Business Development Services and Poverty Alleviation Related Research: A Bibliometric and Corpus-Sensitivity Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the development, research themes, and geographical patterns of nonfinancial business development services research in poverty related contexts. It also explores how publication selection and network specifications may affect bibliometric findings. A Scopus search conducted on 15 August 2026 retrieved 523 full records of which 424 were published between 1991 and 2025. After applying the service, specific eligibility criteria, 187 publications were identified. Two publications were excluded from the conservative primary dataset because the available evidence was insufficient to confirm their business development support specific content. The final dataset therefore included 185 publications comprising 52 studies focusing on welfare related outcomes and 133 examining broader Business development support mechanisms. Bibliometric methods were used to analyses publication trends, citation patterns, author keyword co-occurrence, and international research collaboration. The findings reveal considerable geographical and thematic diversity with 152 publication source labels and a total of 3445 Scopus citations. Author keywords were available for 161 publications. The co-occurrence analysis identified 39 keywords, 114 links, and six Louvain communities at a minimum occurrence threshold of three publications. When the two additional studies were included in the sensitivity analysis, the results increased to 40 keywords, 118 links, and seven communities, indicating that the selection of publications can influence how research themes are classified. This study contributes to the existing literature by distinguishing between nonfinancial enterprise support mechanisms, enterprise performance, and household welfare outcomes. It also provides a clearer understanding of the relationship between BDS and poverty alleviation by identifying major research trends, thematic patterns, and gaps in the existing literature. These findings provide a basis for future empirical research examining how BDS contributes to household welfare and sustainable poverty reduction.

Keywords: business development services; poverty alleviation; enterprise support; business training; microenterprise; bibliometric analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Business development services (BDS) provide nonfinancial enterprise support, including training, mentoring, incubation, advisory services, technical assistance and market linkages. They seek to improve managerial capabilities and enterprise performance yet gains in skills or sales do not necessarily translate into sustained household welfare. Where BDS is delivered with finance, grants or social protection, its separate contribution is difficult to isolate (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2014; Sievers & Vandenberg, 2007).

Empirical research provides varying evidence regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurship support interventions. (Karlan & Valdivia, 2011) examining business training integrated with microfinance services in

Peru, reported improvements in business knowledge and client retention but limited evidence of significant increases in sales or profitability. Similarly, (Valdivia, 2015) highlighted the potential benefits of entrepreneurship training for business practices and enterprise performance, while demonstrating that additional technical assistance does not necessarily generate proportionate improvements. In contrast, (Lafortune et al., 2018) identified positive household-income responses associated with more personalized forms of entrepreneurship support. Broader evidence syntheses further demonstrate considerable heterogeneity in programme outcomes, intervention characteristics, beneficiary populations, and evaluation approaches (Cho & Honorati, 2014; Grimm & Paffhausen, 2015). (Mensah & Benedict, 2010) also examined entrepreneurship training and capacity building as potential mechanisms for poverty alleviation. Taking together these studies show that the relationship between BDS and poverty related results is complex. It is important to distinguish between improvements in enterprise performance and changes in household welfare outcomes. Although BDS may improve business skills, performance, Livelihood and profitability, & these improvements do not necessarily lead to reductions in household poverty. Whether business improvements translate into better household welfare depends on the sustainability of these gains and the ability of enterprises to generate stable or enough income by the time, as reflected in intervention evaluations (Campos et al., 2017; de Mel et al., 2014).

This study therefore finds four levels of analysis: non-financial BDS, business capabilities, enterprise performance, and household welfare. This framework helps organize the existing literature without if improvements at one level necessarily led to improvements at the next (Table 1).

Table 1. Analytical table distinguishing service content, enterprise outcomes, and household welfare without assuming a validated causal relationship between these levels.

Analytical level	Key Dimensions	Interpretation
BDS interventions	Business training, mentoring, consultancy, incubation, technical assistance, and market linkages	Identifies the nature and scope of non-financial enterprise support.
Entrepreneurial capabilities	Business knowledge, managerial skills, operational practices, and networking capabilities	Represents immediate or intermediate improvements associated with enterprise support.
Enterprise performance	Sales, profitability, employment, business survival, and market participation	Reflects business-level outcomes that may influence economic opportunities.
Household welfare	Household income, consumption, economic security, vulnerability, and poverty status	Represents poverty-related outcomes requiring appropriate measurement and causal assessment.

Although Business development support and poverty alleviation have received research attention on existing studies often use overlapping or revised terms such as enterprise development, entrepreneurship training, technical assistance, and financial inclusion. As a result, evidence on specific BDS services is scattered across different disciplines, while broader studies on finance and entrepreneurship may discuss poverty without directly examining non-financial BDS. These differences make it difficult to define a clear and consistent dataset for bibliometric analysis. Bibliometric methods are used to examine publication trends, citation patterns, keywords, and research collaborations. However, the findings can vary depending on how publications are selected and how their metadata are processed. This study addresses two gaps: the need for a transparent, service-specific BDS publication set and the need to examine how inclusion decisions and network parameters affect the interpretation of research themes.

The study examines Scopus-indexed publications from 1991–2025 through a conservative 185-paper corpus (52 welfare-oriented and 133 broader BDS-mechanism studies). An 187 paper sensitivity scenario tests corpus-boundary effects. The purpose is to map literature, not to estimate BDS effects on poverty.

Four research questions guide the analysis:

1. RQ1. How has publication output, source distribution, citation patterns and geographical participation evolved during 1991–2025?
2. RQ2. Which BDS-, entrepreneurship- and poverty-related author keywords co-occur, and how robust are the resulting network patterns?
3. RQ3. What patterns of international institutional collaboration and temporal keyword coverage are visible accounting for metadata limitations?
4. RQ4. To what extent do the review findings vary across the primary corpus, the welfare-oriented subset, and alternative study inclusion scenarios?

This study contributes to existing literature by developing a reconciled, service-specific bibliometric dataset, distinguishing between enterprise-support mechanisms and household welfare, and examining the sensitivity of keyword networks to changes in the dataset. Together, these contributions provide a transparent basis for understanding the existing literature and identifying areas for future research

METHODOLOGY

2.1. Data Source, Search Strategy, and Study Selection

This study used a bibliometric research design to examine the development, intellectual structure, and geographical distribution of research on nonfinancial business development services (BDS) in poverty-related contexts. Scopus was selected as the bibliographic database because of its multidisciplinary coverage and the availability of standardized publication data, including citation information, author keywords, source titles, and institutional affiliations. Since the analysis was based on Scopus-indexed publications, the findings need to be considered in light of the database's coverage limitations. Differences between Scopus and Web of Science in terms of disciplinary, geographical, and language coverage may affect the observed publication trends, citation patterns, and geographical representation (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016)

Bibliographic records were retrieved from Scopus on 15 August 2026 using a search strategy that combined terms related to business development services, entrepreneurship support, enterprise development, training, mentoring, technical assistance, and market access with terms related to poverty and livelihoods. The search was limited to English-language journal research articles and review papers. The complete search string is provided in Appendix A to make the search process transparent and reproducible.

The final Scopus export contained 523 records. After excluding 96 publications from 2026 and three published before 1991, a total of 424 publications remained within the selected study period (1991–2025). All 137 records from the earlier half dataset were found in the updated export, confirming that they were retained in the expanded search results. An earlier Scopus search had displayed 519 records, but this difference was due to the database being accessed at different times rather than any screening or exclusion process.

