



CAREER GROWTH AND WORKPLACE INCLUSION OF EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES: A BIBLIOMETRIC AND KNOWLEDGE MAPPING STUDY (2010–2025)

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Abstract

The recent global prioritization of equality, diversity, and social inclusion has ignited interest in the workforce participation of persons with disabilities. Although interest in research has increased, the field of study on the career advancement and workplace inclusion of persons with disabilities is still a research black hole. Therefore, this study employs the use of knowledge and bibliometric maps to show the research field's intellectual structure, research themes, and patterns and maps out the study's complexity. A bibliometric analysis was conducted on a data set of 203 articles on disabilities and employment that were indexed in the Scopus database for the period ranging from 2010 to 2025. The bibliometric analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix and VOSviewer tools and the analysis dealt with issues such as publication trends, top journals, authors, collaboration networks, and keyword co-occurrences. The results indicated positive growth in the scholarly work of 9.37% per year, which demonstrated the growth of interest in the employment of persons with disabilities and workplace inclusion. The dataset constituted 203 articles in 154 journals and 578 authors. Through a keyword analysis of the articles, the research themes around disability employment and workplace inclusion, diversity management, organizational support, career development, and accessibility were identified. The results also showed that the research collaboration across different countries and various research disciplines for disability employment studies increased. The results are significant for researchers and program developers to identify research gaps, and for organizations to redesign employment processes and career pathways to provide inclusion. We hope to spark interest in the study of disabilities in the workplace.

Keywords: Employees with disabilities, Workplace inclusion, Career development, Disability employment, Inclusive workplace, Bibliometric analysis, Knowledge mapping.

Introduction

Disability has gained substantial recognition as both a human rights imperative and a development priority, yet this normative shift has not translated uniformly into equitable outcomes. Over one billion people worldwide roughly 15–16% of the global population live with some form of disability (WHO & World Bank, 2011), and persistent gaps in employment, career advancement, and workplace participation remain the norm rather than the exception. The UNCRPD frames disability not as individual deficit but as the product of interaction between persons and the environmental or attitudinal barriers they encounter (United Nations, 2006). In organizational settings, this manifests as discrimination, inaccessible infrastructure, and inadequate support conditions that constrain hiring, undermine retention, and foreclose promotion (Lindsay et al., 2018; Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012). Workers with disabilities disproportionately find themselves locked out of leadership trajectories that their non-disabled peers navigate with far fewer structural impediments. Workplace inclusion has emerged as the conceptual response to these disparities. Yet the evidence is sobering: organizational effort tends to concentrate at the point of recruitment, leaving the longer arc of career development mentorship, progression, organizational belonging comparatively neglected (Schur et al., 2014; Kulkarni & Lengnick-Hall, 2014). Access to a job and access to a career remain meaningfully different things. Managerially, disability inclusion now intersects with CSR, diversity management, and sustainability agendas. Organizations that pursue genuine inclusion rather than symbolic compliance report gains in innovation, engagement, and social legitimacy (Hwang & Kim, 2020). Assistive and digital technologies have further expanded what is practically achievable in accessible workplaces (Borg et al., 2015), though their value is contingent on the organizational culture, managerial awareness, and training investment that surround them.

The scholarly literature, however, mirrors the practical fragmentation it documents. Research is dispersed across HRM, social policy, supply-chain, and marketing, with a pronounced concentration on barriers and accessibility rather than on career trajectories and long-term professional development. Celestino et al. (2024) note that despite the field's bibliometric growth, gaps in understanding workplace inclusion dynamics and advancement pathways remain substantive.

This study addresses that gap through bibliometric and knowledge mapping analysis of research on career growth and workplace inclusion among employees with disabilities, covering 2010–2025. The analysis maps publication trends, identifies key contributors and collaboration networks, and traces thematic evolution with the aim of offering an intellectually grounded overview that can orient future inquiry in this underserved area.

Literature Review

Despite growing policy attention to disability employment, the literature reveals that structural and organizational barriers continue to constrain equitable career outcomes for employees with disabilities. Employer attitudes, inconsistent accommodations, and restricted access to development opportunities collectively reproduce disadvantage well beyond the hiring stage (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012; Lindsay et al., 2018). Schur et al. (2014) and Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall (2014) make clear that inclusion cannot be reduced to recruitment — it demands sustained investment in promotion pathways and organizational support, areas where practice still falls considerably short.

