that foster more inclusive decision-making practices in diverse settings.

Keywords: Children's participation; Decision making; Bibliometric analysis; Research trends

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Article History:

Submitted: 12 March 2025
Revised: 8 July 2025
Accepted: 11 July 2025
Published: 31 July 2025

DOI: 10.31436/ijcs.v8i2.442
ISSN: 2600-898X

INTRODUCTION

Children's participation in decision-making processes has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly within healthcare, education, and social policy domains. This growing emphasis aligns with the recognition of children as active agents in their development, as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). Article 12 of the UNCRC specifically highlights the right of children to express their views freely in matters affecting them, emphasizing the global commitment to fostering child agency and autonomy (1).

Research demonstrates that involving children in decision-making not only improves the outcomes of decisions but also enhances their emotional and cognitive development (Coyne et al., 2024). For instance, in healthcare settings, shared decision-making (SDM) with children has been linked to increased treatment adherence, reduced anxiety, and greater satisfaction among young patients (2). Similarly, in educational contexts, participatory approaches empower children to contribute meaningfully to school governance, fostering a sense of responsibility and belonging (3). These findings collectively reinforce the need for systematic approaches to understanding and promoting children's participation across various settings.

Despite the growing body of literature, a comprehensive understanding of trends, patterns, and gaps in research on children's participation in decision-making remains limited. To address this, a bibliometric approach is employed to systematically map the development of knowledge in this area (4). Through the analysis of publication trends, co-authorship networks, and thematic clusters, this study offers an integrated overview of existing research while uncovering areas that require further exploration (5–8). Special attention is given to studies from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, particularly in developing countries where children's voices are often overlooked. The findings aim to enhance understanding of how children are involved in decision-making processes and to inform both future research and practical efforts in this critical field.

METHODS

This bibliometric analysis was conducted to explore research trends, collaborative networks, and keyword trends in children's participation in

decision-making across various contexts. The research procedure and method used are discussed as follows:

Search Strategy

Set the Search Process

- i. Identify the appropriate bibliographic databases and construct a logical search query incorporating relevant keywords and Boolean operators.
- ii. Define inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the literature scope, ensuring the dataset is both comprehensive and relevant to the study's objectives.

The study employed bibliometric performance and network analysis:

- i. Performance analysis to identify the most influential authors, journals, and institutions related to children's participation in decision-making.
- ii. Network analysis to mapping co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence networks using VOSviewer and Bibliometrix R-package within the field of children's participation in decision-making.

Search Keywords

The breadth and depth of coverage in bibliometric studies rely heavily on the logical integration of appropriate keywords into the search strategy. To capture a wide spectrum of research on children's participation in decision-making from multiple dimensions, we constructed the following search query: "children's participation" AND "decision-making." However, limiting the search to specific keyword variations (e.g., "children's participation") may exclude a substantial portion of relevant publications, such as those focusing on related concepts like "child agency" or "shared decision-making." Similarly, restricting the search to "decision-making" could overlook significant literature addressing related terms such as "child voice" or "autonomy."

To address this, the Boolean operator "OR" was incorporated to expand the search coverage and encompass variations in terminology. The search was conducted over a specified study period, i.e., from 2014 to 2025. This initial step yielded 348 articles as the primary dataset. To ensure the relevance and validity of the bibliometric review, we first limit to articles retrieve from journals only and English articles only. We then strictly limit

our analysis to articles that we exclusively retrieve from journals. Our final sample of bibliometric data consists of 315 publications.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the most significant research components within the literature on children's participation in decision-making, including influential authors, journals, and institutions.
2. To uncover key research themes, identify gaps in the existing literature, and propose recommendations or directions for future research to enhance the understanding and practice of children's participation in decision-making.

The Review Method and The Analysis Process

The review and analysis process were conducted systematically in three stages to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the literature on children's participation in decision-making.

