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Education and corporate social responsibility: Mapping the scientific landscape through bibliometric analysis

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Abstract

This study conducts a systematic and bibliometric analysis of global scientific production on the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the educational sector, examining articles indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases from 2010 to 2025. The research was structured following the PRISMA guidelines and the PICo model, analyzing a total of 1,214 articles that met the established methodological and thematic criteria. The findings reveal a sustained increase in academic output since 2016, coinciding with the consolidation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production). Higher education emerges as the primary focus, with five main thematic areas identified: institutional sustainability, ethical training, governance, public perception, and sociocultural factors. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and China lead in scientific production, with growing contributions from regions like Latin America and Asia. The study highlights opportunities for future research, including qualitative studies in local contexts, assessments of the real impact of CSR initiatives, and analyses of the role of emerging technologies in educational settings. These findings underscore the critical role of education as a strategic pillar for ethical and sustainable transformation in the 21st century.

Keywords: CSR, Ethics, PRISMA, Sustainability, Sustainable development goals.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has undergone a significant evolution, transitioning from a predominantly voluntary business practice to a cross-cutting strategy with substantial impact on key sectors such as education. This transformation has been driven by the consolidation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), which promote the integration of sustainability, inclusion, and civic education principles within educational contexts [1-3].

The integration of CSR into the educational sphere has reshaped the conceptualization of academic institutions, positioning them as pivotal agents of social transformation. Beyond their traditional role in technical training, these institutions are increasingly taking on an active role in promoting ethical values, environmental sustainability, and civic responsibility [4, 5]. However, the academic body of knowledge addressing the intersection of CSR and education remains in a phase of consolidation. While studies exploring specific cases, pedagogical approaches, and institutional policies have emerged, the literature is fragmented and lacks a systematic synthesis to identify evolutionary patterns, knowledge gaps, and opportunities for future research [6-8]. This fragmentation hinders a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and limits its practical application across diverse contexts.

Furthermore, several scholars have noted that the adoption of CSR practices in educational settings is not always driven by genuine ethical commitment but may, at times, be motivated by reputational or competitive imperatives [9, 10]. This observation raises questions about the authenticity and sustainability of such practices, underscoring the need to evaluate their actual impact on educational stakeholders and the communities they serve.

Within this context, this study aims to map, characterize, and analyze the international scientific production on the relationship between CSR and education. To achieve this, it employs a combined methodology of systematic review and bibliometric analysis, grounded in the PRISMA protocol guidelines [11] and the PICo model. This methodological approach seeks to address three core research questions: (Q1) Which countries, institutions, and journals lead the scientific production on CSR in education? (Q2) Which educational levels or domains receive the most attention in literature? (Q3) What thematic trends and methodological approaches predominate in the field?

By providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge, this study seeks to establish a robust empirical foundation to support future research and foster institutional initiatives oriented towards social responsibility. Additionally, it aims to position education as a strategic pillar for promoting ethical, social, and environmental transformations in the 21st century, transcending its traditional role as an academic training space to become an active agent of change [12, 13].

2. Methodology

This study employs a bibliometric analysis guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol. This methodological combination enables the mapping, characterization, and analysis of global scientific production on the interrelationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the educational sector.

2.1. Design and Search Protocol

The PICo model was utilized to formulate research questions:

- P (Population): Educational institutions, students, and stakeholders within the educational system.
- I (Interest): Applications, policies, and practices of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in educational contexts.
- Co (Context): Formal educational settings (primary, secondary, higher education) and corporate initiatives impacting education.

2.1.1. General Research Question

How has research on Corporate Social Responsibility in relation to education evolved, and what trends emerge in scientific literature?

2.1.2. Sub-Questions

- Q1: Which countries, institutions, and journals lead the scientific production on CSR in education?
- Q2: Which educational levels or domains receive the most attention in literature?
- Q3: What thematic trends and methodological approaches predominate in the field?