Publication eligibility was determined using service-specific screening criteria. Studies were included if they examined identifiable nonfinancial services aimed at supporting enterprise development, such as business training, mentoring, consultancy, incubation, enterprise-specific technical assistance, and organized market-access support. Empirical studies, service-specific conceptual papers, and relevant review articles were considered eligible when BDS formed a substantial part of their content. Studies focusing only on financial assistance, general entrepreneurial intentions, or recommendations for business training without meaningful analysis of the services were excluded. Programmes combining financial and non-financial support were also included, provided that the study examined an identifiable enterprise-support component

Screening was carried out using publication titles, abstracts, and relevant full-text evidence where available. Decisions were recorded for each publication using its Scopus Electronic Identifier (EID), allowing the

screening results to be traced and checked against the original database export. Each unique EID was counted only once. Records with similar titles but different identifiers were examined to establish whether they represented the same publication before being classified as duplicates. The 424 publications were classified into four categories based on their relevance to BDS and poverty-related research. Category A consisted of 52 studies that examined poverty and household welfare, while Category B included 135 studies covering broader BDS mechanisms and their relationship with enterprise development. Another 194 studies were placed in Category C because they provided relevant background or contextual information, while 43 studies were assigned to Category D because they fell outside the scope of the research. The studies were grouped according to what they examined, rather than the quality of their research methods or whether the interventions were found to be effective.Two older publications were initially included in Category B, but the available information was not sufficient to confirm that they met all the service-specific eligibility criteria. For this reason, they were left out of the conservative primary analysis but included in the sensitivity analysis to examine whether their inclusion would affect the findings. As a result, the primary bibliometric dataset consisted of 185 publications, in which 52 studies focusing on household welfare and 133 examining broader Business Development Support mechanisms. The expanded dataset used for sensitivity analysis with 187 publications.

The complete selection process is shown in Figure 1. Although the identification and screening of records followed the transparency principles of PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021) this study was not made as a prospectively registered systematic review. The screening process was carried out iteratively, with decisions documented at each stage. However, it did not involve independent screening by two reviewers or formal testing of inter-rater reliability. Therefore, the study does not claim independent reviewer agreement or a formal assessment of causal risk of bias at the individual study level.

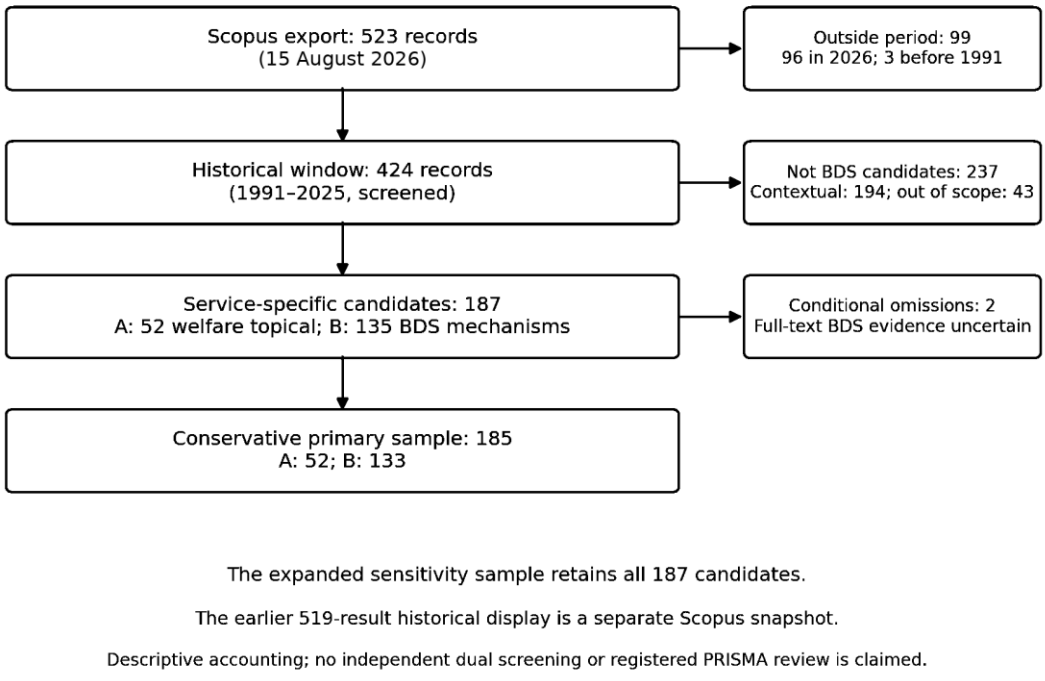

Figure 1. Flow diagram showing Scopus record identification, eligibility screening, and selection of the final bibliometric dataset (1991–2025).

2.2. Bibliometric Analysis and Network Construction

The study used bibliometric analysis to examine publication trends, research output across different sources, citation patterns, relationships between author keywords, and international research collaboration. These

measures were used to examine how Business development support research has developed over time, the scholarly attention it has attracted, the relationships between different research themes, and the distribution of research activity across countries. The analysis followed established methodological guidelines for bibliometric research. (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic, 2015).

Publication productivity was assessed by examining the number of publications each year and how they were distributed across different publication sources. Citation analysis used Scopus "cited by" counts recorded on 15 August 2026 to identify frequently cited studies and examine patterns of scholarly attention. These counts were considered indicators of research visibility rather than measures of publication quality or the effectiveness of BDS interventions. Since the citation counts were not adjusted for publication age or research discipline, the comparisons were descriptive. The names of journals and other publication sources were retained as recorded in Scopus, without combining historical variations in journal titles.

Author-keyword co-occurrence analysis was used to identify frequently occurring research concepts and examine the relationships between them in the selected literature. Before the analysis, keywords were standardized by applying consistent capitalization, removing unnecessary spaces, and eliminating duplicate terms within individual publications. Terms with related meanings but different wording, such as "poverty", "poverty reduction", and "poverty alleviation", were retained as separate keywords to avoid treating them as synonyms without sufficient justification.

Keyword frequency was measured by counting the number of publications in which a particular term appeared, while co-occurrence was measured by how often two keywords appeared together in the same publication. For the primary network, a minimum occurrence threshold of three publications was applied. Thresholds of two and four publications were also examined to assess how changes in this setting affected the findings. The relationships between keyword pairs were measured using association strength, calculated by dividing the number of publications containing both keywords by the product of their individual publication frequencies. Network communities were identified using the weighted Louvain community detection algorithm (Blondel et al., 2008). The analysis was made using biblioshiny software (version 3.6.1). To make the analysis reproducible, keyword nodes and co-occurrence links were sorted in lexicographical order before identifying the communities. The resulting networks were used to examine how research concepts were connected within the literature, rather than to establish fixed theoretical categories. The communities identified could also vary depending on the keywords included, the minimum frequency thresholds applied, the boundaries of the selected dataset, and the computational settings used. The bibliometric visualization approach was also informed by established science mapping methodologies including those associated with VOS viewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).parsing.

Geographical research patterns were examined using institutional-affiliation data obtained from Scopus. Country information was identified from the final sections of affiliation addresses after processing institutional annotations that could affect the accurate identification and separation of address components. Two counting approaches were applied: full counting, whereby each country received one publication credit when represented, and fractional counting, whereby publication credit was distributed equally among the distinct countries associated with a record.

International research collaboration was identified when a publication contained institutional affiliations from at least two countries. Country-level collaboration networks were constructed using unordered pairs of countries appearing within the same publication. Publications involving multiple countries contributed one occurrence for each distinct country pair. Four publications lacked affiliation information. Given the potential for ambiguity in automated address extraction, the geographical indicators were interpreted cautiously and were not treated as representations of the geographical locations of BDS interventions.

Co-citation and bibliographic-coupling analyses were not included because the available cited-reference metadata contained inconsistently structured bibliographic strings and insufficiently reconciled reference identifiers. Consequently, the analysis was restricted to bibliometric indicators that could be reconstructed from the selected 185-publication dataset without introducing unverified citation relationships.

2.3. Sensitivity Analysis and Reproducibility

Sensitivity analysis was conducted to assess how the bibliometric findings might change depending on publication eligibility decisions and keyword-network specifications. Two approaches were used to examine this sensitivity.

The first approach compared the conservative primary dataset of 185 publications with an expanded dataset of 187 publications. The expanded dataset included two older publications (Scopus EIDs 2-s2.0-84879943973 and 2-s2.0-77950698878) whose abstracts suggested potentially relevant training or participatory-learning components. However, the available evidence was insufficient to confirm that these studies met all the service-specific eligibility criteria. They were therefore excluded from the primary analysis without being considered definitively irrelevant.

The second approach examined keyword-network sensitivity by adjusting the minimum author-keyword frequency threshold to two, three, and four publications. More comparing was made using the 52-publication welfare-oriented subset to examine differences between the broader BDS research landscape and the literature with a more direct poverty-related emphasis.