1. First Stage: Bibliometric Performance Analysis

The first stage involved conducting a bibliometric performance analysis to identify the most significant research constituents, including influential authors, publications, journals, and institutions. The analysis utilized VOSviewer, and Bibliometrix (R-package) for data processing and visualization.

i. Selection of Database

The Scopus database was selected for its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed academic literature and suitability for bibliometric analysis.

ii. Incorporation of Relevant Keywords

A comprehensive search query was designed using Boolean operators to include variations in terminology related to the topic. The search terms were: "children's participation" OR "child agency" OR "shared decision-making" AND "decision-making" OR "child voice." The primary search resulted in 348 documents.

iii. Application of Inclusion Criteria

The dataset was refined using the

following criteria including: the timeframe between 2014 to 2025. Subject Area: Excluded irrelevant disciplines such as neuroscience, agriculture, business, engineering, economics, and computer science to maintain a focused scope. Document Type and Source: Limited to peer-reviewed journal articles. Language: Limited to publications in English. After applying these criteria, the final bibliographic dataset consisted of 315 articles, which were used for further analysis.

2. Second Stage: Bibliometric Network Analysis

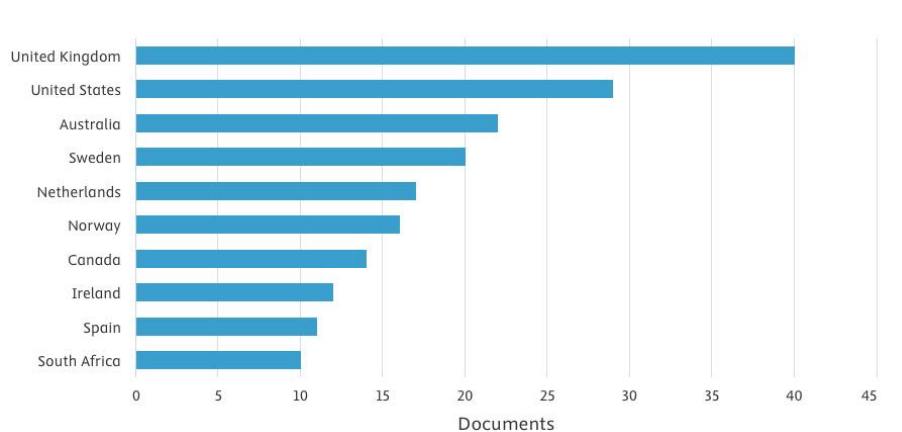
In the second stage, bibliometric network analysis was conducted to explore the social, intellectual, and conceptual structures within literature. Following the selection of relevant articles, the bibliographic data was exported in CSV format, enabling smooth integration with bibliometric analysis software (9). The extracted dataset included key variables such as author names, article titles, publication years, journal sources, and author keywords. This stage focused on identifying co-authorship networks, co-citation patterns, and keyword co-occurrence to map collaborative relationships, influential works, and thematic clusters. Collectively, these analyses offered a multidimensional understanding of the development, structure, and thematic evolution of research on children's participation in decision-making.

RESULTS

Bibliometric Performance Analysis

Geographical Distribution

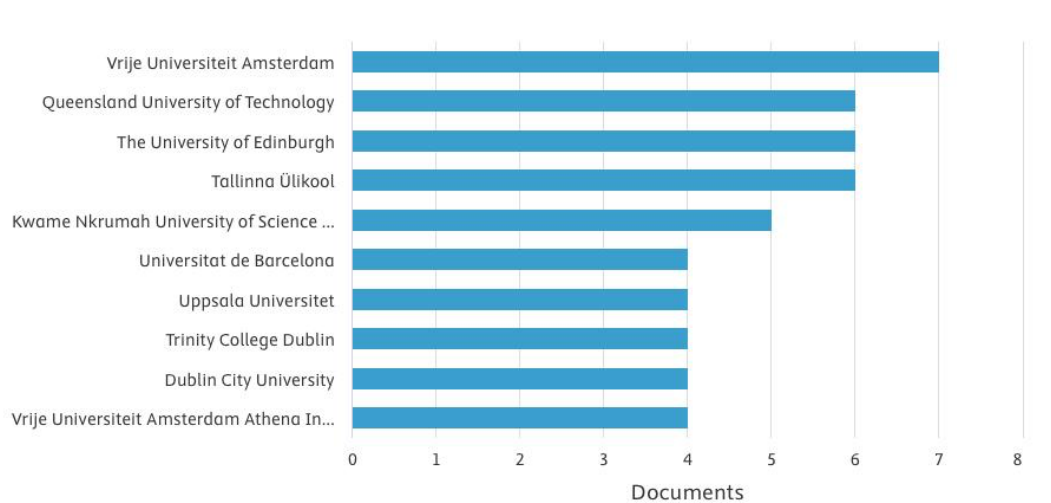
The distribution of research publications on children's participation in decision making by country or region from 2014 to 2025 is detailed in **Figure 1**. It is remarkable that the United Kingdom and United States dominate research in this field, suggesting strong academic or institutional support for this area of study in these countries. While dominated by a few countries, the inclusion of South Africa indicates interest in the research topic in both developed and developing regions.