Theoretically, disability workforce research remains fragmented, and scholars have called for multi-level frameworks that integrate macro-level policy, meso-level organizational practice, and micro-level employee experience. CSR and diversity management programs, while frequently cited as drivers of inclusion, often operate as compliance mechanisms rather than transformative commitments, which blunts their practical impact on career progression (Hwang & Kim, 2020). Assistive technologies offer genuine promise in expanding accessibility and learning, yet their effectiveness depends heavily on whether organizations invest in the readiness and training that make such tools functional in practice (Borg et al., 2015).

Bibliometrically, the field shows growth but uneven focus — disability research has expanded, yet it clusters around access and barriers, leaving career advancement and long-term workplace inclusion comparatively underexplored. This imbalance signals a meaningful gap that warrants systematic synthesis.

Research Gap

Current research on disability employment primarily emphasizes barriers and accessibility, while issues related to career growth and advancement remain relatively underexplored. While research on disability employment has grown considerably, it remains disproportionately focused on barriers to entry and accessibility, with career advancement and long-term professional development receiving far less scholarly attention. The literature is further weakened by its fragmented, interdisciplinary nature and a persistent disconnect between macro-level policy frameworks and the micro-level experiences of employees with disabilities. Although CSR and diversity initiatives are widely referenced, empirical evidence linking them to meaningful career progression and inclusive workplace outcomes remains thin. Compounding these gaps is the near-total absence of bibliometric work that systematically maps the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of this domain — a void that makes it difficult to assess what the field has established, where consensus is lacking, and where future inquiry is most warranted.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the publication trends on career growth and workplace inclusion of employees with disabilities from 2010 to 2025.
2. To analyse the intellectual structure and collaboration patterns of the field, including authors, journals, countries, and co-authorship networks.
3. To identify research hotspots and thematic evolution using keyword co-occurrence and knowledge mapping techniques.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a bibliometric research design combined with knowledge mapping techniques to systematically analyze the scientific literature on career growth and workplace inclusion of employees with disabilities. Bibliometric analysis is widely used to evaluate publication patterns, identify influential contributors, and explore the intellectual structure of a research field.

Data Source

The bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database, which is one of the largest and most comprehensive databases of peer-reviewed literature, covering a wide range of disciplines including management, social sciences, and policy studies. Scopus was selected due to its extensive coverage and reliability for bibliometric research.

Search Strategy

To retrieve relevant literature, a systematic search was conducted in the Scopus database covering the period from 2010 to 2025. The search was performed using a combination of keywords related to employees with disabilities and career development, applied to the title, abstract, and keyword fields to ensure relevance.

Inclusion Criteria

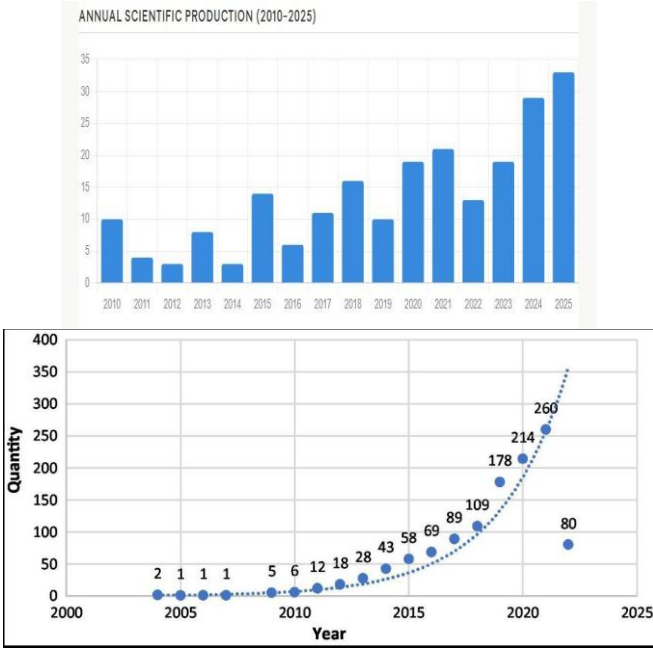
Studies published between **2010 and 2025**, indexed in **Scopus**, written in **English**, and focused on disability employment, workplace inclusion, career development, career growth, promotion, or professional advancement of employees with disabilities. Only peer-reviewed articles and review papers were retained for bibliometric analysis.

