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# Research Collaboration and Epistemic Gaps in Public Sector Financial Sustainability: A Global Bibliometric Perspective

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**Abstract:** This study examines trends in international cooperation within Local Government Financial Sustainability (LGFS) research, a discipline that is becoming increasingly significant owing to the financial difficulties encountered by subnational governments and the need for equitable governance in accordance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite ongoing studies, disparities persist in the involvement of industrialized versus developing nations in LGFS research. This study uses bibliometric methodology with 627 Scopus-indexed data from 2007 to 2025 and VOSviewer to illustrate the co-authorship and keyword networks. Richer countries like the US, UK, and Australia are at the heart of the core-periphery structure, according to the research, while underdeveloped countries are mostly unrepresented on the periphery. Prominent writers and advocacy organizations are within European institutions. The Global South provides only limited intellectual guidance. Keyword co-occurrence mapping shows a shift during the COVID-19 epidemic from austerity and accountability to decentralization and governance. This study revealed disparities in worldwide LGFS research networks, potentially benefiting from donor-driven initiatives. It advocates equal co-authorship policies, enhanced training in underrepresented fields, and open-access distribution to promote inclusive knowledge advancement. The results provide guidance for establishing a framework for global and regional cooperation.

**Keywords:** Financial Sustainability of Local Government, International Research Collaboration, Bibliometric Analysis, Co-authorship Networks, Disparities between Global North and South.

## INTRODUCTION

As the economy deteriorates, it becomes more difficult for subnational governments to monitor their budget. Consequently, local government financial sustainability (LGFS) has gained significance among scholars and policymakers (Sadıç et al., 2024; Cappellaro et al., 2024; Drew, 2022). LGFS refers to the long-term ability of local governments to deliver basic services, maintain balanced budgets, and promote fair growth, especially in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ningrum et al., 2024; Bisogno et al., 2024). It is

important to understand the networks that affect research in this area as local governments are becoming increasingly important for development. International collaboration networks are among the most significant but least examined mechanisms for enhancing and disseminating LGFS research (Syafaruddin, 2024; AbouAssi et al., 2021).

Collaboration across nations is a crucial aspect of public-sector research that fosters innovation and enhances competencies. This enhances the visibility of research, promotes the dissemination of ideas, and facilitates the global propagation of policy changes (Cappellaro et al., 2024; Chirleșan et al., 2023). However, not all individuals have equal inclination to collaborate. They often disclose substantial disparities between affluent and impoverished nations in terms of research infrastructure, financial assets, and accessibility to global publication platforms (Davies et al., 2022; Vazquez-Brust et al., 2020). Developed nations often determine their research agendas because of their well-funded institutions and robust international collaborations. In contrast, developing nations frequently work together in more practical ways to fulfill donor or capacity-building goals (AbouAssi et al., 2021).

Several factors influence the organization and effectiveness of collaboration in LGFS research. Political stability, legal and regulatory clarity, administrative capacity, and accessibility of research funding are essential facilitators (Piña & Avellaneda, 2023; Davies et al., 2022; Shin et al., 2022). In developing countries, these characteristics are often lacking, necessitating collaboration through intermediaries, such as international development organizations or transnational municipal networks (Picavet et al., 2022; Chaudhury, 2020). While supplying essential resources, these partnerships may create disparities in authority and ownership, resulting in local researchers having little influence on the research objectives and methodologies (Grønnestad & Bach Nielsen, 2021).

Theoretical frameworks frequently employed to examine interorganizational collaboration, such as resource dependence theory and institutional theory, provide significant foundations but frequently inadequately address the practical complexities of LGFS collaboration in low-capacity settings (Sadıç et al., 2024). The notion of resource dependence states that businesses work together to reduce environmental uncertainty and receive the resources that they need. In reality, this often results in donor-driven partnerships, whereby Southern participants have less bargaining power (Xia et al., 2023; AbouAssi & al., 2021). Institutional theory underscores the significance of norms, legitimacy, and isomorphism in influencing organizational behavior. However, they may neglect the improvisational and hybrid governance strategies prevalent in developing nations (Cappellaro et al., 2024; Coşkun & Arslan, 2023).