2.2. Information Sources and Search Strategy

The Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases were selected due to their extensive interdisciplinary coverage and validation in scientific research. The search strategy combined Boolean operators, truncations, and exact phrase searches:

- Scopus: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("corporate social responsibility" OR "CSR") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("education" OR "educational institutions")
- Web of Science: TS=("corporate social responsibility" OR "CSR") AND TS=("education" OR "educational development")

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion:

- Articles published between 2010 and 2025.
- Publications in English or Spanish.
- Original research articles (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods).

Exclusion:

- Conference papers, systematic reviews, editorials, and purely bibliometric studies.

2.4. Data Extraction and Cleaning

Search results were exported in .csv (Scopus) and .xlsx (WoS) formats. Duplicates were removed by comparing titles, and non-relevant content was manually filtered through the review of titles, abstracts, and, when necessary, full texts. This process was documented following the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram Page, et al. [11], ensuring traceability and reproducibility (see Figure 1).

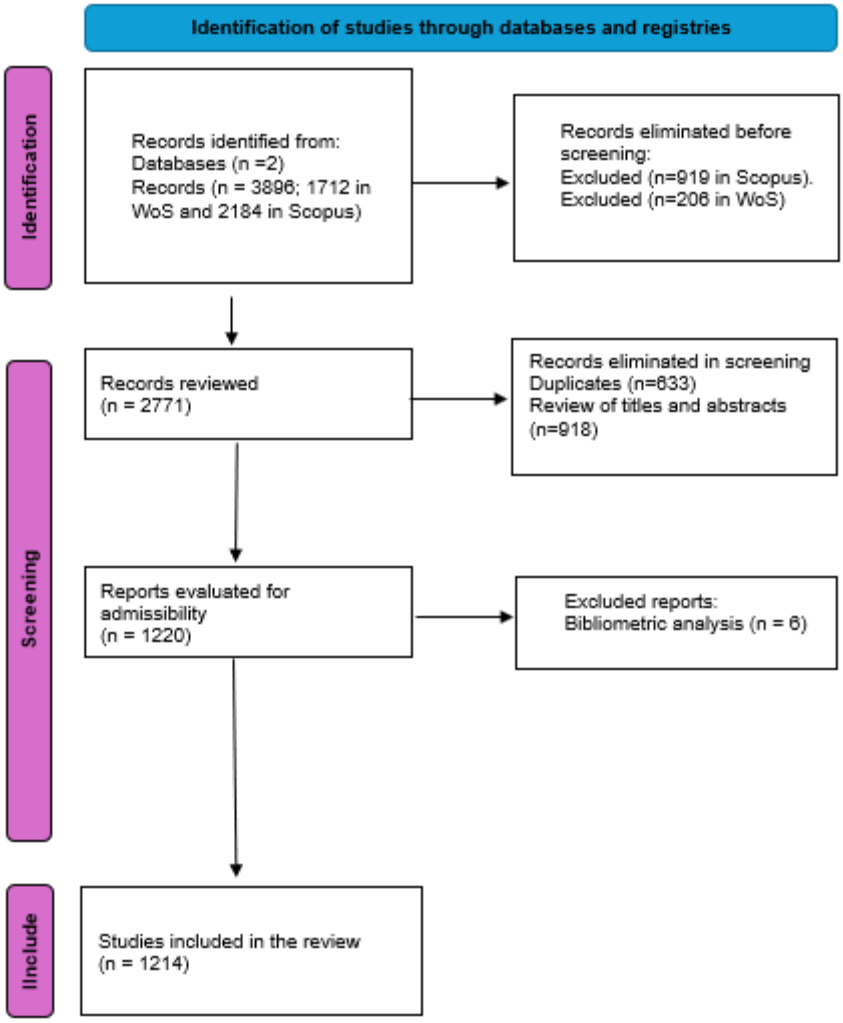

Figure 1.
Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process (PRISMA 2020).

The initial search was conducted on June 4, 2025. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 1,214 studies that met the methodological and thematic requirements were selected for analysis. These articles constitute the final corpus of this bibliometric study.