The publication selection process began with 523 records retrieved from Scopus. After excluding 99 records that fell outside the selected publication period, 424 remained for eligibility screening. Of these, 237 were classified as contextual or outside the scope of the study. Two additional publications could not be fully confirmed as meeting the eligibility criteria and were therefore excluded from the conservative primary analysis, leaving a final dataset of 185 publications. These two publications were included in the expanded sensitivity analysis, bringing the total to 187. All calculations were based on the dated Scopus export, and publication identifiers, screening decisions, keyword-network specifications, and analytical results were documented to allow the analysis to be reproduced. The findings were interpreted with consideration of the database used, the screening criteria, the available metadata, and the analytical settings. Particular attention was paid to distinguishing patterns that remained consistent across the analyses from keyword-network structures that changed when different publication sets or frequency thresholds were used.

By documenting eligibility decisions for individual publications, clearly describing how the keyword networks were constructed, and carrying out sensitivity analyses, this study provides a transparent basis for understanding how BDS research in poverty-related contexts has developed and how its main research themes are organized.

3. Results

3.1. Publication Characteristics and Research Growth

Table 2. Descriptive profile of the conservative 185-publication corpus, the 52-publication welfare-oriented subset, and the 424 search records from the selected publication period (Scopus export: 15 August 2026).

bibliometric indicator	Primary corpus (n = 185)	Welfare-oriented subset (n = 52)	Search records (n = 424)
Publications	185	52	424
Source-title labels	152	48	318
Total Scopus citations	3,445	1,430	7,531
Publications with author keywords	161	43	364
Distinct author keywords	640	194	1,345
Publications with cited references	179	49	408

The annual publication trend suggests growing scholarly interest in BDS-related research over the study period. Research output was relatively low in the earlier years, with only five publications recorded between 1991 and 2000. This increased to 24 publications during 2001–2010 and 81 during 2011–2020. A further 75 publications appeared between 2021 and 2025, accounting for 40.5% of the total corpus within just five years.

The highest number of publications was recorded in 2025 (20 publications), followed by 2024 (17 publications) and 2022 (15 publications). In addition, 84 publications (45.4%) were published between 2020 and 2025, showing that a substantial proportion of the research was concentrated in recent years. Figure 2 presents the annual publication trend, while Table 3 summarizes publication output across four descriptive periods.

Table 3. Distribution of publications across descriptive calendar periods, with the shorter final period limiting direct comparisons between decades.

Period	Publications in primary 185	Interpretive note
1991–2000	5	Earliest indexed segment
2001–2010	24	Broader indexed output
2011–2020	81	Largest equal-length decade
2021–2025	75	Five-year interval; not a decade

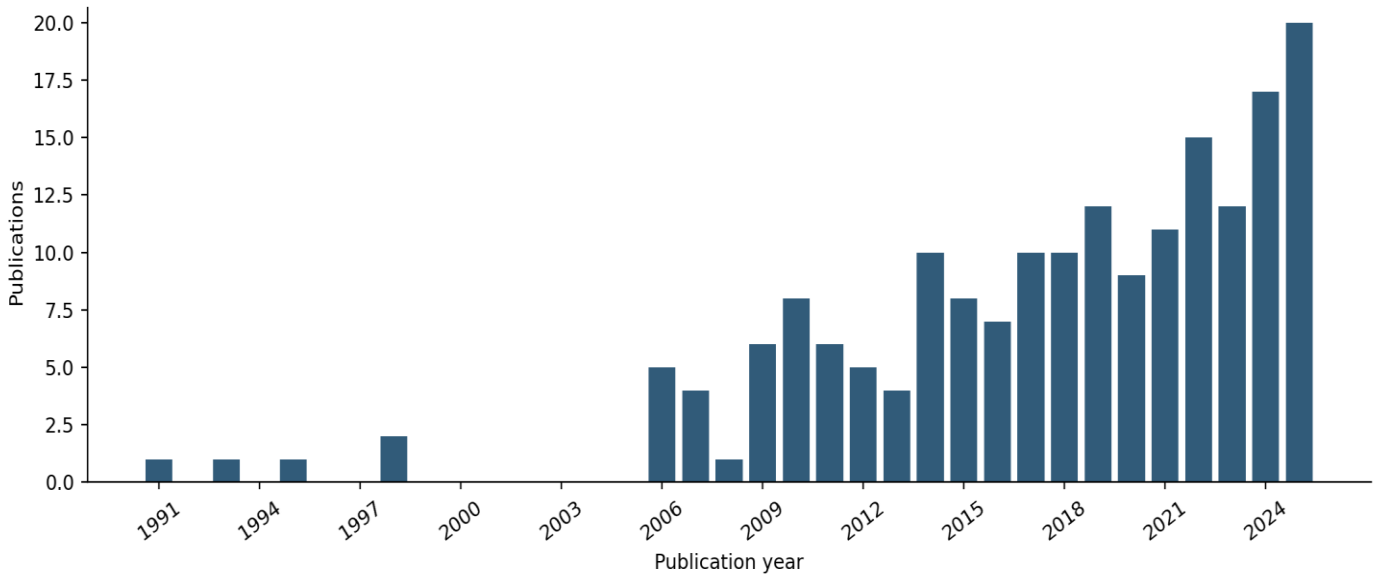

Figure 2. Annual publication output in the conservative BDS corpus of 185 publications, 1991–2025.

The distribution of publications across sources is also widely dispersed, with the three most frequently represented source titles accounting for only 12 of the 185 publications. Figure 3 presents the source titles exactly as recorded in the Scopus export, without combining historical variations in journal titles.

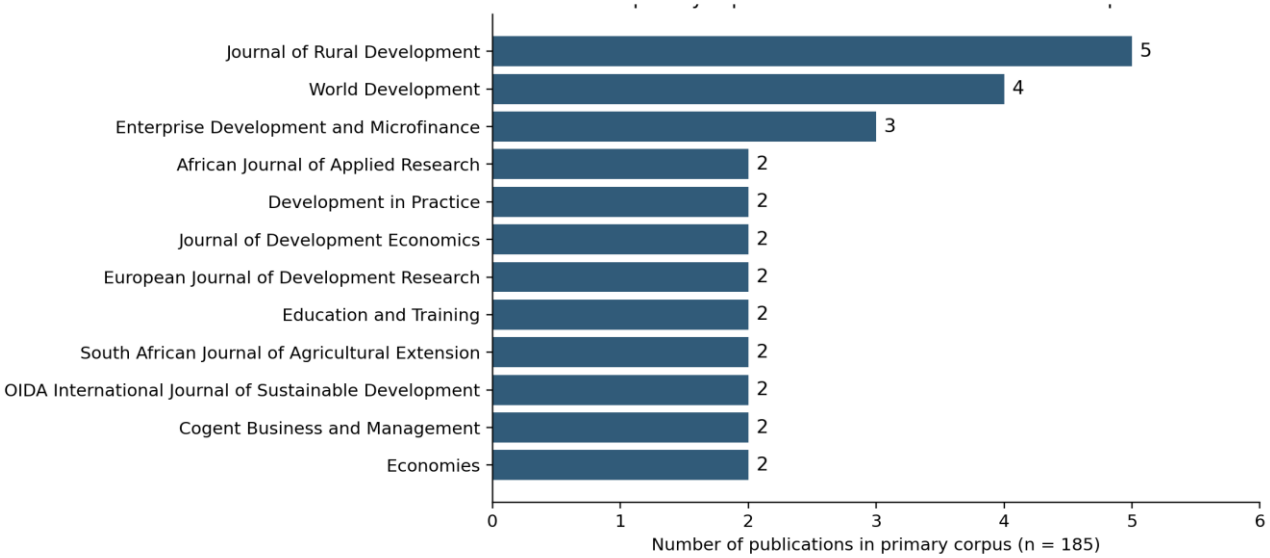

Figure 3. Publication count by the 12 most represented literal Scopus source titles in the conservative 185-record corpus; source-title aliases were not harmonized.