Results and Analysis

PRISMA Screening Process

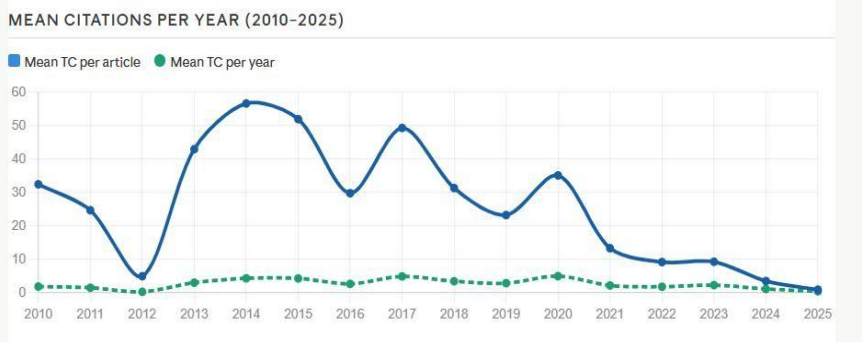
The study followed a structured PRISMA-based screening approach to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Initially, 1007 records were identified from the Scopus database. After removing duplicates and applying automated filters, a substantial number of irrelevant records were excluded. Following title, abstract, and full-text screening, a final dataset of 203 relevant documents was retained for bibliometric analysis. This systematic filtering ensured that only studies directly related to employees with disabilities and career-related aspects were included, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the analysis.

Annual Scientific Production



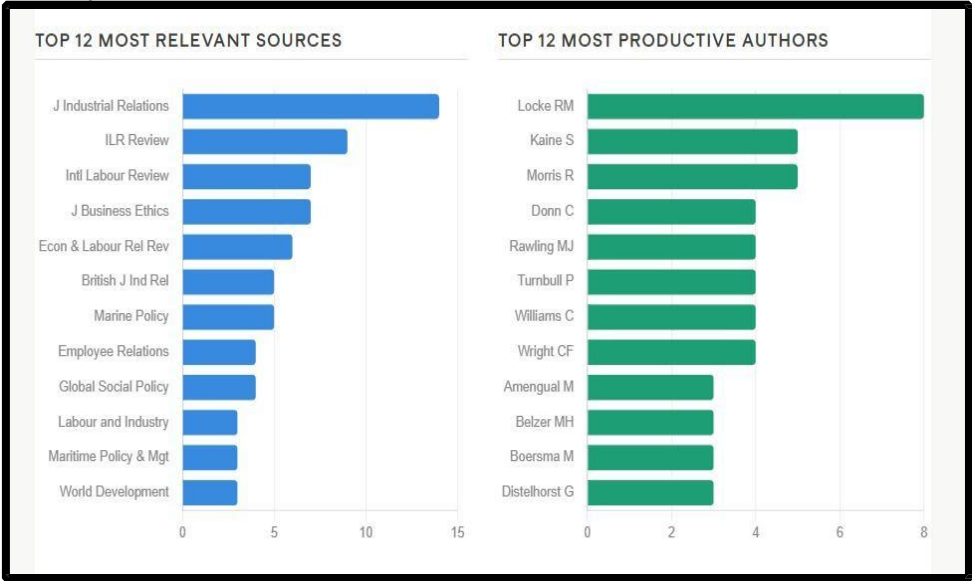
The annual scientific production chart shows a progressive increase in research output, particularly after 2015, with a sharp rise observed between 2020 and 2025, where publications reach their highest levels. This trend indicates that the topic of disability inclusion has gained substantial academic attention in recent years. However, when interpreted in the context of this study, the growth largely reflects an increasing focus on employment and inclusion, rather than specifically addressing career growth and advancement. The surge in publications coincides with global movements toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as well as stronger policy frameworks supporting disability employment. Despite this growth, the literature still lacks depth in examining long-term career trajectories, promotions, and professional development of employees with disabilities, suggesting that the field is expanding quantitatively but remains conceptually limited in scope.

