



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EAST JAVA INDONESIA: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW BASED ON SCOPUS DATABASE USING CRITICAL PARADIGM

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### ABSTRACT

*East Java, as the second-largest economy and hub of Eastern Indonesia, strives to improve its sustainable development indicators. Scholars affiliated with universities contribute to these efforts. The study aims to examine scholarly contributions indexed in the Scopus database through a critical paradigm using a bibliometric systematic review from 1994 to 2026. The study discovered that conference proceedings across various university affiliations publish the majority of articles with sustainable development keywords. The study has also found that the 231 themes are being synthesised into a 63 per cent focus on meso-macro foundational perspectives of business entities and country regulatory stakeholders and a lesser focus on micro-foundational perspectives on individual people-centred development. In addition, regarding the balance of economic, social, and environmental pillars, the study found that environmental and governance topics dominate the researcher's interest in sustainable development in the East Java context. Unfortunately, most authors in the East Java context overlook the philosophical underpinning, political context, and social justice equity as significant topics. Thus, by suggesting critical perspectives on sustainable development, a focus on individual behaviour, and multidisciplinary aspects of research, the authors can help the East Java government expedite sustainable development through research-based policies.*

**Keywords:** East Java, Sustainable Development, Bibliometric Systematic Review, Critical Paradigm

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### ABSTRAK

*Jawa Timur, sebagai ekonomi terbesar kedua dan pusat Indonesia Timur, berusaha untuk meningkatkan indikator pembangunan berkelanjutan. Para akademisi yang terafiliasi dengan universitas berkontribusi dalam upaya ini. Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti kontribusi ilmiah yang terindeks dalam basis data Scopus melalui paradigma kritis menggunakan tinjauan sistematis bibliometrik dari tahun 1994 hingga 2026. Studi ini menemukan bahwa prosiding konferensi mendominasi sebagian besar jenis artikel dengan kata kunci pembangunan berkelanjutan (sustainable development). Studi ini juga menemukan bahwa 231 tema yang disintesis menjadi fokus 63 persen pada perspektif dasar meso-makro dalam entitas bisnis dan pemangku kepentingan kebijakan negara, serta fokus yang lebih kecil dalam perspektif dasar mikro pada pengembangan yang berpusat pada individu. Selain itu, terkait dengan keseimbangan pilar ekonomi, sosial, dan lingkungan, studi ini menemukan*



*bahwa topik lingkungan dan tata kelola mendominasi minat peneliti dalam pembangunan berkelanjutan dalam konteks Jawa Timur. Namun demikian, sebagian besar penulis dalam konteks Jawa Timur mengabaikan dasar filosofis, konteks politik, dan keadilan sosial sebagai topik-topik penting. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menyarankan perspektif kritis tentang pembangunan berkelanjutan, fokus pada perilaku individu, dan aspek multidisipliner dari berbagai topik penelitian, sehingga para penulis dapat membantu pemerintah Jawa Timur mempercepat pembangunan berkelanjutan melalui kebijakan berbasis penelitian.*

**Kata Kunci:** Jawa Timur, Pembangunan Berkelanjutan, Tinjauan Sistematis Bibliometrik, Paradigma Kritis

**JEL:** Q01; Q56; O18; D72; A12

## Introduction

East Java has the second-largest potential and serves as an economic hub for Eastern Indonesia, with a large economy and population density that play a significant role in national and global development. The data released by [The Government of East Java Province \(2025b\)](#) indicated that the province contributed 14.4 per cent to the national GDP. The growing development of East Java province expands beyond the social and economic perimeters to sustain the well-being and targets of regional indicators. The optimism of East Java's development is institutionalised in the Regional Regulation of East Java Province Number 3 of 2025 concerning the East Java Provincial Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) 2025–2029, released by [The Government of East Java Province \(2025a\)](#). Despite the positive impact of development in many sectors, according to [Statistics Indonesia \(2025\)](#), East Java has made notable progress in poverty reduction, sanitation, economic recovery, and governance performance under the SDGs framework. Yet, persistent rural–urban inequality, food insecurity, informal employment, limited safe water access, and rising climate risks remain major structural challenges to achieving sustainable development.

Sustainable development as a global agenda and social balance have been topics of contentious debate and discord. The language sounds good, and the vision is appealing, but the focus of sustainable development should shift away from the economy and materialism and toward a framework that is globally responsible and focused on individuals ([Hartung & Di Fabio, 2024](#)). [Malik et al. \(2021\)](#) did a real-world study that showed that growth does not guarantee sustainable development because (1) sustainability is complex, (2) growth-performance indicators alone are not enough, and (3) enhancing welfare is more important for sustainable clustering than economic scale. [Ghosh & Pearson \(2025\)](#) also said that the slow progress toward achieving the SDGs as main goals means the economy needs to be fundamentally restructured so that the agenda can include only the most relevant parts from various paradigms applicable to the local context.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025 concludes that only 35% of SDG targets are on track, with nearly half progressing too slowly and 18% regressing, signalling a global development emergency driven by conflict, climate change, debt distress, and financing gaps ([United Nations, 2025](#)). Traditional GDP-centered economic development paradigms are insufficient for achieving sustainable development because they neglect social equity and environmental sustainability ([Pamella, 2024](#)). Thus, the study on how to critically examine sustainable development within the grounded context of SCOPUS-indexed journal articles, as found by [Vatananan-Thesenvitz et al. \(2019\)](#), might create an innovative breakthrough within

the topics of development. To understand the curated literature complexities, the study attempts to examine the methodological framework by Hollebeek et al. (2025), explaining the function of micro, meso, and macro foundational theories for examining the unit analysis of text within the individual / human, society (human interaction), and systemic context (government system). The strategies of such a bibliometric systematic review are to enhance a roadmap for producing high-impact scholarly work.

