

A scientometric analysis of research on social emotional learning: Science mapping the research themes and trends from 2002 to 2024

Abstract

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is crucial for mental well-being, academic success, and fostering positive relationships, with broad implications for both individuals and society. Despite extensive research over the past two decades, the general trends in this field remain underexplored. To address this gap, this study utilized scientometric analysis to map research trends, intellectual structures, and theme evolution in SEL by analyzing 1355 peer-reviewed articles indexed in Web of Science from 2002 to 2024. The findings revealed a steady growth in publications, with a notable increase from 2019 to 2023. The field was predominantly dominated by developed countries in North America and Europe, with uneven national collaboration, mainly among Western nations. SEL research was primarily associated with education and psychology, with fewer studies linking it to public health, social work, and family studies. Keywords co-occurrence analysis identified four main research themes: “holistic development and integration of SEL,” “adolescent well-being and school climate dynamics,” “youth resilience and mental health during COVID-19,” and “early academic success and SEL.” Thematic evolution highlighted established topics like “mental health” and “emotional intelligence,” specialized areas like “professional development,” and emerging themes such as “COVID-19.” This study provides valuable insights for researchers and practitioners, enabling more informed decisions regarding SEL programs and contributing to the ongoing development of the field.

Keywords: social emotional learning; scientometric analysis; bibliometrics; research trends