Recent studies have begun to clarify international collaboration in the extensive fields of public administration and sustainability; however, there is a lack of research addressing LGFS (Pohl, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Jing et al., 2024; Marques et al., 2021). There are even fewer comparative analyses of the disparities in collaboration networks between the Global North and South (Jing et al., 2024; Gueye et al., 2022). This gap is crucial because local governments in underdeveloped countries face substantial economic and governance issues but often have less influence on global knowledge production. If researchers do not participate honestly and have cultural sensitivity, the findings on LGFS may not accurately reflect the reality of the area (Drew, 2022).

This study fills this research gap using the Scopus database to perform a bibliometric analysis of global collaboration networks in LGFS research. This study uses VOSviewer software to assess co-authorship networks and examines disparities across national income categories, as designated by the World Bank (Savić et al., 2018). The primary inquiry of the project is as follows: How do international cooperation networks in local government financial sustainability research vary between industrialized and developing nations, and which contextual elements influence these disparities?

This study contributes to literature in several ways. Initially, it employed data to identify the principal countries, significant institutions, and core issue clusters that provide the basis for international research collaboration in the LGFS. Second, it examines the level of involvement and importance of impoverished countries in global co-authorship networks. Third, it employs comparative analysis to examine the political, institutional, and economic factors that influence network formation. This work ultimately presents a methodology aimed at improving fair and effective international research collaborations in the LGFS.

The need for this undertaking is amplified by the growing intricacy of local government issues. Rapid urbanization, financial decentralization, and increased demand for public accountability require innovative strategies for collaborative knowledge generation that transcend national boundaries (Sun, 2023; Zeng, 2023). Research on LGFS should enhance its international scope and promote wider involvement in this project. To accomplish this goal, it is crucial to understand the elements of cooperative networks and to identify areas for improvement. This study examines cooperation trends over two decades (2007–2025), thus enhancing the literature on knowledge governance, research equity, and the sociology of scientific collaboration. This study extends prior bibliometric studies on sustainable governance by focusing on local financial sustainability. This study elucidates how global academic institutions might exacerbate or alleviate structural inequalities by examining the disparities between affluent and disadvantaged nations (Alipourfard et al., 2021).

The results of this study are important for both academics and the public. Potential employers in the real world include international investors, policy research institutions, municipal government entities, and research groups. When planning future efforts, it is essential to thoroughly comprehend your colleagues, including their responsibilities and collaborative relationships. It may also enhance resource distribution to broaden network accessibility to everyone, foster collaborative agenda-setting, and augment the research capabilities of resource-limited institutions. This report provides an evidence-based analysis of the global framework for LGFS research collaboration. It promotes a more refined, data-driven, and egalitarian methodology for analyzing and forming international partnerships in local public finance. The main aim of this project was to create research frameworks that are universally applicable, but customizable to the distinct needs of different locations. These frameworks will assist in tackling the difficulties of fiscal governance in the 21st century.

## METHODS

This study employs a bibliometric methodology to investigate global collaboration trends in the evaluation of local governments' financial sustainability (LGFS). Bibliometric methodologies are extensively used to clarify intellectual frameworks, co-authorship patterns, and subject advances across many disciplines (Maler et al., 2020). This research utilized 627 published data from the Scopus database, which is recognized for its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature in public administration, urban studies, and economics (Nurdin, 2022; Li et al., 2021).

The dataset was obtained using a search term that concentrated on articles about LGFS and international collaboration. The search terms used were "local government financial sustainability," "fiscal decentralization," "intergovernmental finance," and "international collaboration." The time-frame was limited to 2000–2025 to include both the start of the research and its current progress. The examination of co-authorship was confined to the years 2007–2025, to correspond with the notable rise in publication output and international collaboration throughout this timeframe.

