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Fiscal Performance and Economic Growth: A Scientometric Mapping of Global Research

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to map the intellectual landscape of scholarly publications on fiscal performance and economic growth from 1968 to 2025 using bibliometric analysis. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to consolidate fragmented literature, identify conceptual trends, and uncover knowledge gaps, particularly in the context of fiscal decentralization. A total of 1,522 scientific documents were retrieved from the Dimensions database and analyzed using VOSviewer through co-occurrence, citation, and bibliographic coupling techniques. The findings reveal an increasing trend in academic attention, especially in the last decade, with China and the United States dominating research productivity. Six major thematic clusters were identified, ranging from fiscal sustainability and macroeconomic performance to governance, inequality, and regional case studies. Influential institutions such as the World Bank and IMF emerged as central knowledge hubs. The study provides critical insights for guiding future research agendas in fiscal innovation and local economic development. It also emphasizes the importance of inclusive knowledge production and interdisciplinary collaboration for designing adaptive fiscal policy frameworks responsive to global and local economic dynamics.

Keywords: Bibliometric Analysis; Economic Growth; Fiscal Decentralization; Fiscal Performance; Knowledge Mapping; Public Finance; VOSviewer

JEL Classification: H11, H50, 023, R11

INTRODUCTION

The governance of local public finances has long been recognized as a cornerstone for achieving equitable economic growth and sustainable development, particularly within the framework of fiscal decentralization. In theory, fiscal authority granted to subnational governments is expected to foster responsiveness and efficiency in addressing local needs, thereby improving service delivery and promoting regional development (Oates, 1972; Martinez-Vazquez & McNab, 2006). However, in practice, the implementation of decentralization policies continues to encounter persistent challenges, including disparities in fiscal capacity, variations in governance quality, and unequal regional development outcomes. These obstacles highlight the complex interplay between institutional capacity, fiscal management, and developmental equity.

A substantial body of literature has attempted to examine the relationship between local fiscal capacity and regional economic performance. Indicators such as own-source revenue, fiscal autonomy, and expenditure efficiency have often been employed to capture the extent of local financial capacity. Researchers have utilized diverse methodological approaches, including panel regression, Granger causality, and structural modeling, to analyze these dynamics (Halim, 2004; Berliani, 2016). While these studies provide valuable insights, the literature remains conceptually fragmented and lacks an overarching synthesis that can unify disparate findings. The interchangeable use of terms such as "fiscal performance," "fiscal effort," and "local financial management" has further created ambiguities, limiting the development of a coherent theoretical framework and cumulative knowledge base.

Moreover, despite the growing interest in the topic, the majority of research still tends to adopt localized or context-specific approaches without systematically mapping the broader intellectual landscape. This has resulted in inconsistencies in both theoretical and methodological contributions, leaving gaps in understanding how fiscal governance at the local level interacts with broader economic and social outcomes. Considering the increasing global relevance of fiscal decentralization in addressing development inequalities and promoting inclusive growth, the need for a more structured and integrative overview of this field is pressing.

To address these limitations, this study employs a bibliometric approach to systematically map the intellectual structure of research on local fiscal governance and economic growth. Bibliometric analysis is particularly suitable for consolidating fragmented literature, identifying conceptual trends, and uncovering knowledge gaps by examining large volumes of scholarly output through techniques such as co-occurrence mapping, bibliographic coupling, and citation analysis. Through visualization techniques and network analysis, this study identifies prevailing research themes, methodological patterns, and scholarly collaborations that define the evolution of the field. The findings are expected to provide not only a deeper understanding of the conceptual trajectory of fiscal performance studies but also a strategic foundation for advancing future research agendas that integrate fiscal policy, governance quality, and inclusive regional development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The nexus between local fiscal governance and regional economic performance has become a central theme within the discourse of public finance and regional development studies. Building on the foundational principles of fiscal federalism proposed by Oates (1972), the idea suggests that when fiscal authority is devolved, subnational governments are better positioned to customize public services and expenditures according to the preferences of their constituents, thus enhancing efficiency and potentially spurring economic growth. Empirical studies have since attempted to substantiate this theory by examining how various facets of fiscal performance such as local revenue autonomy, fiscal reliance on higher-tier governments, and the quality of public expenditure correlate with economic indicators at the regional level. For example, Rodríguez-Pose and Ezcurra (2010) concluded that although decentralization has the potential to accelerate growth, it may inadvertently intensify regional inequalities, especially where institutional capacity is not evenly distributed.

