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From Redistribution to Recognition? Two Decades of Research on Education and Social Inequality in Indigenous Communities

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous peoples face persistent educational inequality, yet how research understands that inequality has changed. This study maps two decades of research on education and social inequality in Indigenous communities and asks whether the field has moved from concerns of redistribution towards concerns of recognition, in Nancy Fraser's terms. A bibliometric analysis was conducted on 461 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2000 and 2025, combining performance analysis, author-keyword co-occurrence mapping in VOSviewer, and dictionary-based coding of eight inequality dimensions. Output grew by about 10.5% per year, and 46% of articles appeared in 2021–2025. Knowledge production is concentrated: 77% of articles involve authors from Australia, the United States, Canada or New Zealand, these articles are cited more often, and Southeast Asia contributes 2.8%. Eight thematic clusters emerged, centred on access and equity in higher education, racism and identity, cultural safety in professional education, and Indigenous knowledge and decolonisation. Articles framing inequality only in redistributive terms fell from 42.7% before 2018 to 27.2% after, while recognition-only articles rose from 18.7% to 33.8% and articles combining both rose to 29.7%. The rise of recognition was robust across five coding specifications; an apparent decline in attention to socioeconomic disadvantage was not. The field has added recognition to its agenda more than it has abandoned redistribution, but its growth is concentrated in recognition, and its concepts are developed largely in settler-colonial states. Research that integrates redistribution, recognition and representation, led from under-represented Indigenous contexts, is needed.

KEYWORDS

Bibliometric analysis; educational inequality; Indigenous education; redistribution and recognition; social justice.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous peoples remain among the most educationally disadvantaged groups in almost every country where they live. They number more than 476 million people across some 90 countries, around 70% of them in Asia and the Pacific (ILO, 2019). Across this diversity, the pattern is consistent: lower enrolment and completion (Joshi, 2010; Pechenkina et al., 2011), lower measured achievement (Delprato et al., 2022; Song et al., 2014), and schooling that has historically been used to assimilate rather than to serve Indigenous communities (UN DESA, 2017).

How researchers understand this disadvantage shapes what policy tries to fix. For much of the twentieth century, Indigenous educational inequality was framed as a deficit located

in learners, families and communities, to be closed through remedial intervention, a framing that persists in teachers deficit discourses (Stacey, 2022) and in culturalist approaches that homogenise Indigeneity against a dominant norm (Keddie et al., 2013). From the 1990s, scholars increasingly located it in schools and states instead: in racism within classrooms and universities (Bailey, 2016; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Chen, 2025; Moodie et al., 2019), in curricula and languages of instruction that exclude Indigenous knowledge (Battiste, 2013; Makhanya & Zibane, 2020; Veñegas et al., 2025), and in the colonial structures and governance of schooling itself (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Zhang, 2024). These framings imply different remedies. A gap in resources calls for redistribution; a failure to value Indigenous identities and knowledge calls for recognition.

Nancy Fraser's theory of justice gives this distinction analytical precision. Fraser (1995) argued that late-twentieth-century struggles for justice had shifted from claims for the redistribution of economic goods towards claims for the recognition of cultural identity, and warned that recognition risked displacing rather than complementing redistribution. She later added a third dimension, representation, concerning who has political voice in decisions (Fraser, 2008). Indigenous education is a field in which all three dimensions are at stake at once. Indigenous learners are disproportionately poor, their languages and knowledge have been systematically devalued, and their communities have often been excluded from governing the schools their children attend.

Fraser's framework has already proved useful in single settings. Webb (2015) used it to show that Indigenous schooling grants in Chile offered Mapuche pupils some redistribution while undermining recognition. Oyarzún et al. (2017) found that state policy for Indigenous higher education in Mexico and Brazil is mainly redistributive, while recognition-based initiatives come largely from autonomous Indigenous organisations. Keddie (2013) examined how one Australian school addressed the economic, cultural and political dimensions of Indigenous girls' disadvantage, and Del Pino et al. (2025) applied the recognition approach to language in a Mapuce school.

The field has grown rapidly, but its overall shape has not been mapped. Existing reviews are largely national (for example, Australia: Coombs et al., 2025; Moodie et al., 2019) or focus on one sector or dimension of inequality, such as racism, higher-education participation or vocational education (Joncas et al., 2023). The Fraserian studies above, in turn, analyse single countries or institutions. No study has examined, across countries and over time, which forms of inequality the research addresses and whose research defines the field. This matters for two reasons. First, if attention has moved from redistribution to recognition, material disadvantage may be under-studied precisely as it persists. Second, if knowledge is produced mainly in a few settler-colonial states, the concepts that travel to other Indigenous contexts, including those of Asia, Africa and Latin America, may not fit them.

This study addresses that gap with a bibliometric analysis of 461 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2000 and 2025. It asks four questions:

1. How has research on education and social inequality in Indigenous communities developed in volume and geography?
2. Which journals and works have shaped the field?
3. What thematic structure emerges from author-keyword co-occurrence?
4. Which dimensions of inequality does the research address, and has the field moved from redistribution towards recognition?

