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MAPPING RESEARCH ON QUALITY OF LIFE IN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the global research landscape on quality of life among individuals with intellectual disabilities between 2000 and 2025. Based on 527 publications retrieved from the Web of Science and Scopus databases, bibliometric mapping techniques were applied using VOSviewer and Biblioshiny software. The findings reveal a stagnation in scholarly output, with an annual publication decline of 3.6%. Robert L. Schalock and Miguel Verdugo emerged as the most prolific and highly cited scholars in this field. Keyword-based thematic mapping indicated that research has predominantly focused on the themes of "quality of life," "autism," and "family." Co-authorship networks demonstrated a moderate level of international collaboration, with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain ranking among the leading contributors in terms of both productivity and citations. Nevertheless, despite its interdisciplinary nature, the literature remains fragmented, showing limited integration across disciplines and regions. The dominance of high-income countries and the scarcity of global research partnerships underscore the need for more inclusive and internationally representative collaborations. Overall, this study offers a comprehensive overview of intellectual development, key contributors, and thematic directions in the field, while also identifying critical gaps that can guide future research on quality of life in intellectual disability.

Keywords: *Intellectual Disability, Quality of Life, Bibliometric Analysis, Thematic Mapping.*

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ZİHİNSEL YETERSİZLİKLERDE YAŞAM KALİTESİ ÜZERİNE YAPILAN ARAŞTIRMALARIN HARİTALANDIRILMASI: BİBLİYOMETRİK BİR ANALİZ

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, 2000–2025 yılları arasında zihinsel engelli bireylerde yaşam kalitesi üzerine yapılan küresel araştırmaları kapsamlı biçimde incelemektedir. Web of Science ve Scopus veritabanlarından elde edilen 527 yayına dayalı olarak VOSviewer ve Biblioshiny yazılımları kullanılarak bilimsel haritalama teknikleri uygulanmıştır. Bulgular alandaki yayın üretiminin durağan bir seyir izlediğini ve yıllık %3,6 oranında azaldığını göstermektedir. Robert L. Schalock ve Miguel Verdugo, zihinsel engelli bireylerde yaşam kalitesi konusunda en üretken ve en fazla atıf alan araştırmacılar olarak öne çıkmıştır. Anahtar kelime analizine dayalı tematik haritalamada araştırmaların ağırlıklı olarak "yaşam kalitesi", "otizm" ve "aile" temaları etrafında yoğunlaştığını ortaya koymuştur. Ortak yazarlık ağları uluslararası işbirliğinin orta düzeyde olduğunu göstermektedir. ABD, İngiltere ve İspanya hem üretkenlik hem de atıf bakımından en güçlü katkıyı yapan ülkeler arasında yer almaktadır. Bununla birlikte disiplinler arası bir yapıya sahip olmasına rağmen literatürün parçalı kaldığı, bölgeler ve disiplinler arasında yeterli bütünleşmenin sağlanamadığı görülmüştür. Yüksek gelirli ülkelerin alana hâkimiyeti ve sınırlı uluslararası işbirliği daha kapsayıcı ve küresel ölçekte araştırma işbirliklerine duyulan ihtiyacı vurgulamaktadır. Genel olarak bu çalışma alandaki entelektüel gelişim, önde gelen katkı sağlayıcılar ve tematik yönelimler hakkında kapsamlı bir bakış sunarken gelecekteki araştırmalara yol gösterebilecek önemli boşlukları da ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Zihinsel Engellilik, Yaşam Kalitesi, Bibliyometrik Analiz, Tematik Haritalama.*

INTRODUCTION

Intellectual disability (ID) is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, and problem-solving) and adaptive behavior (social, conceptual, and practical skills), with onset before the age of 18 (Parmenter, 2011). Among individuals with ID, quality of life (QoL) has emerged as a central concern in both research and policy, reflecting a broader paradigm shift from deficit-focused to rights-based and person-centered approaches (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998; Schalock et al., 2002). As global health systems and educational frameworks increasingly emphasize dignity, inclusion, and well-being, scholarly interest in QoL among individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) has grown significantly. However, this rapid growth has led to a fragmented body of literature characterized by diverse conceptual frameworks, inconsistent terminology, and geographical imbalances. While some studies (Ganjiwale et al., 2016) have focused on specific populations—such as children, adults, or individuals with comorbidities—a comprehensive mapping of the broader QoL discourse within ID research remains lacking. Bibliometric methods offer a robust means of synthesizing this dispersed knowledge, highlighting influential contributions, and identifying emerging research fronts. Although previous bibliometric reviews have addressed specific subthemes such as digital interventions or inclusive education (Saini et al., 2025), a focused and systematic analysis on QoL in ID is still absent. This study seeks to address that gap by mapping the evolution, scholarly productivity, and intellectual structure of QoL-related research in the context of ID.