2.5. Bibliometric Analysis

The bibliometric analysis was performed using the R software (version 4.4.2) with the following packages:

- *readxl*: for importing data from Web of Science.
- *data.table*: for managing large volumes of Scopus records.
- *dplyr*: for cleaning, filtering, and transforming data.
- *openxlsx*: for exporting results in editable formats.
- *ggplot2* and *gridExtra*: for visualizing the temporal evolution of publications, citations, and authors.

Records were integrated and standardized, using Boolean criteria to retain only articles containing key terms such as "corporate social responsibility," "CSR," and "education" in the title or abstract. Non-empirical articles were excluded to maintain an applied focus. Scientific productivity was analyzed by year, country, and institution, alongside impact assessment through citation counts. Trends were represented using bar charts and cumulative area graphs.

2.6. Network and Keyword Mapping

VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) was used to generate:

- Co-occurrence maps of keywords.
- Collaboration networks among countries and institutions.

These visualizations enabled the identification of predominant thematic areas (such as sustainability, inclusion, ethical training, and public-private partnerships) and the connections among key actors in the field.

3. Results

3.1. Scientific Productivity and Distribution by Country and Institution

Figure 2 illustrates an upward trend in scientific production on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and education between 2010 and 2025. The most significant increase occurred from 2016 onward, coinciding with the consolidation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production). This trend suggests a growing alignment between academic agendas and global sustainability commitments. Articulación entre las agendas académicas y los compromisos globales de sostenibilidad.

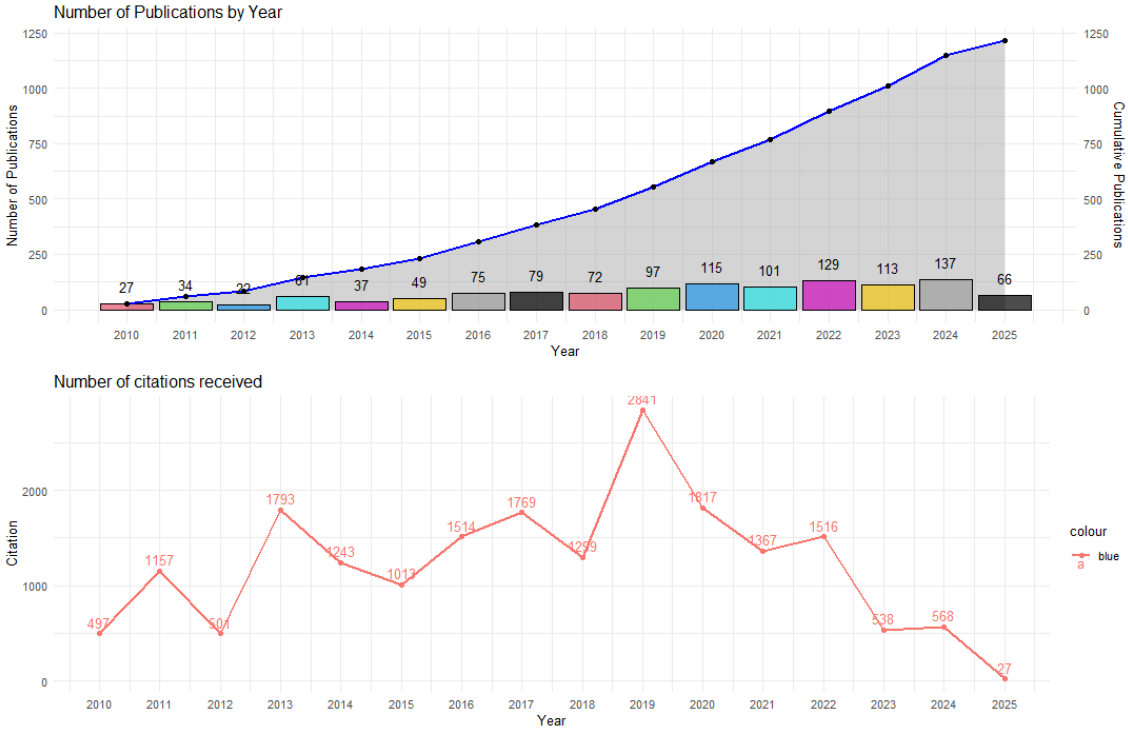

Figure 2.
Annual Evolution of Scientific Publications on CSR and Education (2010–2025).

