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RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF ESG PERFORMANCE LITERATURE IN THE BANKING SECTOR\*

## BANKACILIK SEKTÖRÜNDE ESG PERFORMANSI LİTERATÜRÜNÜN GELİŞİMİ

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Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur. <b>Oğuz Yusuf Atasel</b> <b>Yasin Şeker</b>	It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were complied with during the preparation of this study and all the studies used are cited in the bibliography <b>Oğuz Yusuf Atasel</b> <b>Yasin Şeker</b>
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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF ESG PERFORMANCE LITERATURE IN THE BANKING SECTOR

### Abstract

This study aims a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the development of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance literature in the banking sector between 2010 and 2025. Using data retrieved from the Scopus database, 692 peer-reviewed articles were examined through Bibliometrix (R/Biblioshiny), while VOSviewer visualization tool was employed to map collaboration, co-occurrence, and citation networks. The findings reveal a sharp increase in academic interest in ESG-related banking research, particularly after 2019, with nearly 90% of all publications produced between 2022 and 2025. Italy, China, and India emerged as the leading contributors, supported by strong research activity in Europe and Asia. Institutional analysis shows that universities in Italy and Eastern Europe play a central role, while several Asian institutions are increasingly influential. Sustainability (Switzerland) and Finance Research Letters are identified as the most active journals in the field. Co-word and collaboration networks indicate that research mainly focuses on ESG, banking, financial performance, sustainable development, governance and risk management.

**Keywords:** ESG, Supply Chain Management, Sustainability Reporting

**JEL Codes:** G21, M14, M41

## BANKACILIK SEKTÖRÜNDE ESG PERFORMANSI LİTERATÜRÜNÜN GELİŞİMİ

### Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, 2010–2025 yılları arasında bankacılık sektöründe ESG performansı literatürünün gelişimini bibliyometrik yöntemle kapsamlı bir biçimde incelemektir. Scopus veri tabanından elde edilen 692 hakemli makale Bibliometrix (R/Biblioshiny) kullanılarak analiz edilmiş; işbirliği, birlikte-bulunma ve atıf ağlarının haritalandırılmasında ise VOSviewer tabanlı görselleştirme araçından yararlanılmıştır. Bulgular, özellikle 2019 sonrasında ESG konulu bankacılık araştırmalarında belirgin bir artış olduğunu ve tüm yayınların yaklaşık %90'ının 2022–2025 döneminde gerçekleştirildiğini göstermektedir. İtalya, Çin ve Hindistan en fazla katkı sağlayan ülkeler olarak öne çıkmış; Avrupa ve Asya'daki güçlü yayın sayısı bu eğilimi desteklemiştir. Kurumsal düzeyde özellikle İtalya ve Doğu Avrupa üniversiteleri merkezi bir konuma sahipken, bazı Asya kurumlarının etkisi giderek artmaktadır. Sustainability (Switzerland) ve Finance Research Letters alanın en aktif dergileri olarak belirlenmiştir. Birlikte-bulunma ve işbirliği ağları, araştırmaların ağırlıklı olarak ESG, bankacılık, finansal performans, sürdürülebilir kalkınma, yönetim ve risk yönetimi konuları etrafında şekillendiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** ESG, Tedarik Zinciri Yönetimi, Sürdürülebilirlik Raporlaması

**JEL Kodları:** G21, M14, M41.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF ESG PERFORMANCE LITERATURE IN THE BANKING SECTOR

### Extended Abstract

In recent years, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) indicators have gained significant prominence on the agenda of financial markets and the banking sector. This development is driven by the growing interest of policymakers, investors, regulatory authorities, and academic circles in corporate sustainability goals. The transformation in sustainable finance has led to banks being evaluated not only on their financial performance but also on their social responsibility, environmental impact, and corporate governance. The fact that ESG practices are becoming an increasingly mandatory element for banks has led to a rapid increase in academic studies in this field. Particularly after the 2008 financial crisis, the financial sector's loss of trust and reputation accelerated the shift towards sustainability-based practices and supported the view that transparency, accountability, and risk management practices needed to be strengthened. Accordingly, the number of studies revealing the role and impact of ESG performance in the banking sector has increased, highlighting the importance of the issue.