The Importance of Researching Quality of Life in Intellectual Disability

Scientific progress in the field of ID plays a crucial role in enhancing QoL by fostering evidence-based practices across multiple disciplines. This inherently interdisciplinary field spans psychology, education, rehabilitation, medicine, social work, and genetics—each offering unique perspectives on improving QoL. Bibliometric evidence confirms this breadth, showing that research on ID and QoL cuts across health sciences, nursing, genetics, and molecular biology (Chen et al., 2025). For instance, medical and genetic research facilitates early diagnosis and intervention; educational sciences promote inclusive learning environments; psychology and social work address emotional and behavioral well-being. The synergy among these fields is vital for developing holistic care models that prioritize both functional independence and subjective well-being. The societal impact of such research is profound. Studies that inform policy and practice lead to tangible improvements in the lives of individuals with ID and their families (Perry, 2004). Evidence-based educational programs support inclusive learning, while early intervention initiatives reduce developmental delays (Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Schalock et al., 2011). Additionally, research on caregiver support offers practical strategies to reduce caregiver stress and encourage long-term engagement (Ryan et al., 2021). Recent bibliometric studies emphasize that the overarching goal of scholarship in this area is to integrate multidisciplinary knowledge into actionable strategies that enhance both objective and perceived QoL for individuals with ID (Chen et al., 2025). As the field continues to evolve, sustained interdisciplinary collaboration and context-sensitive research will be essential to address the complex and dynamic needs of individuals with ID, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive, equitable, and responsive support system.

Aim of the Study

Over the past two decades, research on ID has expanded considerably, especially in efforts to improve QoL for individuals with this condition (McBride et al., 2021; Parmenter, 2011). This growth reflects the field's inherently interdisciplinary nature, spanning psychology, education, medicine, rehabilitation, genetics, and social work (Chen et al., 2025). However, existing literature remains disproportionately Western-centric and lacks adequate representation of emerging themes such as digital assistive technologies, caregiver well-being, and rare syndromes (Saini et al., 2025). This study aims to bridge these critical gaps through a comprehensive bibliometric mapping of global research on QoL in ID from 2000 to 2025. The choice of this 25-year period is deliberate. The turn of the millennium marked a pivotal point in disability studies, coinciding with the global dissemination of Schalock's quality of life model, the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and the rapid growth of bibliometric databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, which allow systematic analysis of research output. Moreover, this timeframe captures the acceleration of interdisciplinary approaches and technological innovations (e.g., digital health tools and assistive technologies) that began reshaping both practice and scholarship in the early 2000s. Focusing on 2000–2025 therefore enables the study to analyze a sufficiently broad and contemporary body of literature that reflects both the consolidation of traditional QoL frameworks and the emergence of new thematic directions.

Unlike prior bibliometric reviews that focus narrowly on topics such as internet use (Mengual-Andrés et al., 2020) or inclusive education (Saini et al., 2025), this research adopts a holistic lens to capture the intellectual landscape of QoL-related literature in ID. By doing so, the study aims to identify dominant trends, map scholarly productivity, and uncover neglected areas requiring future attention. To achieve this, it employs bibliometric techniques such as keyword co-occurrence, citation analysis, co-authorship mapping, and co-citation analysis (Donthu et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2020). These tools provide structural and temporal insights into the evolution of the field (McBurney & Novak, 2002; Van Leeuwen, 2006). By integrating data from both the Web of Science and Scopus databases, the study ensures comprehensive coverage and mitigates database-specific biases (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016; Baas et al., 2020). Using this approach, the study examines scholarly output from the first quarter of the 21st century and addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the trends in publication growth related to QoL in ID from 2000 to 2025?
2. Who are the most prolific authors contributing to the QoL literature in ID?
3. Which institutions and countries contribute most significantly to the QoL literature in ID?
4. Which academic journals most frequently publish QoL-related ID research, and how is it distributed across disciplines?
5. What are the major thematic clusters and keyword trends in QoL research in ID, and how have these evolved over time?
6. Which authors and publications have had the greatest influence on the field, based on citation metrics and co-authorship networks?
7. What landmark studies have shaped our understanding of QoL in ID, and what patterns of international collaboration exist in this domain?

