

A Bibliometric Analysis of Collaboration and Consultation in Autism Research: Trends, Global Networks and Emerging Themes

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Abstract

Research on autism has expanded significantly across educational, healthcare, and interdisciplinary contexts, with increasing attention given to collaboration and consultation practices that support autistic individuals. However, existing studies remain fragmented, and limited bibliometric evidence is available to systematically examine the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and global collaboration patterns within this field. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the research landscape of collaboration and consultation in autism studies using a bibliometric approach. The study addressed three research questions concerning publication trends and growth patterns, influential countries and international collaboration networks, and dominant and emerging research themes based on keyword co-occurrence analysis. Data were retrieved from the Scopus database, involving 286 English-language journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. Bibliometric analyses were conducted using VOSviewer, including publication trend analysis, country-level co-authorship analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis. The findings revealed increasing publication trends, indicating growing scholarly interest in collaborative and consultative practices within autism research. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia emerged as the most influential countries in terms of publication productivity and collaboration strength. Dominant themes included inclusive education, interdisciplinary collaboration, social communication, and professional consultation, while emerging themes involved telehealth, neurodiversity, participatory research, and artificial intelligence. Overall, the findings reflect a growing shift toward inclusive and person-centred approaches in autism research.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Collaboration and Consultation, Bibliometric Analysis, Inclusive Education, Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Introduction

Research on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has expanded significantly across multiple disciplines, including special education, healthcare, and social intervention. Current debates within the social sciences increasingly emphasize inclusive education, neurodiversity, interdisciplinary collaboration, and person-centered support systems for autistic individuals.

These discussions highlight the growing importance of collaborative practices across educational, healthcare, and community contexts. The Scopus dataset analyzed in this study indicates that autism-related research encompasses diverse areas such as behavioural intervention, social communication, and educational support systems. Increasingly, these studies emphasize the importance of structured learning environments and targeted intervention strategies to support the developmental needs of individuals with autism.

Within this expanding research landscape, the role of collaboration and consultation has become increasingly prominent, particularly in addressing the complex and multidimensional needs of individuals with autism. Effective collaboration among professionals—including educators, therapists, and multidisciplinary teams—has been identified as a key factor in enhancing intervention outcomes and promoting inclusive educational practices. However, challenges such as differences in professional perspectives, limited resources, and inconsistent implementation practices continue to affect the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. Recent empirical studies have demonstrated that collaborative intervention and interdisciplinary consultation practices contribute positively to communication development, behavioural support, and educational outcomes among autistic individuals (Shih et al., 2021; Friedman et al., 2023).

Furthermore, contemporary autism research highlights a shift toward interdisciplinary and systems-based approaches, where collaboration extends beyond professionals to include families, caregivers, and broader community stakeholders. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the importance of integrated support systems in improving educational and developmental outcomes. As such, collaboration and consultation are increasingly viewed not only as supportive elements but as central components of effective autism intervention frameworks. These developments reflect a broader transition toward integrated and multidisciplinary autism support systems that prioritize collaborative decision-making, family engagement, and inclusive participation.

Despite the increasing emphasis on collaboration and interdisciplinary practices in autism research, existing studies remain fragmented across educational, healthcare, and behavioural contexts. Most previous studies focused primarily on intervention effectiveness and clinical outcomes, while limited attention has been given to systematically mapping the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and global collaboration patterns within this field. Therefore, this study extends existing literature by employing a bibliometric approach to examine publication trends, international collaboration networks, and emerging thematic developments related to collaboration and consultation in autism research.

To address this gap, bibliometric analysis is employed in this study to systematically examine the structure, development, and trends of research related to collaboration and consultation in autism. Bibliometric analysis enables the quantitative evaluation of publication patterns, citation structures, and thematic developments within a field (Donthu et al., 2021). In addition, visualization tools such as VOSviewer facilitate the mapping of relationships between research elements, including countries, keywords, and collaboration networks, thereby providing deeper insights into the intellectual and social structure of the field (van Eck & Waltman, 2010, 2014). Bibliometric analysis is particularly valuable for

identifying emerging research directions, conceptual relationships, and global scholarly collaboration within rapidly developing interdisciplinary fields.