The research used VOSviewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2010) for bibliometric mapping, facilitating the visualization of co-authorship networks, national collaboration, and institutional linkages. This research used VOSviewer because it creates network maps that

depict groups working together and the relative importance of the nodes (Patty et al., 2024; Neamţu & Cibotariu, 2025). The program created maps of co-authorship for both the author and the country. The network nodes represent a country or author, and the links indicate that more than one person wrote a work. The World Bank split countries into "developed" and "developing" groups based on how much money they made (Savić et al., 2018). This classification establishes a uniform and globally acknowledged framework for a comparative analysis. The study computed standard bibliometric metrics, including total publications, total citations, average citations per document, and co-authorship connections for each national group (Kumar & Simic, 2025; Saky et al., 2024). Degree centrality, betweenness centrality, and cluster density are examples of network measures used to analyze the importance of related countries in international collaborative networks (Gueye et al., 2022).

To ensure reliability, only papers with comprehensive affiliation data are used. To maintain data integrity, duplicate entries, editorials, and unpeer-reviewed items were excluded (Gangarapu et al., 2024). Subsequent studies were conducted to identify issue clusters within LGFS research using keyword co-occurrence analysis. This procedure clarifies the main research concerns and their associations with certain countries or areas, and seeks to provide a thorough and comparative assessment of worldwide LGFS research collaborations. When bibliometric indicators, network analysis, and geographical categorization are used together, a complete picture of how information is shared and created in this important policy area is obtained.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of a bibliometric investigation of trends in international cooperation in research on Local Government Financial Sustainability (LGFS). It also included co-authorship and keyword network visualizations produced using VOSviewer. It combines the results with theoretical insights and ensures that they are in line with the main goals of the study: (1) to map out international co-authorship networks in LGFS, (2) to look at differences in collaboration between developed and developing countries, (3) to find important authors and research clusters, and (4) to suggest ways to make LGFS research fairer and more accessible.

### Mapping International Co-authorship Networks

Figure 1 below shows the co-authorship network for each country. Some of the most important nodes in the global LGFS research system are the UK, United States, Australia, China, and Spain. You can tell how much publishing is going on by looking at the size of the nodes and thickness of the linkages. People believe that the UK is the most important actor, followed by Australia, the US, and China. The fundamental principles of resource dependence theory (Celtekligil, 2020) assert that these primary organizations work together to maintain intellectual dominance and acquire resources on a worldwide scale. Their primary professions further illustrate the robustness of the institutions and the substantial funding of academic frameworks, facilitating international studies and establishing research goals.

Clusters in the network show how likely it is that different components operate together. Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, and Kazakhstan are all members of a group that demonstrate how people in Eastern Europe work together on intellectual projects. Indonesia, Taiwan, and Jordan are part of a group in the region that includes Australia and the United Arab Emirates. However, collaboration between African and Latin American countries is limited, suggesting an insufficient engagement with global LGFS research.

This finding is consistent with studies highlighting disparities in research capacity and structural impediments to participation in impoverished nations (AbouAssi et al., 2021). Some of these problems include insufficient money for research, inability to speak English well, and inability to access high-impact journals. Therefore, scientists from countries with weak

economies typically work together in partnerships funded by donors or that help create capacity instead of developing their own research plans (Neamţu & Cibotariu, 2025).

