

Research Trends In Good University Governance At Private Higher Education Institutions Following Mergers: A Bibliometric Analysis For 2015–2026

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Abstract

This study aims to map research trends on good university governance (GUG) in the context of university mergers using a bibliometric analysis approach. Data were sourced from Scopus and Google Scholar via Publish or Perish, covering the period 2015–2026. A total of 36 scientific documents were identified and analyzed using VOSviewer and R Bibliometrix. The analysis covers annual scientific output, average citations per year, the most productive authors, keyword co-occurrence analysis, and research cluster mapping. Results show a highly significant upward trend in publications from 2024 to 2026, peaking at 14 articles in 2026. The highest average citations occurred in 2019–2020 at 16.5 citations per article. The most productive author is CG Lirios with 2 documents. Keyword co-occurrence analysis reveals four main research clusters: (1) institutional-governance and higher education policy, (2) sustainable development and adaptive innovation, (3) digital transformation, and (4) sustainability of institutional services. These findings provide a comprehensive picture of research developments and gaps at GUG following the merger, serving as a basis for future research in Indonesia.

Keywords: *good university governance, university merger, bibliometric analysis, higher education governance, higher education consolidation*



INTRODUCTION

Currently, private universities (PTS) in Indonesia face challenges in maintaining the quality of their higher education programs. The issuance of Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 7 of 2020 concerning the Establishment, Modification, and Dissolution of Public Universities and the Establishment, Modification, and Revocation of Licenses for Private Universities is one of the drivers behind the mergers and consolidations of private universities. This is part of an effort to rationalize the number of higher education institutions (*right-sizing*). Data from the Higher Education Service Agency (LLDikti) Region II shows that the number of private higher education institutions in its region has decreased from 213 institutions in 2018 to 154 institutions by July 2026. This significant decline is a direct consequence of the higher education merger policy.

The consolidation of higher education institutions has not only occurred in Indonesia but also in various other countries, including Sweden (Benner & Geschwind, 2016) , South Africa (Ngcamu & Teferra, 2015) , Finland (Perttu Vartiainen, 2017) , Germany (Sziegat, 2022) , and Taiwan (Lin & Yang, 2026) . One of the central issues arising from this merger process is how to maintain and improve the quality of good university governance (GUG) at the merged institution. GUG encompasses the principles of transparency, accountability, responsibility, independence, and fairness, which form the foundation of high-quality higher education administration.

Although this topic is becoming increasingly relevant both globally and nationally, systematic studies on the development of GUG research in the context of university mergers remain very limited. Bibliometric analysis serves as an appropriate method to address this need, as it enables researchers to map the structure of knowledge quantitatively and visually based on scientific publication data (Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, & Marc, 2021) . Unlike a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), bibliometrics can efficiently process larger literature corpora and generate visual maps illustrating the relationships among concepts, authors, and journals within a scientific field (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) .

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) map annual trends in scientific output on GUG in the context of university mergers during the 2015–2026 period; (2) identify citation patterns and the influence of publications; (3) identify the most productive and influential authors; (4) map dominant research theme clusters through keyword co-occurrence analysis using VOSviewer; and (5) identify research gaps and future research agendas, particularly in the Indonesian context.



LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Good University Governance (GUG)

Good university governance refers to the application of sound governance principles in the administration of higher education institutions. According to (Frølich & Caspersen, 2015) , university governance encompasses authority structures, decision-making mechanisms, accountability systems, and relationships between the university and external stakeholders. In the Indonesian context, GUG is articulated through five main principles established by the Director General of Higher Education (2014), namely: (1) credibility, (2) transparency, (3) accountability, (4) responsibility, and (5) fairness.

(Sziegat, 2022) emphasizes that the transformation of higher education governance in Germany demonstrates how structural reforms contribute to increased institutional autonomy and accountability. Meanwhile, Ramirez-Cardona et al. (2024) found that organizational coupling poses a major challenge in post-merger higher education governance, particularly in integrating different management systems and academic cultures.