The study makes three contributions. It provides the first cross-national map of this literature. It operationalises Fraser's framework to trace how the meaning of educational inequality has changed in the field. And it documents the geographical concentration of

knowledge production, identifying the Indigenous contexts, including Southeast Asia, where evidence is thinnest.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study combines performance analysis and science mapping, the two core techniques of bibliometric research (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). Performance analysis describes the volume, geography and impact of the field. Science mapping identifies its intellectual structure through keyword co-occurrence. A dictionary-based content analysis was added to trace how inequality itself is framed, which descriptive bibliometrics alone cannot show. The four research questions stated at the end of the Introduction guided the analysis.

Data Source and Search Strategy

Scopus was selected for its broad coverage of peer-reviewed social science journals and its standardised export of affiliation, keyword and citation fields. The search was run on 22 October 2026. The query required Indigenous-identity terms and education terms in the article title, and inequality terms in the title, abstract or keywords:

> TITLE (“indigenous” OR “aboriginal” OR “first nations” OR “tribal” OR “native American” OR “maori”) AND TITLE (“education” OR “school” OR “student”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“inequality” OR “inequit” OR “disparit” OR “exclusion” OR “marginali” OR “disadvantage” OR “social justice” OR “educational access” OR “access to education”) AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND DOCTYPE (ar) AND LANGUAGE (english) AND SUBJAREA (soci)

Restricting the Indigenous and education terms to the title was a deliberate precision choice. An initial title-abstract-keyword version returned 6,957 records, most of which mentioned Indigenous peoples or schooling only in passing. The title restriction keeps studies in which Indigenous education is the object of analysis, at the cost of missing studies that address the topic without naming it in the title (see the limitations in the Conclusion).

Screening

The search returned 896 records. Limiting to journal articles left 655, to English-language publications 619, and to the Social Sciences subject area 481. All 481 records had abstracts, and none were duplicates.

Titles and abstracts were then screened against one inclusion rule: the study must examine education as an arena of social inequality for Indigenous peoples. Twenty records were excluded. Eighteen treated a health or clinical outcome as the object of study, with schooling serving only as a setting or covariate (for example, smoking behaviour, oral health, vaccination status or nutrition). Two did not concern Indigenous peoples’ education; the search terms appeared incidentally. Thirty-nine studies of health-professions education were retained because they examine Indigenous students’ access, retention or experience in higher education, and they were flagged for sensitivity checking. Screening was conducted by [AUTHOR] and verified by [AUTHOR]; disagreements were resolved by discussion. The final corpus comprises 461 articles (Table 1).

Table 1. Record selection stages

Stage	Criterion	Records	Removed
Identification	Query, 2000-2025	896	-
Filter 1	Document type: article	655	241
Filter 2	Language: English	619	36
Filter 3	Subject area: Social Sciences	481	138
Screening	Education as arena of Indigenous inequality	461	20

Data Preparation

Author keywords were harmonised with a thesaurus that merged spelling variants (*decolonisation/decolonization*), singular and plural forms (*indigenous knowledge/knowledges*) and near-synonyms (*university/higher education*). Countries were extracted from each author affiliation; a document was counted once for every country that appeared among its authors, and separately by the first author's country.

Analytical Procedures

Performance analysis. Annual output, country productivity, citations per document, source productivity and the most cited works were computed. The corpus was divided into three periods for comparison: 2000-2010 (n = 43), 2011–2017 (n = 128) and 2018–2025 (n = 290). The cut points separate the field's early phase from its growth phase and isolate the most recent eight years, in which output more than doubled.

Keyword co-occurrence. A co-occurrence map of author keywords was built in VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010) using full counting and a minimum of four occurrences per keyword. A thesaurus file merged the variants described under Data preparation. Search terms and country or group names (for example *indigenous education*, *aboriginal*, *australia*) were excluded, because they co-occur with almost every record by design and would obscure thematic structure; topical compounds such as *indigenous knowledge* and *indigenous languages* were retained. Clusters were identified with VOSviewer's default clustering technique, and the overlay visualisation was used to show each keyword's average publication year. Descriptive indicators and the dictionary coding were computed in Python with pandas.

Inequality dimensions. Each article's title, abstract and author keywords were coded against a dictionary of eight inequality dimensions: access and participation; achievement gaps; socioeconomic disadvantage; racism and discrimination; epistemic and linguistic injustice; structural and policy conditions; gender and intersectionality; and school discipline and exclusion. An article could be coded to several dimensions. The same procedure coded the education level examined. Full dictionaries are provided in the supplementary material.

The dimensions were then grouped using Fraser's distinction between claims for redistribution and claims for recognition (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Access, achievement and socioeconomic disadvantage were treated as redistributive concerns, because they concern the allocation of educational resources and outcomes. Racism and epistemic or linguistic injustice were treated as recognition concerns, because they concern whose identities and knowledge are valued. Structural and policy conditions were analysed separately, as they correspond most closely to Fraser's later dimension of political representation.