To map and critically assess Scopus-indexed research and their systematic arguments based on the selected review on sustainable development in East Java, the study examines the dominant themes, influential actors, collaboration networks, and discursive findings using a critical paradigm. Recent developments in East Java, Indonesia, have institutionalised sustainable development as a global agenda. To the best of our knowledge, there have been no critical studies addressing the possible contexts that could contribute to further development. Using a credible database, Scopus, the study aims to develop a critical direction for sustainable development in East Java as a government policy orientation. Moreover, the specific objectives comprise (1) identifying publication trends, leading journals, institutions, and collaboration patterns; (2) detecting thematic clusters and their evolution; (3) examining the critical context of sustainable development; and (4) assessing whether the research discourse leans toward policy implications of the critical sustainable development context. In reference to these four objectives, the study proposes four research questions.

RQ1: How has Scopus-indexed research on sustainable development in East Java evolved, and which institutions and authors dominate the knowledge production and collaboration networks?

RQ2: What are the major thematic clusters, and how do they relate to SDG domains? Which topics receive close attention, and which remain structurally under-researched?

RQ3: How does the literature frame “critical sustainable development”?

RQ4: What policy implications emerge, especially for the East Java context, on sustainable development?

## Literature Review

### *A Critical Examination of Sustainable Development*

Sustainable development must begin with the theoretical concept of development studies, which emphasises the reduction of rural and urban disparities and imbalances within a structural framework of equality (Chambers, 2013; Fiel & Fardhani, 2023; Yumnam et al., 2024; Pamella, 2024). The process of developing attainable sustainability arises from social movements that address the growing interest and contrasting behavioural attitudes within society, as well as individual orientations that can be reoriented, redirected, and readjusted for the highest public benefit (Handy, 1960). The sustainable development concept, by its definition, seeks to meet the holistic needs of future generations and sustain the well-being of balanced generations (Redclif, 2014 as cited in Simon, 2024).

Sustainable development is not merely about agendas and political formalisation, which are to be celebrated by the elite top community; instead, it is the responsibility of every individual in the community. According to Potter et al. (2018), people play a central role in a development process that goes beyond profit; both rational individuals and organisations are responsible for preserving nature and Earth’s habitats. In this context of sustainable development, Baker (2006) reiterated that the ladder of sustainable development must realign the hierarchical literacies from philosophical and ideal underpinnings, the common-

sense agenda within the community, the eccentricity of the current political and economic system, and the anthropocentrism of people's benefits.

However, the sustainable development agenda, as embodied in the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), seems very exclusive, with business and organisational interests abandoning the centrality of people's interests; see, for example, [Yumnam et al. \(2024\)](#). In reality, the economic power of the sustainable development agenda heavily depends on the interdisciplinary connection, innovation, entrepreneurship, and sociocultural approaches of institutional changes instead of a single economic perspective or environmental valuation of development ([Petrakis et al., 2020](#)).

### ***Trends in Bibliometric Analysis and Their Research Implications***

The number of bibliometric studies on sustainable development agendas and relevant topics has grown substantially, reflecting growing global attention across countries, themes, disciplines, networks, and scholarly contributions. [Yumnam et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that a comprehensive understanding of sustainable development supported by measurable and conceptual sound indicators through systematic bibliometric analysis can strengthen critical redirection, policy evaluation, and resource allocation. However, findings from bibliometric reviews indicate that the global discourse on sustainable development continues to prioritise innovation and technological advancement as the main drivers of economic growth and business performance, often aligned with measurable ranking indicators ([Vatananan-Thesenvitz et al., 2019](#)).

At the same time, education as a pillar of human development has gained attention in bibliometric studies. Evidence from Latin America shows persistent inequality across diverse populations, despite structural patterns of higher education concentration ([Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2023](#)). Through a systematic content analysis integrated into a bibliometric review, [Hageer \(2025\)](#) contends that climate action within the sustainable development agenda will not succeed as long as it remains predominantly techno-centric. The study proposes justice as a moral foundation, resilience as institutional capacity, community leadership as the core of implementation, and ethical technology as an enabling instrument.

Therefore, the direction of sustainable development should be critically evaluated through bibliometric analysis using credible database curation and rigorous research protocols, particularly in local and regional contexts such as East Java, Indonesia. Claims of successful sustainable development in East Java should thus be re-examined and reassessed in light of current critical conditions. [Marzi et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Passas \(2024\)](#) describe a procedure comprising designated and defined research problems, quality database, robust analytical procedures, and critical interpretation. In this regard, bibliometric studies serve as a comprehensive and flexible tool for systematic assessment and contextual evidence-based evaluation ([Hoang, 2025](#)).

## **Research Method**

### ***A Critical Perspective on Sustainable Development***

All governments around the world endorse sustainable development as a global agenda. However, in the context of indigenous and local communities, the concept remains an alien and theoretical western perspective, as explained by [Smith \(2020\)](#), who advocated and raised the concerns of decolonising methodologies without erasing the scientific traditions. Thus, the critical approaches and paradigms of bibliometric studies in the context of sustainable development might yield distinct and credible results for East Java's realities and aspirations.