In terms of data source, Scopus is recognized as a comprehensive and high-quality database for bibliometric research due to its extensive coverage and reliable indexing of peer-reviewed literature (Baas et al., 2020; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The use of Scopus data allows for a robust analysis of research productivity, international collaboration, and thematic evolution within autism research. Additionally, ethical considerations are maintained throughout the study to ensure transparency, accuracy, and integrity in the analysis process (Resnik, 2020).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to provide a comprehensive bibliometric overview of research on collaboration and consultation in autism by focusing on publication trends, international collaboration networks, and thematic development. Specifically, the study is guided by the following research questions (Table 1): (RQ1) What are the publication trends and growth patterns in studies related to collaboration and consultation in autism research?

(RQ2) Which countries are the most influential, and how are international collaboration networks structured in this field? (RQ3) What are the dominant and emerging research themes based on keyword co-occurrence analysis?

Table 1

Research Questions Addressed in This Study

RQ	Research Question
RQ 1	What are the publication trends and growth patterns in studies related to collaboration and consultation in autism research?
RQ 2	Which countries are the most influential and, how are international collaboration networks structured in this field?
RQ 3	What are the most dominant and emerging research themes based on keyword co-occurrence analysis?

Methodology

This study employs a bibliometric approach to systematically investigate the progression of research on collaboration and consultation within the field of autism. Bibliometric analysis is widely acknowledged as a robust quantitative method for assessing scholarly productivity, citation dynamics, and the intellectual landscape of a research domain (Donthu et al., 2021). Through the integration of performance analysis and science mapping techniques, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of publication trends, thematic developments, and patterns of research collaboration.

Data Source and Search Strategy

The dataset for this study was obtained from the Scopus database, which is widely regarded as a reliable and high-quality source for bibliometric research due to its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed publications across diverse academic disciplines (Baas et al., 2020). In comparison with other bibliographic databases, Scopus offers broader journal inclusion and more standardized indexing procedures, making it highly suitable for comprehensive bibliometric investigations (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016).

Data retrieval was performed using the TITLE-ABS-KEY search function to ensure the inclusion of documents closely aligned with the research focus. The search strategy incorporated key terms associated with collaboration, consultation, and autism, together with their relevant synonymous variations. To maintain the relevance and timeliness of the dataset, only publications published between 2020 and 2025 were included. This period was selected to capture recent developments and emerging trends in autism research, particularly those related to collaborative and consultative practices. The finalized Scopus search string employed for data retrieval is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Research Question Addressed in This Study

Scopus Search String
TITLE-ABS-KEY((collaboration OR collaborative OR consultation) AND (autism OR ASD OR "autism spectrum disorder")) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA,"SOCL")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE,"ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE,"English"))

Dataset Overview

Following the implementation of the search strategy in the Scopus database, a total of 4,355 records were initially identified. Subsequent filtering based on publication year (2020-2025), subject area (Social Sciences), document type (journal articles), and language (English) reduced the dataset to 286 records. Additional screening procedures were conducted to remove duplicate entries and exclude publications that were not aligned with the study focus on autism, collaboration, consultation, and educational contexts. After the screening process, a final dataset of 286 documents was retained for bibliometric analysis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they: (i) focused on collaboration or consultation within the context of autism or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), (ii) involved interactions among stakeholders such as educators, parents, therapists, or multidisciplinary professionals, and (iii) were published as peer-reviewed journal articles in English between 2020 and 2025. Studies were excluded if they: (i) focused solely on autism without any reference to collaboration or consultation processes, (ii) addressed purely clinical or medical aspects without a collaborative or consultative dimension, or (iii) were conference papers, book chapters, or non-English publications.