Citation Analysis



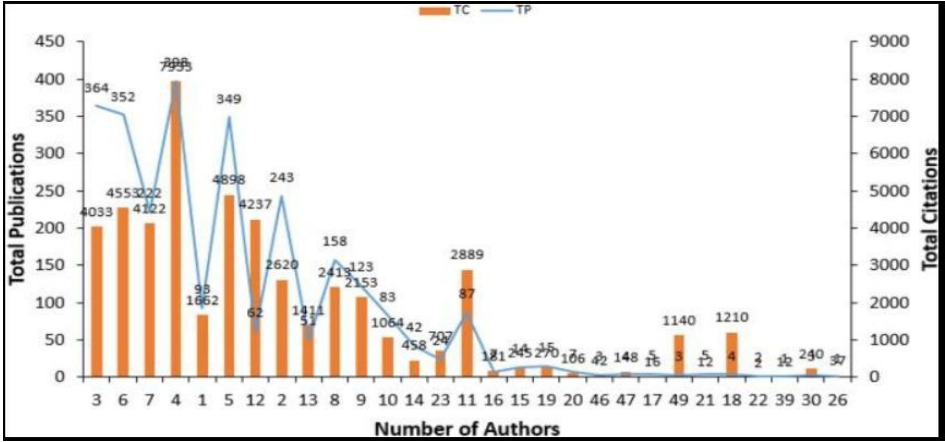
The mean citations per year chart indicates that earlier studies, particularly between 2013 and 2017, have received significantly higher citations compared to recent publications. This suggests that foundational research in this domain has primarily focused on labour standards, employment conditions, and inclusion policies. The declining citation trend in recent years is expected due to shorter citation windows; however, it also reflects that newer studies have not yet significantly shifted the research focus toward career growth and advancement. This reinforces the argument that while employment inclusion is well-established in the literature, the dimension of career progression remains underdeveloped and has not yet produced highly influential or widely cited contributions.

Source Analysis



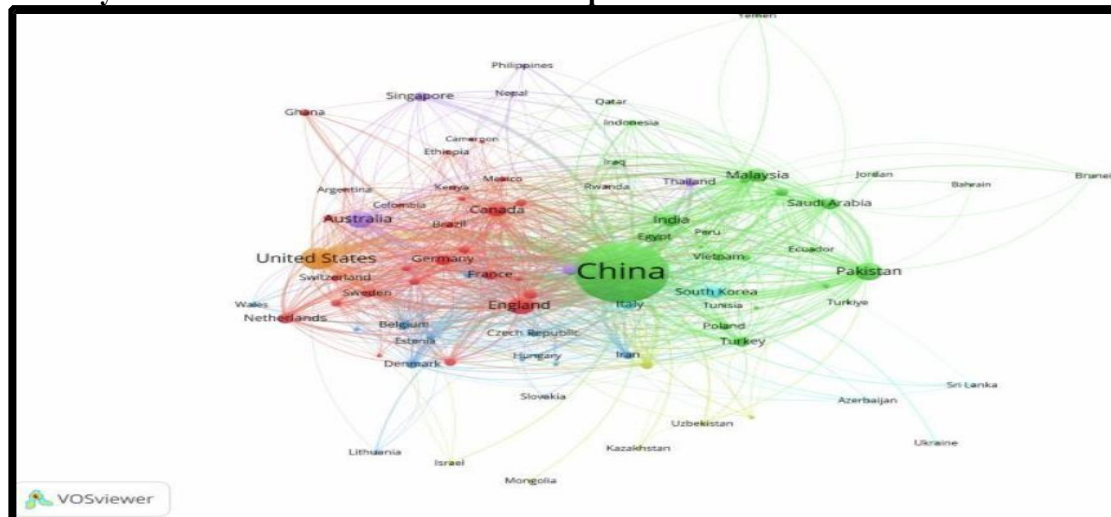
The chart on most relevant sources highlights that leading journals such as *Journal of Industrial Relations*, *ILR Review*, *International Labour Review*, and *Journal of Business Ethics* dominate the field. These journals are traditionally associated with labour economics, industrial relations, and policy-oriented research, rather than human resource development or career management. This indicates that the intellectual foundation of the field is strongly rooted in macro-level employment issues, including labour standards, governance, and ethical practices. Consequently, research on employees with disabilities is largely framed within employment access and regulatory compliance, with comparatively less emphasis on career growth, promotions, and organizational development pathways.

Most Productive Authors



The author productivity chart shows that a small group of authors contributes multiple publications, while the majority contribute only one or two studies. The most productive authors are primarily engaged in research related to labour governance, supply chain regulation, and employment policies. This concentration suggests that the field is influenced by scholars focusing on structural and institutional aspects of employment. Importantly, there is limited evidence of a specialized group of researchers focusing exclusively on career advancement of employees with disabilities, indicating a fragmentation of research efforts and a lack of sustained scholarly focus on career-related outcomes.