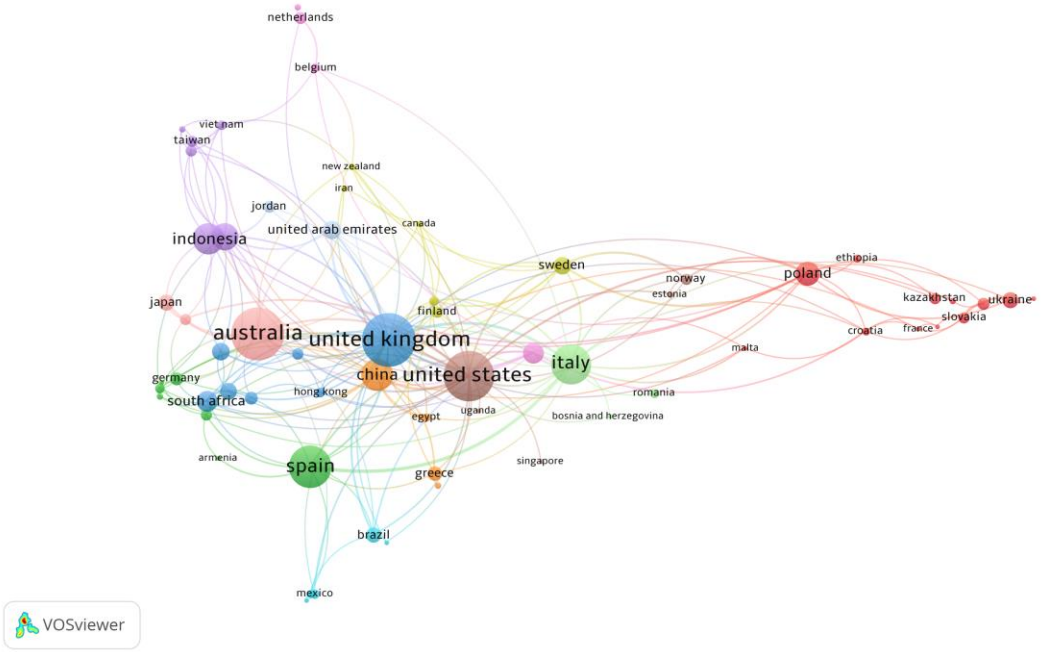



**Figure 1. Country Collaboration Network in Local Government Financial Sustainability Research**

## Disparities Between Developed and Developing Countries

The study of networks shows that people cooperate in many ways. The UK, US, and Australia are important parts of the network because they are in the midst of it in terms of degree and betweenness. Ethiopia, Uganda, and Armenia are new countries on the edge of their networks that do not connect particularly well. The way the academic world works across the globe strengthens the central-periphery dynamics. Institutions in the Global North have cutting-edge research facilities that make it easy to publish a lot of work and find overseas collaborators (Sadıç et al., 2024). On the other hand, institutions in the Global South typically acquire money from outside sources and work together to collect local data or assist with fieldwork, instead of coming up with new ideas (Schwarz et al., 2024). Such changes have affected the real world. They do not think about what others in the area think when they come up with hypotheses, which makes it more difficult to come up with new ideas. Second, they stopped creating good fiscal governance systems in the right situation. Sadıç et al. (2024) contended that LGFS research must be culturally cognizant; nonetheless, peripheral states are perpetually excluded from knowledge co-production.

## Influential Authors and Intellectual Structure

Figure 2 below illustrates the method used to display the author density. Marco Bisogno, Francesca Manes-Rossi, and Giuseppe Grossi have developed complicated co-authorship networks that show how they are still working together and how good they are in specific areas. A number of these authors work for European organizations, which indicates how much the continent's history has affected studies of local government and public sector accounting.
The heatmap shows that there are three main groups of writers.

1. The main ideas were Bisogno and Manes-Rossi, focusing on public financial management, performance audits, and openness.

2. The second group, which includes Maria-Dolores Guillamón and Francisco Bastida, improves upon studies on fiscal performance and responsibility by comparing them.
3. Cassetta and Iacuzzi were in the command of the third group. This group is responsible for coming up with new ideas and making changes to the municipal financial institutions.

These clusters demonstrate thematic focus and disciplinary profundity, corresponding to the concept of intellectual centers in the bibliometric literature (Saky et al., 2024). However, there is a paucity of authors from impoverished nations in these expert domains, which supports the prior claim that there is an uneven representation in international LGFS research.