Creswell and Poth (2016) and Seuring et al. (2020) emphasised the critical paradigm of research efforts beyond the technicalities of bibliometric examinations and tools. Moreover, Creswell and David (2023) ensured that critical and philosophical underpinnings overarch the research design of bibliometric protocols and subsets of their technicalities. The critical worldview or paradigm belongs to the researcher conducting a bibliometric study on sustainable development. The bibliometric analysis was a set of methodological stages and literature measurements, according to Donthu et al. (2021).

### ***Search Strings and Selected Articles for a Bibliometric Study on Sustainable Development***

For a typical systematic review with bibliometric analysis, the study follows the PRISMA update standard, which dictates the quality of the articles to be included in the examination. The PRISMA 2020 guideline modernises systematic review reporting to align with advances in methodology, transparency standards, and evidence synthesis practices by incorporating complete elements of quality articles (Page et al., 2021). The systematic review of selected articles harnesses procedural and descriptive exercises into analytically rigorous, theoretically grounded, multi-method investigations supported by a structured robustness framework consisting of content analysis, bibliometric or scientometric analysis, and meta-analysis (Lim, 2025). The most widely used bibliometric analysis integrates those multiple systematic literature review methods (Donthu et al., 2021; Lim, 2025). Hence, the study may continue with the collection of systematic literature in the area of sustainable development in East Java, Indonesia.

Search String:

( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( “sustainable development” ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( “East Java” ) )

The study discovered 267 articles written in English from 1994 to February 2026 using the credible and curated database of Scopus (Vatananan-Thesenvitz et al., 2019). Then, the study selects 108 articles on availability criteria and the highest citation portfolio as influential authorship for thematic analysis. The study concluded that it had the highest citation performance across 7 classified clusters. Those classifications consist of (1) sustainability & development context, (2) welfare & empowerment outcomes, (3) institutional behaviour & governance, (4) contextual/non-impact development studies, (5) enterprise development & economic performance, (6) human capital & financial literacy, and (7) inclusive finance & Islamic social finance. The internet databases on sustainable development practices group the collections of articles under the seven criteria. To critically examine a selection of bibliometric articles, the study identifies 24 articles for a critical systematic discussion through a Google search using the keywords “critics on sustainable development”. The study selects the most credible articles based on the authors’ track records, expertise, and publishers.

### ***Bibliometric Protocol, Thematic Content Analysis and Critical–Constructive Interpretation***

The study uses the systematic bibliometric review analysis developed by Marzi et al. (2025) and Passas (2024). The bibliometric protocols incorporate seven steps. First, the study defines research objectives along with research questions in the introduction. Second, literature search and data collection are predetermined with transparent search strings in the Scopus database. Third, the study conducts data cleaning, preparation, double-checking, and preprocessing with manual assessment and the help of Microsoft Excel software. Fourth, the selection of bibliometric techniques, referring to Donthu et al. (2021), comprises performance analysis, science mapping, and network analysis. Fifth, the bibliometric data analysis relies on Microsoft Excel and VOS viewer software. Sixth, processing with the bibliometric software, the visualisation of literature textual data is presented in a graph, keywords, and descriptive

statistics measurements. Seventh, the interpretation and reporting of bibliometric analysis are conducted with the interpretation of the results and preparation of a report detailing the findings and their implications through thematic content analysis.

In addition, this bibliometric study uses the framework designed by [Hollebeek et al. \(2025\)](#) to examine critical context, stipulating micro, meso, and macro foundations of the written subject being studied, ranging from individual behaviours or actions, constructs, or concepts to broad, high-abstraction theories. In this practical implementation, the topics of sustainable development are perceived in the smallest unit of analysis as individuals, organisational entities, societies, and constructs of the state through thematic content analysis. The frameworks by [Hoang \(2025\)](#) help to ensure the quality of bibliometric analysis through (1) data consistency across databases, (2) temporal alignment of publication periods, (3) transparent documentation of cleaning procedures, (4) cross-validation of results, and (5) reproducibility of workflows.

### **Finding and Discussion**

The study focuses on answering the aforementioned research objectives and their intended questions. This section is divided into comprehensive segments that include findings from bibliometric analysis, their associated properties, and a critical holistic discussion. The structures of the section are thematic and clearly written in the following subchapters, consisting of 4 subheadings with inferences highlighted from the logical thinking of the study framework and perspective.

The findings and discussion section of the article follows the guidelines of [Donthu et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Lim \(2025\)](#), which present the bibliometric results for the first and second research objectives and the subsequent systematic review for the third and fourth research objectives. In addition, the study applies a critical perspective on sustainable development, as outlined by [Smith \(2020\)](#), who emphasised decolonising methodologies and the logical consistency of scientific methods grounded in the locality's perspectives. The strategical unit of analysis as an approach to examine the textual data is submitted to [Hollebeek et al. \(2025\)](#), subsuming the critical framework of analytical thinking at individual, communal, and country levels.

