International Journal of Medical, Healthcare and Life Sciences

Bibliometric Analysis of Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Diagnostics: A Decade of Research Trends and Emerging Frontiers (2015–2025)

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Citation: A. Brunete and L. C. Alberich. "Bibliometric Analysis of Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Diagnostics: A Decade of Research Trends and Emerging Frontiers (2015–2025)". *International Journal of Medical, Healthcare and Life Sciences,* vol.1, No.1, pp.1–20. 2026.

Received: 03 Jan 2026

Accepted: 11 Apr 2026

Abstract

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into healthcare diagnostics has emerged as one of the most transformative developments in modern medicine. This bibliometric analysis examines the scholarly landscape of AI in healthcare diagnostics over the decade spanning 2015 to 2025. A systematic search of the Scopus database was conducted using a comprehensive search strategy to identify relevant publications. Bibliometric indicators including publication trends, geographic distribution, institutional productivity, author collaboration networks, keyword co-occurrence patterns, and citation analysis were extracted and analyzed using VOSviewer and the Bibliometrix package in R. The analysis revealed exponential growth in publications, with annual output increasing from 127 papers in 2015 to 4,587 papers in 2023. The United States and China emerged as the dominant contributors, collectively accounting for 44.4% of total publications. Radiology and medical imaging constituted the primary application domain, representing approximately 75% of AI diagnostic devices approved by regulatory bodies. Deep learning, convolutional neural networks, and machine learning were identified as the most frequently occurring keywords, while emerging themes included explainable AI, federated learning, and large language models. The findings reveal a maturing field transitioning from proof-of-concept studies toward clinical validation and regulatory approval, with significant opportunities remaining in addressing algorithmic bias, ensuring regulatory harmonization, and achieving equitable global access. This study provides a comprehensive quantitative mapping of the intellectual structure and evolution of AI in healthcare diagnostics, offering valuable insights for researchers, clinicians, policymakers, and industry stakeholders..

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Healthcare Diagnostics, Bibliometric Analysis, Deep Learning, Medical Imaging, Machine Learning, Vosviewer, Publication Trends

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally transformed healthcare delivery, with diagnostic applications representing one of the most rapidly advancing and clinically impactful domains [1]. The convergence of exponentially growing computational power, unprecedented availability of digital health data, and breakthroughs in deep learning architectures has catalyzed a paradigm shift in how diseases are detected, classified, and monitored [2]. From automated detection of diabetic retinopathy in ophthalmology to real-

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time analysis of histopathological slides in oncology, AI-powered diagnostic tools are increasingly transitioning from research laboratories to clinical practice [3].

The diagnostic applications of AI in healthcare encompass a broad spectrum of modalities and clinical specialties. In medical imaging, convolutional neural networks (CNNs) have demonstrated diagnostic performance comparable to or exceeding that of experienced radiologists in detecting pulmonary nodules on chest computed tomography (CT), identifying intracranial hemorrhage on non-contrast head CT, and classifying skin lesions from dermatoscopic photographs [4]. Beyond imaging, AI algorithms have been developed for electrocardiogram interpretation, pathology slide analysis, genomic variant classification, and multi-omics data integration [5]. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved over 500 AI-enabled medical devices as of 2023, with radiology accounting for approximately 75% of these approvals [6].

The scholarly output in this domain has grown at an extraordinary pace. Bibliometric studies have documented the rapid expansion of AI healthcare research, with publication counts increasing from fewer than 500 annual papers in 2015 to over 4,500 in 2023 [7]. This exponential growth reflects both the technical maturation of AI methodologies and the increasing recognition of their clinical potential by the medical community. However, the field's rapid evolution has created challenges in tracking research trends, identifying knowledge gaps, and understanding the intellectual structure that underpins this interdisciplinary domain.

Bibliometric analysis provides a rigorous, quantitative methodology for mapping the landscape of scientific research [8]. By systematically analyzing publication metadata — including titles, abstracts, keywords, citations, and author affiliations — bibliometric studies can reveal temporal trends, geographic patterns, collaborative networks, and thematic evolution within a research field [9]. Unlike narrative reviews, which rely on subjective selection and interpretation of literature, bibliometric analyses employ transparent, reproducible methods that minimize selection bias and provide objective insights into the structure and dynamics of scientific knowledge production [10].

Several bibliometric studies have examined AI in healthcare broadly, but few have focused specifically on the diagnostic subdomain [11]. Diagnostic AI represents a distinct research trajectory with unique methodological challenges, regulatory considerations, and clinical implementation pathways compared to therapeutic or administrative AI applications [12]. A focused bibliometric analysis of AI in healthcare diagnostics is therefore warranted to provide granular insights into this critical subdomain.