Bibliometric Analysis Techniques

The bibliometric analyses were performed using VOSviewer to construct and visualize relationships within the dataset (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Consistent with established bibliometric procedures (Donthu et al., 2021), three analytical techniques were employed in this study. First, descriptive analysis was conducted to examine annual publication trends and growth patterns in research related to collaboration and consultation in autism (RQ1). Second, country-level co-authorship analysis was carried out to identify the most influential countries and to explore the structure of international collaboration networks within the field (RQ2). Third, keyword co-occurrence analysis was applied to identify dominant research themes and emerging areas of study based on the frequency and clustering of keywords (RQ3). Prior to conducting the analyses, a keyword standardization and cleaning process was

undertaken to eliminate generic indexing terms and merge synonymous keywords, thereby enhancing the accuracy, consistency, and reliability of the bibliometric mapping results.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles in the use of secondary bibliographic data obtained from the Scopus database, which contains publicly accessible academic records and does not involve direct interaction with human participants. Despite the absence of sensitive personal data, ethical responsibility remained essential in ensuring the integrity, transparency, and accuracy of the research process. All data were analyzed and reported objectively, with proper attribution provided to acknowledge original sources and avoid plagiarism. In addition, the analyses were conducted systematically to ensure the reproducibility and reliability of the findings. As emphasized by David B. Resnik (2020), ethical research practices are crucial for maintaining trust, accountability, and credibility within the scientific community.

Results and Discussion

Publication Trends and Growth Patterns (RQ1)

An analysis of annual publication trends and growth patterns was conducted to examine the development of research on collaboration and consultation in autism studies between 2020 and 2025. Publication trend analysis provides insights into scholarly attention, research productivity, and the growth trajectory of the field over time.

Table 3

Annual Publication Output and Growth Patterns (2020 – 2025)

Year	Publications (n)	Cumulative Total	Year-On-Year Change (%)	Trend
2020	46	46	-	Baseline
2021	37	83	-19.57%	Stable
2022	38	121	+2.70%	Stable
2023	48	169	+26.32%	Growth
2024	36	205	-25.00%	Stable
2025	82	287	+127.78%	Rapid
Total	287	-	+112.23	Expanding

Table 3 and Figure 1 illustrate the annual publication output and growth patterns in studies related to collaboration and consultation in autism research between 2020 and 2025. The findings indicate a fluctuating yet overall increasing trajectory in research productivity across the observed period. The year 2020 served as the baseline year with 46 publications. Publication output declined to 37 publications in 2021 (-19.57%), reflecting a relatively stable phase of research activity, followed by a slight increase in 2022 with 38 publications (+2.70%), which also remained within the stable trend category. A noticeable growth trend emerged in 2023, where publication output increased to 48 documents (+26.32%). Although the number of publications decreased again in 2024 to 36 documents (-25.00%), the overall research activity remained relatively stable compared to earlier years. The most significant development occurred in 2025, when publication output increased sharply to 82 publications (+127.78%), indicating a phase of rapid growth within the field. The cumulative publication total further demonstrates the continuous expansion of research on collaboration and consultation in autism studies, increasing from 46 publications in 2020 to 287 publications by

2025. These findings suggest that scholarly attention toward collaboration and consultation within autism research has intensified considerably in recent years, particularly in areas emphasizing interdisciplinary practices, inclusive education, and collaborative intervention approaches.