The purpose of this study is to examine publications on ESG performance in the banking sector between 2010 and 2025 using bibliometric analysis methods. A comprehensive literature review was conducted using the Scopus database, and only article-type publications were included in the research. The selection criterion was that concepts such as “Bank, commercial bank, investment bank, Islamic bank, green banking, ESG, ESG disclosure, ESG rating, ESG score, ESG performance” appeared in the title, abstract, or keywords of the publications. A total of 692 articles were analyzed within this scope. Bibliometrix was used to analyze the data; co-author networks, keyword co-occurrences, country collaborations, and publication trends by year were identified. In addition, VOSviewer and Python-based programs were used to visualize the findings.

The bibliometric analysis shows that a total of 692 publications on ESG performance in the banking sector were produced over a 16-year period. A notable increase has been observed particularly after 2019, with publication activity reaching its peak in 2025. Remarkably, approximately 90% of these studies were published between 2022 and 2025, indicating a sharp rise in academic interest during this period. In terms of country contributions, Italy ranks first with 203 publications, followed by China with 199 and India with 88 publications. The results demonstrate that studies in this area are not concentrated in a single geographic region but are instead widely distributed, with Europe and Asia producing the majority of the output. Türkiye, with 33 publications, has contributed primarily through studies related to the BIST Sustainability Index and sustainability reporting regulations.

At the institutional level, the leading contributors to the field are largely European universities—particularly those located in Italy, followed by institutions in Poland, Spain, and France—while universities in Malaysia, India, and Vietnam play a significant role in Asia. From a journal perspective, two outlets stand out for their substantial contributions: Sustainability (Switzerland) and Finance Research Letters. In terms of authorship, researchers such as Buallay, Agnese, Niedziółka, Hassan, and Korzeb emerge as the most prominent contributors, frequently examining themes related to the banking sector, ESG performance, sustainability reporting, and governance. Analysis of the co-occurrence network further reveals that publications in this field cluster around central concepts such as banking, ESG, financial performance, and sustainable development.

By utilising an extensive dataset and a robust bibliometric approach, this study offers a comprehensive overview of the academic landscape on ESG performance in the banking sector. The findings not only enrich the existing literature but also provide a structured foundation for future research. Going forward, studies may benefit from focusing on cross-country comparisons of ESG practices, the regulatory impacts

on banking performance, and the role of climate-related financial risks, all of which represent promising directions for further scholarly inquiry.

**Keywords:** ESG, Supply Chain Management, Sustainability Reporting

**JEL Codes:** G21, M14, M41

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, policymakers, professionals, stakeholders, and academics have become more interested in corporate sustainability goals. This has led to the rapid growth and widespread use of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) indicators (Şeker and Şengür, 2021; Agnese et al. 2024). Financial markets and public authorities are becoming more interested in sustainable finance at the same time. This means that ESG performance is becoming more essential for banks and other financial institutions. The ESG issue is not only ethical; it also has a direct and significant impact on the economy's financial stability. For this reason, ESG considerations are likely to become a permanent component of the global economic system. ESG dimensions are directly related to the fundamental components of corporate sustainability and are increasingly being incorporated into banking strategies and business models. ESG activities can help banks to raise capital, achieve a sound financial position, and increase customer loyalty. This is because the development of the banking environment requires the implementation of business models that are consistent with economic and corporate governance principles and compatible with social and environmental sustainability risks (Menicucci & Paolucci, 2024).

Interest in ESG performance has not only developed with financial markets and public authorities focusing on sustainable finance. Major crises and events have given rise to new norms and standards for business survival and resilience (Elali, 2021). The occurrence and complexity of recent crises have brought about a new wave of corporate behaviour practices requiring greater awareness and transparency (El Khoury et al. 2023). Indeed, it was the 2008 financial crisis that made concepts such as corporate social responsibility and ESG an important part of financial market discourse (Leins, 2020; Miranda et al. 2023). Furthermore, as many leading businesses have been linked to scandals due to irresponsible social and environmental practices, awareness has grown regarding the importance of disclosing ESG information.

Banks and financial institutions have begun to reshape their operations to ensure trust, transparency and reliability. This process has led banks to focus their efforts on ESG performance in order to direct capital flows towards sustainable investments and integrate sustainability into risk management (El Khoury et al. 2023). In other words, due to crises and pressure from customers, investors and regulators, banks have begun to integrate ESG factors into their business strategies, risk management models and governance structures, thereby supporting the transition to a more sustainable economy and reducing sustainability risks (Coleton et al. 2020). Consequently, interest in assessing ESG performance in the banking sector has increased in recent years (Bektur & Arzova 2022; El Khoury et al. 2023).