Table 1 presents the leading academic journals in terms of publication output and citations. Sustainability (Switzerland) stands out with 66 published articles, while Journal of Cleaner Production and Journal of Business Ethics lead in citations, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the field, which integrates sustainability, business ethics, and educational management.

Table 1.
Scientific Journals with the Highest Production and Citation Rates in Studies on CSR and Education (2010–2025).

Source title	Documents	Citations
Sustainability (Switzerland)	66	1119
Social Responsibility Journal	33	391
Journal of Business Ethics	22	1700
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	19	557
Journal of Cleaner Production	17	1758
International Journal of Management Education	13	679
Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies	11	9
Journal of Global Responsibility	10	120
JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ETHICS	9	430

The most productive institutions are concentrated in business schools and social sciences faculties, as evidenced by Figure 3. This reflects the consolidation of CSR as a subject of study in academic programs focused on ethical training and responsible management.

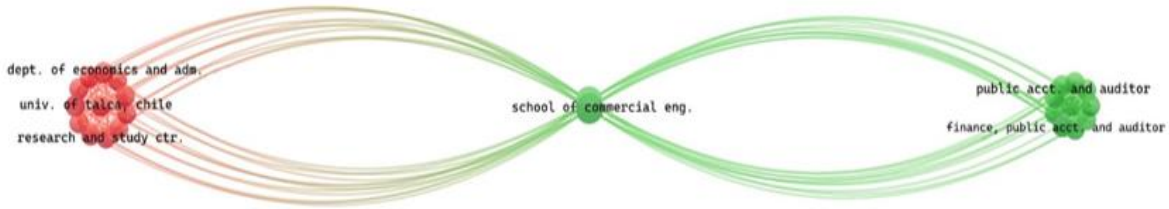

Figure 3.
Leading Institutions in Publications on CSR and Education.

Regarding geographical distribution (Figure 4), the countries with the highest production are the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Spain, and Mexico. There is also a growing participation from emerging nations in Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. This pattern reflects both the research capacities and the implementation of sustainable policies in the academic contexts of these countries.