A large portion of the literature has concentrated on quantifying local fiscal effectiveness using specific ratios, including the proportion of locally generated income to total revenue, the share of capital expenditures, and indicators of fiscal dependence. These measurements are commonly applied to assess the ability of local governments to mobilize financial resources and allocate them strategically (Martinez-Vazquez & McNab, 2006; Halim, 2004). In the Indonesian context, recent empirical studies have offered nuanced perspectives on these dynamics. Nurosidah et al. (2022), for instance, identified the presence of the flypaper effect in specific expenditure categories such as operational and transfer spending, while total local government expenditure did not exhibit the same pattern. Their analysis of 476 districts and cities from 2010 to 2020 revealed asymmetric fiscal behavior, indicating a persistent dependency on unconditional intergovernmental transfers. In a related vein, Anggraeni et al. (2022) examined fiscal decentralization and per capita income convergence across Java Island, finding evidence of convergence but at uneven speeds between districts and municipalities, suggesting that fiscal decentralization alone is insufficient without complementary institutional reforms. Likewise, Rohimah et al. (2020) analyzed the effect of regional fiscal policy on economic growth in North Sumatera and found that fiscal policy significantly influenced regional economic performance, particularly through development expenditure that directly supports infrastructure and public services. Complementary to these findings, Berliani (2016) investigated the causal links between fiscal variables and economic outcomes using panel and time-series analyses, though their results varied substantially depending on regional and fiscal contexts.

Nonetheless, inconsistencies remain in both conceptual and methodological approaches within the literature. Scholars frequently use terms like “fiscal performance,” “fiscal effort,” “local financial capacity,” and “governance quality” interchangeably, creating ambiguity and hampering the development of a unified theoretical framework (Zupic & Cater, 2015). Furthermore, despite the expanding body of empirical work, there remains a scarcity of bibliometric or meta-analytic studies that systematically examine the evolution and structure of academic thought in this area. Bibliometric analysis, which has been widely employed in other policy-related fields such as climate change economics (Fu & Waltman, 2022) and energy governance (Sweileh, 2020), offers a valuable methodological lens to track thematic progress, map scientific influence, and identify emerging patterns.

Current bibliometric investigations on governance issues often adopt a broad analytical scope, seldom focusing specifically on the intersection of fiscal governance and economic outcomes. For instance, Bhatti & McDonald (2020) explored literature on public finance in Southeast Asia without isolating local fiscal governance as a standalone category. Similarly, Farida et al. (2024) conducted a bibliometric mapping of regional development research in Indonesia but lacked a focused discussion on fiscal mechanisms. This reflects a crucial void in the literature, underscoring the necessity of a focused bibliometric examination on the role of local fiscal governance in economic development.

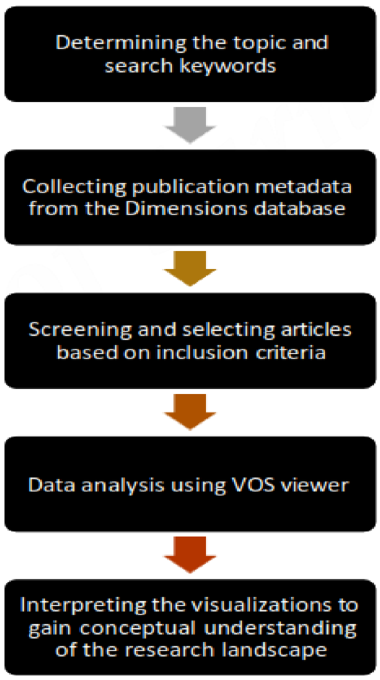
RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative bibliometric methodology to systematically examine the intellectual landscape and thematic development of scholarly works related to local fiscal governance and economic growth. Bibliometric analysis is particularly effective for synthesizing large-scale scientific datasets, as it enables the identification of publication dynamics, co-authorship patterns, institutional linkages, and conceptual trends through citation analysis and keyword co-occurrence mapping (Zupic & Cater, 2015).