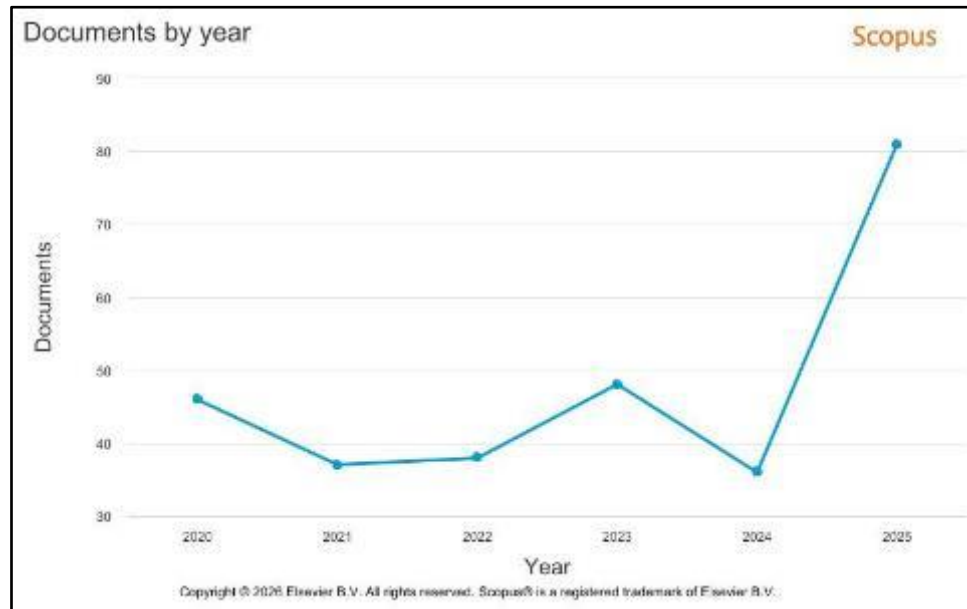


Figure 1: Annual publication output and growth patterns in studies related to collaboration and consultation in autism research (2020–2025).

The sharp increase in publication output in 2025 reflects the growing recognition of collaborative and consultative approaches as essential components in autism-related intervention and educational support systems. Recent studies within the retrieved literature increasingly highlight the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration among educators, therapists, families, and community stakeholders in enhancing support systems for individuals with autism. For instance, recent publications highlight the importance of integrated intervention frameworks, transition planning, inclusive educational practices, and cross-sector collaboration in improving developmental and educational outcomes for autistic individuals (Zainal & Zahri, 2025). Similarly, studies focusing on social communication, friendship development, and self-regulation further demonstrate the increasing emphasis on collaborative support mechanisms within autism intervention research (Nuske et al., 2022; Shih et al., 2021). The observed growth pattern therefore reflects not only an expansion in publication volume, but also a thematic shift toward more holistic, multidisciplinary, and collaborative perspectives in autism research.

International Collaboration Network by Country (RQ2)

Country-level collaboration analysis was conducted to identify the most influential countries and examine the structure of international collaboration networks in autism research related to collaboration and consultation. Co-authorship analysis provides insights into global research productivity, scholarly influence, and international research partnerships within the field.

Table 4

Top 10 countries by document output, citation count, and network position in collaboration and consultation research within autism studies (2020–2025).

Rank	Country	Documents	Citations	Link Strength	Regional Group
1	United States	118	936	High	Nort America
2	United Kingdom	35	394	High	Europe
3	Australia	24	200	High	Oceania
4	Canada	19	198	Medium	North America
5	Spain	11	101	Medium	Europe
6	China	9	149	Medium	Asia
7	Sweden	9	53	Low	Europe
8	Saudi Arabia	8	27	Low	Middle East
9	Brazil	7	12	Low	South America
10	Ireland	7	28	Low	Europe

The findings presented in Table 4 indicate that the United States emerged as the most influential country in the field, recording the highest number of publications ($n = 118$) and citations ($n = 936$), while also occupying a high network position within the international collaboration structure. This was followed by the United Kingdom (35 publications; 394 citations) and Australia (24 publications; 200 citations), both of which also demonstrated strong collaborative positions within the network. Canada and China exhibited moderate network positions despite comparatively lower publication outputs, suggesting active participation in international scholarly collaboration. In contrast, countries such as Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and Ireland demonstrated relatively limited collaboration strength and lower citation performance. Overall, the findings suggest that research productivity and scholarly influence in collaboration and consultation within autism research are predominantly concentrated in high-income Western countries with established research infrastructures and interdisciplinary autism support systems.