Robustness of the dictionary coding. Because dictionary coding can be sensitive to the choice of terms and text fields, the redistribution–recognition classification was re-estimated under five specifications: the main specification (title, abstract and keywords);

title and keywords only; abstract only; a strict dictionary that removes broad terms (for example *language*, *transition*, *disadvantage*); and the strict dictionary on titles and keywords only. Findings are reported as robust only where their direction holds across all five specifications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Growth of the Field

The 461 articles were published in 288 journals and have received 8,014 citations (median 9 per article; *h*-index 41). Output grew at about 10.5% per year between 2010 and 2025, from 14 to 61 articles a year (Figure 1). Nearly half of the corpus (46.0%, *n* = 212) appeared in 2021–2025, and 2025 alone accounts for 13.2%. The field is therefore young: most of what is known about education and Indigenous inequality was published in the last eight years.

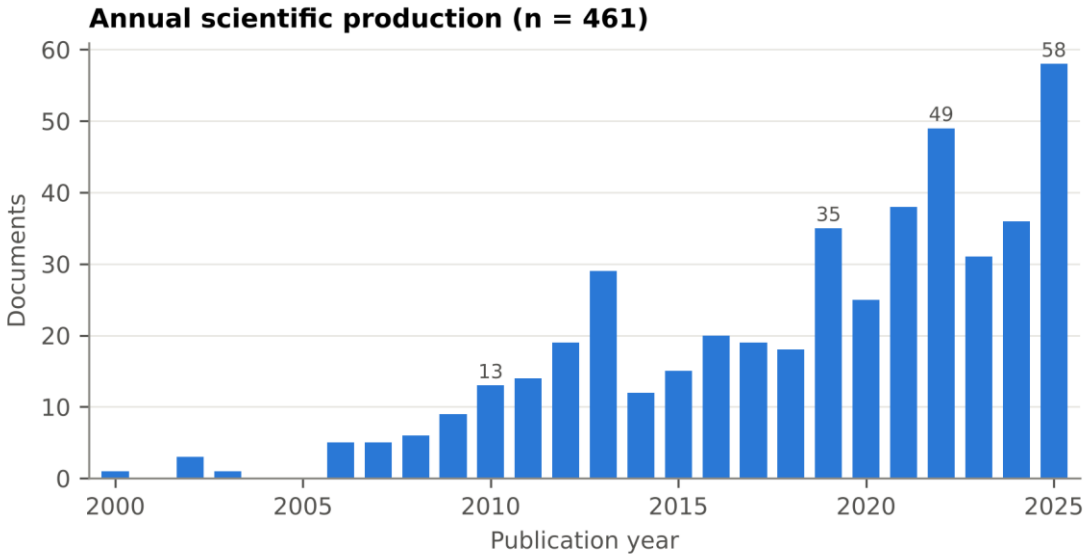


Figure 1. Annual scientific production, 2000–2025 (n = 461)

Geography of knowledge production

Authors were affiliated with institutions in 52 countries, yet production is highly concentrated (Figure 2; Table 2). Three in four articles (77.0%) involve at least one author from Australia, the United States, Canada or New Zealand, the four settler-colonial states commonly grouped as CANZUS. First authors from these four countries account for 75.3% of the corpus.

Table 2. Ten most productive countries

Country	Articles	First-author articles	Citations per article
Australia	167	164	17.4
United States	91	88	20.7
Canada	74	65	19.0
New Zealand	32	30	23.0
United Kingdom	23	18	17.3
India	19	17	7.4
South Africa	15	11	8.4
Chile	6	6	7.0
Mexico	6	6	4.0
Philippines	5	5	8.0

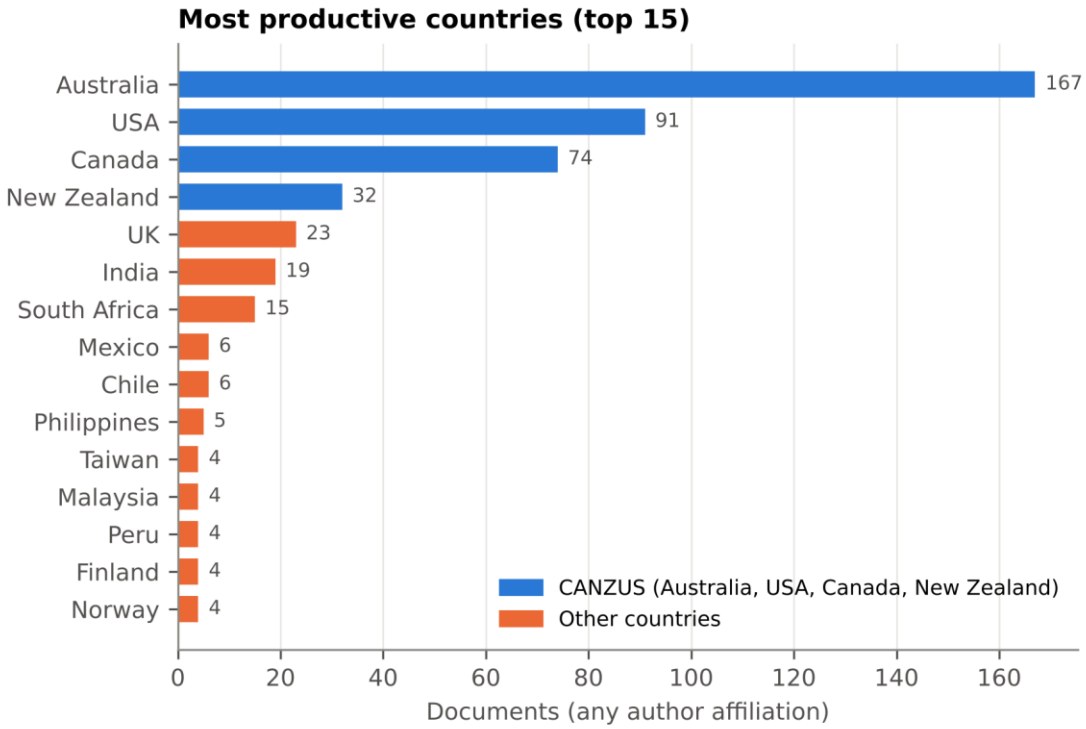


Figure 2. Most productive countries by number of articles (any author affiliation). CANZUS = Australia, United States, Canada, New Zealand