METHOD

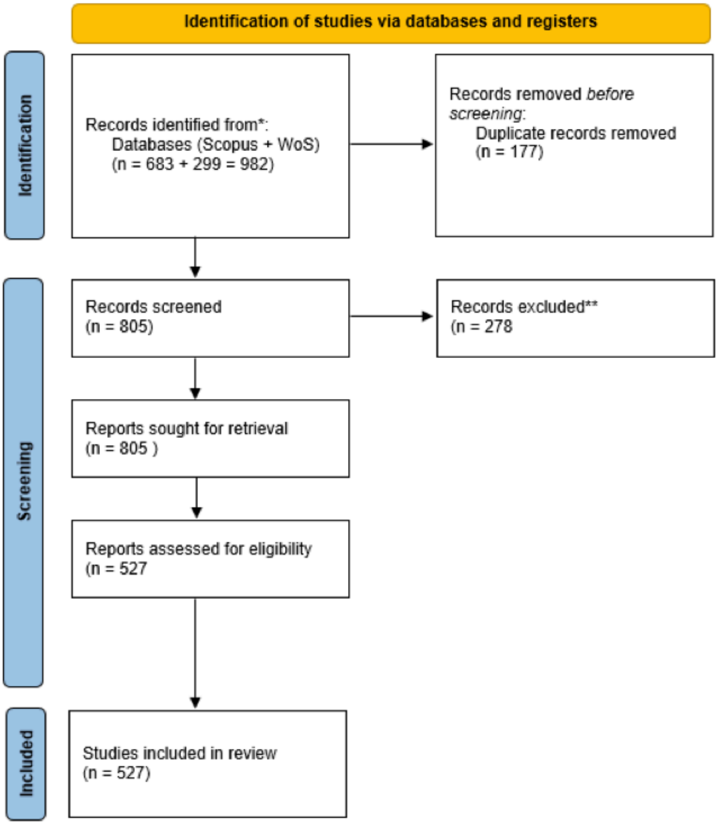
This study adopted a descriptive bibliometric approach to provide a comprehensive mapping of scholarly publications related to QoL in ID over the period 2000–2025. Bibliometric analysis allows for the quantitative assessment of academic output, patterns, and trends in a particular research field using large-scale publication datasets (Donthu et al., 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The study aimed to identify the most prolific sources, influential authors, thematic structures, and collaborative networks by applying standard bibliometric techniques.

Search Strategy and Data Sources

Data were retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), selected for their broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). A keyword-based search "intellectual disability" OR "mental retardation" OR "developmental disability" AND "quality of life" OR "rehabilitation" OR "cognition" OR "adaptive function") was conducted for publications between January 2000 and March 2025. Following the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Page et al., 2021), 683 records from Scopus and 299 from WoS were screened. After removing uncited documents and 177 duplicates, 527 unique cited publications were included for analysis (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Flow chart for selection of studies



Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in several stages using both descriptive and relational bibliometric techniques. The Bibliometrix package in R was used for general performance analysis, including yearly scientific production, most cited documents, influential journals, top authors, and author impact indices (H-index, G-index). VOSviewer software was employed for network visualization, including co-authorship networks (authors, countries, institutions), co-word analysis, and citation and bibliographic coupling maps (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Thematic mapping and trend topic analysis were carried out to identify key clusters and their evolution over time. Thematic strength was determined based on Callon’s centrality and density metrics, allowing for the classification of themes into four categories: motor, basic, niche, and emerging/declining (Cobo et al., 2011).

FINDINGS

Descriptive Results

Figure 2 summarizes key bibliometric indicators based on 527 documents published between 2000 and 2025 on QoL in ID. These works appeared in 238 sources, with an annual publication decline of –3.6%. A total of 1,720 authors contributed, including 52 solo-authored papers. International co-authorship was 9.3%, with an average of 4.18 authors per paper. The dataset included 1,059 author keywords. Documents averaged 9.5 years in age and 20.94 citations each. Overall, findings indicate moderate collaboration and a declining publication trend, despite a notable citation impact.

Figure 2.