The aim of this study is to systematically examine studies on ESG performance in the banking sector using bibliometric analysis. As mentioned hereinabove, it is of vital importance for banks to consider ESG factors in their strategies and activities in order to ensure financial stability in the banking sector and to direct capital flows towards sustainable finance. The literature includes studies on risk management in the banking sector (Elbir Mermer, 2024), financial sustainability (Karaaslan & Karadavut, 2025), ESG and financial performance (Ertan, 2025), the relationship between competition and risk in the banking sector (Karadağ Ak, 2024), green finance in banking (Türk & Demirci Aksoy, 2025), banking and finance

in Türkiye (Apaydın et al. 2024), sustainability in the banking sector (Sürücü & Caylan, 2024), ESG performance in the banking sector in Web of Science (WOS) (Galletta et al. 2022), ESG performance in cooperative banks (Korzeb et al. 2024), ESG performance in Islamic banks (Tumewang et al. 2024). Within the scope of this study, a bibliometric analysis has been conducted on ESG performance in the banking sector in the Scopus database between 2010 and 2025. Thus, differing from the literature, the overall banking sector has been taken into account, and studies on ESG performance have been comprehensively examined.

The following parts of the paper are structured as follows. Section 2 explains the methodology used for the study, encompassing the data, variables, and analytical techniques. Section 3 delineates and examines the results of the analysis. Section 4 concludes the paper by synthesizing the key results and highlighting their theoretical and practical implications.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative bibliometric research methodology grounded in science mapping techniques to systematically examine the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of the ESG–banking literature. Bibliometric analysis is widely used to analyse large bodies of academic publications by identifying influential studies, collaboration patterns, and conceptual relationships within a research field (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al. 2021). The dataset for this study consists of articles published between 2010 and 2025 examining ESG performance in the banking sector. The Scopus database has been used to conduct a comprehensive literature review. The inclusion criteria were set as articles containing the concepts ‘bank, commercial bank, investment bank, Islamic bank, green banking, ESG, environmental social governance, ESG disclosure, ESG score, ESG rating, ESG performance’ in their titles, abstracts or keywords. After applying this requirement, a total of 692 scientific articles were obtained in both CSV and BibTeX formats from Scopus were obtained for the analysis. Bibliometric analyses were performed using Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), while network visualisations were created using VOSviewer and Python-based custom drawing functions to obtain high-resolution graphics.

## 3. FINDINGS

The findings section reports the results of a bibliometric analysis of articles on ESG performance in the banking sector published in the Scopus database between 2010 and 2025. The analysis covers the annual distribution of publications, the most influential countries, institutions, journals, and authors, as well as co-word and country collaboration networks. The temporal evolution of publication output is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Number of Publications

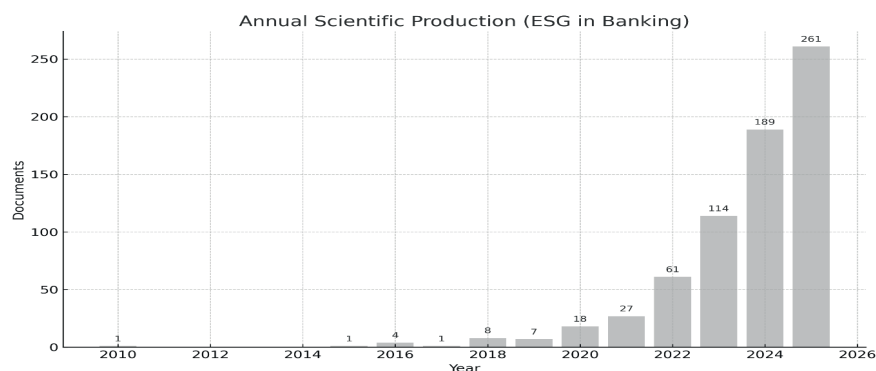




Figure 1 shows a clear increase in the number of publications on ESG performance in the banking sector over time. Between 2010 and 2018, 15 publications have been published in this field. However, a significant upward trend has been observed since 2019. The rate of increase in publications since 2021 has been particularly noteworthy. This situation can be explained by the fact that banks' stakeholders are increasingly focusing not only on financial matters but also on ESG performance, leading to a rapid shift in academic research towards this area.