3.2. Citation Performance and Influential Publications

Citation analysis was used to assess the scholarly visibility and influence of publications included in the selected research corpus. The 185 publications accumulated 3,445 Scopus citations as of 15 August 2026, indicating substantial variation in the extent to which individual studies have been cited.

(Karlan & Valdivia, 2011) emerged as the most frequently cited publication, with 439 citations, followed by (Assenova, 2020) with 139 citations and (Viswanathan et al., 2009) with 120 citations. These publications address different aspects of entrepreneurship support, enterprise development, and capability enhancement, illustrating the range of research perspectives represented within the corpus.

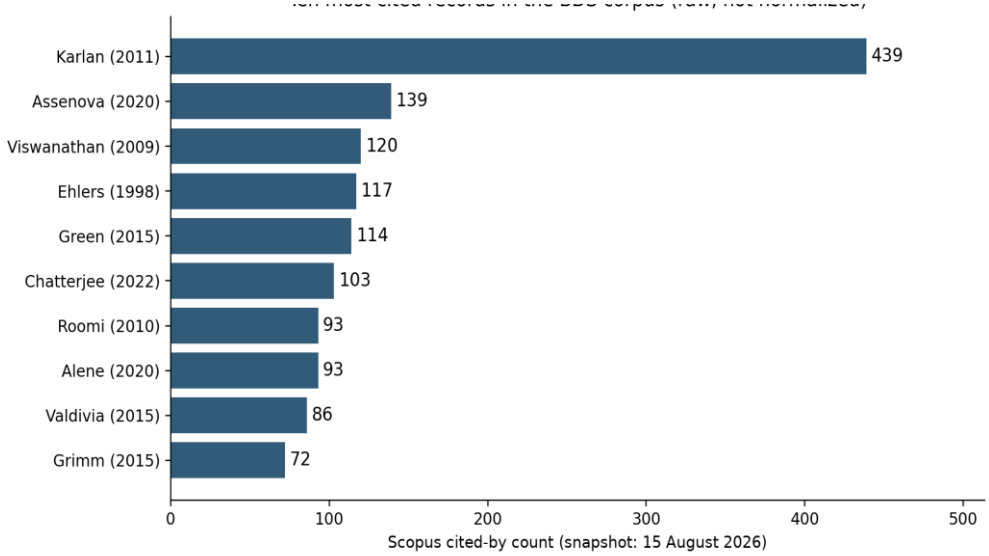

Figure 4. Most-cited individual publications in the conservative 185-record Scopus corpus as of 15 August 2026. Raw citation totals are not normalized by publication age or discipline and do not measure BDS effectiveness.

3.3. Author-Keyword Frequency and Thematic Structure

Author keyword analysis was employed to identify frequently investigated concepts and examine thematic relationships within Business development support related research. Of the 185 publications, 161 (87.0%) contained author keywords, while 24 had no recorded author-keyword information. After standardizing capitalization, removing extra spaces and eliminating duplicate terms within individual records a total of 640 distinct author keywords were identified.

The most frequently occurring keyword was entrepreneurship, appearing in 26 publications. Other prominent terms included poverty alleviation (12 publications), poverty (11 publications), training (9 publications), capacity building (9 publications), and poverty reduction (9 publications). These findings demonstrate the prominence of entrepreneurship development, enterprise capabilities, and poverty-related objectives in the vocabulary of the selected literature.

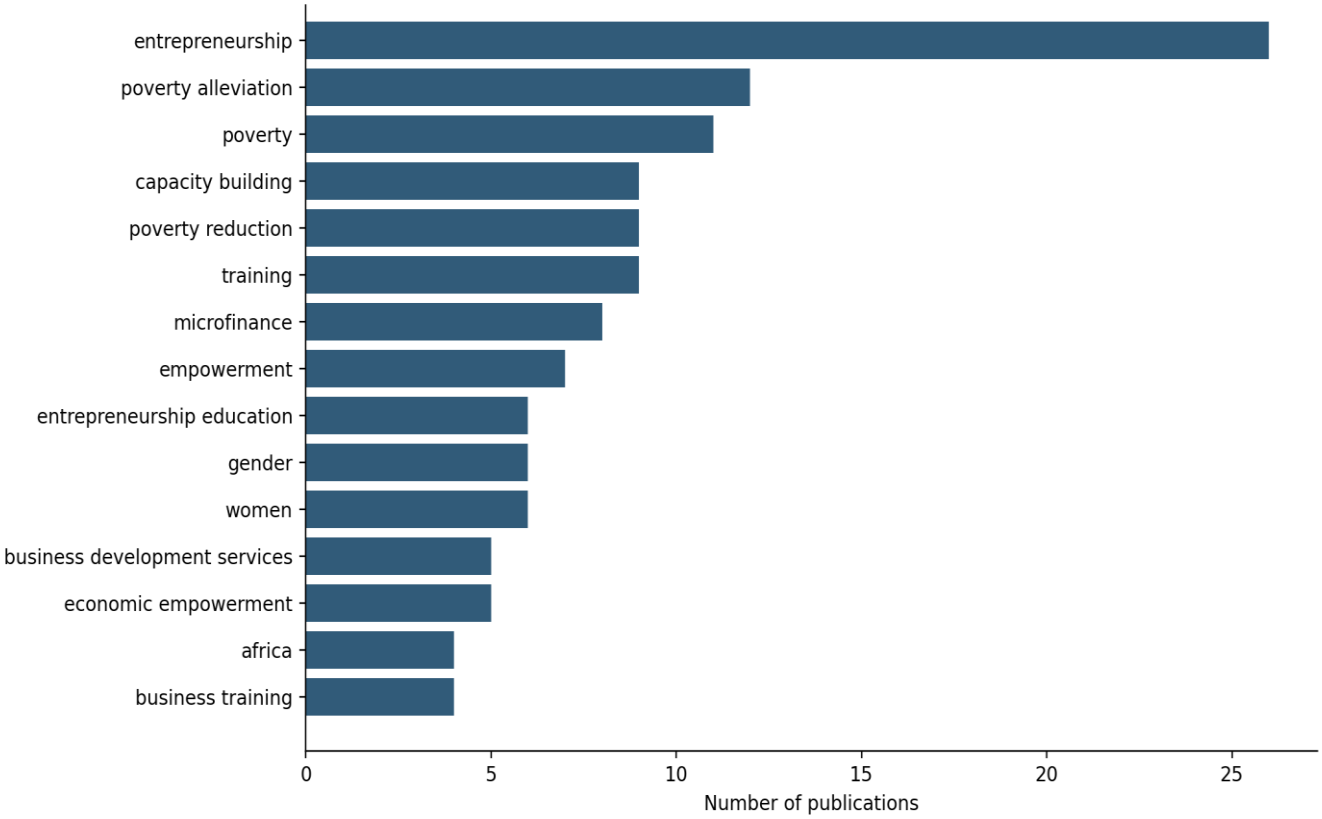

Figure 5. Fifteen most frequent author keywords in the conservative 185-record BDS corpus; semantically similar phrases remain separate.

The distribution of keywords also shows considerable variation in the terminology used across literature. For example, *poverty*, *poverty reduction*, and *poverty alleviation* were retained as separate expressions because the analysis applied minimal lexical harmonization. Consequently, their individual frequencies reflect the terminology selected by authors rather than mutually exclusive research topics.

To investigate thematic relationships, an author-keyword co-occurrence network was constructed using a minimum occurrence threshold of three publications. The resulting network contained 39 keywords connected by 114 links. Weighted Louvain community detection identified six groups of keywords that frequently appeared together within the same publications.