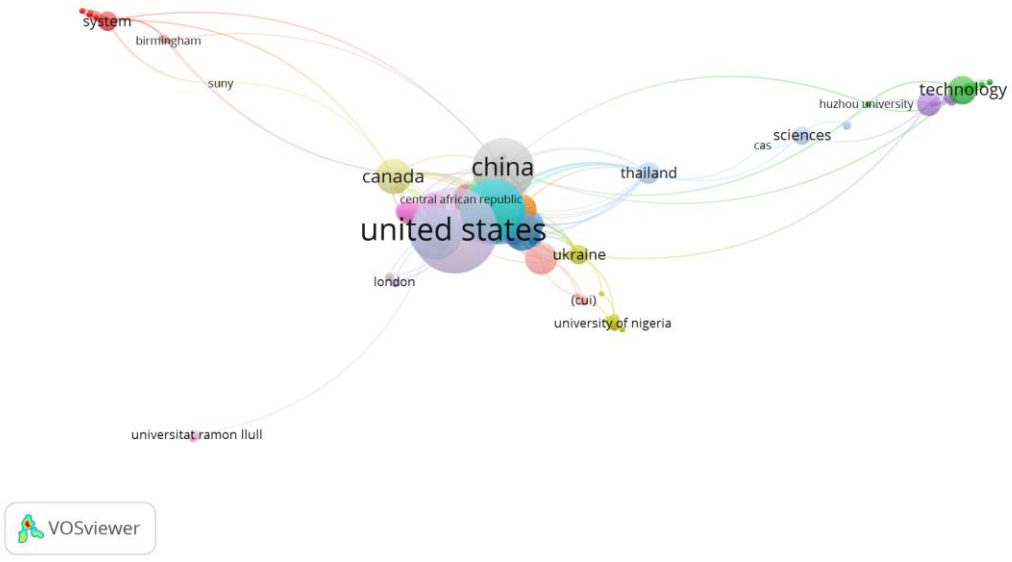

Figure 4.
Geographical Distribution of Scientific Production on CSR and Education.

In China, for instance, Yan, et al. [14] explore how CSR enhances the development of sustainable digital competencies in academic settings. In Taiwan, Lin, et al. [15] analyze the impact of institutional sustainability commitments on university students' perceptions. Meanwhile, in Turkey, Sunata and Özdemir [16] investigate global educational governance in the context of migration flows, linking public ethics with the educational challenges of forced mobility.

In Latin America, research stands out for its focus on connecting CSR with inclusion, organizational culture, and social well-being. In Mexico, Ravina-Ripoll, et al. [13] propose organizational happiness as a cross-cutting theme in responsible

practices within higher education, while in Puerto Rico, Vega, et al. [17] connect the use of emerging technologies with institutional ethics in public universities.

Central and Eastern Europe also emerge as a hub for academic production. In Slovakia, Čmelíková, et al. [18] address ethical leadership and its reflection in the sustainability reports of educational institutions. Similarly, in Malaysia, Mosuin, et al. [19] and Noor Faezah, et al. [20] reinforce Southeast Asia's presence through studies focused on university governance and pro-environmental behavior in school settings.

From a global perspective, several studies reflect a concern for adapting ethical and responsible frameworks to specific contexts. In Switzerland, [21] examines the tension between extractivism and education in African indigenous communities, while Radzi, et al. [22] highlight the need to strengthen collaboration between universities and businesses to bridge educational gaps. In China, Zhang, et al. [23] address the influence of corporate culture on the implementation of CSR programs in technical schools.

Collectively, these findings confirm that research on CSR in education is not only expanding in volume but also in geographical and contextual diversity. Each country tends to prioritize distinct dimensions of institutional responsibility based on its structural challenges and social goals, enriching the construction of a global yet contextually grounded perspective on educational CSR.

3.2. Prioritized Educational Domains (Q2)

Higher education emerges as the central focus in CSR literature. Numerous studies analyze how universities integrate sustainability into their institutional reports (Rosati & Faria, 2019), promote ethical leadership [12], or develop profiles of change agents [4]. Additionally, research links board diversity with the quality of CSR reporting Katmon, et al. [24], faculty job satisfaction with responsible practices [25], and the role of universities in emerging countries in disseminating the SDGs [2].

At a structural level, studies such as Cockx and Francken [26] demonstrate how poor natural resource management can reduce educational investment, while Pohlmann, et al. [27] highlight the role of key companies in nutritional education and sustainable development. Similarly, Chou [28] examines how environmental policies in educational hotels impact staff performance, reinforcing the intersection between educational management and organizational sustainability.

3.3. Key Thematic Areas and Predominant Methodological Approaches (Q3)

The bibliometric analysis identifies five key thematic clusters:

1. Institutional Sustainability: Analysis of sustainable practices in universities reveals their transformative potential, as proposed by Setó-Pamies and Papaoikonomou [5] and Pohlmann, et al. [27].
2. Ethical Training and Responsible Leadership: Groves and LaRocca [12] and Huang [29] address the influence of ethical values and CEO profiles on institutional and educational performance. Similarly, Annan-Diab and Molinari [6] emphasize the importance of interdisciplinarity in MBA programs to foster critical thinking and sustainability.
3. Governance and Diversity: Katmon, et al. [24]and Fernández-Gago, et al. [30] highlight the impact of board diversity and members' backgrounds on institutional transparency.
4. Public Perception and Strategic Communication: Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque [7] and Saxton, et al. [31] examine the reception of CSR messages by students and society.
5. Social, Cultural, and Religious Factors: Kumar, et al. [32], Schmeltz [33] and Wang and Zhai [34] analyze the interplay between religion, language, culture, and responsible practices.