The bibliographic data were retrieved from the Dimensions database using the search term "Fiscal Performance and Economic Growth." From this process, a total of 1,522 scientific publications that met the established selection criteria were incorporated into the analysis. The inclusion criteria emphasized peer-reviewed scientific articles with content directly relevant to fiscal performance and economic growth, and publications released between 1968 and 2025.

Several bibliometric indicators were employed in the evaluation, including publication count, citation frequency, and Total Link Strength (TLS) to assess the interconnectedness of items in the dataset. The analysis was conducted using VOSviewer version 1.6.20, which generated three forms of visual representation: network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization. In addition, the study mapped collaboration networks among authors, institutional affiliations, country distributions, journal sources, and keyword co-occurrences, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the research landscape in this domain.

Figure 1. Stages of Bibliometric Analysis Method



Based on Figure 1, this study adopts the five-stage bibliometric analysis framework proposed by Mo et al. (2024). The process begins with the identification of the research domain and the selection of relevant keywords, followed by the retrieval of publication metadata from the designated database. The next stage involves screening and filtering documents to ensure their alignment with the inclusion criteria. Subsequently, the curated data are analyzed using VOSviewer to generate various bibliometric visualizations. Finally, the visual outputs are interpreted to derive conceptual insights and uncover thematic patterns within the field of study.

The selection of VOSviewer as the primary analytical tool is attributed to its strength in constructing and visualizing bibliographic networks, such as co-authorships, country-level collaborations, and keyword associations (Eck & Waltman, 2010; Sweileh, 2020). Its wide adoption in bibliometric studies underscores its effectiveness in identifying evolving research themes within targeted disciplines (Wang et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2019).

By incorporating data from both domestic and international sources, this study offers a multi-dimensional perspective on the scholarly discourse surrounding local fiscal governance and its economic implications. This methodological triangulation enhances analytical robustness and enables a more comprehensive understanding of both theoretical and policy-relevant developments.

Table 1. Annual Distribution of Publications on Fiscal Performance and Economic Growth (1968–2025)

Year	Publications	Percentage
1968–2009	366	24.04%
2010	34	2.23%
2011	42	2.76%
2012	44	2.89%
2013	50	3.29%
2014	42	2.76%
2015	52	3.42%
2016	58	3.81%
2017	62	4.07%
2018	58	3.81%
2019	66	4.34%
2020	82	5.39%
2021	82	5.39%
2022	110	7.23%
2023	120	7.88%
2024	160	10.51%
2025	94	6.18%
Total	1,522	100%

As illustrated in Table 1, scholarly output on the topic has demonstrated an upward trajectory, particularly from 2019 onwards. The most significant growth occurred in 2023 (7.88%) and peaked in 2024 (10.51%), suggesting an intensifying academic interest in the fiscal-economic nexus, potentially influenced by global decentralization trends and post-pandemic economic recovery strategies.

The bibliometric procedure employed in this study follows a deductive analytical approach, beginning with the identification of macro-level publication trends and proceeding to micro-level insights such as author networks and thematic clustering. Multiple analytical units were applied, including bibliographic coupling based on country, institution, journal, author, and document, as well as co-occurrence analysis of keywords. This comprehensive approach facilitated the discovery of both conceptual interrelations and collaborative structures, thereby offering a holistic understanding of the research ecosystem within the domain of fiscal performance and economic growth (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019).

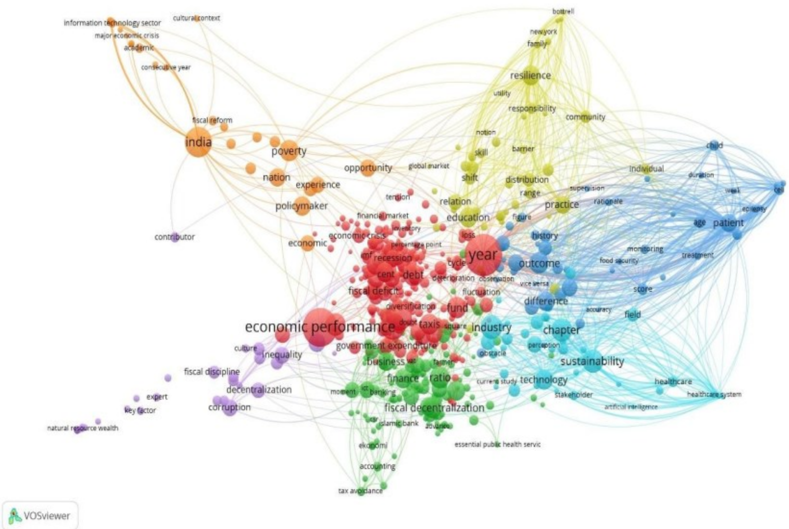
RESULTS

The bibliometric analysis reveals a dynamic and expanding body of literature on fiscal performance and economic growth. Using VOSviewer, several findings were identified through keyword co-occurrence, bibliographic coupling, co-authorship, and citation analyses.