Figure 1: Top Ten Most Cited Countries Based on Total Counts

Affiliation

From the perspective of influential institutions in the world, **Figure 2** provides the presentation of the top 10 influential institutions. The figure reflects a diverse geographical distribution of institutions, with contributions from Europe,

Australia, and Africa. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is a clear leader, possibly serving as a hub for collaborative efforts in this field. The involvement of multiple institutions with 3-4 contributions highlights the global interest in the topic, though contributions appear concentrated among a few key institutions.

Figure 2: Most Influential Institutions from the Number of Citation Perspectives

Most Influential Journals and Authors

To identify the most influential articles in the field, we applied a citation threshold of 50 citations per article, as established by the authors. Out of the 254 sources analyzed, only 6 sources met the authors' criteria for having at least 5 publications. These 6 sources collectively account for 42 out of the total 216 articles included in the dataset. **Figure 3** represents a bibliometric analysis based on Bradford's Law, which identifies core sources in a specific field of research. The shaded region represents the core sources of articles in the field, as identified by Bradford's Law. These journals or sources publish the most articles relevant to the

research topic. At the peak of the graph, journals like *Children and Youth Services Review*, *International Journal of Children's Rights*, and *Child and Family Social Work* appear to be the most prolific contributors. These influential articles are key in understanding the collaboration networks among authors and in identifying the most relevant and impactful journals for future research. **Figure 3**, which adheres to Bradford's Law, highlights the core journals responsible for publishing the majority of articles related to impulsive suicidal behavior. The top 10 journals in this area form the core of literature, with a concentrated output of publications as stated in **Table 1**.