Publications between 2022 and 2025 account for 90.32% of total publications. This indicates that the field is no longer only theoretical; regulatory developments, sustainability reporting standards and banks' efforts to improve their ESG performance have made research focus a corporate requirement. The number of publications on ESG performance in the banking sector reached its highest level in 2025 (with 261 publications). The chart generally shows that ESG has become a rapidly maturing research area in banking literature, rather than one that is still developing. The upward trend indicates that academic interest in this topic will continue at a similar pattern in the coming years. Countries with the highest contributions are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Countries with the Highest Contributions

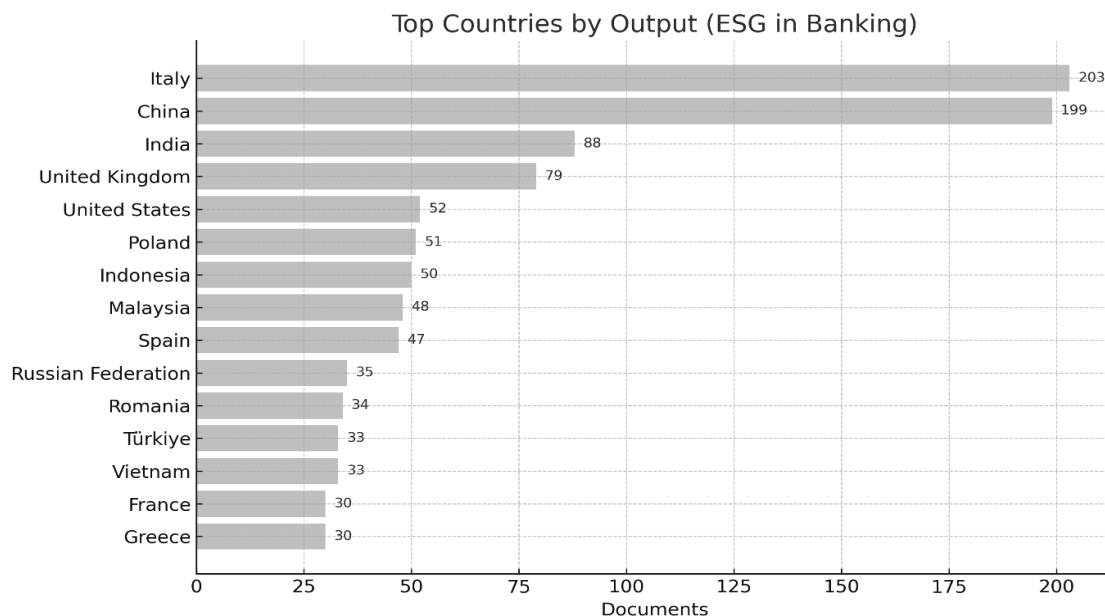


Figure 2 indicates that research on ESG performance in the banking sector is geographically widespread. In terms of publication output, Italy (203 publications), China (199 publications), and India (88 publications) emerge as the three most productive countries. Italy's dominance in this field can be closely linked to the rapid integration of sustainable finance policies into the banking system in Europe. The taxonomy regulations introduced by the European Union, the European Sustainability Reporting Standards, and sustainable banking guidelines have contributed to a high volume of publications in Italian academia. China (199 publications) and India (88 publications) with high number of publications demonstrate their dominance in the literature on ESG performance in Asia's banking sector. The United Kingdom (79 publications) and the United States (52 publications), despite their leading position in global finance literature, have produced only 131 publications in this field. Malaysia (48 publications), Indonesia (50 publications) and Vietnam (33 publications) in Southeast Asia have contributed a total of 131 publications, which focus on topics such as Islamic banking, green credit products and financial inclusion in sustainable finance. Türkiye's position in the middle ranks with 33 publications indicates a rapidly developing but not yet reached maturity in ESG literature. Researchers' focus on the BIST

Sustainability Index, sustainability reporting regulations, etc., has been effective in the development of this field in Türkiye. Institutions with the highest contributions are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Institutions with the Highest Contribution**



Figure 3 indicates that publication output is concentrated among a limited number of academic institutions. Universities in Italy (particularly Sapienza Università di Roma, Università degli Studi di Bari and Parthenope University) stand out among European countries, making the highest contribution. This situation shows an increase in academic publications parallel to the EU's sustainable finance regulations. The inclusion of institutions from countries such as Russia, Portugal and France in the list suggests that research on ESG performance in the banking sector indicates that Europe has a generally strong research network. Institutions from Malaysia, India and Poland represent the emerging research centres of Asia and Central Europe. This shows that research in this field is concentrated in some institutions, with this focus being European-centric but balanced by contributions from universities in Asia and Eastern Europe. Journals with the highest contributions are presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Journals with the Highest Contribution**