Thematic Clusters of Research

The keyword co-occurrence analysis produced six major clusters that define the intellectual landscape of the field (Figure 2). The first cluster, shown in red, highlights issues of fiscal sustainability and macroeconomic outcomes, with particular emphasis on deficits, debt, taxes, and economic cycles. The second cluster, represented in green, focuses on fiscal decentralization and public financial management, addressing themes such as governance, expenditure, taxation, and Islamic finance. The third cluster, marked in blue, links fiscal policy with human capital development by examining how government spending on healthcare influences productivity and overall well-being. The fourth cluster, illustrated in yellow, concerns education, resilience, and social distribution, underlining the role of fiscal spending in fostering social equity and mobility. The fifth cluster, in orange, reflects regional case studies and sectoral reforms, with a strong concentration on the Indian context and sector-specific fiscal challenges. Finally, the sixth cluster, depicted in purple, centers on governance, inequality, and institutional quality, analyzing critical issues such as corruption, decentralization, and the management of natural resources.

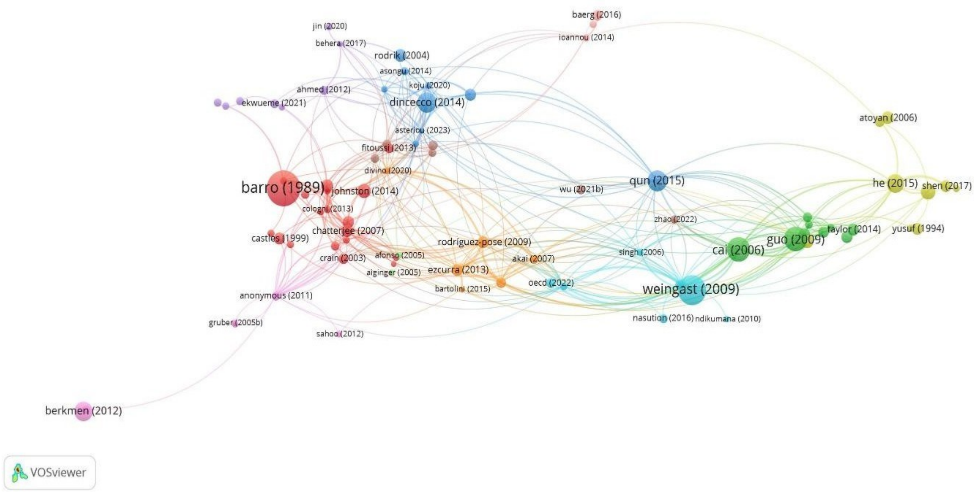
Figure 2. Network Visualization of Author Keywords



Author and Citation Networks

The bibliographic coupling analysis identified Barro (1989) as the most cited work with 639 citations, followed by Weingast (2009), Cai & Treisman (2006), and Jia et al. (2014). These authors form the intellectual backbone of fiscal performance research. More recent works, including contributions from Li et al. (2024) demonstrate the ongoing expansion of the field toward empirical and interdisciplinary orientations.