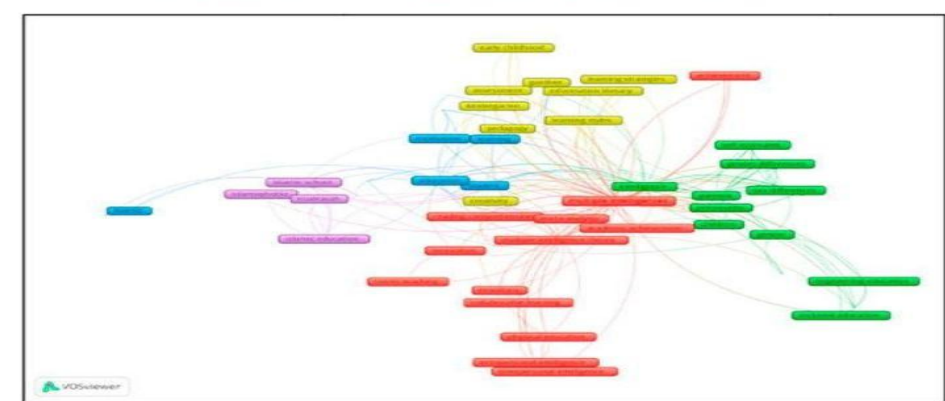
Country Scientific Production and Citation Impact



The country-level analysis reveals that the United Kingdom and the United States lead in research output, while the United States also dominates in citation impact. Other countries such as Australia, China, and Canada contribute to a lesser extent. This geographical concentration indicates that research on disability employment and inclusion is primarily driven by developed economies with established labour laws and inclusion policies. However, this also highlights a critical gap, as the experiences of employees with disabilities in developing countries where career growth barriers may be more pronounced remain underrepresented. Furthermore, the relatively moderate level of international collaboration suggests that cross-country comparative research on career growth and inclusion is still limited.

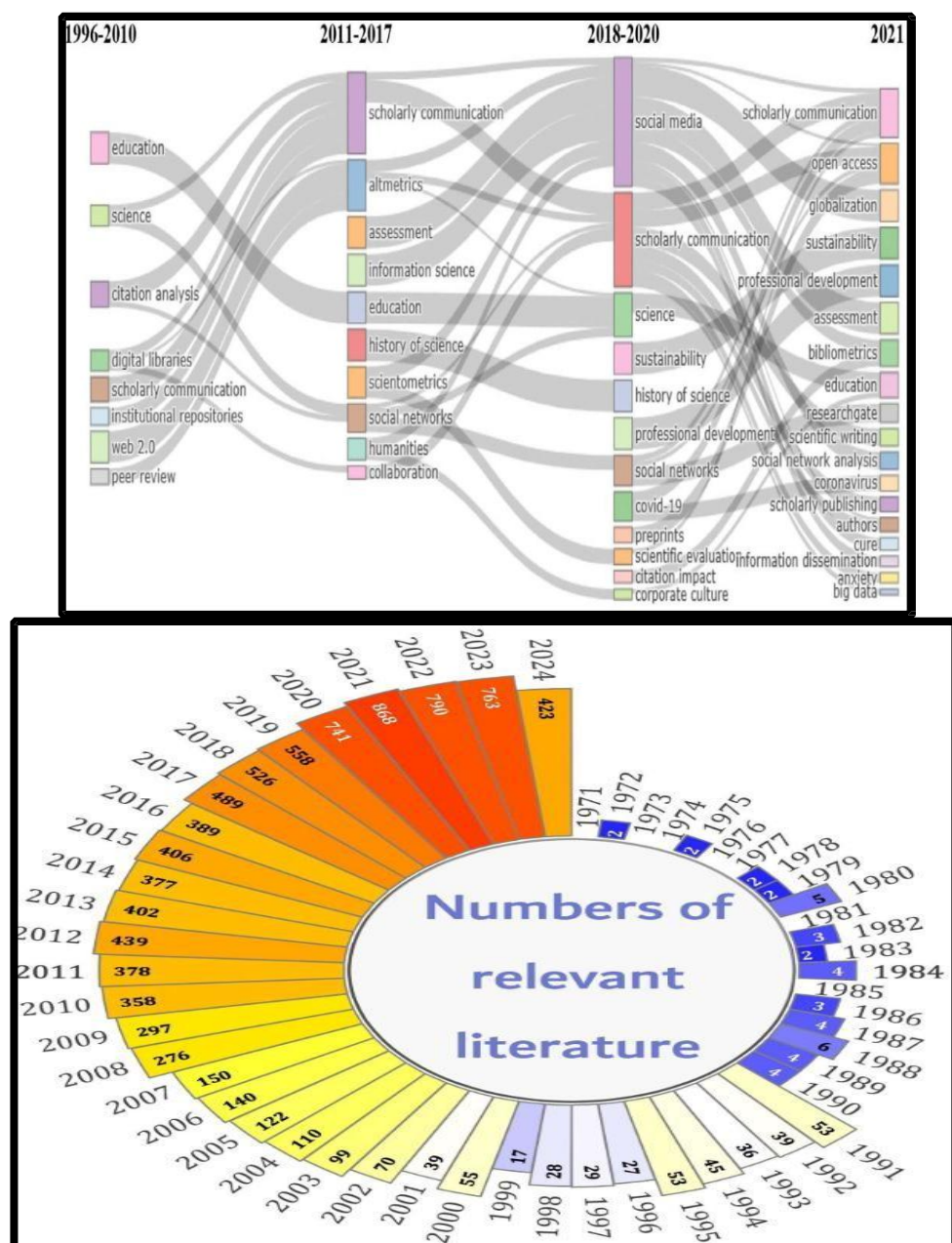
Keyword Co-Occurrence and Frequency Analysis

