

CHAPTER 3

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH TRENDS: ALIGNMENT OF ACADEMIC OUTPUT WITH GLOBAL PROGRESS

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations' adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 marked a historic moment in global governance and collective human action. Building upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs constitute a universal framework of 17 goals and 169 associated targets designed to address interconnected challenges across social, economic, and environmental fields (SDGs, 2020). Their scope encompasses eradicating poverty and hunger, combating climate change, ensuring inclusive education, promoting gender equality, advancing sustainable energy, and protecting biodiversity (SDGs, 2025). Unlike their predecessors, the SDGs are distinguished by their universality and indivisibility, emphasizing that no country, regardless of income level, is exempt from responsibility (UNDP, 2025). Furthermore, they are explicitly framed as integrated goals, recognizing that progress in one field often depends on advances in others. For example, achieving universal education (SDG 4) is deeply connected to reducing inequalities (SDG 10), fostering inclusive growth (SDG 8), and enabling effective climate action (SDG 13) (Icfei Briefing Sheet, 2015; Regeringskansliet, 2015).

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knowledge from non-English academic ecosystems. Second, while the normalized scoring method and alignment framework offer valuable comparisons, they simplify complex phenomena such as research quality, local policy contexts, and institutional capacity for implementation. Third, the keyword-to-goal matching relied on a predefined set of 47 SDG-related terms, which—despite being systematically derived—may not fully capture the thematic nuances or interdisciplinary overlaps embedded in the broader SDG agenda. This limitation may restrict the comprehensiveness of goal-level classification and should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Future research should consider extending the analysis to include regional bibliometric databases and incorporating qualitative assessments of research impact, such as citations in policy documents or uptake in national strategies. Moreover, thematic deep dives into neglected SDGs—such as SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)—could yield richer insights into the structural factors limiting academic and policy attention. Finally, future work could explore the role of non-academic actors (e.g., NGOs, think tanks, and civil society) in bridging the research–implementation divide.

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