### ***Identifying Publication trends, Leading Journals, Institutions, and Collaboration Patterns***

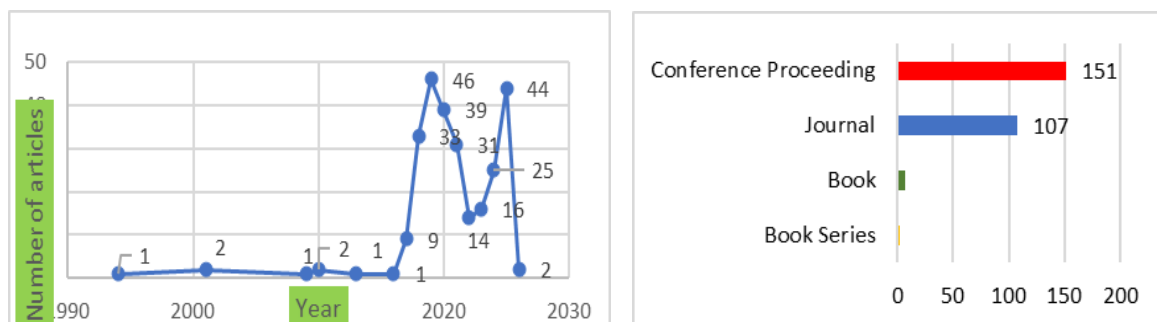
Data from the Scopus database on sustainable development keywords show a fluctuating increase and a surge from 2020 to 2025, as depicted in Figure 1 below. The effort to publish a far higher output of scholarly works has been in accordance with the Global Agenda on Sustainable Development ([United Nations, 2025](#)). The academic community saw the momentum of contribution and action through scientific contributions curated in a credible database. The number of articles published peaked in 2019 and 2025 with consecutive year publications of 46 and 44, accounting for a total of 267 articles across the years.

The field of study clusters based on sustainable development is dominated by science and engineering. The classification of subject areas based on the number of articles consists of Environmental Science (185), Earth and Planetary Sciences (133), Social Sciences (59), Energy (45), Engineering (25), and Agricultural and Biological Sciences (19). Those specific areas have been a concern of a sustainable agenda, as identified in the study by [Yumnam et al. \(2024\)](#).

The increasing number of documents produced and indexed in Scopus has predominantly been conference papers. This inclination is not expected to be associated with the highest quality attainment of publication standards. [Vatananan-Thesenvitz et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Lim \(2025\)](#) reiterated that highly monitored, peer-reviewed academic journals determine

the quality of publications. Based on the current data, 151 of 267 publications were categorised as conference proceedings.

Most of the article’s conferences are published in (1) IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science (104 articles), (2) E3s Web of Conferences (16 articles), and (3) AIP Conference Proceedings (10 articles). Despite transparent, well-defined standards, the credibility of conference papers remains lower than that of academic journals. International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning and Sustainability Switzerland has become the higher-level publication for sustainable development articles in East Java, Indonesia, with reputable publication indicators and performances. The most frequent keywords being depicted in the Scopus database range from ‘Sustainable Development’ (175 times), ‘Indonesia’ (69 times), ‘Planning’ (51 times), ‘East Java’ (41 times), ‘Environmental Protection’ (23 times), and ‘Agriculture’ (22 times). Unfortunately, the primary attention has not focused on the most micro-foundational word for individual action in sustainable development, as explained by [Hollebeek et al. \(2025\)](#).



Source: Scopus Database, 2026

**Figure 1: Scopus-Indexed Publications on Sustainable Development in East Java**

Many researchers and authors associated with top East Java universities and neighbouring countries have made sustainable development their central focus. Based on the Scopus data tabulation and its inferences (Table 1), various experienced researchers and newly trained figures produce the article with the keywords and areas of sustainable development in East Java. The figure above shows that authors and researchers with Scopus and Google Scholar identification, ranging from junior to senior experts, contribute to the accumulation of indexed databases in East Java, Indonesia.

Sustainable development has been a multidisciplinary subject that attracts collaboration among institutions and experts. According to [Pamella \(2024\)](#) and [Ghosh and Pearson \(2025\)](#), sustainable development issues move beyond the single perspective of traditional economic centralities based on gross domestic product and uphold the balance of people, prosperity, planet, and partnership. As a consequence, the consistent efforts require and engage various disciplinary strategies across institutions and experiences, working for a systematic global agenda ([Hartung & Di Fabio, 2024](#)).

The networking of authors, researchers, and scholars interested in sustainable development in East Java creates scholarly circles and research groups. The indication is depicted in the figure attached in the appendices. The Vos Viewer results support the identification of top authors through co-authorship networks, providing an overlay visualisation of personalised areas of study. Issues of sustainable development foster cross-reliance and understanding toward achieving the 2030 target ([Yumnam et al., 2024](#)).

**Table 1: Leading Authors in Sustainable Development Research in East Java, Indonesia**

No	Author Names	Publication (Sustainable Development in East Java)	Scopus Document	Scopus Citation	Scopus H-index	Google Scholar H-index	Affiliations
1	Aulia, B.U.	6	16	16	2	10	Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November
2	Santoso, E.B.	6	35	53	5	19	Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November
3	Hakim, L.	4	123	524	13	36	Brawijaya University
4	Isdianto, A.	4	66	208	7	15	Brawijaya University
5	Soemarno	4	102	499	13	28	Brawijaya University
6	Bachri, S.	3	103	903	15	28	Universitas Negeri Malang
7	Fatahillah, E.R.	3	4	22	3	3	Brawijaya University
8	Handayani, S.	3	9	14	2	9	Universitas Negeri Malang
9	Hasyim, A.W.	3	21	128	5	11	Brawijaya University
10	Retnoningsih, D.	3	15	92	5	11	Brawijaya University
11	Sidi, F.	3	123	1069	16	23	Universiti Putra Malaysia
12	Sumarmi	3	178	1590	23	55	Universitas Negeri Malang
13	Zikra, M.	3	33	83	5	9	Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November

Source: Scopus Database, 2026

This mission aligns with the development parameters established by the respective institutions to achieve impactful development outcomes for local communities ([Statistics Indonesia, 2025](#); [The Government of East Java Province, 2025b, 2025a](#)). The development must be delivered to the communities. However, the focus on elitist, higher-education-centred sustainable development has not led to significant improvements. It has not translated into the well-being of indicators of primary development, such as health conditions, equal education, and economic opportunities. This factual argument can refer to the indicators by the [United Nations \(2025\)](#), opinions proposed by [Mathai et al. \(2021\)](#), and SDGs ranked by [Times Higher Institution \(2026\)](#). Despite the achievable parameters and targets, such indicators require consistent improvement ([Statistics Indonesia, 2025](#); [The Government of East Java Province, 2025a, 2025b](#)). The center of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is institutionalised as a manifestation of their agenda by policymakers, with support from higher education institutions ([United Nations, 2025](#)).