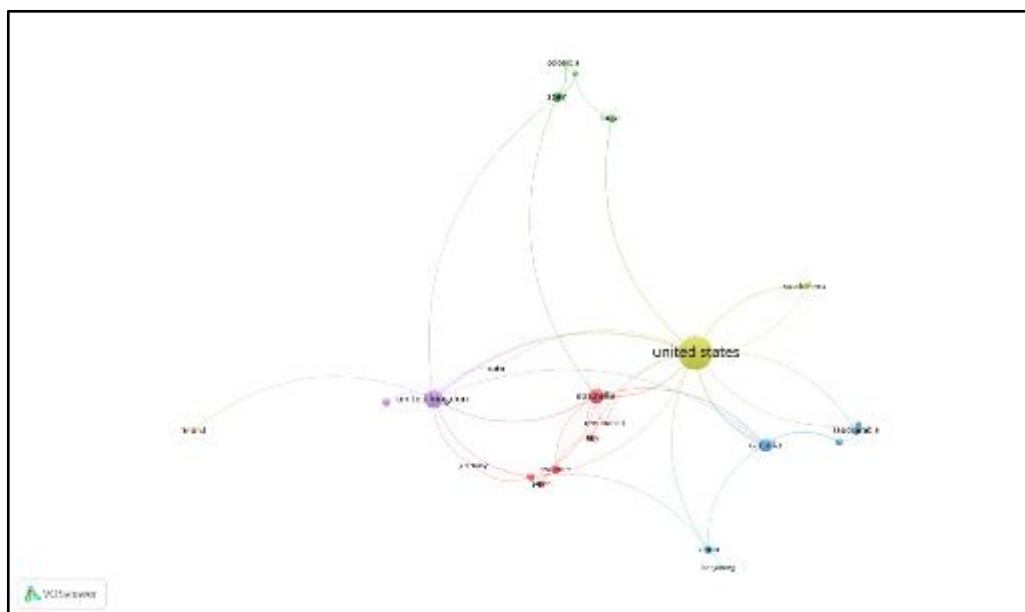


Figure 2. Country-level co-authorship network in collaboration and consultation research within autism studies.

The international collaboration network illustrated in Figure 2 further reveals a highly interconnected yet uneven global research structure. The United States occupies the most central position within the co-authorship network, functioning as the primary collaboration hub connecting multiple countries across different regions, including Canada, China, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Several regional clusters were also identified, reflecting patterns of geographical and institutional collaboration. For example, the United Kingdom demonstrated collaborative links with Finland, Qatar, Germany, and Australia, whereas Spain formed connections with Brazil and Colombia. The visual structure of the network suggests that international collaboration in this field remains concentrated among a limited number of dominant countries, while emerging contributors from Asia, South America, and the Middle East are increasingly participating in global autism research networks. These findings indicate that the field is characterized by expanding internationalization and interdisciplinary engagement, particularly in studies emphasizing collaborative intervention practices, professional partnerships, and inclusive support systems for autistic individuals (Friedman et al., 2023; Duxbury et al., 2025).

Dominant and Emerging Research Themes (RQ3)

Keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed using VOSviewer to examine the dominant and emerging thematic areas within research on collaboration and consultation in autism studies. The analysis focused on the frequency and co-occurrence relationships among author keywords extracted from the retrieved dataset, allowing the identification of conceptual patterns and thematic interconnections within the literature. The generated network and density visualizations provide insights into the intellectual structure of the field by revealing both established research domains and evolving areas of scholarly attention.

Table 5

Keyword Co-Occurrence Clusters: Themes, Key Terms, and Research Orientation

Cluster	Theme Label	Key Terms	Orientation
1	Inclusive and Collaborative Education	autism, collaboration, inclusion, inclusive education, special education, school, parents, children	Core/ Established
2	Interdisciplinary and Professional Practice	consultation, professional development, interprofessional collaboration, interprofessional education, training, self-efficacy, healthcare	Core/ Established
3	Social Communication and Development	social communication, social interaction, social skills, communication, autistic children, families	Emerging
4	Technology and Emerging Intervention Approaches	artificial intelligence, telehealth, technology, co-production, participatory research, collaborative learning	Emerging
5	Neurodiversity and Well-being	neurodiversity, mental health, stigma, diversity, disability, physical activity	Methodological

The keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed several dominant and interconnected thematic areas within collaboration and consultation research related to autism. As

presented in Table 5 and visualized in Figure 3, the most prominent cluster centred on *autism*, *collaboration*, *inclusive education*, and *special education*, indicating that educational inclusion and collaborative practice constitute the intellectual core of the field. High-density keywords such as *autism*, *autism spectrum disorder*, *collaboration*, and *inclusive education* appeared at the centre of the visualization map, demonstrating their strong conceptual interconnectedness and high frequency of occurrence within the dataset. The prominence of these terms suggests that contemporary autism research increasingly emphasizes multidisciplinary cooperation involving educators, therapists, families, and support professionals in inclusive educational settings. Evidence from the retrieved publication dataset further indicates that collaborative intervention models and interprofessional engagement are becoming increasingly significant in supporting autistic individuals across educational and healthcare contexts (Friedman et al., 2023; Dexter et al., 2025).

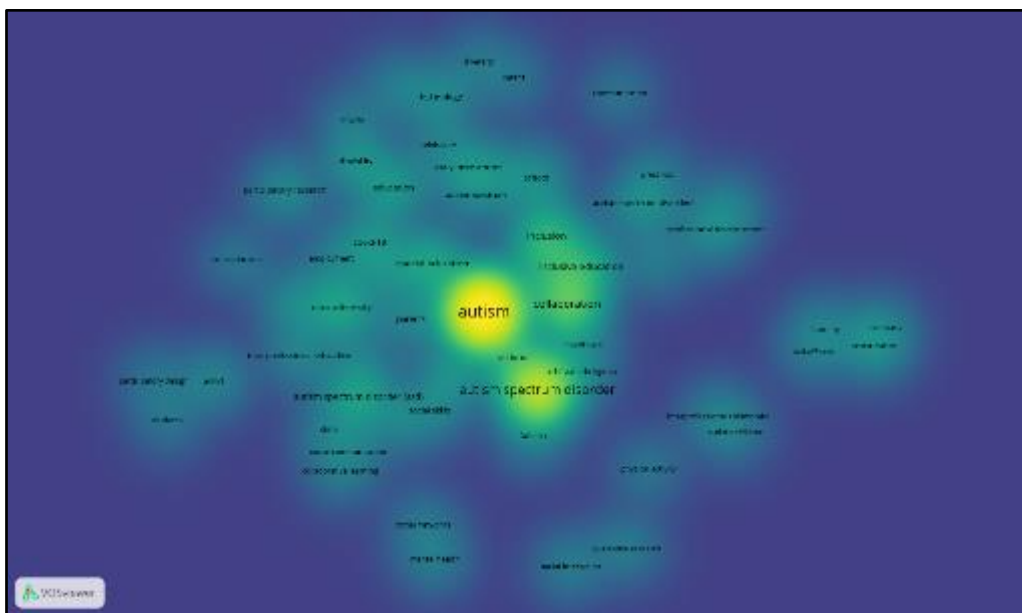


Figure 3: Keyword Co-Occurrence Density Visualization of Collaboration and Consultation Research in Autism Studies

In addition to established themes, the analysis also identified several emerging and evolving research directions. Keywords such as *telehealth*, *artificial intelligence*, *participatory research*, *co-production*, and *professional development* formed peripheral yet increasingly connected clusters, suggesting growing scholarly attention toward technology-enhanced collaboration and participatory approaches in autism research. Similarly, themes associated with *neurodiversity*, *mental health*, *social communication*, and *self-efficacy* indicate a gradual shift toward more holistic and person-centred perspectives. The density visualization further demonstrates that consultation-related keywords, including *training*, *consultation*, and *interprofessional collaboration*, remain moderately connected to the central autism cluster, implying that consultation practices are emerging as an important supporting mechanism rather than a standalone research domain. These findings reflect the evolving nature of the field, where research is progressively expanding beyond behavioural intervention toward inclusive, collaborative, and socially responsive frameworks for supporting autistic individuals (Duxbury et al., 2025; Friedman et al., 2023).