Higher Education Mergers

A university merger is defined as the process of uniting two or more higher education institutions into a single new entity (Harman & Harman, 2015) . (through an analysis of the organizational design process in university mergers found that this process is not merely administrative but involves in-depth negotiations regarding academic identity and power structures. Vartiainen (2017), in his study of the University of Eastern Finland, identified campus-based tensions that emerged during the structural development of the merged institution.

In South Africa, (Ngcamu & Teferra, 2015) documented how leadership significantly determines the success of institutional transformation in the post-merger and incorporation era, using the Durban University of Technology as a case study. Meanwhile, at the policy level, * analyzes the conflicting rationales underlying higher education merger and consolidation policies in Sweden.

Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method for analyzing scientific publications using bibliographic data such as authors, publication year, journals, keywords, and citations (Stork & Astrin, 2014) . (distinguishes two main types of bibliometric analysis: performance analysis to measure the scientific contribution of the unit of analysis, and science mapping to visualize the



intellectual structure of a field. Commonly used tools include VOSviewer for network visualization and R Bibliometrix for comprehensive bibliometric statistical analysis (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a bibliometric analysis method using a descriptive quantitative approach. Bibliometrics was chosen because it provides a comprehensive and objective overview of research developments in a field based on scientific publication data (Donthu et al., 2021). This method has been widely used in higher education policy studies to map research trends and gaps.

The research data were sourced from two databases: (1) Scopus, the primary international scientific index database, and (2) Google Scholar via the Publish or Perish (PoP) application as a supplement to access a broader range of literature. The search on Scopus was conducted using the following search string:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("good university governance" OR "university governance" OR "higher education governance") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("merger" OR "consolidation" OR "amalgamation" OR "post-merger") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("private university" OR "private higher education" OR "higher education institution") AND PUBYEAR > 2012

A search on Google Scholar using similar keywords via the Publish or Perish application was conducted to ensure data completeness. All search results were exported in CSV and RIS formats and subsequently processed using R Bibliometrix and VOSviewer. The inclusion and exclusion criteria used are as follows.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Document Type	Journal articles, scientific proceedings	Books, editorials, opinion pieces
Language	English, Indonesian	Other than these two
Period	2015–2026	Before 2015
Accessibility	Complete metadata available	Incomplete metadata
Relevance	GUG topics and/or PT mergers	Outside the context of higher education

A combined search of Scopus and Google Scholar yielded 36 documents that met the inclusion criteria after deduplication. The data were analyzed using: (1) R Bibliometrix for descriptive analysis, including annual scientific output, average citations per article per year, and

2712



the most relevant authors; (2) VOSviewer for keyword co-occurrence analysis, which generated network maps in network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization views.

RESEARCH RESULT

Overview of Publications

Based on the combined search results from Scopus (16 documents) and Google Scholar via Publish or Perish (20 documents), a total of 36 scientific documents relevant to the topic of good university governance in the context of university mergers during the 2015–2026 period were obtained after the deduplication process. The documents were published in various international journals covering the fields of educational administration, higher education policy, and institutional management.

Table 2. Distribution of Publications by Year, 2015–2026

Year	Number of Publications	Cumulative
2015	3	3
2016	2	5
2017	1	6
2018	1	7
2019	2	9
2020	1	10
2021	0	10
2022	1	11
2023	2	13
2024	2	15
2025	6	21
2026	14	35
Total	35	—

Annual Scientific Production

Figure 1 shows the trend in annual scientific output in the field of GUG and university mergers from 2015 to 2026 based on an analysis by R Bibliometrix.