Bibliometric Indicators of Publications on QoL in ID between 2000 and 2025

Timespan
2000:2025

Sources
238

Documents
527

Annual Growth Rate
-3.6 %

Authors
1720

Authors of single-authored d
52

International Co-Authorship
9.298 %

Co-Authors per Doc
4.18

Author's Keywords (DE)
1059

References
0

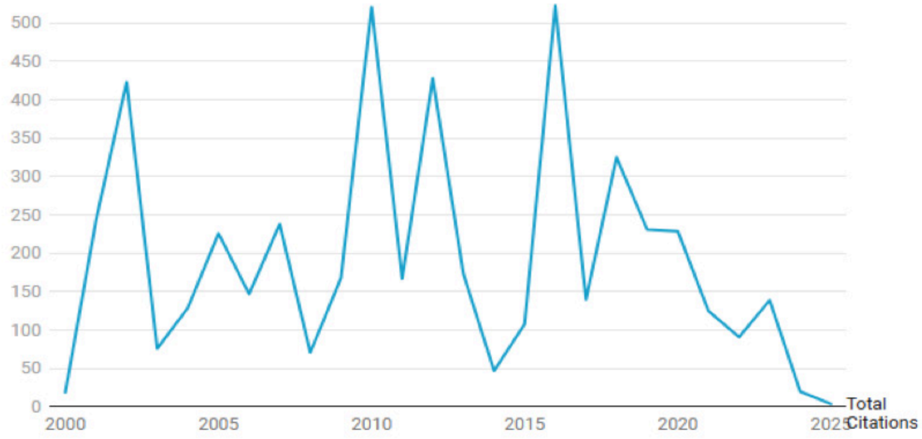
Document Average Age
9.5

Average citations per doc
20.94

Figure 3 illustrates the annual citation distribution of research on QoL in ID between 2000 and 2025, revealing significant fluctuations over time. Peaks occurred in 2002, 2010, and 2016, with total citations nearing or surpassing 500, indicating high-impact publications in those years. In contrast, declines are seen in 2013, 2015, and especially post-2023, likely due to reduced publication volume and the limited time for recent works to gain citations. Overall, the pattern reflects cyclical academic influence, with certain years producing more widely cited research.

Figure 3.

Annual Trends in the Number of Publications and Citations



Bibliometric Findings

Table 1 presents the top 10 most influential authors in the field of in QoL of ID based on a bibliometric analysis conducted for the period 2000–2025. The authors' impact levels were assessed using indicators such as the h-index, g-index, m-index, total citations (TC), number of publications (NP), and the year of first publication (PY_start). Schalock R. ranks first with the highest h-index and g-index, having authored 17 publications and received a total of 1,680 citations. He is followed by Brown I and Verdugo M. Notably, Jacoby P. holds the highest m-index value (1.00), indicating a high level of influence relative to the recency of his scholarly contributions. These findings highlight the leading scholars in the field in terms of both productivity and academic impact.

Table 1.
Bibliometric Indicators of the Most Influential Authors in the Field in QoL of ID

Rank	Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY Start
1	Schalock R.	16	17	0,667	1680	17	2002
2	Verdugo M.	11	12	0,55	629	12	2006
3	Brown I.	10	15	0,417	1026	15	2002
4	Brown R.	7	10	0,292	844	10	2002
5	Downs J.	7	7	0,778	163	7	2017
6	Gomez L.	7	8	0,438	393	8	2010
7	Chou Y.	6	7	0,316	160	7	2007
8	Jacoby P.	6	6	1	127	6	2020
9	Reddihough D.	6	6	0,667	155	6	2017
10	Whitehouse A.	6	6	0,667	155	6	2017

TC: Total Citations, NP: Number of Publications, PY Start: Publication Year Start

Figure 4 displays the longitudinal publication trends of the top 10 institutions contributing to the research domain of QoL in ID between 2000 and 2025. Notable institutions such as the *University of Toronto*, the *University of Western Australia*, and the *Universidad de Salamanca* exhibit consistent growth in scholarly production throughout the period. A significant rise is observed in the *University of Western Australia*'s output after 2018. Additionally, institutions like *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven)*, *Deakin University*, and the *University of British Columbia* have shown notable increases in publication activity in recent years. These trajectories reflect the evolving institutional engagement and academic leadership within this research domain.

Figure 4.