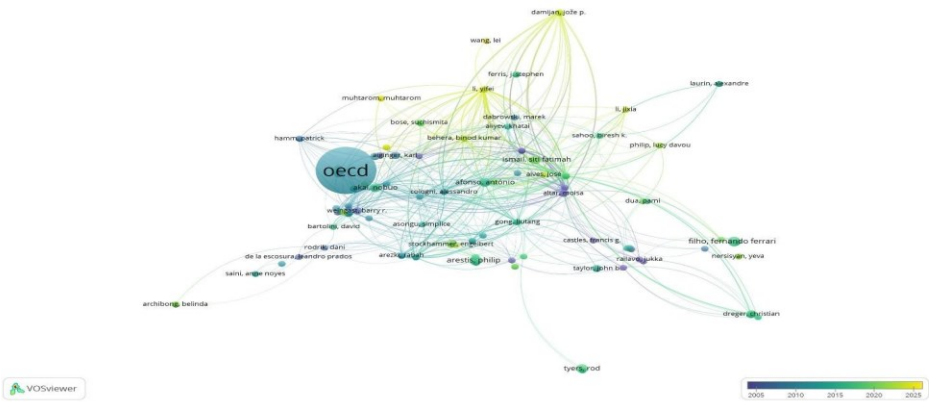
Figure 3. Network Visualization of Document Bibliographic Coupling



Co-Authorship and Collaboration Networks

The co-authorship analysis reveals that the OECD functions as the most central and influential institution, closely linked with scholars such as Weingast, Bartolini, Rodrik, and Afonso. This network illustrates strong collaborative ties and demonstrates the enduring influence of policy-driven research institutions in shaping academic discourse.

Figure 4. Overlay Visualization of Author Bibliographic Coupling



Country-Level Contributions

Country bibliographic coupling highlights China and the United States as the most dominant contributors, both in terms of publication output and citation impact. Other notable contributors include the United Kingdom, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India. This finding shows the diversification of fiscal research, with significant input from emerging economies that expand the global reach of the discourse.

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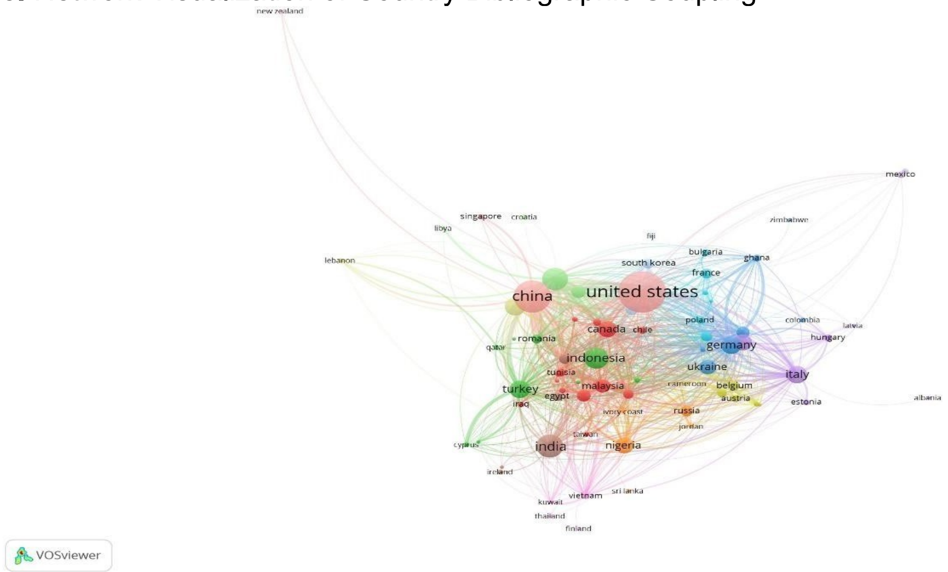
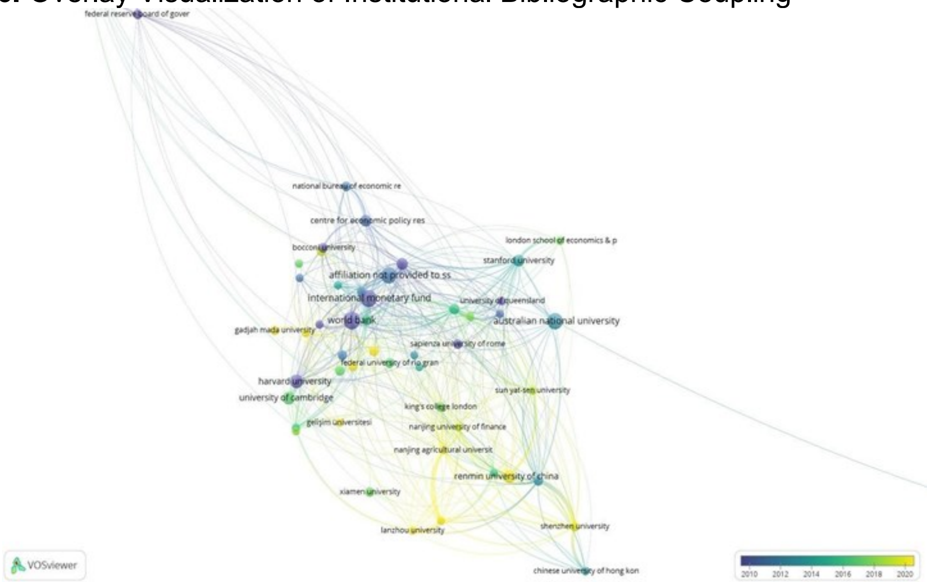
Figure 5. Network Visualization of Country Bibliographic Coupling