Figure 3: Bradford’s Law for Most Influential Journals

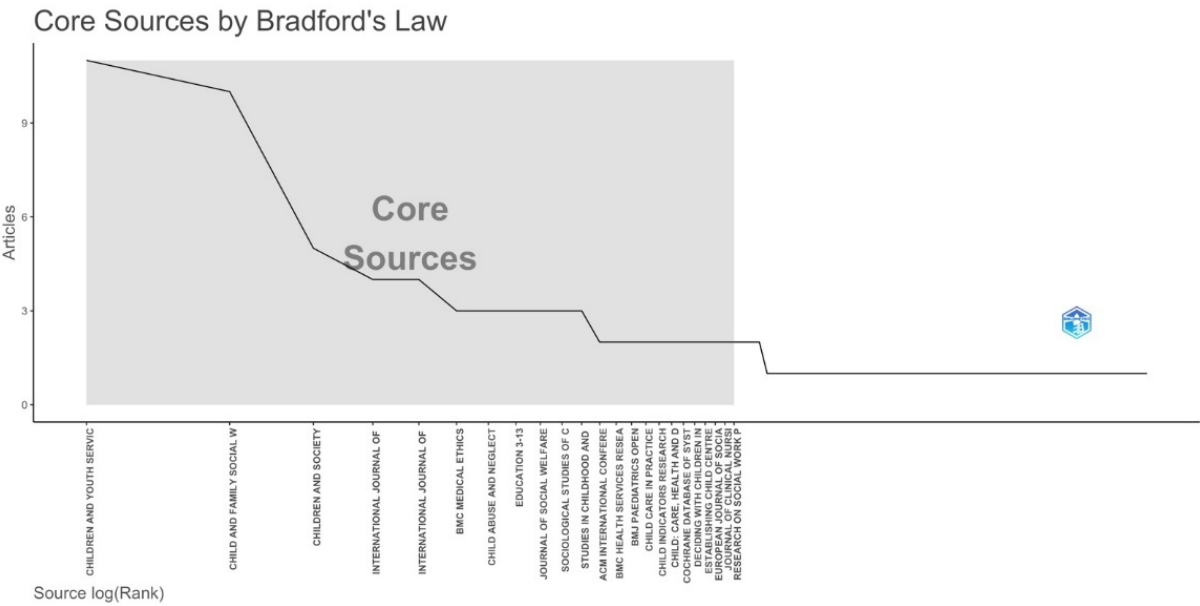


Table 1: Top Ten Most Relevant Journals Based on Total Documents and Total Citations

Rank	Source	Document	Citation
1.	Children and Youth Services Review	16	277
2.	International Journal of Children’s Rights	15	248
3.	Children and Society	12	1249
4.	Child and Family Social Work	11	375
5.	Childhood	7	290
6.	European Early Childhood Education Research Journal	5	234
7.	Child Indicators Research	5	190
8.	Children’s Geographies	5	23
9.	Child Abuse and Neglect	5	90
10.	Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law	4	65

Most Influential Articles

Table 2 presents the ten most influential publications on children’s participation in decision making, based on total citation analysis. Among the top contributors, Coyne and colleagues ranked first, highlighting their significant influence in the field of children’s participation. Their work remains crucial in advancing knowledge and understanding within this area of research.

Bibliometric Network Map Analysis

In recent decades, there has been a notable increase in academic research on children’s

participation in decision-making. Exploring the intellectual structure, research collaboration networks, and conceptual frameworks within this field is essential to understanding the “structures of knowledge.”

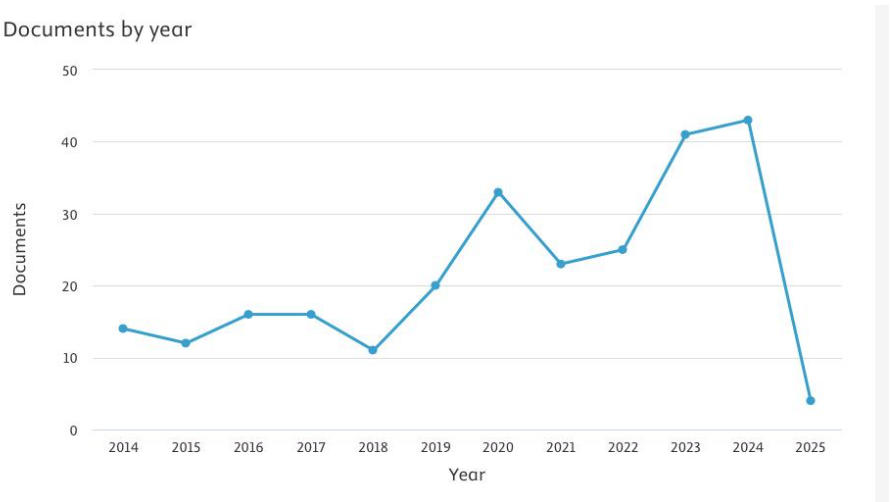
Publication Trends

Publication trends highlight the changing patterns in research over time, including the number of articles, shifts in topics, and changes in authorship. Figure 4 illustrates the growth and volume of publications from 2014 to 2025, showing a significant exponential increase in research activity between 2014 and 2024.