From a methodological perspective, quantitative approaches predominate, employing statistical analyses, surveys, and bibliometric studies. Qualitative and mixed-methods approaches are also used in research focused on specific contexts [5, 27].

3.4. Networks and Thematic Co-Occurrence Mapping

The map generated with VOSviewer (Figure 5) identifies five thematic clusters: "sustainability," "higher education," "ethics," "stakeholders," and "social impact." These clusters are interconnected around three cross-cutting dimensions: environmental (infrastructure and health), formative (values and leadership), and structural (equity, governance, and participation).

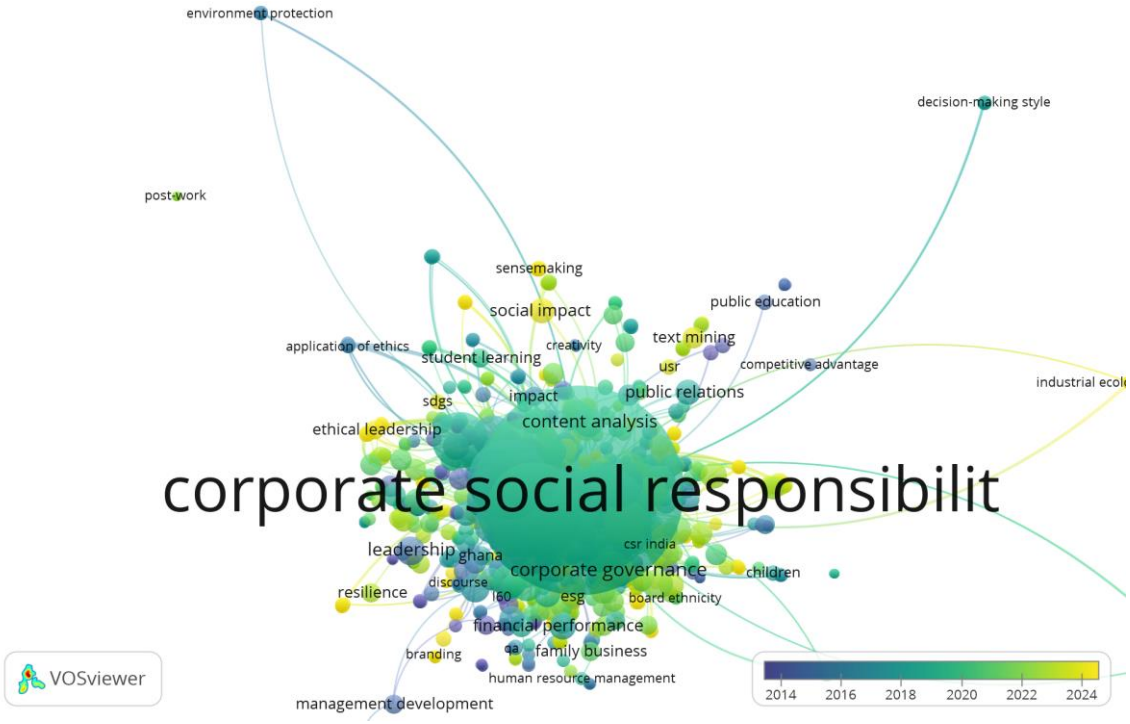

Figure 5.
Co-occurrence Map of Keywords in Studies on CSR and Education.

The first cluster revolves around sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. Terms such as *sustainability*, *SDGs*, *sustainable development*, and *climate action* appear frequently in studies aimed at measuring the environmental and social impact of educational institutions. For example, Gupta, et al. [35] analyze how sustainable practices in school infrastructure can contribute to environmental health. Similarly, Wang [36] proposes mathematical models to assess the impact of institutional policies on the SDGs.