Institutional Distribution of Scholarly Output in the Field of QoL in ID

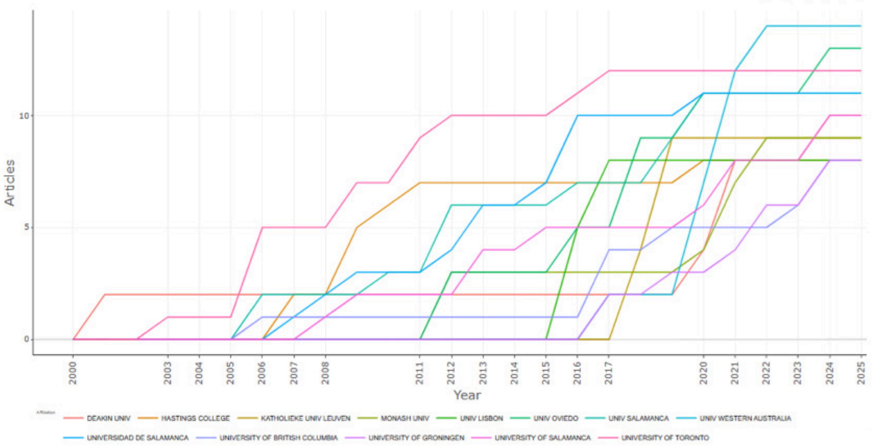


Table 2 presents the ten most influential academic journals in the field of QoL in ID, ranked by the number of publications and total citations. The Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities leads in terms of the number of documents (n = 36), followed closely by Research in Developmental Disabilities (n = 32) and the Journal of Intellectual Disability Research (n = 31). Howeve"r, in terms of citation impact, the Journal of Intellectual Disability Research is the most cited source, accumulating 1,962 citations, followed by the Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities (n = 896). Notably, although Mental Retardation includes only three documents, it has received 616 citations, indicating a high citation-per-article ratio. Similarly, Trends in Neurosciences and the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, despite having few documents, show substantial citation counts, suggesting their publications' relevance and interdisciplinary impact. These results highlight the most important journals for knowledge dissemination in the field of quality of life research in intellectual disability.

Table 2.

The Top 10 Journals with the Most Publications and Citations

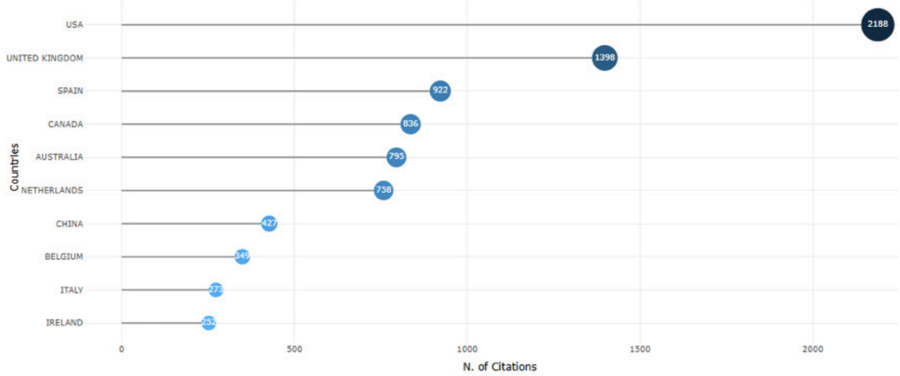
Rank	Journal Title	Documents	Citations
1	Journal of Intellectual Disability Research	31	1962
2	Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities	25	896

3	Research in Developmental Disabilities	32	870
4	Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities	36	742
5	Mental Retardation	3	616
6	Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability	16	398
7	Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	9	360
8	Trends in Neurosciences	1	320
9	Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders	5	301
10	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	10	237

Figure 5 displays the top 10 countries with the highest number of citations in the field of quality of life (QoL) research in intellectual disability (ID). The data are ranked according to total citation counts. The United States leads with 2,188 citations, followed by the United Kingdom (1,398), Spain (922), Canada (836), and Australia (795). These figures indicate not only the research productivity of these nations but also their significant academic influence in the field. In addition, countries such as China (427 citations), Belgium (349), Italy (276), and Ireland (252) have achieved a notable citation impact despite producing fewer publications. Overall, these findings suggest that global academic contributions to QoL research in ID are predominantly driven by developed countries.

Figure 5.

The Most Cited Countries in the Field of QoL in ID



As illustrated in Table 3, the most highly cited studies in the field of intellectual disability and quality of life span a wide range of interdisciplinary themes, including self-determination, social inclusion, health-related quality of life, and professional practice. The most cited article is by Ramakers et al. (2002), which focuses on the cellular basis of cognition and the role of Rho proteins in mental retardation (n=292). However, in terms of average citations per year, Nota et al. (2007) leads with 75.25 citations annually, reflecting sustained scholarly interest in self-determination and social functioning among individuals with intellectual disabilities. Other influential works, such as those by Wil et al. (2010) and Verdugo et al. (2012), highlight conceptual models and rights-based approaches to quality of life. Notably, several top-cited studies (e.g., Meng et al., 2005; Lauren et al., 2018) address both biological underpinnings and social support mechanisms, illustrating the field's integration of biomedical and psychosocial perspectives. The presence of more recent publications (e.g., Lauren et al., 2018; Beadle-Brown et al., 2016) among the most cited also signals a growing emphasis on severe and complex needs, particularly in populations with comorbid conditions such as autism and epilepsy. Overall, the citation trends demonstrate an evolving yet cohesive research agenda, where foundational studies continue to shape contemporary discussions on quality of life in intellectual disabilities.