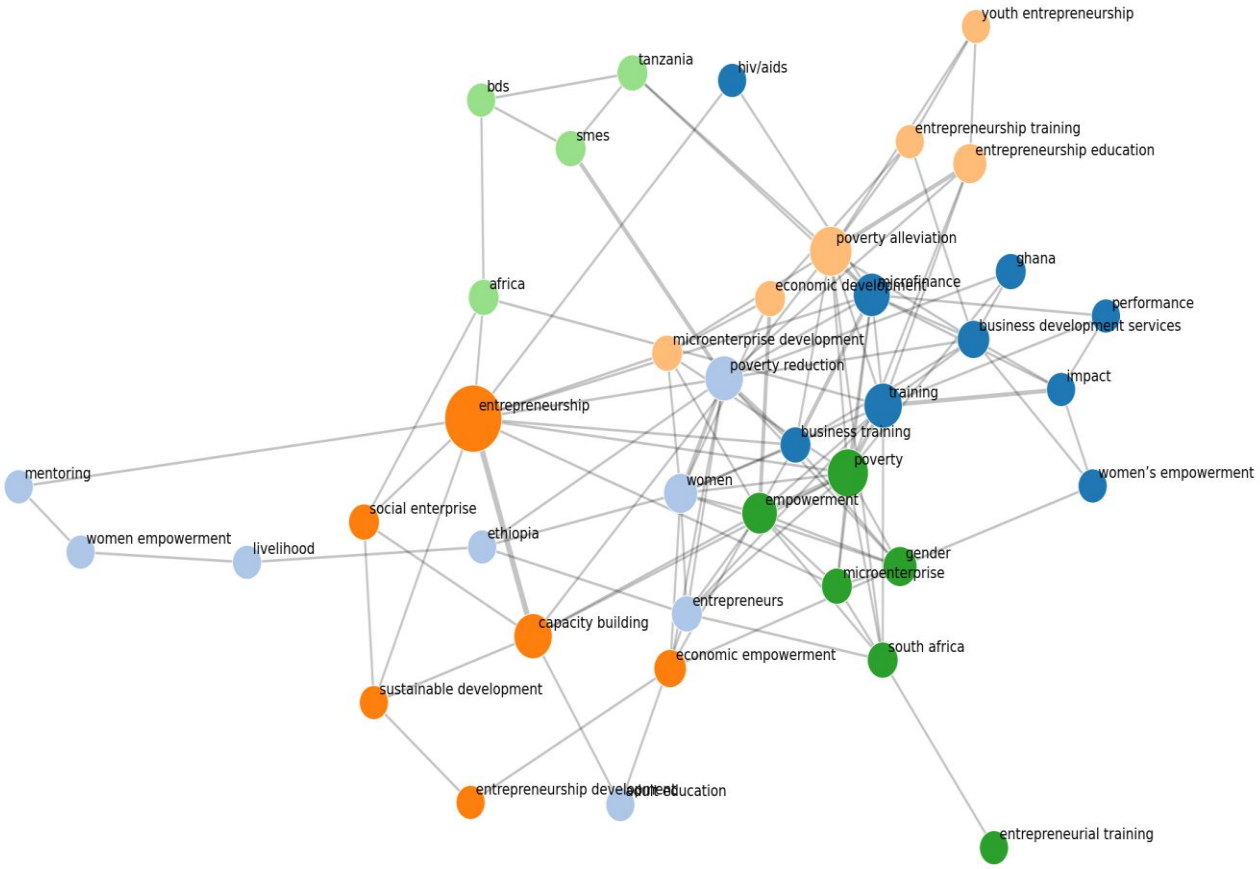

Figure 6. Author-keyword network (n = 185; occurrence threshold ≥3; association-strength weights; sorted graph construction; weighted Louvain, resolution 1, seed 41; six communities).

3.4 Sensitivity to corpus selection and thresholds

Table 4. Keyword-network sensitivity under lexicographically ordered graph construction and weighted Louvain clustering.

Analytical specification	Keyword nodes	Network links	Louvain communities
Primary corpus (185); threshold ≥ 2	93	275	11
Primary corpus (185); threshold ≥ 3	39	114	6
Primary corpus (185); threshold ≥ 4	24	79	4
Welfare-oriented subset (52); threshold ≥ 2	27	58	7
Welfare-oriented subset (52); threshold ≥ 3	8	9	3

The findings show that the number of keywords, co-occurrence links, and identified communities changes considerably depending on the selected occurrence threshold. In the dataset of 185 publications, lowering the threshold to two publications increased the network to 93 keywords, 275 links, and 11 communities. In contrast raising the threshold to four publications reduced the network to 24 keywords, 79 links and four communities.

These differences suggest that the thematic structure of the keyword network can change depending on whether less frequently used keywords are included. Lower thresholds allow more research concepts to appear in the network, while higher thresholds retain only the more frequently used terms, resulting in smaller and more concentrated networks.

The welfare-oriented subset produced a much smaller keyword network. When the minimum occurrence threshold was set at three publications, the subset of 52 publications contained only eight keywords, nine links, and three communities, including one isolated node. This smaller network may be explained by the limited number of publications and the relatively few author keywords shared across them. These differences make it difficult to compare the thematic structure of the welfare-oriented subset directly with that of the full corpus.

The sensitivity of the findings to corpus selection was further examined by adding two conditional publications that were excluded from the conservative primary analysis. When the dataset increased from 185 to 187 publications, the number of keyword nodes rose from 39 to 40, while the number of links increased from 114 to 118 at the minimum occurrence threshold of three publications. The number of Louvain communities also increased from six to seven.

Despite the relatively small change in publication numbers the resulting community structure differed. In contrast, the additional publications contributed only 11 citations, two additional source-title labels, and one publication with author keywords, while the highest-output publication years remained unchanged.

Overall, these results demonstrate greater stability in descriptive publication indicators than in the precise partitioning of keyword networks. The six sections identified in the conservative corpus therefore reflect the specific analytical settings used in this study rather than a fixed classification of the field of research.

3.5. Geographical Distribution and International Research Collaboration

Geographical analysis was conducted using institutional affiliation information recorded in the Scopus database. Institutional-affiliation data were available for 181 of the 185 publications, while four publications had no affiliation information. Country identifications revealed 51 country labels within the selected corpus. Of the 185 publications, 59(31.9%) included affiliations from at least two countries indicating international institutional collaboration based on the counting method used in this study.

The analysis of international research collaboration identified 86 distinct country pairs, which appeared a total of 103 times across the publications. The 86 pairs represent the different country-to-country affiliation links, while the 103 occurrences show how often these links appeared in the dataset. Since a publication involving three or more countries creates several country pairs, the total number of pair occurrences is greater than the number of publications involving international collaboration.

The United States had the highest institutional participation, with affiliations recorded in 45 publications, followed by India with 26 and Malaysia with 17. Under fractional counting, each publication was divided equally among the countries represented in that record. Using this method, the United States accounted for 32.25 publication equivalents, India for 21.17, and Malaysia for 14.17.

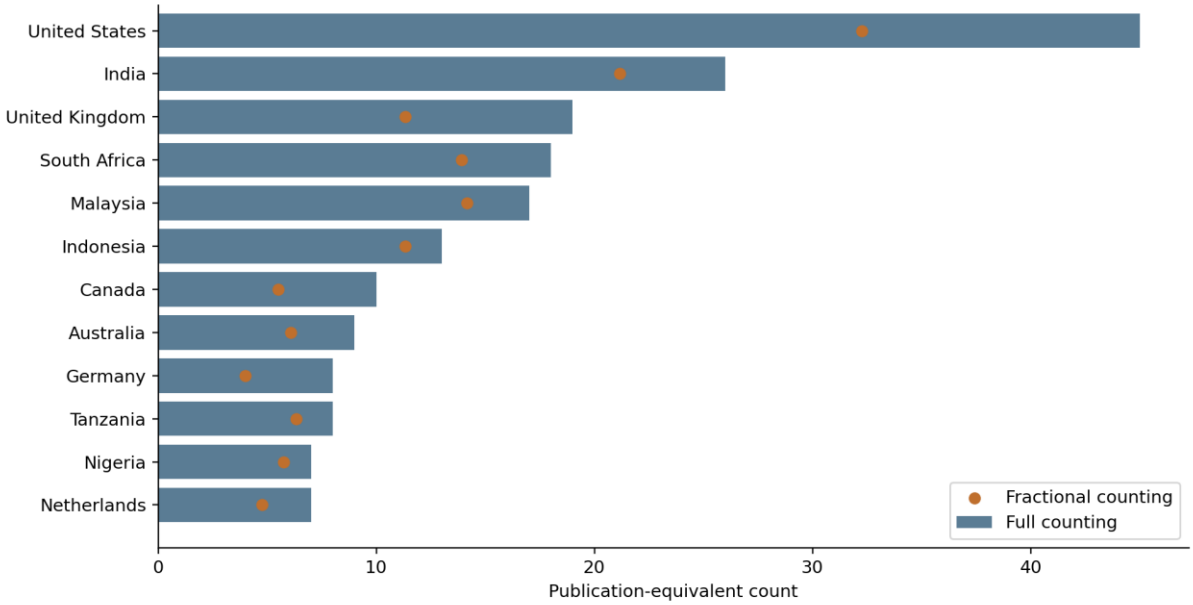

Figure 7. Leading institutional affiliated countries under full and fractional publication counting and conservative 185 record sample.