Figure 4 illustrates that the highest number of publications on ESG performance in the banking sector is found in the journals *Sustainability* (Switzerland) with 34 articles and *Finance Research Letters* with 32 publications. Due to their substantial publication output, these two publications serve as the primary research venues in this field. The *Sustainability* journal, with its broad scope on sustainability, accommodates interdisciplinary studies, while *Finance Research Letters* makes a strong contribution to the subject from a financial perspective, primarily through empirical studies. These journals are followed by journals specialising in finance, management and environmental responsibility, such as *Research in International Business and Finance* (27 publications) and *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* (24 publications). Journals such as the *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, and the *International Review of Financial Analysis* are journals where more analytical and policy-oriented approaches are prominent. Authors with the highest contributions are presented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5.** Authors with the Highest Contribution

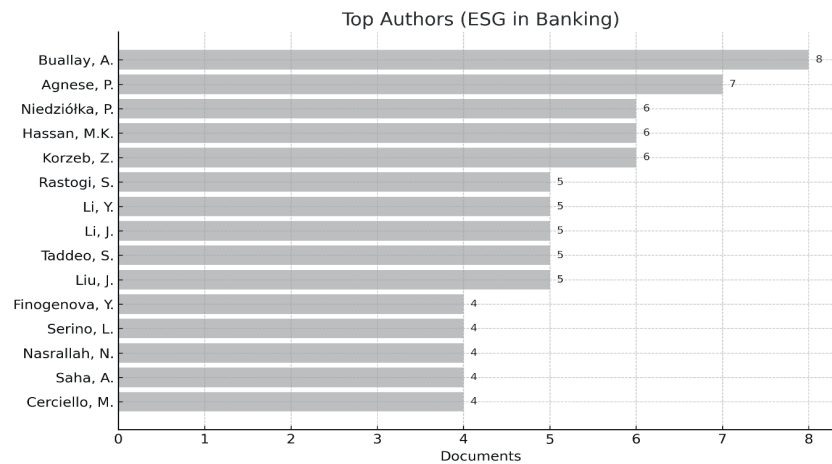


Figure 5 indicates that Buallay, A. has the top position in the publication rankings concerning ESG performance in the banking sector, with a total of 8 publications. This author has written studies examining the relationship between corporate sustainability, financial performance and banking using different methods. The second-ranked author, Agnese, P., has 7 publications, and the author's work has focused more on ESG practices and regulatory impacts in European banking markets. Looking at the distribution of authors in general, it can be said that the authors are of European and Asian origin and that the studies are interdisciplinary. The co-word network is presented in Figure 6.



**Figure 6. Co-word Network**  
**Co-word Network (Top 35) — Non-overlapping labels**

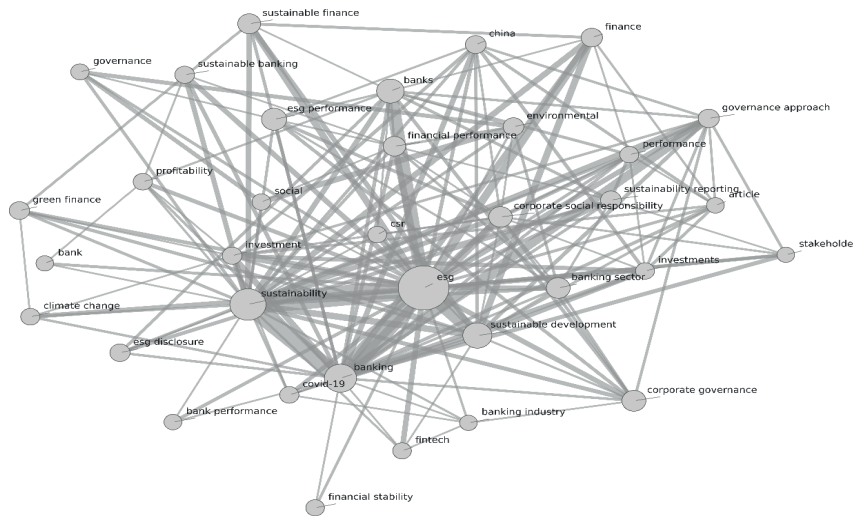


Figure 6 depicts the co-occurrence network of words, effectively demonstrating the clustering of concepts and the subjects that inform research on ESG performance within the banking sector. At the centre of the network, crucial topics such as ESG, banking, sustainable development, and financial performance are apparent. This suggests that research in this field mostly focuses on the performance, sustainability, and governance dimensions of banks' ESG activities. The strong connections with concepts such as 'corporate governance,' 'disclosure,' 'risk management,' 'stakeholder,' and 'sustainable banking' show that most studies address ESG within a governance, transparency, and risk-focused framework. Words surrounding the network, such as 'green finance,' 'climate change,' 'financial stability,' 'profitability,' and 'investment,' represent new subtopics that are increasingly expanding in this field. The appearance of concepts such as COVID-19 and fintech in the network indicates that ESG studies are beginning to be addressed in conjunction with economic shocks and technological transformation. The country collaboration network is presented in Figure 7.