The Scopus database on sustainable development in the East Java context demonstrates the domination of leading institutional universities within the province and on Java Island. The strategic way to address the issues starts with the mounting and challenging problems societies face that affect the intellectual and academic functioning of higher education institutions. Table 2 shows the contributing institutions to sustainable development in the Scopus database. [Vatananan-Thesenvitz et al. \(2019\)](#) explicated innovative action through technological breakthroughs and business model redevelopment, powering sustainable development in societies.

In the context of fundamental initiatives for sustainable development, [Pedraja-Rejas et al. \(2023\)](#) highlighted the role of education and its associated structural changes in shaping the sustainability of society, business, and the environment through research and collaborative networks. The extreme actions taken on the sustainable development agenda foster a shared understanding among the broader academic community regarding the reality of ongoing

climate change. Hageer (2025) argued that the effectiveness of preventive action and the reliable solution of climate change might require a transdisciplinary understanding grounded in local knowledge, inclusive governance, and active participatory involvement. Leading universities, as illustrated in Table 2, can fulfil these strategic roles through the participation of institutionally affiliated authors. Unfortunately, the critical impacts of collaborative action on sustainable development are concentrated in a few dominant, resourceful, and prestigious universities, leaving behind underprivileged institutions that never make the global list.

**Table 2: Institutional Affiliations of Authors and SDG University Rankings in Sustainable Development Research in East Java**

No	Institutional Affiliations of Authors in Sustainable Development Research in East Java	Number of Authors	University Impact Rankings 2025 (SDGs indicator)
1	Brawijaya University	54	401-600
2	Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember	40	201-300
3	Universitas Airlangga	16	9
4	Universitas Negeri Malang	16	601-800
5	Universitas Gadjah Mada	12	82
6	IPB University	11	101-200
7	Universitas Negeri Surabaya	11	601-800
8	Universitas Sebelas Maret	9	301-400
9	Universitas Indonesia	6	30
10	Institut Teknologi Bandung	6	201-300
11	Universitas Diponegoro	6	301-400
12	Universitas Jember	6	1001-1500

Source: Scopus Database and Times Higher Education, 2026

The surprising data on articles indexed in Scopus highlight the dominance of conference papers from leading universities in East Java, which does not align with the sustainable development indicators used in global rankings that focus on SDG criteria. The Times Higher Institution (2026) processes and announces the regular world university ranking based on 17 sustainable development indicators, as shown in Table 2. The comparative data in Table 2 shows that the productive output of sustainable development topics in East Java does not improve the world's global ranking. Universitas Airlangga, with 16 Scopus-indexed publications, ranked third, rising to 9 top-world ranks.

Meanwhile, many producing universities in East Java on sustainable development topics are not included in the top list of institutions. The sustainable development objective and its SDGs agenda should be democratized for communities, with individual targets and entities, such as the strategy of Universitas Airlangga, aiming for higher global indicators with fewer Scopus documents. The Times Higher Institution (2026) explains that the metrics are calculated from publications, policy contributions, and community outreach. The ideas on democratization and broader justice perspectives are asserted by the need for recreation of sustainable development into the local context and its participation from the community by involving more inclusive human-centered actions. Smith (2020) asserts the need to recreate sustainable development within local contexts, emphasizing the importance of community participation through more inclusive, human-centered actions, as discussed in ideas on democratisation and broader justice perspectives (Mensah, 2019; UNDP, 2023).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) functioning as university rankings have accommodated the aspirations of Baker (2006), Chambers (2013), Petrakis et al. (2020), Potter

et al. (2018), and Redclif (2014) as cited in Simon (2024) contributing to measurable impact on local communities. However, sustainable development as a research topic has still neglected the people-centred focus that it should have. This indicative claim is reflected in Scopus-based trending articles that focus on topics and keywords that do not address the critical perspective of how SDGs affect individual well-beings. The nearest topics on the human individual as an evolving result refer to the keywords like 'poverty alleviation', 'stunting', 'pregnancy', and 'sanitation', and others as depicted in the figure in the appendices.

The microfoundational perspective by Hollebeek et al. (2025) emphasises that the SDGs agenda or sustainable development programme can affect and improve individual behaviours and actions across social, cultural, and economic contexts. In fact, most papers indexed in Scopus have not addressed these topics and instead have focused on meso- and macrofoundational dimensions, such as community, society, environment, and governing institutions. These factual realities are evident in the frequency of keywords in the appendices and in the most-cited papers and journals. Scopus-indexed articles tend to focus more on meso- and macrofoundational perspectives, as noted by Hollebeek et al. (2025). Considering sustainable development indicators by the United Nations (2025), which focus on the people with 17 agendas as micro, meso, and macro foundational principles, and place the people as the centre of gravity and their activities.