Table 3.

Descriptive characteristics of the top 10 most cited nursing and AI studies

Rank	Title	Authors/year published	Total citations	Average per Year
1	Rho proteins, mental retardation and the cellular basis of cognition	Ramakers et al. (2002)	292	15.09
2	Self-determination, social abilities and the quality of life of people with intellectual disability	Nota et al. (2007)	217	75.25
3	Models of Disability, Quality of Life, and Individualized Supports: Implications for Professional Practice in Intellectual Disability	Wil et al. (2010)	193	10.06
4	Abnormal long-lasting synaptic plasticity and cognition in mice lacking the mental retardation gene Pak3	Meng et al. (2005)	153	24.8

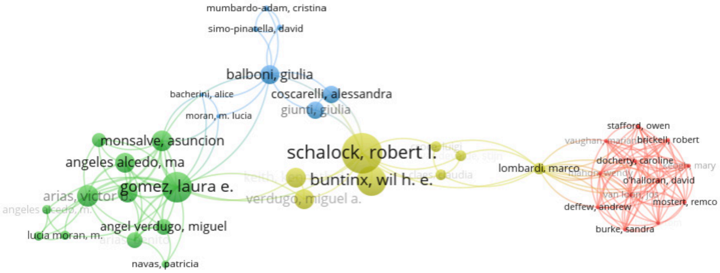
5	The concept of quality of life and its role in enhancing human rights in the field of intellectual disability	Verdugo et al. (2012)	152	28.25
6	The health-related quality of life of children with refractory epilepsy: A comparison of those with and without intellectual disability	Sabaz et al. (2001)	129	21.2
7	The combined impact of social support and perceived stress on quality of life in adults with autism spectrum disorder and without intellectual disability	Lauren et al. (2018)	90	13.71
8	Quality of Life Model Development and Use in the Field of Intellectual Disability	Robert et al. (2010)	87	18.8
9	Quality of Life and Quality of Support for People with Severe Intellectual Disability and Complex Needs	Beadle-Brown et al. (2016)	86	11.63
10	Quality of Life for Transition-Age Youth with Autism or Intellectual Disability	Elizabeth et al. (2016)	80	10

Co-authorship: Authors

Figure 6 presents the co-authorship network in the literature on quality of life in intellectual disability, using VOSviewer. Node sizes indicate publication counts, and links show co-authorship relations. Distinct colors represent author clusters. Robert L. Schalock stands out with 17 publications, 1,680 citations, an h-index of 16, and a Total Link Strength (TLS) of 169, highlighting his central role. He closely collaborates with Miguel Verdugo (12 publications, TLS = 133) and Laura Gomez (8 publications), forming a strong cluster. In contrast, authors like Jenny Downs, Peter Jacoby, and Helen Leonard, each with 6 publications and lower TLS values (48), form a smaller but cohesive group. I. Brown (15 publications) and R. Brown (10 publications) have significant outputs but show weaker collaboration links, suggesting a more independent research approach. The network reveals both strong collaborative clusters and individual scholarly paths in the field.

Figure 6.

Co-authorship Network Map

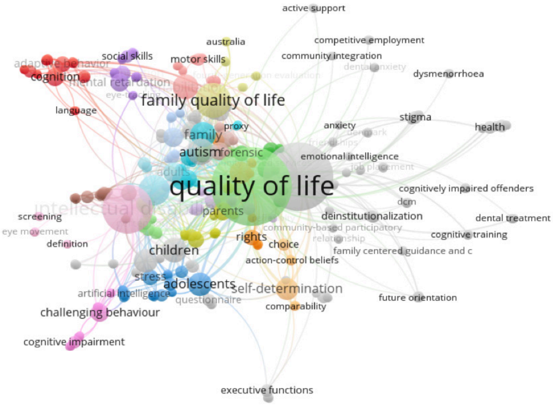


Co-occurrence: Keywords

Figure 7 presents a keyword co-occurrence map generated via VOSviewer, identifying 55 thematic clusters related to quality of life in intellectual disability. Node size indicates keyword frequency, while proximity and links reflect conceptual associations. "Quality of life" emerges as the most central term, connecting themes like "self-determination," "adolescents," "parents," and "rights." Another key cluster centers on "family quality of life," associated with terms such as "autism" and "proxy." Additional clusters involve "challenging behaviour," "cognitive impairment," and the growing role of "artificial intelligence" in diagnostics. Keywords like "adaptive behavior," "language," and "motor skills" reflect developmental focuses, while emerging terms such as "employment," "health," and "stigma" suggest expanding interest in social and emotional dimensions. The map highlights both established and evolving research areas in the field.