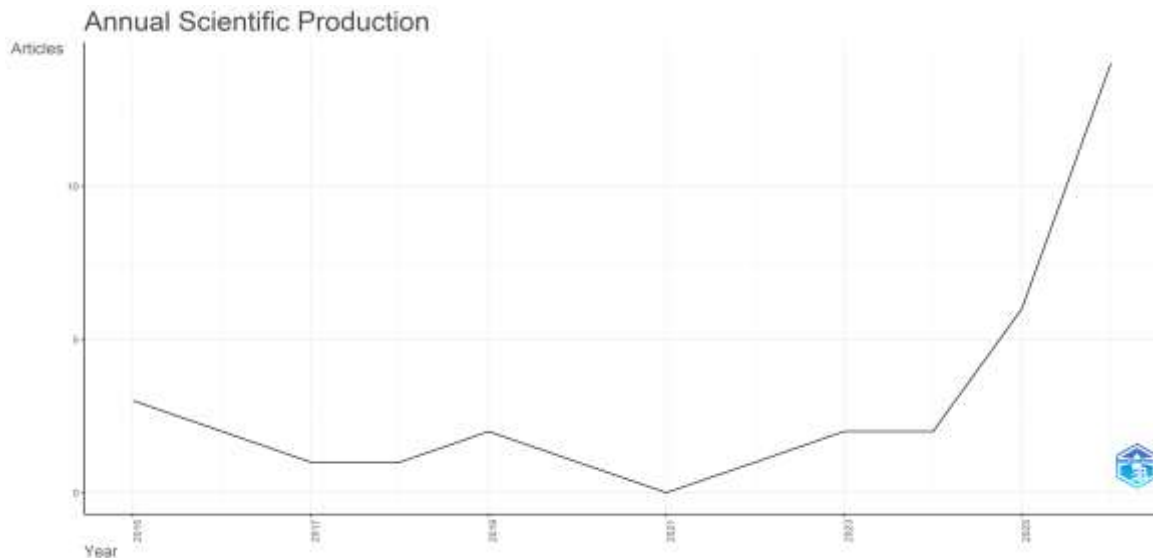


Figure 1. Annual Scientific Production 2015–2026

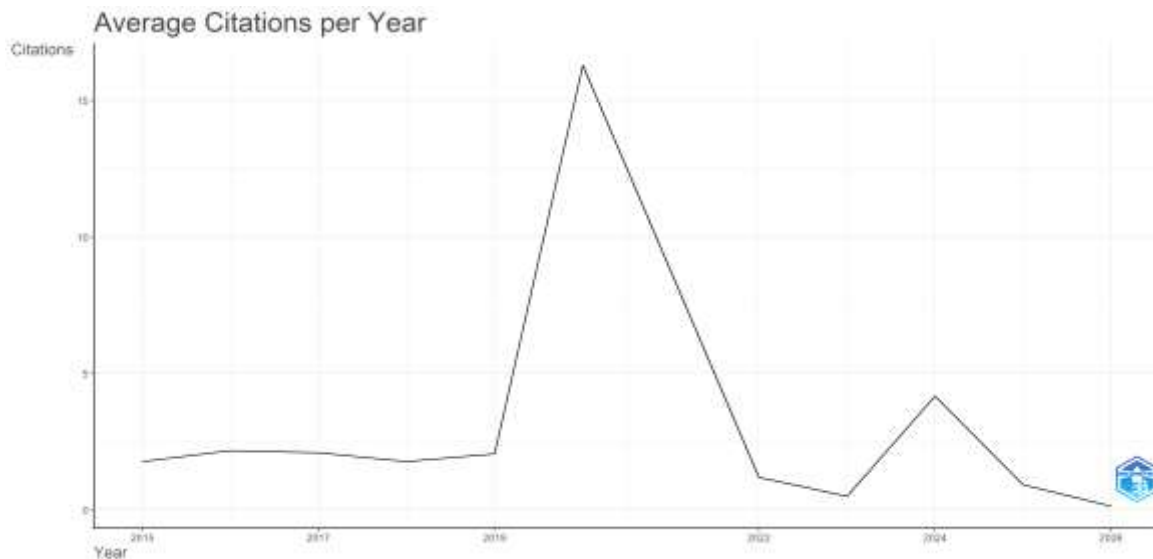
(Source: R Bibliometrix, 2026)

Based on the Annual Scientific Production graph, several important patterns can be identified. First, during the 2015–2021 period, scientific output remained relatively stable and low, averaging 1–3 articles per year, and there was even a complete absence of publications in 2021. Second, a significant surge began in 2024 and continued exponentially through 2026, with 14 articles recorded in 2026 alone—the highest number throughout the observation period. This sharp upward trend reflects the global academic community's growing attention to issues of higher education governance and institutional consolidation. This acceleration also aligns with increasing post-pandemic policy pressures that have prompted many countries to rationalize and merge higher education institutions.