These findings show which countries were most frequently represented in the selected research literature through their institutional affiliations. Full counting and fractional counting offer different but complementary ways of examining geographical participation, particularly in studies involving researchers from more than one country.

Figure 8 shows the international research collaboration network based on institutional-affiliation data. Of the 51 country labels identified, 45 were connected to at least one other country through research collaboration. The network included 86 distinct country pairs, with stronger links representing a higher number of publications shared between the countries.



Figure 8. Country to country institutional collaboration links in the conservative corpus of 185 publications (45 connected countries labels and 86 distinct countries pairs). Node size represents the

number of publications associated with each country under full counting while thicker links indicate more publications shared between countries pairs. Countries with less connections are not all labelled. Country identification remains provisional and requires manual verification.

The observed network gives an overview of cross-national scholarly collaboration within the BDS research corpus. However, the geographical indicators refer to the institutional affiliations of researchers rather than the locations of the enterprise-development programmes examined. In addition, automated extraction of country labels from affiliation addresses introduces potential classification uncertainty, particularly for historical or inconsistently formatted records.

Accordingly, the reported geographical patterns characterize research participation and collaboration rather than the geographical distribution or effectiveness of BDS interventions.

3.6. Temporal Keyword Coverage and Metadata Completeness

To examine the temporal distribution of the literature and the completeness of keyword information, the 185 publications were divided into three descriptive periods: 1991–2016, 2017–2022, and 2023–2025.

The earliest period contained 69 publications, followed by 67 publications during 2017–2022 and 49 publications during 2023–2025. Author-keyword information was available for 52 publications (75.4%) in the first period, 62 publications (92.5%) in the second period, and 47 publications (95.9%) in the most recent period.

The findings show that author keywords were more commonly available in recent publications than in older ones. This means that differences in keyword frequencies across publication periods may partly be due to missing metadata rather than actual changes in the topics examined in BDS research.

This difference is important when examining how research terminology has changed over time. Keywords that appear mainly in recent publications should not automatically be considered emerging research themes, as the limited availability of author keywords in older publications may influence the patterns observed.

The analysis also identified gaps in the completeness and organization of cited-reference metadata. Of the 185 publications, 179 contained cited-reference information, while six had no such data. In addition, the available reference details were not consistently linked to standardized publication identifiers. These issues made it difficult to construct co-citation, bibliographic-coupling, and historiographic networks that could be reliably verified. Overall, the findings show a growing body of BDS-related research, with increasing publication activity, publications spread across different sources, citations concentrated in a relatively small number of studies, connections between entrepreneurship and poverty-related terminology, and evidence of international research collaboration. However, the sensitivity analyses show that the identified thematic network structures can vary depending on corpus selection, keyword-frequency thresholds, and the availability of metadata. These findings provide a basis for discussing the development and conceptual characteristics of BDS research in the following Discussion section.4. Discussion

4.1 Evolution and Intellectual Structure of BDS Research

The findings show that academic interest in business development services (BDS) in poverty-related contexts has grown considerably over the past three decades. The concentration of publications between 2011 and 2025 suggests that nonfinancial enterprise support has received increasing attention in entrepreneurship, development economics, and poverty-related research. However, the 185 publications were spread across 152 source-title labels, showing that BDS research is published in a wide range of outlets rather than being concentrated in a small number of specialized journals. This suggests that researchers approach enterprise development and poverty alleviation from different perspectives. However, the variety of publication sources alone does not show how closely these areas of research are connected or integrated.

Citation analysis also shows that scholarly attention is unevenly distributed, with the ten most-cited publications accounting for 39.9% of all citations. The prominence of (Karlan & Valdivia, 2011), along with other frequently cited studies on entrepreneurship training, enterprise support and capability development, suggests that empirical intervention research has received considerable attention in this field. However, the citation influence of these studies should not be confused with evidence that the interventions were effective. For example, (Karlan & Valdivia, 2011), reported improvements in business knowledge and client retention following entrepreneurship training combined with microfinance services but found limited evidence of improvements in sales or profitability. Their high citation count therefore reflects scholarly interest in the intervention and its evaluation rather than proof that BDS consistently leads to positive economic outcomes.

The author-keyword analysis provides further insight into how the main research concepts are organized within the field. Terms such as entrepreneurship, poverty alleviation, capacity building, and training appeared frequently, suggesting that BDS research is closely connected to both enterprise development and wider social and economic objectives. The co-occurrence network also identified connections between business support, microfinance, livelihoods, women's economic empowerment, and entrepreneurial capabilities. These patterns suggest that researchers often examine BDS within broader development contexts rather than treating it as a separate intervention.

An important finding is that terms related to enterprise development and poverty alleviation appear within the same thematic communities. This suggests that researchers often examine entrepreneurship support in connection with poverty-related objectives. However, the presence of these terms within the same communities does not necessarily mean that the studies measured changes in household poverty or demonstrated the effectiveness of BDS interventions. When interpreting the intellectual structure of the field, it is therefore necessary to distinguish between the research topics being studied, the types of support provided, and the outcomes established by the evidence.

The geographical analysis also shows the international nature of Business development support related research. The involvement of institutions from different countries and the presence of international collaboration networks suggest that research on Business development support extends across national and institutional boundaries. However, geographical information based on institutional affiliations identifies where the contributing research institutions are located, rather than where BDS programmes are implemented. Therefore, the geographical patterns observed in this study should be understood as indicators of academic participation and research collaboration, rather than evidence of the geographical distribution of BDS interventions or their socioeconomic effects.

4.2. BDS & and Poverty Related Outcomes: Evidence from Previous Studies

The reviewed literature illustrates considerable variation in the outcomes associated with nonfinancial enterprise-support interventions. This variation is particularly evident when comparing studies examining business training, technical assistance, personalized consulting, and integrated enterprise-development programmes. Although these interventions share the objective of strengthening entrepreneurial activities, their mechanisms, implementation characteristics, beneficiary populations, and measured outcomes differ substantially.

Evidence from Peru illustrates the importance of intervention design and outcome selection. (Karlan & Valdivia, 2011) found that incorporating entrepreneurship training into microfinance services improved selected knowledge and institutional outcomes but produced limited evidence of improvements in enterprise sales or profitability. (Valdivia, 2015) examining entrepreneurship training among female microentrepreneurs, reported improvements in business practices and longer-term sales outcomes, although additional technical assistance did not produce a clearly superior long-term enterprise-growth trajectory. These findings indicate that improvements in entrepreneurial knowledge and managerial practices may occur without corresponding or proportionate improvements in business performance.

In contrast, (Lafortune et al., 2018) reported positive household-income responses associated with more personalized forms of entrepreneurship support in Chile. Their findings suggest that the outcomes of enterprise-support programmes may be influenced by how the interventions are designed, particularly the provision of individualized guidance and opportunities to learn from role models. Similarly, (Campos et al., 2017) demonstrated that personal-initiative training generated stronger enterprise-profit responses than conventional business training among the enterprises studied in Togo. These findings highlight the potential importance of behavioural and personalized approaches, while also demonstrating that different forms of training should not be treated as interchangeable interventions.

Other evaluations provide further evidence of heterogeneous enterprise responses. (de Mel et al., 2014), examining business training among women entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka, found improvements in business practices without consistent or sustained gains in enterprise performance among existing business owners. (Karlan et al., 2015) similarly reported that management consulting and capital interventions among microenterprise tailors in Ghana influenced selected business practices and investment decisions without generating sustained average improvements in profitability. In contrast, (Bruhn et al., 2018) identified productivity and longer-term employment improvements associated with management consulting among small and medium-sized enterprises in Mexico.