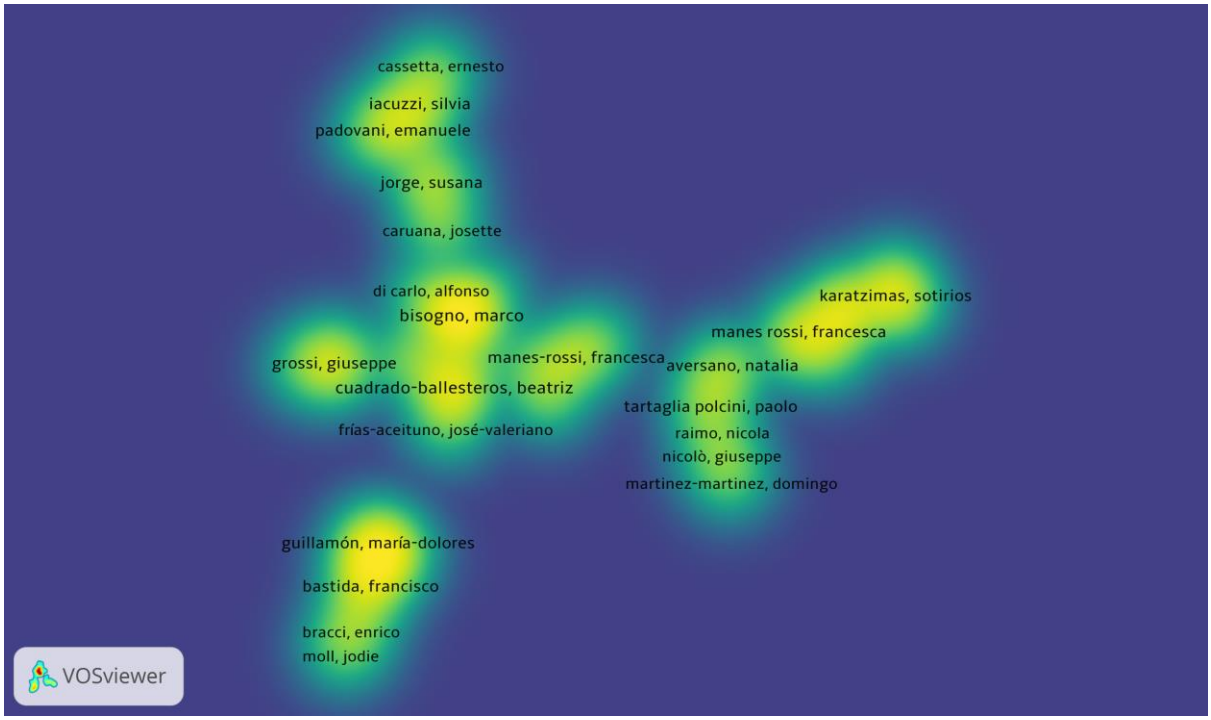



**Figure 2: Author Co-authorship Density Map in Local Government Financial Sustainability Research**

## Thematic Evolution and Keyword Clustering

Figure 3 below shows how adjacent words are grouped. Four main groups came together:

1. The blue cluster, which includes "local government," "accountability," and "COVID-19," is, looking at how policies and institutions react.
2. The red cluster is about "sustainability," "poverty," and "corruption," which are all major issues and goals for the Global South.
3. The green cluster has "governance," "public policy," and "infrastructure." This means that budgets have changed significantly.
4. The yellow cluster connects "financial sustainability" to "public sector", "efficiency", and "social and economic effects."

These groups show that LGFS research looks at a lot of different areas, such as economics, public administration, and development studies. COVID-19 is currently in the blue cluster, which means that research on governance that can manage crises has recently changed. The addition of gender, microfinance, and corruption to the red cluster indicates that LGFS research progressively concentrates on justice and inclusivity.