**Figure 7. Country Collaboration Network**

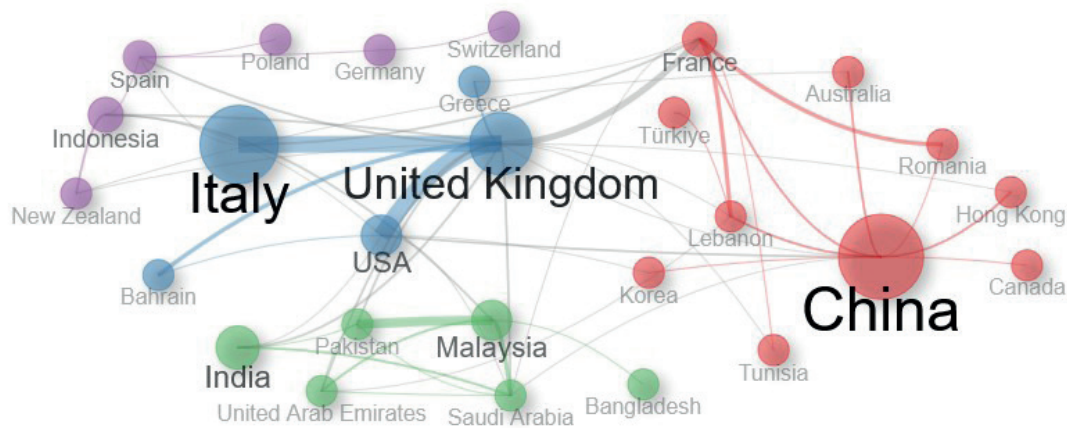


Figure 7 illustrates the global network of academic collaborations among countries. Countries such as China, the United Kingdom, Italy and the United States stand out as large, central nodes, demonstrating their high levels of collaboration. On the other hand, countries such as France, Germany, India and Malaysia also have significant connections, but appear to have a more limited network of interactions. Furthermore, countries such as New Zealand and Saudi Arabia feature as smaller nodes, while countries like Bangladesh appear to have more isolated collaborations. These findings reveal that research and academic collaborations between countries are organised at different levels.

## CONCLUSION

This study examines the literature on ESG performance in the banking sector over the 2010–2025 period using a quantitative bibliometric approach. Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database and limited to article-type publications. The analysis offers a structured overview of publication trends, leading contributors, and dominant research themes within the field. The bibliometric analysis revealed that a total of 692 publications on ESG performance in the banking sector have been published over a 16-year period. It has been determined that these publications have increased, particularly since 2019, with the highest number of publications occurring in 2025. In fact, it can be said that 90% of the publications were published between 2022 and 2025. The countries that contributed the most publications to this field are respectively: Italy (203 publications), China (199 publications), and India (88 publications). It has been revealed that the publications are not centred on a single country but are geographically dispersed, with more publications originating from Europe and Asia. Türkiye has contributed 33 publications to the field, which have been determined to be related to the BIST Sustainability Index and sustainability reporting regulations.

At the institutional level, it can be said that contributors to ESG performance in the banking sector are predominantly European-based universities (particularly Italy, followed by Poland, Spain, France, etc.), while institutions in countries such as Malaysia, India, and Vietnam are influential in Asia. From a journal perspective, two journals stand out as making the most significant contributions to this field. These are Sustainability (Switzerland) and Finance Research Letters. When examining authors by number of publications, Buallay, Agnese, Niedziółka, Hassan and Korzeb stand out. These authors have generally focused on topics such as the banking sector, ESG performance, sustainability reporting and governance in their studies, examining the relationship between them. When the co-occurrence network is analysed, it can be seen that the publications are centred on banking, ESG, financial performance and sustainable development.

This study provides a systematic overview of the literature on ESG performance in the banking sector using a large-scale bibliometric approach, thereby contributing to the existing literature and offering a structured reference point for future research. Future studies may place greater emphasis on cross-country comparative ESG practices, the effects of regulatory frameworks on banking performance, and the financial implications of climate-related risks, which are likely to become increasingly important in this field.

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