These contrasting findings suggest that the outcomes of enterprise-support interventions may depend on the characteristics of participating businesses, the relevance of the services provided, and the constraints facing entrepreneurs. Services that improve the performance of established businesses may not have the same effect on subsistence-oriented micro-enterprises, particularly those facing limited capital, uncertain demand, or restricted access to markets.

Evidence from Uganda further demonstrates the importance of beneficiary characteristics and intervention combinations. (Fiala, 2018) reported differences in responses to capital and training interventions between male and female microentrepreneurs, with limited short-term effects among women-owned enterprises in the evaluated programme. (Anderson et al., 2018) also found that marketing and finance-focused business training could improve profitability through different behavioural mechanisms. Together, these findings suggest that it is important to consider the specific content of Business development services interventions rather than assuming that all training and advisory services produce outcomes through the same process.

Broader evidence syntheses reinforce this interpretation. (Cho & Honorati, 2014) identified considerable variation in entrepreneurship-programme outcomes, including differences between improvements in business knowledge and subsequent income or enterprise expansion. (Grimm & Paffhausen, 2015) highlighted the difficulties associated with generating employment growth through interventions targeting microenterprises and small firms. (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2014) likewise emphasized the methodological and measurement challenges involved in assessing entrepreneurship training programmes. These studies collectively support a more differentiated understanding of BDS interventions and their potential socioeconomic contributions.

An additional challenge emerges when nonfinancial enterprise support is delivered alongside financial assistance, grants, savings interventions, or social protection programmes. (Bossuroy et al., 2022), for example, evaluated multifaceted interventions in Niger that combined entrepreneurship-related support with other economic and psychosocial components. Although such programmes can generate household-level economic improvements, the resulting effects must be interpreted in relation to the evaluated intervention packages rather than attributed automatically to training or coaching alone.

Similarly, (Chatterjee et al., 2022) demonstrated that women's entrepreneurial participation and venture creation do not necessarily correspond to uniformly positive well-being outcomes. (Chu & Luke, 2021) also highlighted the importance of distinguishing immediate programme achievements from more durable beneficiary outcomes in microenterprise-development initiatives.

Together, these findings suggest that the relationship between BDS and poverty-related outcomes varies depending on the characteristics of the intervention, the conditions of the beneficiaries, and the level at which programme outcomes are measured.

Table 5. Illustrative empirical evidence on BDS interventions and the measurement of their outcomes.

Study	Intervention or research focus	Principal outcome interpretation
(Karlan & Valdivia, 2011)	Entrepreneurship training integrated with microfinance	Improvements in knowledge and client retention, with limited evidence of gains in key enterprise outcomes.
(Valdivia, 2015)	Business training and additional technical assistance	Improvements in practices and sales, without a clearly superior long-term effect from additional assistance.
(Lafortune et al., 2018)	Personalized consulting and role-model support	Positive household-income responses associated with personalized intervention components.
(Fiala, 2018)	Capital support and business-skills training	Differences in enterprise responses across beneficiary groups and intervention conditions.
(P10008 Bossuroy et al., 2022)	Multifaceted poverty programme incorporating entrepreneurship support	Household-economic improvements associated with intervention packages rather than independently isolated BDS effects.
(Chatterjee et al., 2022)	Women's entrepreneurship and well-being	Entrepreneurial participation and venture creation do not necessarily translate into improved individual well-being.

4.3. Understanding the Relationship Between BDS, Enterprise Performance, and Household Welfare

A central contribution of this study is the distinction between nonfinancial enterprise-support services, entrepreneurial capabilities, enterprise performance, and household welfare. Although these dimensions are closely related improvements in one area do not necessarily lead to similar improvements to the next level.

Business development support interventions generally aim to address limitations in entrepreneurs' knowledge, management skills, production practices, market relationships, and business decision making. Improvements in these capabilities may help enterprises increase productivity, profitability, survival, and market participation. However, whether these business improvements contribute to poverty alleviation depends on their ability to produce lasting changes in household income, financial security, and overall, well being.

This relationship can be understood as a conditional sequence of four interconnected stages: access to relevant nonfinancial enterprise-support services, development of entrepreneurial capabilities, improvement in enterprise performance, and enhancement of household welfare. This sequence provides a conceptual framework for understanding differences in how outcomes are measured across the existing literature. However, it does not suggest that the relationships between these stages have been empirically established through the present bibliometric analysis.

The first relationship focuses on how entrepreneurs receive and make use of support offered through BDS programmes. Taking part in training does not necessarily improve entrepreneurial capabilities if the content does not address participants' needs or if the training is poorly delivered. How often support is provided, how long it lasts, and how intensive it is may also influence whether entrepreneurs can apply what they have learned in their daily business activities. For this reason, short training sessions, long-term mentoring, and ongoing technical consultancy should be treated as different forms of enterprise support, each with its own delivery characteristics.

The second relationship concerns how improvements in entrepreneurial capabilities translate into better business performance. Entrepreneurs may gain knowledge and skills in financial management, marketing, and business operations without necessarily achieving higher profits or greater participation in the market. Even with improved skills and business practices, enterprise performance may remain limited by difficulties in accessing finance, market saturation, inadequate infrastructure, weak customer demand, or other external factors. The contrasting findings of (de Mel et al., 2014; Karlan & Valdivia, 2011) and (Campos et al., 2017) suggest that improvements in entrepreneurial skills and management practices do not necessarily lead to enterprise growth.

The third relationship focuses on how improvements in business performance affect household welfare. Even when businesses supported by BDS earn higher revenues or profits, these improvements may not lead to lasting reductions in household poverty. Business income can be unstable, reinvested into the enterprise, or simply insufficient to cover household needs. Household welfare also depends on factors beyond business earnings, including the ability to meet daily consumption needs, cope with economic shocks, maintain financial independence, and achieve better overall well-being.

Gender-related and household constraints may further influence this relationship. Women entrepreneurs may face difficulties accessing markets, have limited control over productive resources, carry unpaid care responsibilities, and have less authority in household or business decision-making.

These challenges can influence both business performance and the extent to which income generated by enterprises contributes to household welfare. (Chatterjee et al., 2022) also suggest that improvements in entrepreneurship do not necessarily lead to corresponding improvements in individual well-being.

The findings therefore suggest the need for a more detailed approach to understanding BDS-related outcomes. Rather than assessing interventions only through participation rates, entrepreneurial knowledge, or business performance, future empirical studies should examine how specific enterprise-support services affect both business performance and household welfare over suitable follow-up periods.

Importantly, this proposed sequence is an analytical framework based on the distinctions identified in the existing literature. The relationships between its different stages still need to be examined through empirical research designs capable of addressing programme selection, confounding factors, intervention combinations, and temporal changes in outcomes.

4.4. Thematic Robustness and Methodological Contributions

Beyond examining publication characteristics and research themes, this study also shows how bibliometric findings can be affected by methodological choices. Comparing the conservative dataset of 185 publications with the expanded dataset of 187 publications reveals that even small changes in publication selection can influence the structure of keyword networks.

The primary keyword co-occurrence analysis identified six Louvain communities. When two additional conditional publications were included, the number increased to seven. Although the dataset expanded by only two publications, the grouping of keywords into communities changed. This suggests that the themes identified through community-detection algorithms can be influenced by the publications selected, the way keywords are processed, and the methods used to construct the networks.

Changes in keyword-frequency thresholds also affected the network structure. In the conservative corpus, lowering the minimum occurrence threshold from three to two publications increased the number of communities from six to eleven. However, raising the threshold to four publications reduced the number to four. These differences suggest that keyword communities should not be regarded as fixed theoretical categories, as their structure depends on the analytical settings applied.

The welfare-oriented subset provides another point of comparison. Although 52 publications focused on poverty or household welfare, the author-keyword co-occurrence network contained only eight keywords at the primary occurrence threshold. This relatively small network may reflect the limited frequency of shared keywords and gaps in the available metadata. For this reason, comparisons between the broader BDS corpus and the welfare-oriented subset need to be made carefully, as differences in their network structures may partly reflect these limitations.