Institutional Linkages

Institutional bibliographic coupling shows that international organizations such as the World Bank, IMF, and Federal Reserve play central roles in the research ecosystem. Their close connections with globally recognized universities such as Harvard, Cambridge, and Stanford underscore the synergy between academic research and policymaking. At the same time, the emergence of institutions from East Asia and Southeast Asia, such as Renmin University and Gadjah Mada University, highlights new regional contributions.

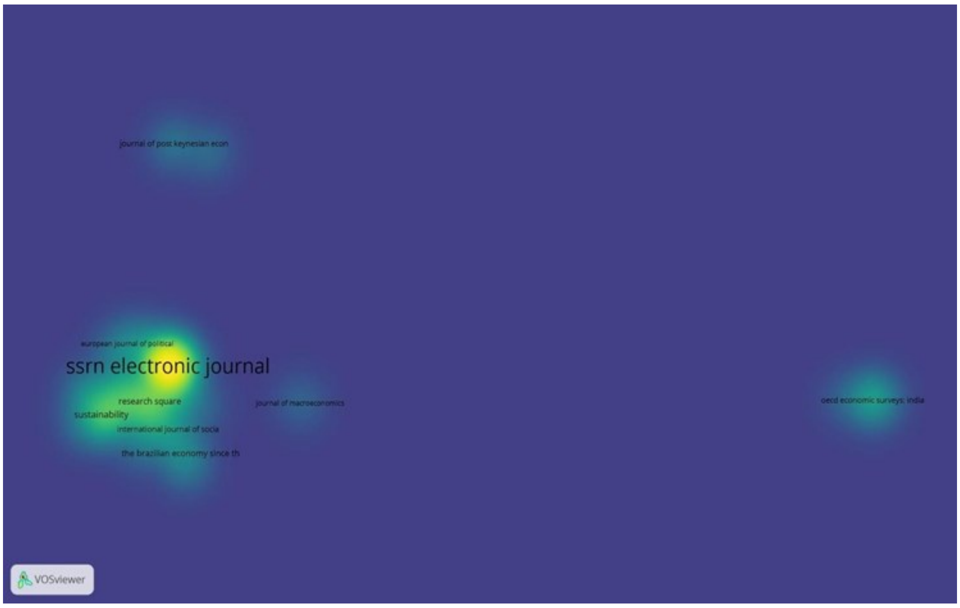
Figure 6. Overlay Visualization of Institutional Bibliographic Coupling



Publication Sources

Analysis of publication outlets shows that the SSRN Electronic Journal is the most dominant source, supported by other multidisciplinary journals such as Sustainability and the European Journal of Political Economy. The diversity of outlets reflects a fragmented publishing landscape, shaped by open-access platforms that provide broad accessibility but lack concentration in traditional high-impact journals.

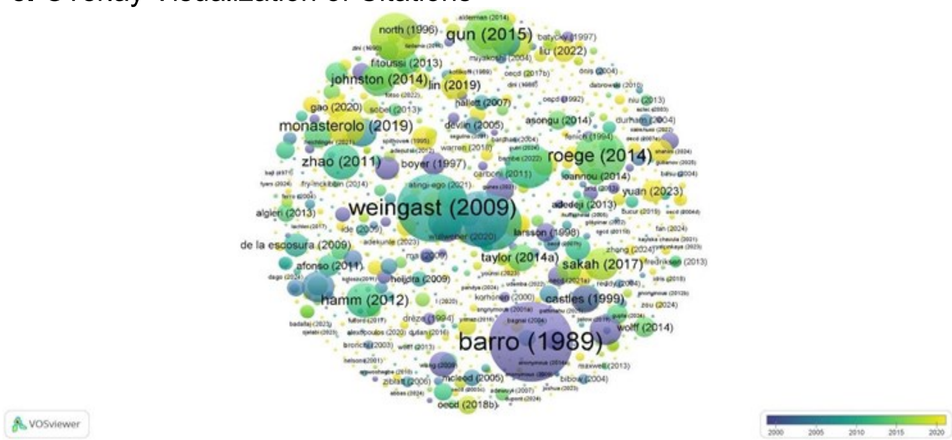
Figure 7. Density Visualization of Sources Bibliographic Coupling