Average Citations per Article per Year

Figure 2 presents the average citations per article per year, reflecting the impact and influence of publications in this field.

Figure 2. Average Article Citations Per Year



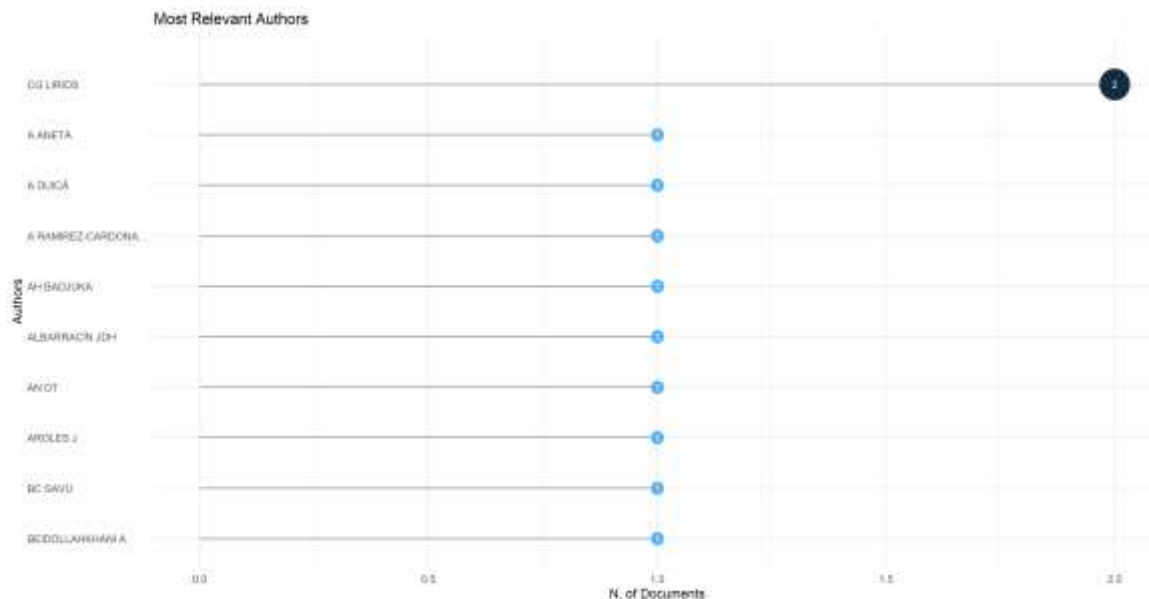
(Source: R Bibliometrix, 2026)

The Average Citations per Year graph shows a different pattern from the production trend. The average number of citations remained at a low but stable level (around 2 citations per article) during the 2015–2018 period. The most dramatic surge in citations occurred in 2019–2020, peaking at around 16.5 citations per article in 2020. This surge was primarily driven by the article "Upon the gears and upon the wheels," which received 114 citations—the highest in this corpus. After 2020, the average number of citations declined due to the large number of new articles published in 2025–2026 that have not yet accumulated citations. This pattern is common in bibliometric analysis, where new articles take time to gain academic recognition.

Most Relevant Authors

Figure 3 shows the most relevant authors based on the number of documents published in the fields of GUG and university mergers.

Figure 3. Most Relevant Authors



(Source: R Bibliometrix, 2026)

Based on the Most Relevant Authors analysis from R Bibliometrix, CG Lirios is the only author with more than one document (2 documents) in this corpus, while all other authors contributed one document each. This reflects the characteristics of the GUG and university merger research fields, which are still in their early stages of development, where the research community has not yet consolidated into consistently productive research groups. Among the authors with a single document, several names stand out based on citation impact, including: McCann L. et al. (114 citations, 2020), Frølich N. & Caspersen J. (49 citations, 2015), Deruytter L. & Derudder B. (33 citations, 2019), Barrier J. & Musselin C. (32 citations, 2016), and Ramirez-Cardona A. et al. (21 citations, 2024).