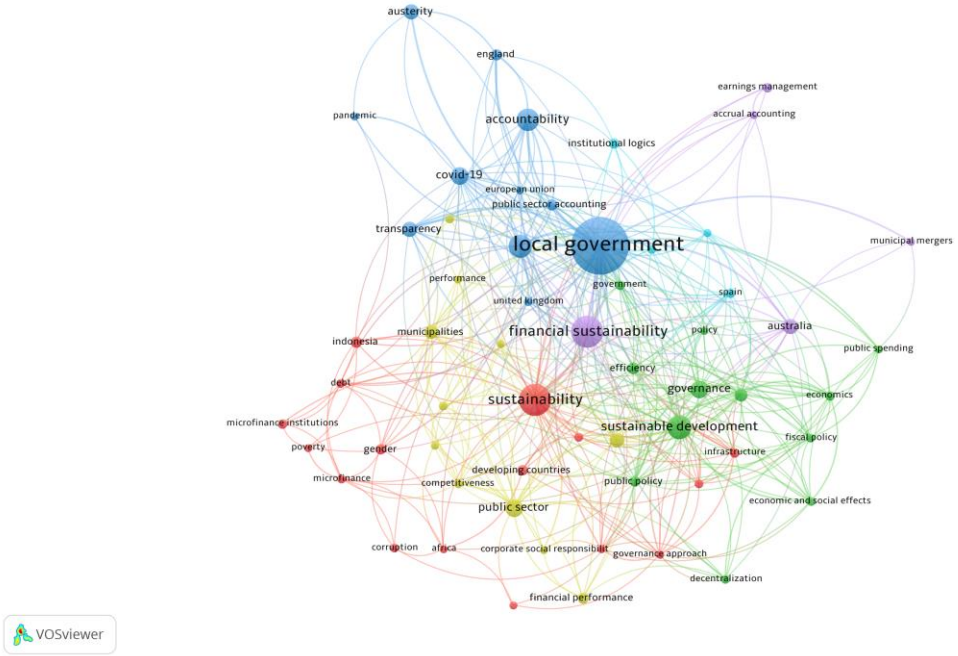



**Figure 3: Keyword Co-occurrence Network in Local Government Financial Sustainability Research**

The overlay in Figure 4 below shows how things evolve over time. A previous study (2019–2020) has investigated accountability, austerity, and institutional efficacy. From 2022 to 2023, the issues were changed to include dealing with COVID-19, decentralization, and long-lasting development. This experience demonstrates that global policy may undergo modifications, particularly in response to fiscal shocks, social inequalities, and challenges associated with post-pandemic recovery (Piña & Avellaneda, 2023).