### ***Detecting Thematic Clusters and Their Evolution***

Co-occurrence portraits with a minimum of 2 occurrences of the keyword, producing 231 clusters calculated by VOS viewer, explain the concept of sustainable development in East Java and then evolve into various aspects of related fields. This progress shows the growing and complex attention from the global research community in the East Java context. As explained in the United Nations (2025), SDGs document, Figure 2 demonstrates that sustainable development has evolved and proliferated into far broader, transformative ideas and communal efforts across transdisciplinary dimensions. Mensah (2019) conducted a comprehensive systematic review, accentuating that evolving sustainable development could be achieved through environmental integrity, economic viability, and social equity, relying on integrated and responsible human action across generations.

The centrality of individual human behavior and action, which is overlooked by current trends of published articles in the Scopus database, is supported by the consistency with previous theoretical and philosophical studies by Baker (2006), Petrakis et al. (2020), and Potter et al. (2018). In addition, the finding of a systematic review on sustainable development by Mensah (2019) supports the more recent output of the Vos Viewer network visualization in Figure 2, which shows the richly evolving topic across disciplinary subjects. The framework developed by Hollebeek et al. (2025) corroborates Mensah's (2019) findings based on the concentration of human actors for theoretical development through systematic review.

The most cited article reveals a strong interest in business organisations, environmental issues, and social balance as trending topics on sustainable development. The inclined studies indicate that findings similar to those of Mensah (2019) and Yumnam et al. (2024) emphasise the balanced coexistence among social, economic, and environmental factors as a sustainability equilibrium. A sustainable development research study based on the Scopus database in East Java finds that the most cited article is "The role of green innovation between green market orientation and business performance: its implication for open innovation" by Tjahjadi et al. (2020). The study concluded that the positioning and branding of green marketing innovation and orientation for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) could improve business performance by aligning with environmental factors.



The thematic discussions of seven clusters are consistently subsumed in the framework of [Hollebeek et al. \(2025\)](#) and induce the classification into two levels of analysis. First, the micro foundational level focuses on the typical unit of analysis: clients, consumers, households, and individuals. Based on the author's calculations from 267 articles, 37 per cent of these discuss sustainable development in East Java in the context of individual behaviour. Second, the meso-macro foundational level in the broader context focuses on business entities, government institutions, and regulatory systems. The researcher's calculations indicate that the majority of these numbers 63 percent—focus on sustainable development at the organisational level in East Java. Despite the potential similarity, the study reads and concludes from the unit of analysis's perspectives to determine the level. Thus, the sustainable development context, as suggested by [Baker \(2006\)](#), [Potter et al. \(2018\)](#), [Mensah \(2019\)](#), [Ghosh and Pearson \(2025\)](#), fosters greater involvement in people-centred activities. This bibliometric future strategy can align with university rankings by the [Times Higher Institution \(2026\)](#) and Universitas Airlangga, which pursue the SDGs beyond indexed Scopus documents.

The micro-, meso-, and macro foundation, as a unit of analysis in sustainable development, proposed by [Hollebeek et al. \(2025\)](#), still refers to thematic criteria that categorise economic, social, and environmental aspects, merging the sustainability definitions proposed by [Luukkanen et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Mensah \(2019\)](#). The practical application of selected studies reveals interrelatedness, connectivity, and complementarity among these thematic classifications. Thus, this study focuses on and realigns the analysis with the initial definition embedded in the unit of analysis. The microfoundation of sustainable development in East Java has been addressing the economic issues of green marketing for SMS's individual owner profitability through research by [Tjahjadi et al. \(2020\)](#) and the beneficial role of society empowerment in ecotourism, developed by [Wikantiyoso et al. \(2021\)](#). Meanwhile, the educational concern for sustainable development was examined by [Fiel and Fardhani \(2023\)](#), who stated that innovative botanical education could enhance students' responsibility for environmental issues.

The sustainable development was also explicated by Islamic finance through family awareness on poverty alleviation from active family contribution ([Astutik et al., 2022](#)). On the other hand, the meso- and macro-foundations address environmental issues related to industrial emissions. [Muryani et al. \(2023\)](#) attempted to deliberate the solution with policymakers through strong regulatory leadership, improved environmental knowledge, infrastructure investment, and institutional coordination. In addition, [Mulyati and Geldermann \(2017\)](#) brought about the sustainable and resilient business of seaweed through the implementation of risk assessment with impactful targets. [Riska Farisa et al. \(2019\)](#) argued that social participation, supported by government budgets and facilitated by community social capital, could develop a sustainable ecotourism economy at the lower levels of the government system, responding to sustainable development.

### ***Examining The Critical Context of Sustainable Development***

The critical explanations of sustainable development based on the current discussion are classified into five themes consisting of (1) conceptual and theoretical argumentation, (2) ecological and environmental issues, (3) political economy understanding, (4) social justice and equity, and (5) institutional and governance stance. Those five perspectives emerge from the long historical practices of sustainable development. In addition, examining issues in sustainable development should employ multidimensional windows, lenses, and approaches ([Luukkanen et al., 2024](#)). Philosophically, the critics of sustainable development departed from [Handy \(1960\)](#) and [Smith \(2020\)](#), encouraging the global agenda that was supposed to be examined in

the worldview of local communities. Consistently, such criticism uses the framework by Baker (2006), Potter et al. (2018), Hollebeek et al. (2025), and Ghosh and Pearson (2025), focusing on people, individual behaviour, and action along with their surrounding circles in society as the primary target of impactful sustainable development.