Figure 7.

Network Map of the Most Frequently Used Keywords

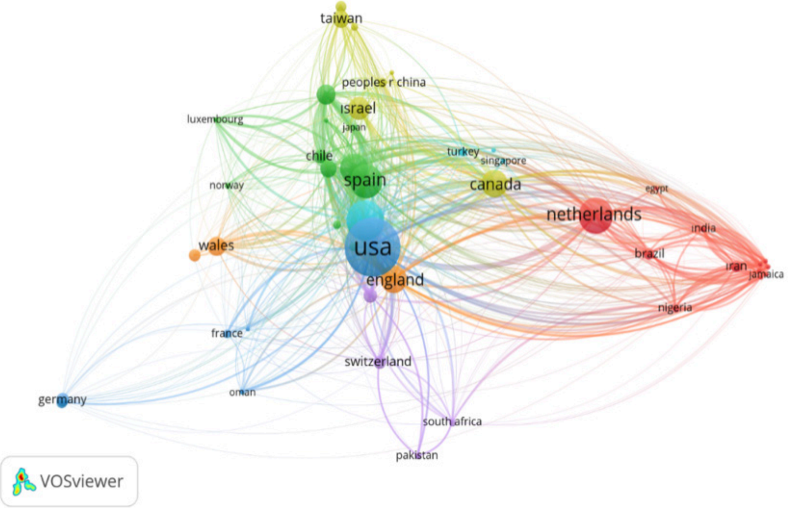


Bibliographic Coupling of Countries (Total Link Strength)

Figure 8 illustrates the bibliographic coupling network among 49 countries using VOSviewer. Each node represents a country, with node size indicating publication volume and links reflecting shared references. Seven distinct clusters emerged based on bibliographic connectivity. The United States leads with 71 publications, 2,188 citations, and the highest total link strength (6,174), followed by Spain, England, and Australia. The USA occupies a central position, showing strong integration across clusters. Countries like Spain, the Netherlands, Canada, and Italy also demonstrate significant bibliographic ties. This structure suggests a globally distributed yet regionally clustered scholarly network, with international collaborations concentrated at the reference-sharing level.

Figure 8.

Density map of the Most Productive Countries



Thematic Map

"As shown in Figure 9, the thematic map illustrates that the conceptual themes emerging in the literature on quality of life in intellectual disability are categorized into four quadrants based on their degree of development (density) and relevance (centrality). Themes such as “quality of life,” “child,” and “adolescent”, located in the upper-right quadrant, demonstrate high levels of both centrality and density, thereby qualifying as Motor Themes, which serve as key drivers of development in the field. In contrast, “intellectual impairment,” “humans,” and “human”, positioned in the lower-right quadrant, exhibit high centrality but relatively lower density, thus being classified as Basic Themes that form the foundational structure of the research area. The upper-left quadrant includes terms like “nonhuman,” “gene expression,” and “brain,” which, although specialized and novel, are identified as Niche Themes due to their limited overall impact and lower centrality. Meanwhile, the lower-left quadrant features themes such as “cognitive defect,” “memory,” and “review,” which rank low in both development and relevance, indicating that they represent Emerging or Declining Themes within the current research landscape. In addition, themes such as 'social support,' 'caregivers,' and 'family' show moderate levels of both centrality and density, highlighting the growing importance of social dimensions in quality of life research within the context of intellectual disability. Similarly, concepts such as “controlled study,” “mental retardation,” and “autism” are classified as more fundamental clinical themes, reflecting ongoing interest in empirical and diagnostic approaches within the domain.

Figure 9.
Thematic Map Analysis

DISCUSSION

This study underscores the ability of bibliometric analysis to deliver an objective and comprehensive overview of research trends in the field of QoL in in ID. While prior reviews have often concentrated on specific subdomains such as digital technologies or inclusive education (Saini et al., 2025), the present research provides a panoramic synthesis of the global literature between 2000 and 2025, drawing on data from both the Scopus and Web of Science databases. By capturing the intellectual trajectory of the past quarter-century, this study contributes a broader lens through which to assess scholarly developments in the field.