The second cluster is related to ethical and civic education. Terms such as *ethics*, *leadership*, *values*, *civic education*, and *professional development* converge here. Huq and Huq and Gilbert [37] highlight the need to integrate ethical principles into business curricula to prepare responsible leaders. Azam, et al. [38] address the role of organizational culture in transmitting ethical values within educational institutions.

The third thematic cluster involves educational stakeholders, including *students*, *teachers*, *communities*, and *policy makers*. These actors are considered key agents in the implementation and evaluation of CSR strategies. Strønen [39] examines how environmental programs in schools in vulnerable areas require collaboration from the entire educational community.

The fourth cluster pertains to inclusion and equity. Concepts such as *gender*, *diversity*, *social justice*, *accessibility*, and *intercultural education* recur in articles addressing structural barriers in education.

Collectively, these clusters reflect an interconnected and transdisciplinary literature that articulates structural (governance, equity), formative (ethics, citizenship), and environmental (sustainability, health) variables. This convergence demonstrates that CSR, far from being an isolated corporate practice, constitutes a comprehensive strategy for educational and social transformation.

4. Discussion

The results of this bibliometric study reveal sustained growth in scientific production on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the educational sector between 2010 and 2025. This growth, particularly pronounced since 2016, coincides with the consolidation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production). This increase suggests that the global educational agenda has increasingly integrated principles of sustainability, ethics, and institutional responsibility into its practices and academic discourse [1, 2].

Geographically, leading countries in publications—such as the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and Spain—represent contexts with well-established academic structures and institutional policies that actively promote CSR. However, there is also growing participation from emerging countries, particularly in Latin America and Asia, indicating an internationalization of academic interest in linking sustainability with educational training. Studies such as those by Ravina-Ripoll, et al. [13] and Radzi, et al. [22] demonstrate that responsible practices are increasingly incorporated into public and private universities as part of a comprehensive strategy for well-being and human development.

The predominance of higher education as the primary research focus underscores the key role of universities as catalysts for social change. Tertiary education institutions are not only adopting responsible practices in their operations but also integrating ethical, environmental, and governance content into their curricula, thereby training leaders committed to social transformation [4, 6].

The five identified thematic clusters—sustainability, ethical training, educational stakeholders, inclusion, and social justice—reflect an interconnected and multidimensional literature. This articulation suggests that CSR should not be approached as an isolated component but as a cross-cutting strategy that permeates all dimensions of education: from sustainable infrastructure [35] to the promotion of values and responsible leadership [12, 37].

Despite the richness of approaches, a recurring limitation is the lack of in-depth qualitative research in local contexts. While this review provides a comprehensive overview, there is a need for case studies that analyze how CSR is implemented in specific educational settings, particularly in developing regions. Additionally, many studies focus on analyzing institutional reports without directly assessing their impact on educational stakeholders.

Overall, the findings of this study not only highlight the consolidation of the academic field of CSR and education but also invite a rethinking of the role of educational institutions as promoters of global, ethical, and committed citizenship. Integrating CSR into education is not merely a matter of regulatory compliance or reputational gain but a pathway to training agents capable of addressing the complex challenges of the 21st century.

4.1. Practical Implications

The findings of this bibliometric review have significant implications for both institutional management and curriculum design in educational contexts. First, they underscore the urgency of strengthening the integration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a cross-cutting theme in educational policies, not only in institutional discourse but also in teaching practices, sustainable infrastructure, and institutional performance evaluation mechanisms [5].

From an organizational perspective, educational institutions, particularly universities, can leverage these findings to establish strategic partnerships with the business and governmental sectors to implement sustainable and socially responsible practices. This includes, for example, ethical training programs, environmental responsibility campaigns, and community engagement projects.

Moreover, the study suggests that adopting CSR in education can enhance institutional reputation and improve public perception, aspects increasingly valued by stakeholders, including students, families, employers, and accreditation bodies [7, 31].