The five criticisms on sustainable development can be highlighted in the following sentences. The foundational pillar of sustainable development lacks conceptual clarity and structural analysis, which leads to theoretical weaknesses and risks turning it into a rhetorical compromise rather than a transformative framework for inclusive development (Lélé, 1991). Ecological limits account for the scarcity of resources necessary for humans to live in decent conditions, while also acknowledging the restricted capabilities of our planet and ecosystems (Griebler et al., 2025). A global agenda imposes sustainable development as a political transformation within structural projects, rather than a technical optimisation problem (Mathai et al., 2021). The UNDP (2023) addressed sustainable development in its legal documentation of the global agenda on social justice and equity to overcome concrete issues and problems in society, rather than merely focusing on abstract, peripheral matters and document-based indicators. In the context of institutional governance, Park and Park (2024) stated that sustainable development through the SDGs represents an agenda that requires normative political negotiation and adaptation within institutions.

The study examines 267 articles published in the Scopus database on sustainable development in East Java, Indonesia. It constructs critical systematic perspectives based on 24 selected articles, along with the framework of the study. To better understand, the study refers to the co-occurrence of network visualisation in the Vos viewer output and the list of the Scopus database. First, the majority of 267 articles have insufficiently demonstrated the philosophical underpinning, as in studies by Lélé (1991) and Daly (1990), for addressing the issues of sustainable development, beyond their global agenda implementation. Second, as mentioned earlier, the environment plays a significant role in sustainable development (Luukkanen et al., 2024; Mensah, 2019); however, most of the studies examined focus on these problems in relation to other social connections within the context of East Java. Third, no studies among the 267 selected as part of the bibliometric examination discussed the political context of sustainable development in East Java, Indonesia, as did Zahedi (2019) and Mathai et al. (2021). Fourth, the issues of social justice and equity as social preconditions for implementing sustainable development programs have not been addressed by most of the 267 selected articles, as noted by the UNDP (2023). Fifth, issues related to governance and its associated topics were mentioned in some studies based on a selected set of 267 articles. For example, Muryani et al. (2023) concluded that an institutionally driven approach—supported by education and infrastructure—offers the most practical pathway toward sustainable industrial transformation. Lestari et al. (2021) further clarified that institutional pressures, rather than internal motivation, drive green innovation among SMEs. Thus, environmental and governance issues have been the focus of critical discussion in 267 selected articles, in accordance with five thematic critiques of sustainable development in East Java, Indonesia. The Times Higher Institution (2026) and United Nations (2025) outline the 17 concrete SDG indicators. However, top universities in East Java have not fully exposed their researchers to these 17 indicators.

### ***Assessing Whether the Research Discourse Leans Toward Policy Implications of the Critical Sustainable Development Context***

The study comprises policy implications inferred and synthesised from research questions 1–3, with a central focus on non-capturable areas, the expansion of identification

within the unit of analysis, a micro-foundational perspective on individual behaviour, and multidisciplinary approaches to mounting problems. To create the implication, the study draws on comprehensive existing data through bibliometric analysis and an intuitive systematic review. First, the research topic of sustainable development in East Java should move beyond economic considerations and business organisations to a human-centered focus. The future study must uphold the framework of decolonisation of research by [Smith \(2020\)](#), [Handy \(1960\)](#), and [Mensah \(2019\)](#) that voices the local native perspective on the development agenda. Second, in terms of unit analysis, people-centred SDG individual behaviour and action should be prioritised to understand and pursue further sustainable development in East Java, as recommended by [Mensah \(2019\)](#), [Hartung and Di Fabio \(2024\)](#), and [Ghosh & Pearson \(2025\)](#). Besides, aligning with people's centrality, microfoundational perspectives, and individual psychological behaviour in sustainable development approaches by [Hollebeek et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Hartung and Di Fabio \(2024\)](#). Third, following both stages, research trends on sustainable development in East Java should be aligned with the real mounting SDGs problems through multidisciplinary approaches like university ranking agenda by [Times Higher Institution \(2026\)](#); human orientation by [Hageer \(2025\)](#), [Pedraja-Rejas et al. \(2023\)](#), [Vatananan-Thesenvitz et al. \(2019\)](#); and open exploration by [Luukkanen et al. \(2024\)](#). Thus, by combining three approaches to policy implications, sustainable development in East Java can yield greater impact and strengthen researchers' understanding of local contexts in East Indonesia to address current problems. The designated sustainable indicator can improve and support the government of East Java, Indonesia.

## Conclusions

The study concludes that researchers and authors should expand beyond the current trajectory of scientific progress by employing critical perspectives and a strategic unit of analysis to examine the sustainable development database indexed in Scopus in East Java. Firstly, conference papers dominate the sustainable development papers published in Scopus from East Java, despite the varied expertise and multidisciplinary backgrounds of the authors. IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science and E3S Web of Conferences have become the primary target of Scopus publication in the East Java context. The leading institutions ranked by the Scopus database are Brawijaya University, Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November, and Universitas Airlangga. In addition, the growing collaborative networks of researchers and institutional supports facilitate sustainable development in East Java toward more inclusive subjects. However, existing trends in sustainable development research in East Java have not aimed to achieve all 17 SDG indicators. Additionally, the focus of such research tends to be on meso- and macrofoundational perspectives, as well as on the viewpoints of business entities, policymakers, and government regarding sustainable development. As a result, the critical examination of the people-centred aspects of sustainable development in East Java, particularly from a microfoundational perspective, has not advanced towards meeting the 17 SDG standards.