The concentration extends to impact. Articles led from CANZUS countries receive 19.3 citations on average, against 11.7 for those led from elsewhere. Southeast Asia contributes 13 articles (2.8%), despite its large and diverse Indigenous populations. International collaboration is rare: only 11.1% of articles involve authors from more than one country.

The pattern is shifting slowly. The CANZUS share of first authors fell from 83.6% in 2000–2017 to 70.3% in 2018–2025. India drives much of this change, rising from 3 articles before 2018 to 16 since, almost all of them on tribal communities. Earlier Indian work documented enrolment, drop-out and exclusion in schools (Joshi, 2010; Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013); recent studies examine school exclusion among migrant tribal girls, the effects of school consolidation, tribal poverty and educational aspiration (Das, 2020; Das & Barik, 2025; Das et al., 2025; Rupavath, 2023; Sucharita, 2025).

Sources and influential works

The *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* is the leading outlet (27 articles), followed by *Higher Education Research and Development* (11), *Australian Educational Researcher* (10) and *Race Ethnicity and Education* (9). Dispersion is high: 216 of the 288 journals published only one article, and the ten most productive journals account for 20.0% of output. The field therefore has no single disciplinary home.

Table 3. Ten most-cited articles

Rank	Article	Journal	Citations
1	Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson (2016), racism and Indigenous Australian identity in education	Race Ethnicity and Education	258
2	Bishop et al. (2009), Te Kotahitanga and disparities facing Māori students	Teaching and Teacher Education	219
3	Pidgeon (2016), Indigenous inclusion in higher education	Social Inclusion	179

Rank	Article	Journal	Citations
4	Chilisa & Ntseane (2010), Indigenous and African feminist theory in gender and education research	Gender and Education	152
5	Lomawaima & McCarty (2002), tribal sovereignty and American Indian education	American Educational Research Journal	134
6	Hornberger (2009), multilingual education policy grounded in Indigenous experience	Language Teaching	121
7	Mbah et al. (2021), Indigenous knowledge systems and climate change education	Sustainability	117
8	St. Denis (2007), Aboriginal education and anti-racist education	Canadian Journal of Education	117
9	Fish & Syed (2018), Native Americans in higher education	Journal of College Student Development	115
10	Moodie et al. (2019), racism in the schooling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	Australian Educational Researcher	102

Three of the ten most-cited works (Table 3) take racism as their central problem, a fourth centres sovereignty, and three more concern Indigenous knowledge, language or feminist epistemology. Only one, the *Te Kotahitanga* evaluation, frames inequality primarily as an achievement disparity. The field's most influential works thus already lean towards recognition.

Thematic structure

The keyword map contains 39 keywords in eight clusters (Figure 3; Table 4). Article counts are the number of articles containing at least one keyword of the cluster; the mean year is the mean publication year of those articles.

Table 4. Keyword clusters identified in VOSviewer

Cluster (colour)	Label	Keywords (occurrences)	Articles	Mean year
1 (red)	Access, equity and inclusion	higher education (40), equity (15), inclusive education (9), Indigenous languages (9), diversity (6), retention (6), gender (4), academic success (4)	78	2019.5
2 (green)	Colonial legacies and policy	education policy (10), colonialism (9), culture (6), leadership (5), language (4), community engagement (4)	33	2018.0
3 (blue)	Racism, identity and inequality	racism (20), inequality (6), epistemology (5), identity (5), resilience (4)	34	2018.8
4 (yellow)	Cultural safety in professional education	social work education (13), cultural safety (8), field education (5), mentoring (5), assessment (4)	26	2020.3
5 (purple)	Social justice and teacher education	social justice (32), teacher education (15), social capital (6), COVID-19 (6), early childhood education (5)	59	2018.9
6 (cyan)	Indigenous knowledge and curriculum	Indigenous knowledge (17), curriculum (8), pedagogy (6), settler colonialism (5)	30	2020.8
7 (orange)	Health-professions education	Indigenous health (7), cultural competence (7), transformative learning (5), medical education (4)	19	2019.1
8 (brown)	Decolonisation	decolonization (20), critical pedagogy (5)	23	2020.4