In terms of education, the results support the need to integrate ethics, sustainability, and inclusion as core competencies in the training of teachers and future professionals. This entails developing curricula that foster critical thinking, responsible leadership, and decision-making oriented toward the common good.

4.2. Future Research Areas

This study opens multiple lines of inquiry for future research. One key area is the need for qualitative empirical studies examining the effective implementation of CSR in specific educational contexts, particularly in regions of the Global South where literature remains nascent.

Additionally, it is recommended to explore the real impact of CSR strategies on educational outcomes, social inclusion, and community development, incorporating mixed methodologies that combine quantitative analyses with narrative and ethnographic approaches.

Another relevant line of research would be to investigate the role of emerging technologies (such as artificial intelligence or blockchain) in promoting responsible practices in educational settings and how these tools can contribute to institutional transparency, equity, and sustainability [17].

Finally, it is suggested to delve into the intercultural dimension of CSR, analyzing how cultural values, religious beliefs, or linguistic identities shape perceptions and practices of institutional responsibility in diverse educational contexts [32, 33].

4.3. Limitations

While this study provides a broad and systematic overview of the scientific landscape on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in educational contexts, it presents certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

First, the review was limited to publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, which, while ensuring a high standard of quality, may have excluded relevant studies published in other regional or specialized databases, such as SciELO, ERIC, or RedALyC, particularly in the Latin American context.

Additionally, the analysis was restricted to articles published in English or Spanish, potentially excluding significant contributions in other languages, such as French, Portuguese, German, or Chinese, which could offer different cultural or methodological perspectives on the implementation of CSR in education.

Another consideration is the bibliometric nature of the study, which focuses primarily on publication patterns, co-occurrence, and collaboration but does not allow for an in-depth examination of the quality, conceptual depth, or real social impact of the CSR practices described in the analyzed articles.

Furthermore, while the use of tools such as R and VOSviewer enabled rigorous and visually clear data processing, analytical decisions (such as the selection of keywords or the exclusion of systematic reviews) may have introduced some degree of thematic bias.

Finally, the cross-sectional approach of the study, covering the period from 2010 to 2025, does not allow for a detailed detection of qualitative changes in academic narratives that may have emerged in specific contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate justice movements, or the digital transformation of education.

Future research is recommended to complement this type of analysis with qualitative or comparative studies that delve into the content, discourses, and real impacts of CSR across different educational levels and regions of the world.

5. Conclusions

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive and systematic overview of the evolution of scientific knowledge on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the educational sector, analyzing a corpus of 1,214 articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science between 2010 and 2025. The results highlight sustained growth in academic production, particularly following the consolidation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting an increasing alignment between institutional ethical commitments and global educational agendas.

Universities emerge as the most significant actors within the research ecosystem, playing a dual role as both subjects of analysis and active promoters of responsible practices. The thematic focus on institutional sustainability, ethical training, governance, public perception, and sociocultural diversity indicates an increasingly multidimensional and interdisciplinary field.

From a geographical perspective, the leadership of countries with established academic traditions (the United States, the United Kingdom, China) is evident, alongside the rise of emerging nations, particularly in Latin America and Asia. This phenomenon suggests a process of internationalization in the discourse on educational CSR, though disparities in visibility, resources, and research depth persist.

Despite its breadth, the analyzed literature reveals certain limitations, such as the predominance of quantitative studies and the limited representation of qualitative research in local contexts. Additionally, greater attention is needed to empirically evaluate the real impact of CSR policies and practices on educational stakeholders and communities.

In summary, Corporate Social Responsibility emerges as a cross-cutting strategy that transcends the corporate sphere to establish itself as an ethical, formative, and structural pillar in educational transformation. This study contributes to laying an empirical foundation for future research and reinforces the need for educational policies that integrate sustainability, institutional ethics, and social justice as cornerstones of an education oriented towards the common good.

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