One of the most striking findings is the negative annual growth rate of –3.6% across 527 publications, which suggests a possible stagnation or redirection of research activity. In contrast to the typical upward trend in scientific output, this decline may reflect shifts in terminology—such as the transition from "mental retardation" to "intellectual disability"—or changing research priorities within adjacent disciplines. For instance, Saini et al. (2025) highlighted a marked increase in inclusive education studies between 2004 and 2022, suggesting that scholarly attention is increasingly directed toward socially responsive themes, while biomedical or traditional emphases may be leveling off. Citation patterns also reveal critical periods of scholarly impact, with citation peaks in 2002, 2010, and 2016 corresponding to foundational publications, such as those by Ramakers et al. (2002) and Buntinx and Schalock (2010). In contrast, the post-2020 decline in citations likely reflects the recency of publications and their limited time to accrue academic influence.

Key scholars such as Robert L. Schalock, who pioneered the QoL framework, remain central to the field. His contributions, alongside those of Verdugo et al. (2012) and Ivan Brown, have solidified the centrality of rights-based, outcome-oriented approaches. Co-authorship network analysis confirms the presence of influential collaborative clusters formed around Schalock, Verdugo, and Gómez, whereas scholars like R. Brown follow more independent scholarly trajectories.

The international collaboration rate of 9.3% indicates moderate levels of cross-national academic exchange, mostly among high-income countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Spain, Canada, and Australia. This observation aligns with Saini et al.'s (2025) call for more inclusive research practices and diversified global partnerships. Western dominance is also evident in bibliographic coupling, with the U.S. serving as a central node among seven national publication clusters.

Regarding publication venues, field-specific journals such as the *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, and the *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research* emerge as primary outlets. Notably, interdisciplinary journals such as *Trends in Neurosciences* and the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* achieve high citation counts despite fewer publications, demonstrating cross-disciplinary relevance. Legacy journals like *Mental Retardation*—now *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*—continue to exert bibliometric influence despite evolving terminology.

The co-word analysis reaffirms that "quality of life" remains the central thematic anchor, bridging key concepts such as “self-determination,” “rights,” “parents,” and “adolescents.” The rising presence of terms like “family quality of life,” “autism,” and “proxy” suggests a shift toward more holistic and family-centered perspectives. Thematic mapping identified four clusters: “motor themes” (e.g., QoL, children, adolescents) driving field advancement; “basic themes” underpinning conceptual foundations; “niche themes” (e.g., gene expression, brain) rooted in biomedical science; and “emerging or declining themes,” such as memory and cognitive impairment. The notable underrepresentation of memory-related studies highlights a significant research gap, especially considering their theoretical importance.

Bibliometric methods, therefore, serve not only to synthesize existing scholarship but also to identify underexplored and emerging areas. As emphasized by Donthu et al. (2021) and Pranckutė (2021), these tools are vital for aligning academic agendas with societal priorities. In this study, keywords such as “artificial intelligence,” “digital technology,” “employment,” and “stigma” point to an expanding research scope that integrates mental health, technological innovation, and social inclusion. By incorporating data from both Scopus and Web of Science, the study mitigates the single-source bias typical of prior analyses (Van Leeuwen, 2006; Pranckutė, 2021), thereby improving representativeness. Despite ongoing limitations related to language and indexing, the inclusion of leading authors and journals supports the generalizability of the findings. In sum, this bibliometric analysis offers strategic insights for scholars, institutions, and policymakers aiming to enhance the scientific depth and societal relevance of research on intellectual disabilities. Through its comprehensive scope and rigorous methodology, it provides both a roadmap for future investigations and a foundation for evidence-informed policy development.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this bibliometric analysis offer several meaningful implications for research, practice, and policy. First, the observed thematic evolution—particularly the rising emphasis on "family quality of life," "self-determination," and "rights-based approaches"—underscores a paradigm shift toward more holistic and person-centered models. Future research should prioritize underexplored areas such as memory, cognitive function, and digital interventions, which remain marginal despite their theoretical and practical relevance.

Second, the dominance of high-income countries in collaborative networks and publication output points to a pressing need for more inclusive global partnerships. Researchers and funding agencies should actively support intellectual disability studies in underrepresented regions, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

Third, the presence of interdisciplinary contributions from neuroscience, education, psychology, and social work highlights the importance of cross-sector collaboration in improving quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Policymakers should leverage such findings to inform evidence-based practices and inclusive policy reforms.

Finally, the integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence and assistive devices into future QoL frameworks may open new avenues for personalized care and educational strategies. These insights provide a strategic foundation for shaping the next generation of research and services in the field of intellectual disabilities.

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