Keywords network visualisation (with minimum number of occurrences of a keyword: 3)



The keyword frequency chart provides one of the most critical insights for this study. The most commonly occurring keywords include “labour standard,” “employment,” “supply chain management,” and “labour market,” which clearly indicate that the research field is heavily oriented toward employment conditions and regulatory frameworks. Notably, keywords directly associated with career growth, promotion, leadership development, or career advancement are largely absent. This absence is highly significant, as it empirically confirms the research gap identified in this study. It suggests that existing literature focuses primarily on getting individuals with disabilities into the workforce, rather than examining how they can progress, develop skills, and achieve long-term career success within organizations.

Thematic Evolution (Trending Topics)



The thematic evolution chart shows a clear shift in research focus over time. Early research (pre-2010) concentrated on public policy and industrial relations, reflecting a macro-level perspective. Between 2010 and 2018, the focus expanded to include supply chains, compliance, and labour conditions, indicating growing attention to global labour governance.

In recent years (2018–2025), themes such as employment, workplace inclusion, gender, and workforce participation have gained prominence. However, even in the most recent phase, the emphasis remains on inclusion at the entry level, rather than career advancement or leadership progression. This suggests that while the field is evolving toward organizational-level concerns, it has not yet fully integrated a career development perspective.

Overall Interpretation

When all charts are interpreted collectively, a clear pattern emerges: the research field has made significant progress in addressing employment access and workplace inclusion, but it has largely neglected the dimension of career growth and advancement. The dominance of labour-oriented journals, keywords, and authors indicates that the field is still grounded in macro-level perspectives, with limited attention to micro-level employee experiences and career trajectories. This imbalance suggests that inclusion is being treated as a starting point (employment) rather than a continuous process (career development and growth).

5. Implications

The findings of this study have important theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study highlights the need to expand the research focus beyond employment access to include career growth and long-term professional development of employees with disabilities. From a practical standpoint, organizations and policymakers should move beyond compliance-based hiring practices and focus on creating inclusive environments that support career progression. This includes implementing training programs, mentorship opportunities, and inclusive HR policies that facilitate growth and advancement.

6. Limitations

This study is subject to certain limitations. The analysis is based solely on data retrieved from a single database, which may not capture all relevant publications. Additionally, citation-based metrics may introduce bias toward older publications, as they have had more time to accumulate citations. Furthermore, the study relies on bibliometric techniques, which provide quantitative insights but may not fully capture the qualitative aspects of research.

7. Conclusion

This bibliometric and knowledge mapping study provides a comprehensive overview of research on workplace inclusion and employment of employees with disabilities. The findings reveal a significant growth in research output over time, with a strong concentration in labour and policy-oriented domains. However, the analysis also identifies a critical gap in the literature, as limited attention has been given to career growth and advancement. Addressing this gap is essential for developing a more inclusive and holistic understanding of workplace equality. Future research should focus on career development pathways, organizational practices, and inclusive HR strategies to ensure sustainable and meaningful employment for employees with disabilities.

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