In light of that reality, the study also identified thematic clusters and their evolution, revealing 231 themes that encompass broader, transformative ideas and communal efforts across transdisciplinary dimensions. However, the current inclination pays less attention to the human, or individual, center of sustainable development. The articles most cited primarily discuss business organisations, environmental issues, and their social impacts. The study, based on recommendations from an internet application on sustainable development via a Google application, summarises the entire thematic clusters into two primary criteria consisting of a micro foundational level with an individual-based unit of analysis and a meso and macro foundational level focusing on business entities and country regulatory institutions. Meso-

macro criteria dominate most themes, accounting for 63 per cent, while micro individual domination accounts for 37 per cent. The study comprehensively critiques the sustainable development in East Java from five perspectives. The 267 most selected articles lack (1) foundational philosophy subjects, (2) political context, and (3) social equality arguments. The existing database deliberates on the environmental and governance aspects of sustainable development in East Java. Eventually, the lesson learnt for future policy implementation for sustainable development in East Java should apply creative and critical efforts, concentrate on individual or people-centred research, and explore multidisciplinary approaches to better understand the reality of local contextual phenomena for creating new knowledge with a beneficial impact on the community, supporting the East Java government. Hence, through this critical discussion, policymakers can reorient the sustainable development agenda with a philosophical context, a micro-perspective of human-centeredness, and the democratisation of the entire SDG development.

## **Declaration**

### ***Authors' Contributions***

**Ahmad Hudaifah** contributes to conceptualisation, methodology design, data collection, formal analysis, writing (original draft and revisions), supervision, project administration, and funding acquisition.

**Shochrul Rohmatul Ajija** works for data collection, formal analysis, writing (original draft and revisions), project administration, and funding acquisition.

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### ***Informed Consent Statement***

“Not applicable”: The study does not involve human participants, data, or biological material

### ***Conflict of Interest***

“The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.”

### ***Availability of Data and Materials***

The data can be accessed in [www.scopus.com](http://www.scopus.com)

### ***Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)***

“The author(s) declare that AI tools, namely Quill Bot and Grammarly, were used for language editing, clarity, and grammar accuracy. In addition, ChatGPT was used to organise the clarity of Vos Viewer and the definitions of bibliometric data. All results, analyses, and conclusions remain the full responsibility of the author(s).”

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## Appendices

**Table 3: Leading Scopus-Indexed Publications on Sustainable Development in East Java**

No	Source of Publication (Journal and Conference Proceeding)	Number of Articles	Scopus Coverage	Cite Score	SJR	SNIP	Publishers
1	Iop Conference Series Earth and Environmental Science	104	2010-2026	1.3	0.214	0.335	Institute of Physics Publishing
2	E3s Web of Conferences	16	2013-2025	1.1	0.205	0.363	EDP Sciences
3	Aip Conference Proceedings	10	1973-2026	0.5	0.153	0.204	American Institute of Physics
4	International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning	9	2006-2025	2.6	0.284	0.637	International Information and Engineering Technology Association
5	Sustainability Switzerland	5	2009-2026	7.7	0.688	1.113	Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (MDPI)
6	Ecology Environment and Conservation	4		0.6	0.149	0.266	EM International
7	Proceedings International Association for Hydro Environment Engineering and Research IAHR Asia Pacific Division Apd Congress Multi Perspective Water for Sustainable Development IAHR Apd 2018	4			Unavailable		
8	Biodiversitas	3	2014-2025	3.1	0.366	0.757	Biology department, Sebelas Maret University Surakarta
9	Environmental Research Engineering and Management	3	2-15-2025	2.4	0.308	0.410	Kaunas University of Technology
10	Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites	3	2013-2016	3.7	0.296	0.664	Editura Universitatii din Oradea

Source: Scopus Database, 2026



**Table 4: “Most Cited Article on Sustainable Development in East Java”**

No	Names	Titles	Years	Cited by
1	Tjahjadi, B.; Soewarno, N.; Hariyati, H.; Nasihatun Nafidah, L.N.; Kustiningsih, N.; Nadyaningrum, V.	The role of green innovation between green market orientation and business performance: its implication for open innovation	2020	112
2	Mulyati, H.; Geldermann, J.	Managing risks in the Indonesian seaweed supply chain	2017	55
3	Achmad, F.; Prambudia, Y.; Rumanti, A.A.	Sustainable Tourism Industry Development: A Collaborative Model of Open Innovation, Stakeholders, and Support System Facilities	2023	40
4	Hakim, L.; Soemarno, S.	Biodiversity conservation, community development and geotourism development in Bromo-Tengger-Semeru-Arjuno biosphere reserve, East Java	2017	37
5	Fiel'Ardh, K.; Fardhani, I.; Fujii, H.	Integrating Perspectives from Education for Sustainable Development to Foster Plant Awareness among Trainee Science Teachers: A Mixed Methods Study	2023	33
6	Lestari, E.R.; Dania, W.A.P.; Indriani, C.; Firdausyi, I.A.	The impact of customer pressure and the environmental regulation on green innovation performance	2021	31
7	Sirait, M.	Cleaner production options for reducing industrial waste: The case of batik industry in Malang, East Java-Indonesia	2018	30
8	Hermawati, W.; Ririh, K.R.; Ariyani, L.; Helmi, R.L.; Rosaira, I.	Sustainable and green energy development to support women's empowerment in rural areas of Indonesia: Case of micro-hydro power implementation	2023	29
9	Wikantiyoso, R.; Cahyaningsih, D.S.; Sulaksono, A.G.; Widayati, S.; Poerwoningsih, D.; Triyosoputri, E.	Development of Sustainable Community-Based Tourism in Kampong Grangsil, Jambangan Village, Dampit District, Malang Regency	2021	27

Source: Scopus Database, 2026