The findings also show why the completeness of bibliographic metadata matters when examining research trends. Author keywords were less frequently available in older publications than in more recent ones. This makes it difficult to determine whether keywords appearing mainly in recent studies represent genuinely emerging research themes. Some of the changes observed over time may be explained by differences in metadata availability and indexing practices rather than actual shifts in the focus of BDS research.

Another methodological contribution of this study is its emphasis on transparent publication selection and reproducible analytical procedures. A review and reconciliation of the Scopus search history identified considerably more publications within the selected study period than were available in the earlier partial export. This shows how incomplete retrieval of bibliographic records can influence publication trends, citation measures, and the interpretation of research networks. To ensure that the network analysis could be reproduced, keyword nodes and links were arranged in a consistent order, and the community-detection algorithm and random seed were clearly specified.

These findings are consistent with established methodological recommendations that emphasize the importance of transparent data selection, appropriate construction of bibliometric indicators, and careful interpretation of results (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015)

The geographical findings also point to an important consideration when interpreting bibliometric results. Although the United States, India, and Malaysia were among the most frequently represented countries in terms of institutional affiliations, these findings reflect where the contributing researchers were based rather than where BDS interventions were implemented. Studies conducted in Malaysia, including research involving low-income microentrepreneurs (Al Mamun et al., 2021) provide useful contextual evidence. However, institutional-affiliation frequencies alone cannot determine where BDS programmes are most widely implemented or how effective they are in different countries.

Taken together, these findings show that bibliometric analysis can help explain how BDS research has developed and how the existing literature is organized. However, interpreting these findings requires careful consideration of publication selection, analytical procedures, and limitations in the available metadata. The results indicate that BDS research has grown over time, with publications appearing across a wide range of sources, connections between entrepreneurship and poverty-related themes, and evidence of international research collaboration.

The broader contribution of this study lies in distinguishing patterns found in the literature from evidence of the actual effectiveness of BDS programmes. By considering specific BDS support mechanisms, enterprise-level outcomes, and household welfare as separate but related aspects, the study provides a clearer basis for understanding existing research and identifying questions that need further empirical investigation.

CONCLUSION

This study examines 185 Scopus indexed publications on nonfinancial business development services (BDS) in poverty related contexts between 1991 and 2025. The findings show a growing and diverse body of research with publications spread across 152 source title labels and a total of 3445 Scopus citations. Of the 185 publications, 59 involved institutional affiliations from at least two countries, based on the counting approach used in this study. At the minimum occurrence threshold of three publications, the author keyword network contained 39 keywords, 114 links and six Louvain communities. When two additional conditional publications were included, bringing the dataset to 187 publications, the number of communities increased to seven. This

suggests that the identified thematic structure depends partly on corpus selection rather than representing fixed divisions within literature.

The main contribution of this study is the distinction between nonfinancial enterprise-support services, entrepreneurial capabilities, enterprise performance, and household welfare. Business training, mentoring, incubation, consultancy, technical assistance, and market linkages provide different forms of support and may influence business outcomes in different ways. Improvements in entrepreneurial knowledge and business practices do not necessarily lead to higher profits. Similarly, improvements in enterprise performance may not result in lasting benefits for household welfare. The 52 welfare-oriented publications reflect research focus on poverty and household well-being rather than 52 studies providing verified causal evidence of poverty reduction. This distinction allows for a more careful interpretation of the existing BDS literature and helps identify the different levels of outcomes that future empirical research should examine.

For policymakers and BDS providers, the findings suggest the need for comprehensive programme monitoring and evaluation rather than recommending a single intervention for all contexts. Programme evaluations should examine the type of services provided, how frequently and intensively they are delivered, the characteristics of participants, and the quality of implementation. They should also assess changes in business practices, enterprise survival, profitability, and market participation. Where poverty alleviation is an explicit goal, changes in household income, consumption, economic resilience, and vulnerability should also be measured. For programmes that combine training or advisory services with grants, credit, or other forms of support, the effects of individual components should only be assessed separately when the evaluation design allows their contributions to be reliably identified. Considering these factors can help improve programme design and provide a clearer understanding of the outcomes achieved.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. The analysis was restricted to English-language journal articles and review papers indexed in Scopus, meaning that relevant research published in other languages, available through other databases, or found in grey literature may not have been included. Although the publication selection process was documented, the studies were not screened independently by two reviewers. Two older publications were also left out of the conservative dataset because there was not enough evidence to confirm that they met the BDS-specific eligibility criteria. Furthermore, citation counts were collected at a single point in time, without adjusting for differences in publication age or research discipline. The bibliometric maps may also have been influenced by several factors, including missing author keywords and cited references, the decision to keep related but differently worded terms separate, and the use of different keyword co-occurrence thresholds. Other possible influences include the automated identification of countries from institutional affiliations and variations in publication-source names that were not standardized. For these reasons, citation counts and relationships between keywords should be viewed as indicators of scholarly attention and connections between research concepts, rather than direct evidence that BDS interventions are effective in reducing poverty.

Future bibliometric studies should extend their searches to other databases and provide a clear keyword thesaurus to make the selection and treatment of keywords more transparent. Institutional-affiliation locations should also be checked manually, while cited references should be matched with stable publication identifiers before constructing co-citation or bibliographic-coupling networks. A complementary systematic review could examine studies of implemented BDS interventions through independent screening, assess the methodological quality of their research designs, and distinguish between outcomes measured at the enterprise and household levels. Further empirical research should investigate the additional contributions of mentoring, training, market access support, and consultancy in programmes that combine non-financial services with financial assistance, using appropriate follow-up periods to assess their outcomes.

Attention should be given to differences in gender, business sector, market access, and household responsibilities to better understand why similar improvements in enterprise performance may lead to different household welfare outcomes.

Overall, this study provides a transparent overview of a diverse body of research while clarifying the distinction between enterprise-support mechanisms and poverty-related outcomes. It identifies major research patterns, shows how thematic network structures can change depending on analytical decisions, and provides a basis for future research examining how, under what conditions, and for which groups BDS may contribute to sustainable livelihoods and improved household welfare.

Declarations

Data and Code Availability

The bibliometric data for this study were obtained from Scopus through institutional access. Details of

publication screening decisions, Scopus Electronic Identifiers (EIDs), derived bibliometric datasets, and analytical code may be made available, subject to Scopus licensing conditions and the data-sharing policies of the selected journal. The original Scopus export has not been made publicly available because of potential licensing restrictions.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study relied entirely on published bibliographic records and related metadata obtained from Scopus. No human participants were recruited, and no personal information from individual participants was collected or analyzed. As the research involved only bibliographic data and did not require human participation, informed consent was not applicable.

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Appendix A. Reproducible Scopus Search Expression

The search below reproduces the recorded topic terms, document-type and language restrictions. The 1991–2025 publication period was applied to the 15 August 2026 export during screening, rather than being inferred from the earlier 519-result historical display. The initial field-name prefix has been restored as TITLE-ABS-KEY from the saved search syntax; verify it against the Scopus search history before final submission.

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("business development service*" OR "business development support" OR "business support service*" OR "business advisory service*" OR "enterprise development service*" OR "enterprise support program*" OR "enterprise development program*" OR "entrepreneurship development program*" OR "small business support" OR "microenterprise support" OR "microenterprise development" OR "micro-enterprise development" OR "entrepreneurship support" OR "entrepreneurship training" OR "entrepreneurial training" OR "business training" OR "enterprise training" OR "business mentoring" OR "business coaching" OR "business incubation" OR "business capacity building" OR ((entrepreneur* OR microenterprise* OR "small business*" OR SME* OR MSME*) AND ("technical assistance" OR "capacity building" OR "market linkage*" OR "market access" OR mentoring OR coaching))) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (poverty OR "poverty alleviation" OR "poverty reduction" OR livelihood* OR "household income" OR "household welfare" OR "income generation" OR "income diversification" OR "economic empowerment" OR "economic inclusion").