Table 3. Top 10 Most-Cited Articles in the Corpus

No	Author	Year	Title (abbreviated)	Citations
1	McCann L.; Granter E.; Hyde P.; Aroles J.	2020	'Upon the gears and upon the wheels': Terror convergence in the neoliberal university	114
2	Frølich N.; Caspersen J.	2015	Institutional governance structures	49
3	Deruytter L.; Derudder B.	2019	Keeping financialization under the radar: The Brussels Airport case	33
4	Barrier J.; Musselin C.	2016	Draw Me a University: Organizational Design in	32

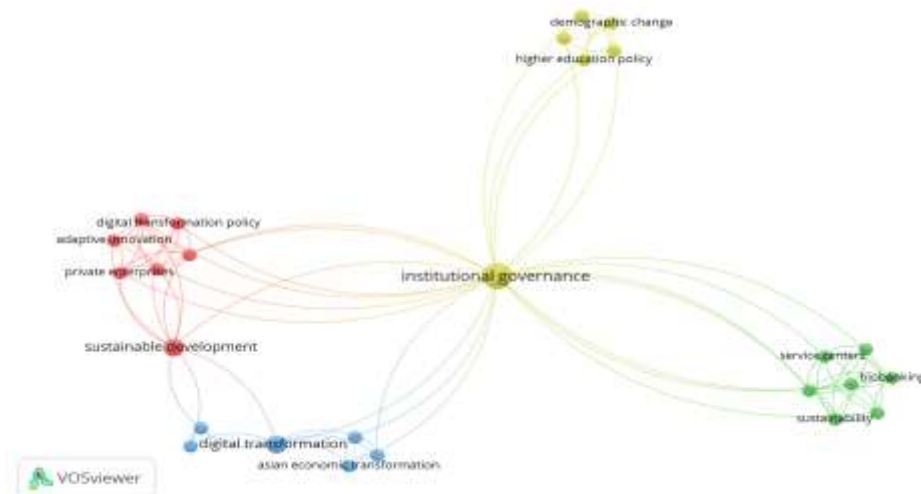
No	Author	Year	Title (abbreviated)	Citations
			University Mergers	
5	Ramirez-Cardona A. et al.	2024	Organizational coupling in higher education institutions: challenges for university governance	21
6	Vartiainen, P.	2017	Campus-based tensions in a newly merged university: the case of Finland	21
7	Benner, M.; Geschwind, L.	2016	Conflicting rationalities: Mergers in Swedish higher education policy	16
8	Safavi, M.; Håkanson, L.	2018	Advancing Theory on Knowledge Governance: A Higher Education Merger Case	16
9	Ngcamu B.S.; Teferra D.	2015	Leadership influence on post-merger transformation: The DUT case	13
10	Sziegat H.	2022	Transforming Governance of German Higher Education Institutions	6

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis (VOSviewer)

The keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted using VOSviewer by importing data in RIS format. This analysis produced three complementary visualizations: network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization.

Network Visualization

Figure 4. Keyword Co-occurrence Map – Network Visualization



(Source: VOSviewer, 2026)

Figure 4 displays a keyword co-occurrence network map that identifies four major research theme clusters, each distinguished by a different color:

Cluster 1 (Yellow – Institutional Governance & Higher Education Policy): This cluster is dominated by the keyword “institutional governance” as the central node, which is connected to “higher education policy” and “demographic change.” “Institutional governance” is the keyword with the highest frequency (appearing 4 times) and serves as the main connector (hub) between all clusters. This cluster reflects research focused on how demographic changes affect higher education governance and institutional restructuring policies.