Table 2: Most Relevant Publications

	Author (s) and Year	Title and Journal	Total Citations
1.	Coyne I.; Amory A.; Kiernan G.; Gibson F, 2014	Children's participation in shared decision-making: Children, adolescents, parents and healthcare professionals' perspectives and experiences, <i>European Journal of Oncology Nursing</i>	216
2.	Woolfall K.; Frith L.; Gamble C.; Gilbert R.; Mok Q.; Young B, 2015	How parents and practitioners experience research without prior consent (deferred consent) for emergency research involving children with life threatening conditions: A mixed method study, <i>BMJ Open</i> .	92
3.	Coyne I.; Amory A.; Gibson F.; Kiernan G, 2016	Information-sharing between healthcare professionals, parents and children with cancer: More than a matter of information exchange, <i>European Journal of Cancer Care</i>	86
4.	Kennan D.; Brady B.; Forkan C., 2018	Supporting children's participation in decision making: A systematic literature review exploring the effectiveness of participatory processes, <i>British Journal of Social Work</i>	85
5.	Derr V.; Tarantini E., 2016	"Because we are all people": outcomes and reflections from young people's participation in the planning and design of child-friendly public spaces, <i>Local Environment</i>	72
6.	Feenstra B.; Boland L.; Lawson M.L.; Harrison D.; Kryworuchko J.; Leblanc M.; Stacey D., 2014	Interventions to support children's engagement in health-related decisions: A systematic review, <i>BMC Pediatrics</i>	65
7.	Montreuil M.; Bogossian A.; Laberge-Perrault E.; Racine E., 2021	A Review of Approaches, Strategies and Ethical Considerations in Participatory Research with Children, <i>International Journal of Qualitative Methods</i>	64
8.	Kosher H.; Ben-Arieh A., 2020	Children's participation: A new role for children in the field of child maltreatment, <i>Child Abuse and Neglect</i>	64
9.	Palaiologou I., 2014	'Do we hear what children want to say?' Ethical praxis when choosing research tools with children under five, <i>Early Child Development and Care</i>	63
10.	Balsells M.Á.; Fuentes-Peláez N.; Pastor C., 2017	Listening to the voices of children in decision-making: A challenge for the child protection system in Spain, <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i>	62

Figure 4: The Growth and the Number of Publications by Year



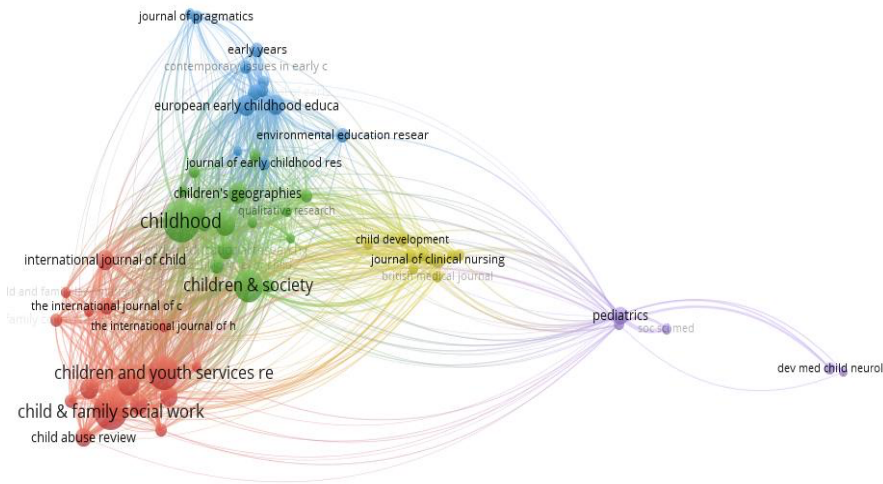
Intellectual Structure

Co-citation of Sources

Co-citation analysis focuses on using representative journals as the units of analysis to examine the interrelationships between them. The primary objective is to assess the significance and dissemination of citations among journal pairs. This method helps identify the most frequently co-

cited journals and the connections between them. Generally, the closer the positioning of journals in the analysis, the stronger their co-citation relationships are considered. The lines connecting journals further illustrate the strength of these co-citation links. As shown in **Figure 5**, the proximity of the five clusters indicates that journals with at least 60 citations tend to share common references, demonstrating relatively robust co-citation connections among them.