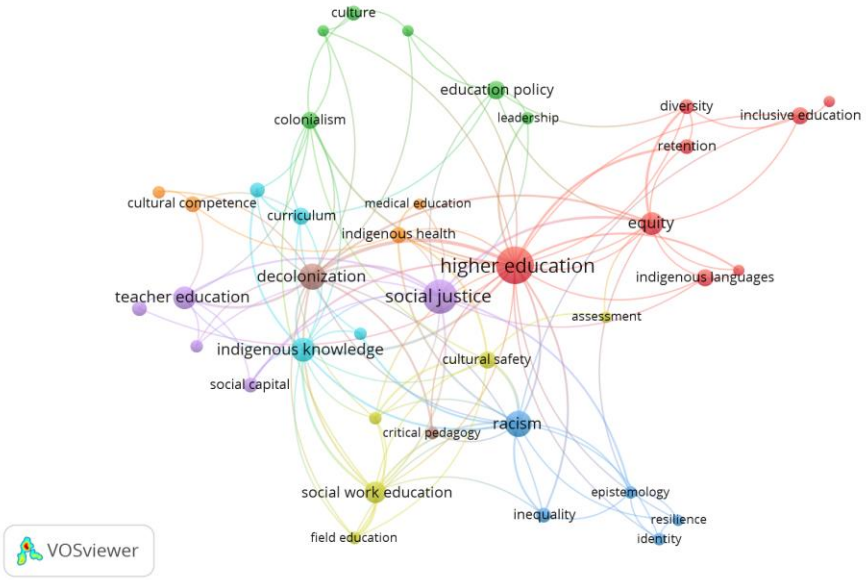


Figure 3. Author-keyword co-occurrence network (VOSviewer; full counting; keywords with at least 4 occurrences; search terms excluded). Node size = occurrences; colour = cluster

Higher education is the map's largest node and sits at its centre, linked to every cluster. Cluster 1 joins it to equity, retention and inclusion, a largely redistributive agenda of access and success in universities (Coombs et al., 2025; Mayeda et al., 2022; Pechenkina et al., 2011). Clusters 4 and 7 locate much of the field in professional education, where cultural safety and cultural competence are the dominant responses to inequality in social work and health (Bullen & Roberts, 2019; Lane & Petrovic, 2018). Cluster 3 is the most telling: *inequality* itself is grouped with *racism*, *identity* and *epistemology*, not with access or achievement. In this literature, inequality is increasingly discussed in the vocabulary of recognition.

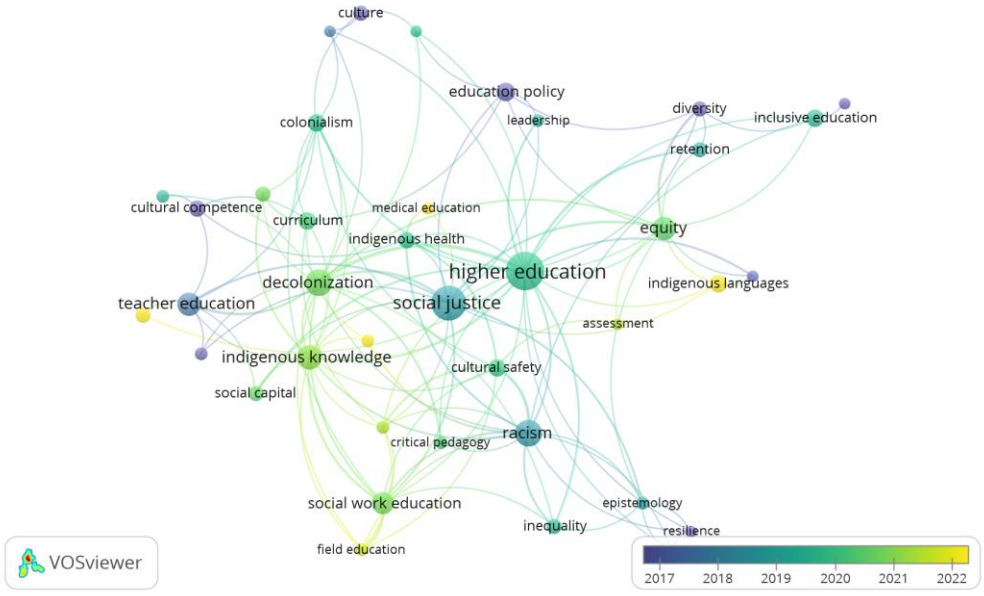


Figure 4. Overlay visualisation of the keyword network, coloured by the average publication year of articles containing each keyword

The overlay visualisation (Figure 4) adds a temporal dimension. The oldest keywords, with average publication years between about 2015 and 2018, are *diversity*, *culture*, *education policy*, *gender*, *cultural competence*, *early childhood education* and *teacher education*. The most recent, from about 2021 onwards, are *Indigenous languages*, *COVID-19*, *medical education*, *settler colonialism*, *field education* and *mentoring*, with *decolonization* (2020.6) and *Indigenous knowledge* (2020.9) close behind. Redistributive keywords do not sit uniformly at the old end: *equity* (2020.5) and *social capital* (2020.5) are as recent as *decolonization*. The map therefore shows recognition terms entering the field alongside, rather than in place of, the language of equity, consistent with the layering reported in the next subsection.