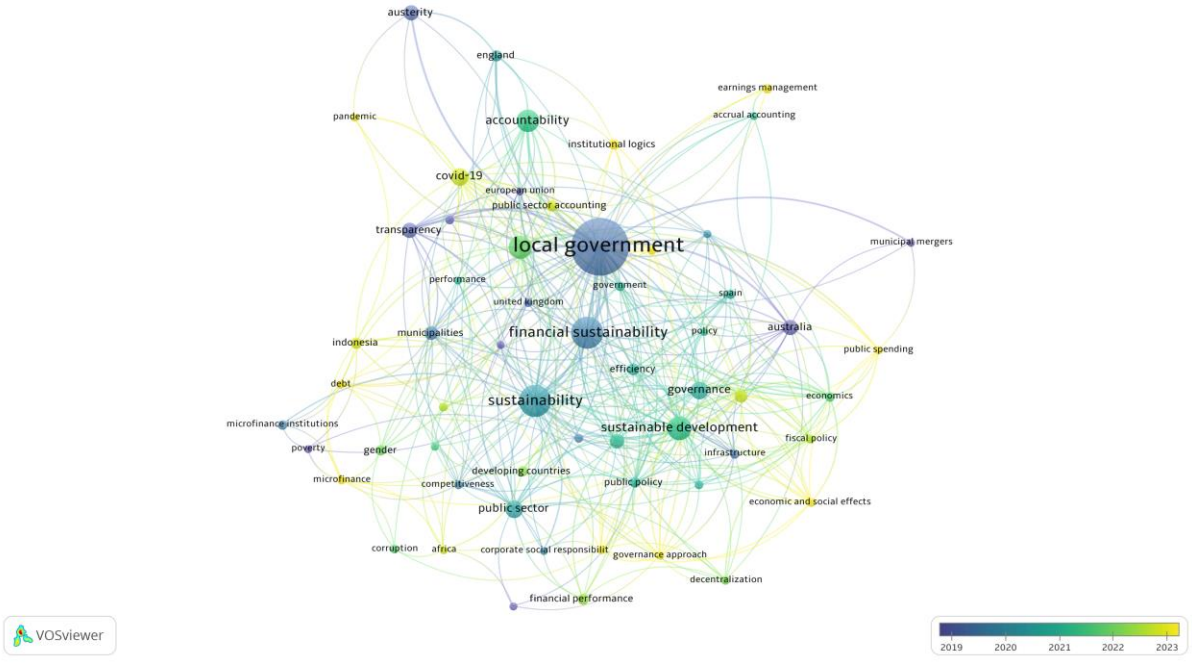



**Figure 4: Overlay Visualization of Keyword Co-occurrence by Average Publication Year**

### Linking Results to Theoretical and Policy Frameworks

The results affirm the significance of institutional theory in elucidating the influence of norms and legitimacy on LGFS research objectives (Cappellaro et al., 2024). The importance of industrialized nations and their institutional structures has a persistent impact on the global debate on budgetary sustainability. The lack of visibility of hybrid governance and informal finance practices in poor nations shows that the classic LGFS procedures do not have a strong epistemic basis.

The validity of resource dependence theory was further corroborated. Others with a lot of intellectual capital work together to maintain their power and receive resources, whereas others with little academic capital pursue jobs that help them earn money and raise awareness. This difference could help maintain research plans focused on donors until it becomes common to make plans that include everyone (AbouAssi et al., 2021).

### Practical Implications and Future Directions

These results suggest that LGFS research requires strong ways to collaborate. Funding organizations and institutions must prioritize the following:

1. Collaborations for capacity building that help authors from the south become better conceptual leaders.
2. Fair co-authorship agreements that consider what each person brings to the table.
3. Publishing it so that everyone can read and translate it into numerous languages to reach more people.

Further research is required to assess the impact of collaborative networks on policy acceptance in an LGFS. This method helps us see how LGFS research fits into a larger picture. It shows the structural differences that make it difficult to create and share knowledge with institutions in the Global North in the center and the Global South at the edges. Over time, cooperation has increased; however, it is not evenly distributed and often exacerbates epistemic inequality, rather than ameliorating it. To make research easier for everyone, LGFS researchers, funders, and institutions must follow the rules of epistemic diversity, equality, and growing capacity through collaboration. Only then can LGFS research reach its full potential to address financial and governance challenges in various locations. This study shows how LGFS scholarship on networks and themes has changed over time. It meets its goals and sets the stage for future research collaborations that are conscious of their surroundings, interactive and important.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of global collaboration patterns in Local Government Financial Sustainability (LGFS) research, and provides empirical insights into the structural dynamics and thematic development of academic co-authorship networks. This study analyzed 627 articles published from 2007 to 2025 using VOSviewer and Scopus data, emphasizing notable differences in the volume and visibility of research output across industrialized and developing nations. Developed nations, especially the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, serve as vital centers within the collaborative network, exerting influence through significant institutional capacity, whereas developing countries mostly occupy the periphery. This structural mismatch underscores persistent injustices within global academic institutions and corresponds with theoretical frameworks such as resource dependence theory and institutional theory, which clarify the power dynamics governing collaboration.

This study emphasizes that international collaboration in the LGFS is markedly imbalanced and often influenced by donor-centric priorities, consequently limiting the

epistemic independence of researchers from the Global South. This makes it difficult to identify fiscal governance solutions that fit the situation and function of the area. The results show that the LGFS is becoming more popular worldwide. However, only a few issue clusters have focused on the specific problems faced by low-income communities, such as poverty, corruption, and informality. Sometimes, when people talk about audits, openness, and making things work better, they ignore the challenges. This makes Southern views even less important when learning about new things.

The study's co-authorship and keyword network visualizations helped us to understand how ideas are connected and how the field of LGFS research is growing. The addition of crisis-related subjects, such as COVID-19 and decentralization, in recent years has signified a transition towards matters of adaptable governance. The minimal involvement of impoverished nations in these growing areas shows that we need to conduct more research that includes everyone and creates fair agendas. This paper calls for fair co-authorship agreements, better research skills in the Global South, and more multilingual, open-access ways to share research, so that it is easier to find and use. These strategies may facilitate the transition of LGFS research from utilitarian to genuinely collaborative interaction.

This project makes the LGFS research collaboration more useful for both academics and policymakers. This emphasizes the need to establish interconnected research ecosystems globally, while addressing local requirements to tackle the complex fiscal and governance challenges of the 21st century. Future studies should examine the dynamics of collaboration and endeavors to democratize the knowledge-creation framework in public finance.

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