Figure 5: Co-citation of Sources

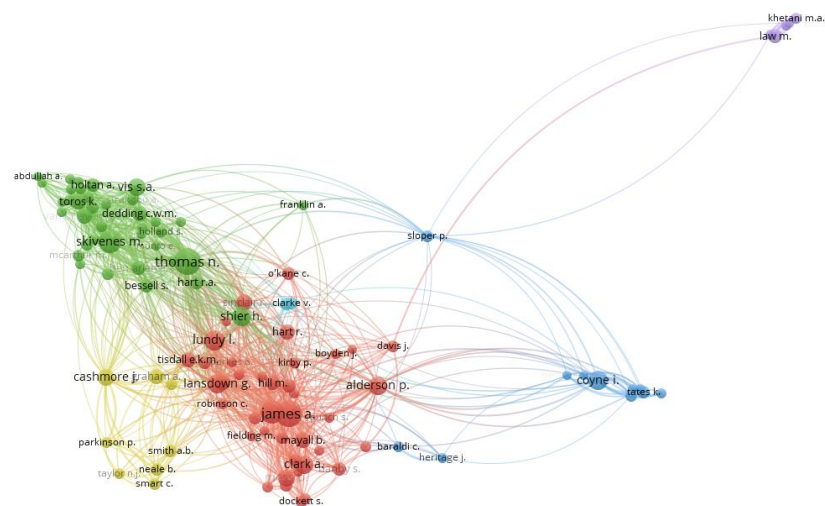


Social Structure (Co-authorship Analysis)

In the co-authorship analysis, the social network comprises 105 authors, organized into six distinct clusters, as presented in **Figure 6**. This network,

along with the analysis of the most relevant publications, reveals that Coyne I, James A, Lundy I, Thomas N form the most influential group of authors in the field.

Figure 6: Co-authorship Analysis



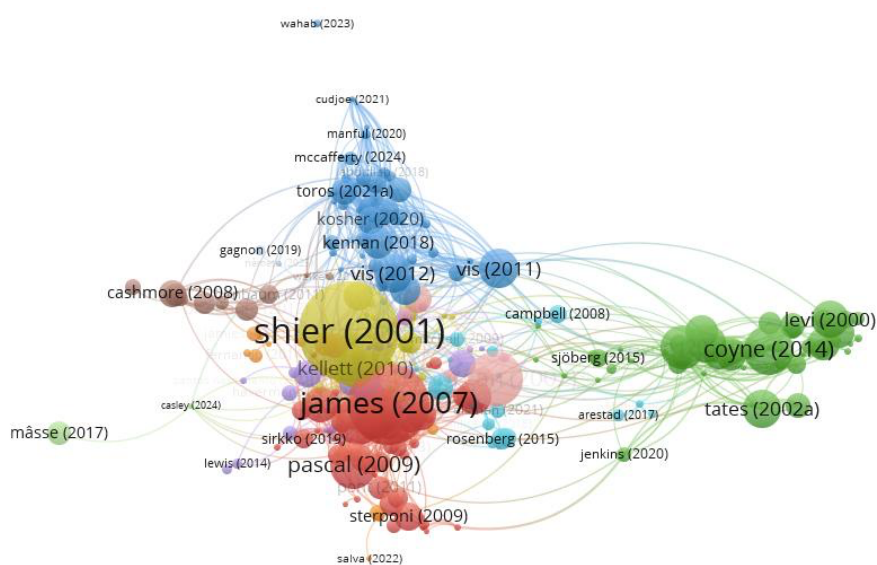
Conceptual Structure of Children’s Participation

Bibliographic Coupling

Bibliographic Coupling (BC) (see **Figure 7**) evaluates the relationship between publications based on the number of shared references. This

metric suggests that publications with common references are likely to address related topics. When applied across a body of literature, bibliographic coupling can help identify cohesive research clusters, potentially shaping the thematic or conceptual framework of the subject under investigation.