Dimensions of inequality

Across the corpus, the most frequently addressed dimension is structural and policy conditions (43.2% of articles), followed by epistemic and linguistic injustice (36.2%), access and participation (34.5%), socioeconomic disadvantage (28.9%), racism and discrimination (25.8%) and achievement gaps (24.7%). Gender and intersectionality (10.6%) and school discipline and exclusion (5.6%) remain marginal, even though the few studies of discipline find Indigenous students markedly over-represented in suspensions and exclusions (Agnew et al., 2025; Graham et al., 2023; Mitchell et al., 2020).

The balance between dimensions has shifted (Figure 5). Between 2011–2017 and 2018–2025, attention to racism rose from 20.3% to 30.0% of articles, to epistemic and linguistic injustice from 25.8% to 42.1%, and to structural and policy conditions from 37.5% to 46.9%. Over the same interval, socioeconomic disadvantage fell from 38.3% to 24.1% and achievement gaps from 25.8% to 23.4%. Access and participation stayed close to one-third throughout.

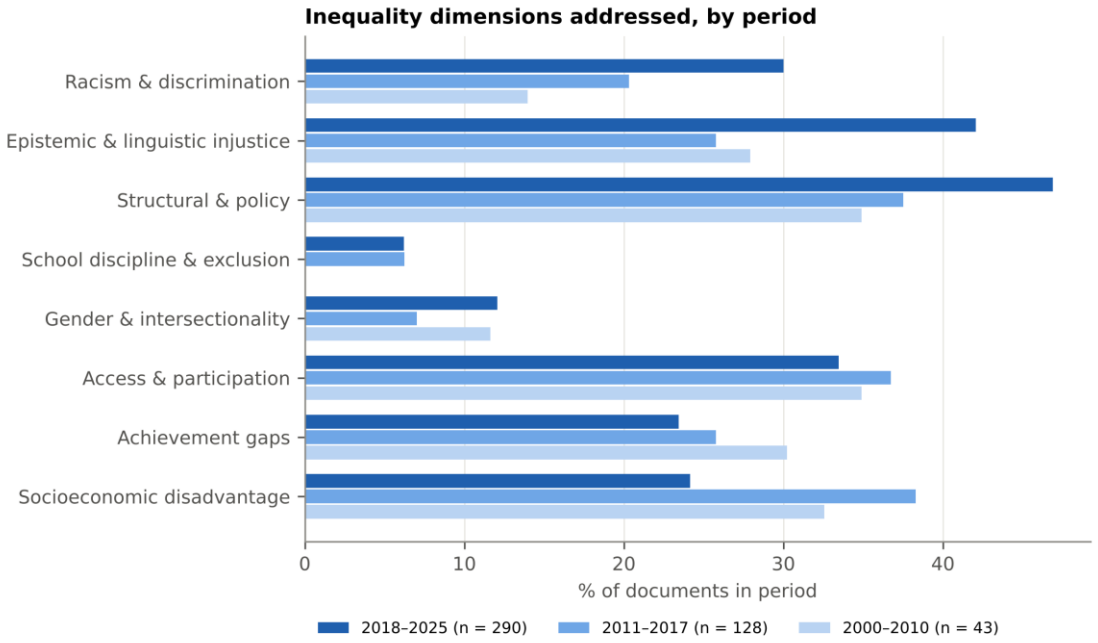


Figure 5. Share of articles addressing each inequality dimension, by period (multi-label)

Grouping these dimensions with Fraser's framework makes the shift explicit (Table 5; Figure 6).

Table 5. Framing of inequality by period

Framing	2000–2010 (n = 43)	2011–2017 (n = 128)	2018–2025 (n = 290)
Redistribution only	44.2%	42.2%	27.2%
Both redistribution and recognition	18.6%	22.7%	29.7%
Recognition only	20.9%	18.0%	33.8%
Neither	16.3%	17.2%	9.3%

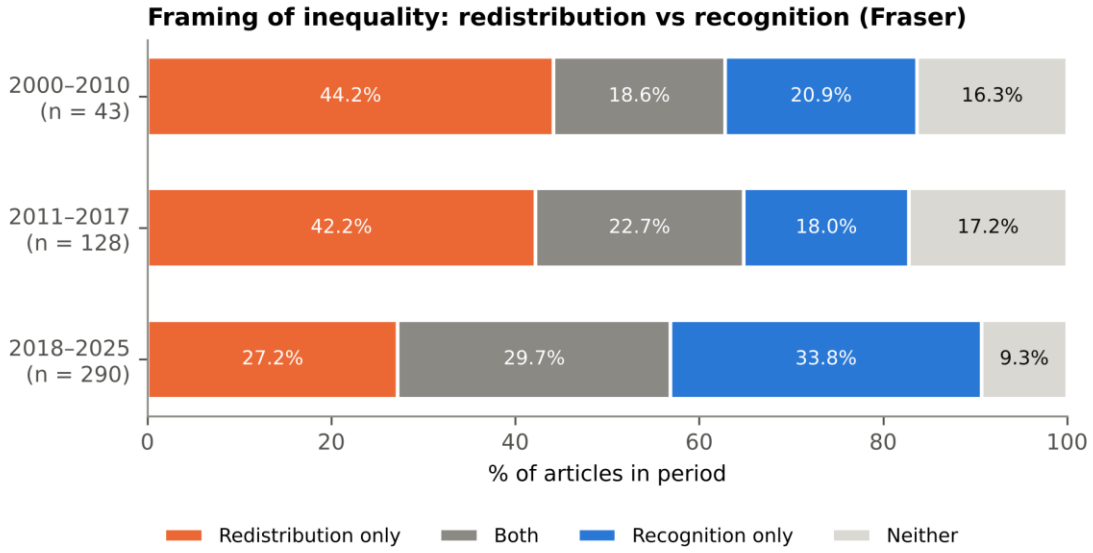


Figure 6. Framing of inequality by period, following Fraser's distinction between redistribution and recognition