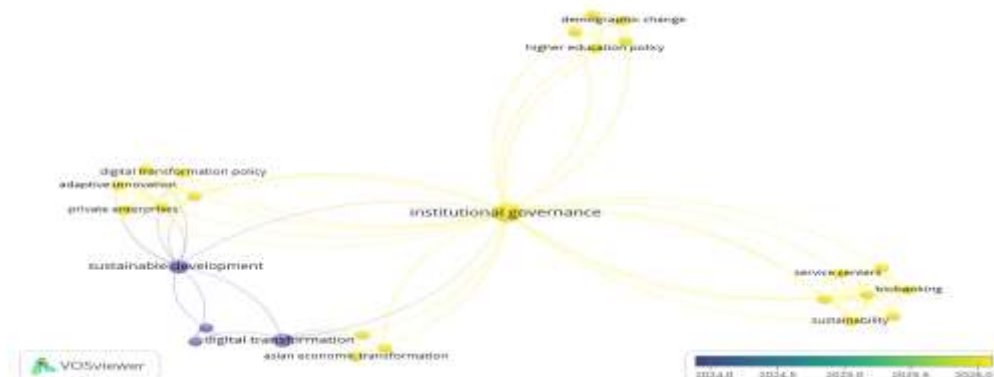
Cluster 2 (Red – Sustainable Development & Adaptive Innovation): This cluster consists of the keywords “sustainable development,” “digital transformation policy,” “adaptive innovation,” and “private enterprises.” It represents research examining the role of innovation and digital transformation policies in supporting institutional sustainability, particularly at private universities undergoing consolidation.

Cluster 3 (Blue – Digital Transformation): This cluster consists of “digital transformation” and “Asian economic transformation.” Although relatively small, this cluster reflects a growing research trend on how digital transformation influences the governance and restructuring of higher education institutions, particularly within the context of the Asian economy.

Cluster 4 (Green – Sustainability of Institutional Services): This cluster includes the keywords biobanking, service centers, and sustainability. It reflects the operational sustainability of institutional services in the context of consolidation, emphasizing the importance of sustainable resource management and service delivery following a merger.

2) Overlay Visualization

Figure 5. Keyword Co-occurrence Map – Overlay Visualization

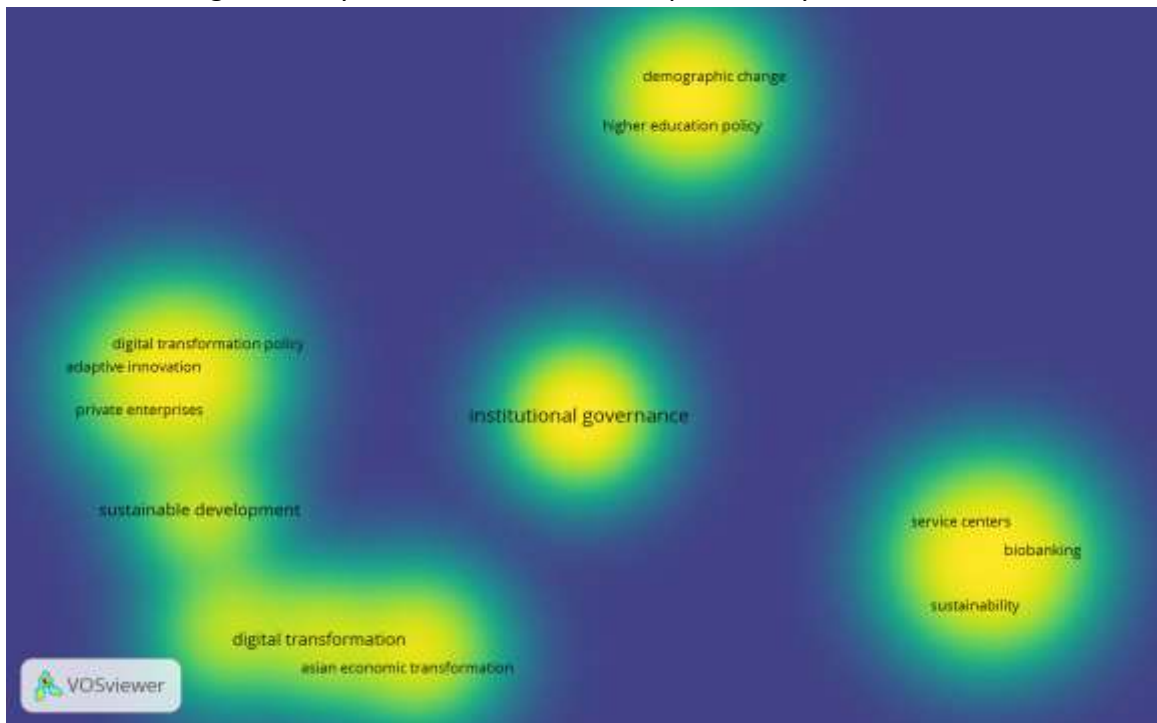


(Source: VOSviewer, 2026)