Citation Analysis

The citation visualization reinforces the pivotal role of classical works by Barro (1989) and Weingast (2009). Their foundational theories continue to shape fiscal and economic debates. Meanwhile, the inclusion of newer contributors such as Idrus (2024) indicates the field's responsiveness to contemporary themes, including adaptive governance and fiscal innovation.

Figure 8. Overlay Visualization of Citations



DISCUSSION

Evolution of Research Themes

The bibliometric results clearly illustrate that the study of fiscal performance and economic growth has evolved through several conceptual stages. Early scholarship was largely dominated by macroeconomic perspectives, with particular emphasis on fiscal deficits, public debt management, taxation, and cyclical stability. These themes reflected concerns over maintaining fiscal discipline as a foundation for long-term economic sustainability. Over time, however, research interests expanded to incorporate more nuanced dimensions such as fiscal decentralization, institutional governance, and distributive outcomes. The integration of health and education into fiscal discourse marks a significant shift, highlighting that fiscal policy is not merely a financial tool but also a mechanism for enhancing human capital and social welfare. This thematic broadening aligns with global development priorities, where fiscal policy is increasingly viewed as an instrument to achieve equity, resilience, and inclusive growth rather than solely macroeconomic balance.

Thematic Clusters and Their Implications

The six clusters identified through keyword co-occurrence mapping provide a holistic understanding of how fiscal performance scholarship has matured. The fiscal sustainability cluster underscores the persistent relevance of fiscal stability in maintaining macroeconomic growth and mitigating crises. The decentralization and financial management cluster sheds light on the challenges and opportunities that arise when fiscal authority is devolved, particularly in emerging economies where institutional capacity remains uneven. The health and human capital cluster illustrates how public investment in healthcare contributes directly to productivity, economic resilience, and quality of life, while the education and social equity cluster demonstrates fiscal policy's role in promoting mobility, skills development, and social cohesion. The regional case study cluster, with a strong focus on India, reinforces the importance of context-specific strategies in addressing fiscal and developmental challenges. Lastly, the governance and institutional quality cluster highlights structural barriers such as corruption, inequality, and elite capture, which can undermine otherwise sound fiscal policy. Collectively, these clusters reveal that fiscal performance research is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, integrating insights from economics, political science, sociology, and public administration.

Influential Authors and Intellectual Foundations

The citation and bibliographic coupling analyses confirm that foundational works such as Barro (1989) and Weingast (2009) remain critical intellectual anchors in this field. Barro's contributions to growth and fiscal theory provide a baseline for understanding the macroeconomic implications of fiscal policy, while Weingast's work on fiscal federalism continues to shape debates on decentralization and incentives. These classical perspectives have been complemented by more recent scholarship from Bayrakçeken (2024), who address contemporary challenges including fiscal innovation, adaptive governance, and resilience in the face of economic shocks. This balance between classical theory and empirical, policy-oriented research demonstrates intellectual continuity as well as innovation, suggesting that the discipline is both historically grounded and dynamically responsive to present needs.

Global and Regional Contributions

The dominance of China and the United States in publication output and citation influence reflects their capacity to shape global academic discourse. Their extensive collaborations with other countries have helped establish central nodes in the global fiscal research network. Nevertheless, the rising contributions from emerging economies, particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, and India, represent a significant step toward greater inclusivity and diversification of perspectives. This is consistent with the Results, which identified regional clustering in Southeast Asia, Europe, and Africa, showing that the research landscape is becoming more interconnected. Such regional collaborations provide a richer understanding of fiscal governance by embedding global theories within local contexts, thereby enhancing both theoretical and practical relevance.