Figure 7: Bibliographic Coupling Network



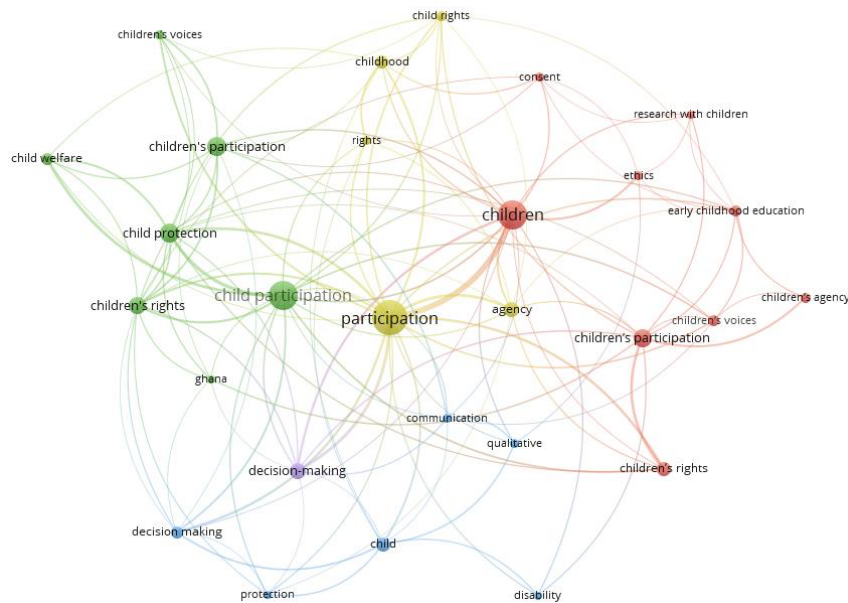
We set the minimum number of citations for a document to 10, and we also determined the minimum cluster size to be 30. Accordingly, of 348 documents, 315 meet the criteria.

Title and Abstract Map Analysis

The textual data extracted from the titles and

abstracts of publications are used to create keyword co-occurrence maps. These keyword networks help researchers identify relevant variables related to their research interests. Additionally, the clusters of keywords, as shown in the network map (see **Figure 8** and **Table 3**), provide a visual representation of the keywords co-occurrence within the literature.

Figure 8: Keywords Co-occurrence Analysis



Note: we set the minimum number of occurrences of a term to the default value, i.e. 10 times. We opt for the complete count method of analysis. Our set parameters generate 28 out of 979 terms.

Table 3: Title and abstract map analysis

Cluster	Most relevant keywords	Occurrences	Links	Total link strength
1	Children	54	18	40
1	Children's agency	7	3	4
1	Children's participation	22	11	15
1	Children's rights	14	6	12
1	Children's voices	8	7	6
1	Consent	6	7	4
1	Early childhood education	8	10	7
1	Ethic	6	5	4
1	Research with children	5	5	3
2	Child participation	53	16	30
2	Child protection	23	14	23
2	Child welfare	10	6	10
2	Children's participation	23	10	10
2	Children rights	20	12	15
2	Children's voices	6	6	6
3	Child	13	9	9
3	Communication	6	8	6
3	Decision making	10	9	10
3	Disability	5	4	4
3	Protection	5	7	5
3	Qualitative	6	5	5
4	Agency	16	10	12
4	Child rights	7	9	7
4	Childhood	11	8	9
4	Participation	77	20	61
4	Rights	6	6	6
5	Decision-making	18	10	16

DISCUSSION

The findings of this bibliometric analysis offer a comprehensive overview of the research trends, influential contributors, and conceptual developments in the field of children's participation in decision-making. This discussion contextualizes these findings within broader literature and highlights implications for practice.

Research Trends and Gaps

The significant growth in publications from 2014 to 2025 features the increasing recognition of children's participation as a critical area of study. This aligns with global movements advocating for child agency, as emphasized in frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1). However, while the volume of research has grown, notable gaps remain. For instance, geographical disparities in research focus, as evidenced by the predominance of studies from the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia, suggest the need for more diverse, context-specific investigations, particularly in underrepresented regions such as Africa and Southeast Asia.

Thematic Areas and Intellectual Contributions

The bibliometric analysis revealed key thematic areas and intellectual developments in the literature on children's participation in decision-making. These themes highlight the multidimensional nature of child agency and the scholarly contributions shaping the field. Below is an elaboration of the main themes and associated issues, followed by an overview of the intellectual structure of the research landscape.

Children's Roles in Healthcare Decision-Making

This theme captures the evolving view of children not merely as passive recipients of care, but as active participants in decisions affecting their health. The literature highlights that meaningful involvement tailored to a child's age, maturity, and context can improve treatment adherence, emotional well-being, and trust in healthcare providers. However, the degree of participation varies widely across healthcare systems and cultural contexts, with many still practicing adult-led decision-making. This reflects an ongoing challenge in translating children's agency from theory into routine clinical practice (3).