Figure 5 displays an overlay visualization showing the temporal dimension of keyword development. Based on a color scale ranging from dark blue (2024) to light yellow (2026), it is evident that most keywords in the cluster appeared during the 2025–2026 period (marked in yellow), confirming the surge in scientific output observed in the analysis of annual scientific production. The keywords “sustainable development,” and “digital transformation”—shown in blue-purple—appeared in 2024, making them relatively earlier than the others. Meanwhile, “institutional governance” and “higher education policy”—shown in yellow—indicate that these topics remained actively studied through 2026.

Density Visualization

Figure 6. Keyword Co-occurrence Map – Density Visualization



(Source: VOSviewer, 2026)

Figure 6 displays a density visualization illustrating the density of keyword occurrences. Bright yellow areas indicate keywords with high density (most frequently occurring together), while dark blue areas indicate low density. “Institutional governance” appears to have the highest density, confirmed by the largest and most intense yellow area in the center of the map. High density is also evident in the “digital transformation policy – adaptive innovation – private

enterprises” cluster on the left, as well as in the “biobanking – service centers – sustainability” cluster on the right. This indicates that these three areas have a fairly strong concentration of research in the analyzed literature.

Identification of Research Gaps

Based on a comprehensive bibliometric analysis, several significant research gaps were identified:

Table 4. Identification of Research Gaps and Their Implications

No	Research Gap	Implications for Research in Indonesia
1	The Southeast Asian and Indonesian contexts are still largely underrepresented in the global literature	Significant opportunities for research on the implementation of Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 7/2020 in LLDikti
2	There are no longitudinal studies on the impact of the merger on GUGs	A 5-year post-merger study of private higher education institutions is needed to measure the actual impact
3	The perspectives of faculty, students, and educational staff are severely lacking	Multi-stakeholder survey-based research at post-merger private universities in LLDikti Region II
4	The role of the supervisory agency (LLDikti) has not yet been studied in a global context	A study of LLDikti’s role as a facilitator of the Post-Merger University Governance Group (GUG) could be an original contribution
5	The integration of digital transformation clusters with post-merger GUGs has not yet been examined	Research on the digitization of private higher education institution governance during the merger process holds great potential

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study successfully mapped the development of research on good university governance in the context of university mergers based on 36 scientific documents from Scopus and Google Scholar for the period 2015–2026. The main findings of this study are as follows:

First, the trend in scholarly output shows an exponential surge beginning in 2024, peaking

2720



at 14 articles in 2026. This indicates that the topics of GUG and university mergers are receiving increasing serious attention from the global academic community, in line with the rise of higher education consolidation policies in various countries following the pandemic.

Second, citation patterns show that articles published during the 2015–2020 period have accumulated more citations than newer articles, with citations peaking in 2020 (an average of 16.5 citations per article). The article by McCann et al. (2020) was the most influential, with 114 citations.

Third, CG Lirios is the most productive author with 2 publications, while most other authors contributed one publication. This indicates that the research community in this field remains fragmented and that no dominant research group has yet emerged.

Fourth, the keyword co-occurrence analysis identified four research theme clusters: (1) institutional governance & higher education policy, with institutional governance as the central node; (2) sustainable development & adaptive innovation; (3) digital transformation; and (4) sustainability of institutional services. Overlay visualization confirms that most of these research themes are growing rapidly during the 2025–2026 period.

Fifth, five significant research gaps were identified, namely the scarcity of studies from the Southeast Asian and Indonesian contexts, the absence of longitudinal studies, the lack of a multi-stakeholder perspective, and the absence of research on the role of LLDikti as a facilitator of GUG following the merger. These gaps present significant opportunities for Indonesian researchers to make original contributions to the global literature.

The practical implications of these findings are highly relevant for the government—particularly the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikti Saintek) and LLDikti Region II—in designing more effective GUG support policies for private higher education institutions (PTS) that have undergone or will undergo mergers in accordance with Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 7 of 2020.

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