Institutional and Policy Linkages

The findings also highlight the critical role of global policy institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and Federal Reserve. Their strong linkages with leading universities demonstrate the integration of academic research with real-world policy design and implementation. At the same time, the emergence of regional universities—such as Renmin University of China and Gadjah Mada University—signals a generational shift, where academic centers in developing economies are beginning to play a more active role in knowledge production. This reflects not only an academic trend but also a policy necessity, as fiscal reforms must be informed by both global best practices and local institutional realities.

Publication Landscape and Knowledge Dissemination

The analysis of sources revealed that open-access platforms such as SSRN dominate the field, indicating both opportunities and challenges. While this enhances accessibility and accelerates dissemination, the fragmented nature of publication outlets limits the consolidation of knowledge in high-impact journals. Strengthening visibility in established peer-reviewed outlets would improve comparability, credibility, and integration of research findings. At the same time, the rise of multidisciplinary and open-access venues reflects the increasingly cross-cutting nature of fiscal performance research, where economics intersects with law, governance, health, and social sciences.

Future Research Directions

The diversification of themes and the gaps identified in this bibliometric analysis point to several promising directions for future inquiry. Research could focus on fiscal resilience to global shocks, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing geopolitical uncertainties. The integration of digital technologies in public finance management, such as e-budgeting and blockchain for fiscal transparency, represents another critical frontier. Additionally, participatory budgeting and community-based fiscal planning offer opportunities to strengthen trust, accountability, and inclusivity in governance. Finally, addressing spatial inequalities and regional disparities remains an urgent agenda, particularly for developing economies seeking to balance growth with equity. These directions resonate with the conclusions of this study, which emphasize adaptive, equitable, and inclusive fiscal systems as central to achieving sustainable economic growth.

CONCLUSION

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of global scholarly contributions on fiscal performance and economic growth. Drawing on metadata from the Dimensions database and employing visualization techniques through VOSviewer, the research successfully mapped publication trends, influential authors, institutional linkages, and citation patterns. The findings reveal that much of the academic output remains concentrated in developed economies, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as in major international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Nonetheless, a significant rise in contributions from emerging economies, including China, Indonesia, and Malaysia, indicates a positive trend toward greater inclusivity in global knowledge production.

From a conceptual standpoint, the field has evolved from a narrow focus on fiscal decentralization and revenue generation to broader concerns encompassing institutional quality, governance performance, and their linkages with social outcomes such as poverty alleviation and inequality reduction. This transformation reflects a deepening interdisciplinary orientation and affirms that fiscal performance must be understood not only as a technical or financial measure but also as an integral part of inclusive and sustainable development.

The study carries several important implications. First, there is a pressing need to expand empirical research in underrepresented regions to ensure more balanced and globally representative knowledge. Second, the application of advanced methodological approaches such as spatial econometrics, institutional diagnostics, and participatory governance models can provide sharper analytical precision and richer insights. Third, the bibliometric mapping generated in this study offers strategic value for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers by identifying knowledge gaps and fostering stronger academic collaboration.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the importance of designing fiscal systems that are adaptive, equitable, and context-sensitive. Governments are encouraged to strengthen local fiscal capacity, enhance transparency and data accessibility, and institutionalize community participation in fiscal planning. Furthermore, fostering effective intergovernmental coordination is crucial to align fiscal strategies with broader national development objectives. By pursuing these directions, fiscal policy can better respond to economic shocks, reduce spatial inequalities, and ultimately contribute to inclusive and sustainable growth.

LIMITATION

This study is limited by its exclusive reliance on the Dimensions database, which, although comprehensive, may exclude relevant publications indexed in other platforms such as Scopus or Web of Science. The bibliometric methods used, such as co-occurrence and citation analysis, are effective in mapping patterns but do not capture the theoretical depth and qualitative insights of the literature. In addition, the time-lag in citations may reduce the visibility of recent influential works. This research also does not delve deeply into country-specific fiscal contexts, which may affect the generalizability of its conclusions. Future studies are encouraged to integrate multiple databases, apply mixed methods, and expand the scope to include more contextual and regional analysis.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the authorship, research process, or publication of this article. All findings and interpretations are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not reflect any institutional or funding body's views. This study was conducted independently and free from commercial, political, or other external influence

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