Before 2018, articles addressing only redistributive concerns were the largest group. Since 2018, recognition-only articles are the largest group and redistribution-only articles the smallest of the three. Articles addressing both rose steadily, from 18.6% to 29.7%. The shift is therefore not a simple replacement: recognition has been added to the field's agenda faster than redistribution has left it.

These patterns differ in robustness. The rise of recognition-only articles holds in all five specifications, roughly doubling in each (for example, from 16.4% to 37.2% with the strict dictionary). The fall in redistribution-only articles holds in direction in all five but is small when only titles and keywords are coded (from 20.3% to 16.2%). The decline in attention to socioeconomic disadvantage is not robust: with the strict dictionary it rises slightly (12.5% to 14.5%), because the main estimate depends heavily on the broad term *disadvantage*, which is also one of the search terms. The finding that this study can defend is therefore a growth of recognition, not a measured retreat from socioeconomic concerns.

Education levels

Higher education is the most studied level (38.2% of articles), followed by primary and secondary schooling (32.5%) and professional education in health, social work, law and business (15.4%; Figure 7). Teacher education accounts for 7.6%. Early childhood education (3.7%) and vocational and adult education (2.8%) are barely represented (for exceptions, see Helme, 2007; Riser et al., 2019; Taylor, 2010), although both are stages at which educational inequality for Indigenous children and adults is first produced or most directly converted into labour-market outcomes.

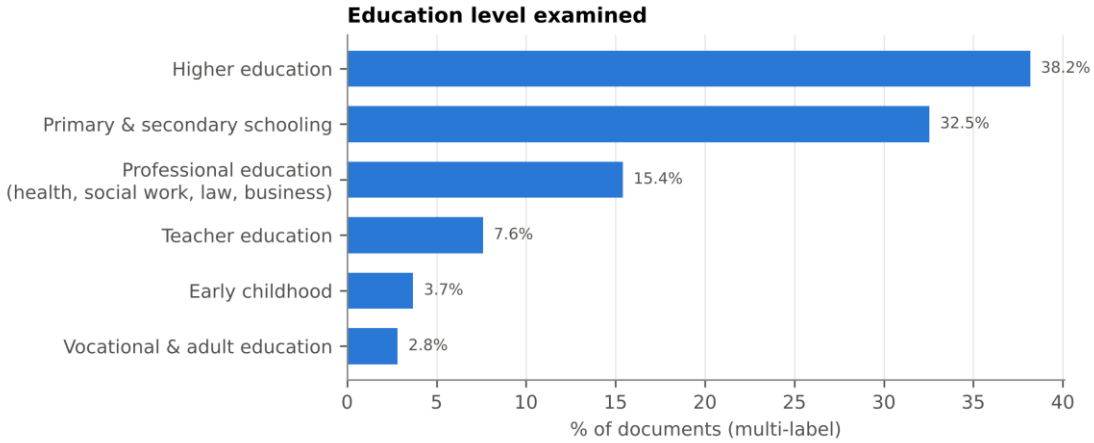


Figure 7. Education level examined (share of articles, multi-label)

Recognition added, redistribution receding

The answer to the question in this article's title is a qualified yes. Since 2018, studies framing Indigenous educational inequality only in redistributive terms have fallen from about 43% to 27% of the field, while recognition-only studies have risen from about 19% to 34%. Racism, epistemic injustice and decolonisation now organise much of the research agenda, and the field's most-cited works already took that direction a decade earlier.

The shift is not a simple displacement, however. The fastest-growing category is research that addresses both redistribution and recognition. Fraser (1995) warned that recognition claims could crowd out struggles over material inequality; this corpus shows a field in which recognition has been layered onto redistribution more often than it has replaced it. That is the integration Fraser herself argued for.

The question Fraser raises is whether this growth comes at material inequality's expense. The evidence here cannot settle it. The apparent decline in attention to socioeconomic disadvantage does not survive the robustness checks, so the safer reading is that socioeconomic concerns have held roughly steady while recognition has grown around them. That still matters, because material disadvantage has not receded: Indigenous peoples remain nearly three times as likely as non-Indigenous people to live in extreme poverty, and Indigenous women have the lowest chance of completing basic education (ILO, 2019). A field whose growth is concentrated in racism and epistemic exclusion risks under-specifying the economic mechanisms, such as poverty, labour-market exclusion and school funding, through which those injustices become unequal outcomes. The rarity of *social capital* and similar material concepts among author keywords points the same way. Studies that do model material conditions find them decisive. In a New Zealand birth cohort, socioeconomic disadvantage in childhood largely explained the lower educational attainment of Māori (Marie et al., 2008). PISA analyses attribute much of the Indigenous achievement gap to home resources and the inequitable allocation of school resources (Song et al., 2014). In remote Australia, rising school completion has not translated into employment or income for First Nations language speakers (Guenther, 2021). Strathdee (2013) argues that policy which reads educational disadvantage mainly through ethnicity can become blind to its socioeconomic roots.