Family Dynamics and Shared Decision-Making

Family involvement emerged as a crucial factor influencing children's ability to participate in decisions. Parents often act as gatekeepers to information and as mediators between children and professionals. Literature reflects both enabling and limiting roles of families while some support autonomy and encourage expression, others override children's preferences based on perceived protection or cultural norms. These emphasize the nature of decision-making, suggesting a need for family-centered approaches that balance parental guidance with the child's voice (2).

Educational Participation and Everyday Decision-Making

Beyond healthcare, literature explores children's roles in school settings, where decision-making opportunities often relate to classroom rules, learning strategies, and school governance. The research indicates that when children are given opportunities to contribute, it enhances their confidence, engagement, and sense of responsibility. Yet, participation is often limited, indicating a gap between rights-based frameworks and institutional practices (5). This suggests a broader issue in implementing participatory principles across everyday contexts.

Rights, Consent, and Child Protection (Emerging and Underdeveloped Theme)

Although children's rights and protection are foundation for participation, the thematic analysis shows that concepts such as consent, legal recognition of agency, and safeguarding mechanisms remain underdeveloped. These topics appear in fragmented discussions, often overshadowed by more general participation discourse. This indicates a need for integrated frameworks that embed rights-based principles within healthcare and education policies, ensuring participation is both meaningful and safe for children, especially in vulnerable contexts.

These themes reveal that while there is growing recognition of child agencies, implementation remains inconsistent and context dependent. Issues such as cultural attitudes, adult perceptions of competence, and institutional constraints continue to limit meaningful participation. There is also a lack of research in low-resource or non-Western settings, which raises concerns about equity and inclusion in participatory practices.

The identification of influential authors and journals, such as those led by Coyne et al. and high-impact publications in journals like the *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*, underlines the pivotal role of these contributors in shaping the field (2,11). The co-citation and co-authorship networks also demonstrate robust collaborative efforts but highlight the potential for expanding these networks to include diverse cultural and disciplinary perspectives.

Conceptual Structures and Methodological Insights

The bibliometric coupling and keyword co-occurrence analyses illuminate the intellectual and conceptual structures underpinning the literature. Terms such as "children's agency," "decision-making," and "participation" form central nodes, reflecting a shared focus on empowering children. However, the relative lack of methodological diversity in the dataset, with a predominance of qualitative studies, points to opportunities for integrating mixed methods approaches to deepen our understanding of how participation varies across contexts and populations.

Implications for Practice and Policy

To advance children's participation in decision-making, policies should prioritize child-inclusive frameworks across healthcare, education, and social sectors. Future research should expand its focus on diverse cultural contexts and adopt mixed method approaches to deepen the understanding of participatory practices. Additionally, strengthening interdisciplinary collaborations among researchers from different fields can enhance both theoretical and practical contributions to this area of study.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric review highlights the dynamic evolution of research on children's participation in decision-making. By mapping trends, identifying influential contributors, and uncovering conceptual frameworks, this study provides a valuable foundation for advancing research and practice in this field. Addressing gaps and fostering inclusivity will be crucial in strengthening child agency in decision-making processes globally.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, the reliance on Scopus may exclude relevant studies

from other databases. Second, the search strategy and inclusion criteria may have omitted non-English publications and gray literature, limiting the scope of the review. Third, the temporal range (2014–2025) might not fully capture earlier foundational research. Fourth, the analysis focuses on trends and contributors but does not assess methodological rigor or quality. Lastly, while bibliometric tools provide valuable insights, they may oversimplify complex relationships and lack contextual depth across specific subfields.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study.

FUNDINGS

This project received funding from the International Institute of Islamic Thought (East and Southeast Asia Office), under the grant number IIIT-SRP24-056-0056.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the International Institute of Islamic Thought (East and Southeast Asia Office) for supporting this research project.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

LSP: Conceptualized the study, conducted the bibliometric analysis, and drafted the manuscript.
SHAH: Assisted in interpreting the bibliometric results and reviewed the manuscript.

SRMA: Contributed to the creation of figures and tables and reviewed the manuscript.

AA: Conducted the final data validation and provided critical revisions of the manuscript.

NAS: Critical revision/technical, material support.

KA: Assisted in data organization and contributed to the preparation and formatting of the manuscript.

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