Synthesis and Implications

Overall, the findings indicate that research on collaboration and consultation in autism is undergoing substantial intellectual expansion, characterized by increasing publication growth, strengthening international collaboration networks, and evolving thematic orientations. The prominence of themes related to inclusive education, interdisciplinary collaboration, and social communication suggests a gradual shift from isolated behavioural intervention models toward more integrated, person-centred, and collaborative approaches in autism research. Studies within the retrieved literature increasingly emphasize the importance of interprofessional partnerships among educators, occupational therapists, behaviour analysts, families, and community stakeholders in supporting autistic individuals across educational and healthcare contexts (Friedman et al., 2023). Furthermore, the strong research influence of countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia highlights the critical role of established interdisciplinary research ecosystems and global collaboration networks in shaping the development of autism scholarship.

In addition to established research domains, the findings also reveal the emergence of newer and more socially responsive thematic areas within the field. Themes associated with participatory research, neurodiversity, telehealth, artificial intelligence, and collaborative support systems indicate that autism research is increasingly embracing inclusive, technology-enhanced, and co-productive approaches (Dexter et al., 2025; Rizvi et al., 2025). Recent studies also demonstrate growing attention toward staff training, family involvement, and interdisciplinary consultation practices aimed at improving intervention effectiveness and reducing restrictive practices among autistic individuals (Duxbury et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings imply that future autism research should continue to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration, inclusive educational practices, participatory engagement, and cross-sector partnerships to support the development of more holistic and contextually responsive intervention frameworks for autistic individuals.

Limitation and Future Directions

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the analysis was restricted to publications indexed in the Scopus database and limited to English-language journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. Although Scopus is widely recognized for its extensive coverage and suitability for bibliometric analysis (Baas et al., 2020), this limitation may have excluded relevant studies published in other databases or alternative publication formats.

In addition, bibliometric analysis primarily focuses on quantitative indicators such as publication output, citation patterns, keyword frequency, and collaboration networks, which may not fully capture the contextual and practical dimensions of collaboration and consultation practices in autism research (Okubo, 1997; Passas, 2024). Although VOSviewer effectively visualizes thematic and collaboration structures, the interpretation of clusters and thematic categories remains partly dependent on researcher judgment and keyword standardization procedures (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Future studies should incorporate multiple databases and broader publication sources to provide a more comprehensive understanding of autism research. Longitudinal analyses covering wider time periods may also offer deeper insights into the evolution of collaboration

and consultation themes. Furthermore, emerging areas such as telehealth, participatory research, neurodiversity, artificial intelligence, and interdisciplinary consultation practices warrant further investigation due to their increasing prominence within contemporary autism research.

Conclusion

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive overview of research developments related to collaboration and consultation in autism studies between 2020 and 2025. In relation to RQ1, the findings revealed fluctuating yet overall increasing publication trends, with a substantial rise in publication output in recent years, indicating growing scholarly attention toward collaborative and consultative practices within autism research. Citation patterns further showed that earlier publications exerted stronger scholarly influence, while more recent studies have not yet accumulated substantial citation impact due to the time-lag effect associated with newly published research.

Regarding RQ2, the findings identified the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia as the most influential countries in terms of publication productivity, citation performance, and international collaboration strength. The co-authorship network analysis demonstrated that global collaboration within the field remains highly interconnected but concentrated among a limited number of dominant countries. Nevertheless, emerging contributions from countries in Asia, South America, and the Middle East indicate a gradual expansion of international research participation and interdisciplinary collaboration in autism studies.

In relation to RQ3, the keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed that inclusive education, interdisciplinary collaboration, social communication, and professional consultation practices constitute the dominant thematic areas within the field. At the same time, emerging themes such as telehealth, participatory research, neurodiversity, and artificial intelligence reflect a growing shift toward more inclusive, technology-enhanced, and person-centred approaches in autism research. Overall, the findings suggest that collaboration and consultation are becoming increasingly central within contemporary autism scholarship, particularly in educational and interdisciplinary support contexts, while also highlighting the importance of future international collaboration and innovative intervention practices for autistic individuals.

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