Representation as the growing third dimension

Structural and policy conditions are the most frequently addressed dimension and the one that grew most steadily, from 34.9% to 46.9% of articles. Much of this work concerns sovereignty, self-determination and the governance of Indigenous schooling (Lomawaima

& McCarty, 2002; Weinstein, 2014; Zhang, 2024), including who controls school funding (Martinez et al., 2019) and whose experience shapes school practice (Keddie, 2013). In Fraser's (2008) later terms, this is a politics of representation: a question of who decides what Indigenous education is for. The field's trajectory therefore runs not only from redistribution to recognition but also towards representation, and future reviews could treat the three as a single framework rather than a binary.

A field defined by settler-colonial states

Three-quarters of the research is led from Australia, the United States, Canada and New Zealand, and that research is cited more. The field's central concepts, including cultural safety, settler colonialism and decolonisation, were developed in these four states, where Indigenous peoples are numerical minorities within English-speaking democracies shaped by settler colonisation. These concepts are powerful, but their transfer is not automatic. In much of Asia and Africa, Indigenous status is defined differently, is politically contested, or is not formally recognised by the state, because the concept itself was formed in regions shaped by European settlement (Kingsbury, 1998). In such settings, "settler colonialism" may describe little, while linguistic diversity, rural poverty and state-led development may describe a great deal. Latin American research offers a different vocabulary again, centred on intercultural bilingual education and the tension between assimilation and recognition (Oyarzún et al., 2017; Zsögön, 2025).

The low level of international collaboration (11.1%) compounds the problem: knowledge from CANZUS states and knowledge from elsewhere rarely meet in the same article. The recent growth of research from India suggests that this imbalance can change. Southeast Asia, however, remains almost absent (2.8% of articles). Studies from the region examine the Baduy and Samin in Indonesia (Bukhori Muslim, 2021; Kholiq et al., 2022), the Orang Asli in Malaysia (Ahmad et al., 2022), the Dumagat and Lumad in the Philippines (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021; Magdadaro & Sacramento, 2022) and ethnic minority students in Vietnam's Central Highlands (Hai et al., 2025), but they are too few to build a regional body of evidence. Several of them show the same double pattern found elsewhere: material barriers to access combined with national curricula and policies that marginalise Indigenous identities (Cucio & Roldan, 2020; Kholiq et al., 2022). This reflects a wider pattern in which theory is produced in the global North and applied in the South (Connell, 2007).

Uneven attention across the life course

Higher education receives more attention than any other level, and professional education alone accounts for 15.4% of the corpus. Early childhood (3.7%) and vocational and adult education (2.8%) are barely studied. This distribution follows where researchers are located, in universities, rather than where inequality originates. Gaps in school readiness emerge before formal schooling begins, and vocational and adult education is where educational inequality is converted into income inequality. Both are under-researched relative to their importance for redistribution. The available evidence shows cumulative early risks affecting the school readiness of Native American children (Riser et al., 2019) and the potential of vocational education to address Indigenous disadvantage when it is designed around social justice (Joncas et al., 2023).

Implications

For researchers, the findings point to three priorities: studies that hold recognition and redistribution together rather than choosing between them; research led from, and theorised in, Indigenous contexts outside the CANZUS states; and greater attention to early

childhood and vocational education. For policymakers, they caution against adopting either framing alone. Culturally responsive curricula and anti-racist reform address real injustices, but they do not by themselves close gaps in income, infrastructure or funding. Programmes that pair recognition with material investment, and that give Indigenous communities authority over both, are more consistent with what this literature, taken as a whole, implies.

CONCLUSION

Research on education and social inequality in Indigenous communities has grown fast, from a handful of articles a year in the 2000s to 61 in 2025. Its understanding of inequality has broadened in the same period. Racism, epistemic injustice and the governance of schooling now stand alongside access and achievement, and research addressing redistribution and recognition together is the fastest-growing part of the field. Two imbalances persist. The field's growth has come mainly through recognition rather than through closer study of material disadvantage, and knowledge production remains concentrated in four settler-colonial states, with Southeast Asia nearly absent.

Four limitations qualify these findings. First, the search used Scopus only and English-language articles only, which under-represents research published in Spanish, Portuguese, Indonesian and other regional languages, and therefore the very contexts this study finds under-studied. Second, restricting Indigenous and education terms to the title favours precision over recall. Third, inequality dimensions were coded with a dictionary; it was tested for robustness across five specifications but not validated against manual coding, and it captures what articles name rather than how deeply they analyse it. Manual coding of a sample would strengthen the classification. Fourth, the 2000–2010 period contains only 43 articles, so its percentages should be read with caution; the main comparison rests on 2011–2017 and 2018–2025.

Future studies could extend the search to Web of Science, SciELO and regional indexes such as SINTA and MyCite, include non-English publications, and code a sample of full texts to test whether the recognition turn reflects analytical depth or vocabulary. Comparative studies across Indigenous contexts in Asia, Africa and Latin America are most needed, particularly research led by scholars from those regions.

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