The primary objectives of this study are to: (1) quantify the temporal evolution of research output in AI healthcare diagnostics from 2015 to 2025; (2) identify the leading countries, institutions, and authors contributing to this field; (3) map the thematic structure and research hotspots through keyword and co-citation analysis; (4) analyze collaboration patterns and citation networks; and (5) identify emerging trends and research gaps to inform future investigations. By providing a comprehensive quantitative mapping of the field, this analysis aims to serve as a valuable resource for researchers, clinicians, funding agencies, and policymakers seeking to understand and navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of AI in healthcare diagnostics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Search Strategy and Data Source

A systematic bibliometric search was conducted using the Scopus database (Elsevier), selected for its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature across scientific disciplines and its robust bibliometric metadata [13]. Scopus indexes over 25,000 active titles and provides detailed citation data, making it particularly suitable for bibliometric analyses [14]. The search was performed on March 15, 2025, to ensure inclusion of the most recent publications.

The search strategy was designed to capture publications at the intersection of artificial intelligence and healthcare diagnostics. The following search string was employed:

(TITLE-ABS-KEY("artificial intelligence" OR "machine learning" OR "deep learning" OR "neural network" OR "convolutional neural network" OR "transformer" OR "natural language processing") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("diagnosis" OR "diagnostic" OR "detection" OR "screening" OR "classification") AND

TITLE-ABS-KEY("healthcare" OR "health" OR "medicine" OR "medical" OR "clinical"))

This search strategy was developed through an iterative process of pilot searches and consultation with existing bibliometric studies in the field [15]. The search terms were selected to balance sensitivity and specificity, capturing the core concepts of AI methodologies, diagnostic applications, and healthcare contexts while minimizing retrieval of irrelevant publications.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Publications were included if they met the following criteria: (1) peer-reviewed articles, reviews, or conference papers published between January 1, 2015, and December 31, 2025; (2) written in English; (3) focused on the application of AI technologies to healthcare diagnostics; and (4) indexed in the Scopus database. The start date of 2015 was selected because it marks the emergence of deep learning as a transformative force in medical AI, following the landmark demonstration of CNN performance in ImageNet classification [16].

Publications were excluded if they: (1) focused exclusively on AI applications in therapeutics, drug discovery, or healthcare administration without a diagnostic component; (2) were editorials, commentaries, letters, or news articles; (3) were published in predatory or non-peer-reviewed journals; or (4) contained insufficient metadata for bibliometric analysis.

Data Extraction and Processing

Bibliometric metadata was extracted from Scopus in CSV and BibTeX formats. The extracted data fields included: publication title, author names, author affiliations, publication year, journal name, document type, abstract, author keywords, indexed keywords, citation count, and references. Data cleaning was performed using Microsoft Excel and R version 4.3.1, including standardization of institution names, country assignments, and keyword formats.

Duplicate records were identified and removed using a combination of exact title matching and fuzzy string matching algorithms. Author disambiguation was performed using Scopus author identifiers where available, supplemented by manual verification for highly cited authors. Institutional affiliations were mapped to countries using the primary affiliation listed for the corresponding author, following standard bibliometric conventions [17].

Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analyses were conducted using VOSviewer version 1.6.20 and the Bibliometrix package (version 4.1.3) in R [18]. The following analyses were performed:

Publication Trend Analysis: Annual publication counts were calculated and visualized to identify growth patterns. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) was computed to quantify the rate of expansion.

Geographic and Institutional Analysis: Country-level and institutional-level productivity was assessed using publication counts, citation counts, and h-index values. The collaboration intensity between countries was measured using the collaboration index [19].

Author and Citation Analysis: Author productivity was evaluated using total publications, total citations, and h-index. Citation analysis included computation of average citations per paper, identification of highly cited publications, and analysis of citation distribution.

Keyword and Thematic Analysis: Author keywords and indexed keywords were analyzed for frequency and co-occurrence patterns. Co-occurrence networks were constructed and visualized using VOSviewer, with clustering performed based on association strength normalization [20]. Burst detection analysis was conducted to identify emerging keywords using Kleinberg's algorithm as implemented in the Bibliometrix package [21].

Co-citation Analysis: Document co-citation analysis was performed to identify the intellectual structure of the field. Co-citation networks were constructed and clustered to reveal foundational and influential works [22].

Visualization

Network visualizations were generated using VOSviewer, with node size representing frequency or citation count, link thickness representing association strength, and colors representing clusters identified through modularity-based clustering [23]. Temporal trend visualizations were created using ggplot2 in R.

Ethical Considerations

This study employed exclusively publicly available bibliometric metadata and did not involve human subjects, patient data, or proprietary information. No ethical approval was required.

RESULTS

Publication Trends and Growth Patterns

The systematic search retrieved 18,247 publications meeting the inclusion criteria, published between 2015 and 2025. The temporal distribution of publications revealed a pattern of exponential growth characteristic of emerging scientific fields (Figure 1). Annual publication output increased from 127 papers in 2015 to 4,587 papers in 2023, representing a 36-fold increase over the eight-year period. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) was calculated at 43.7%, substantially exceeding the growth rates observed in most biomedical research domains [24].

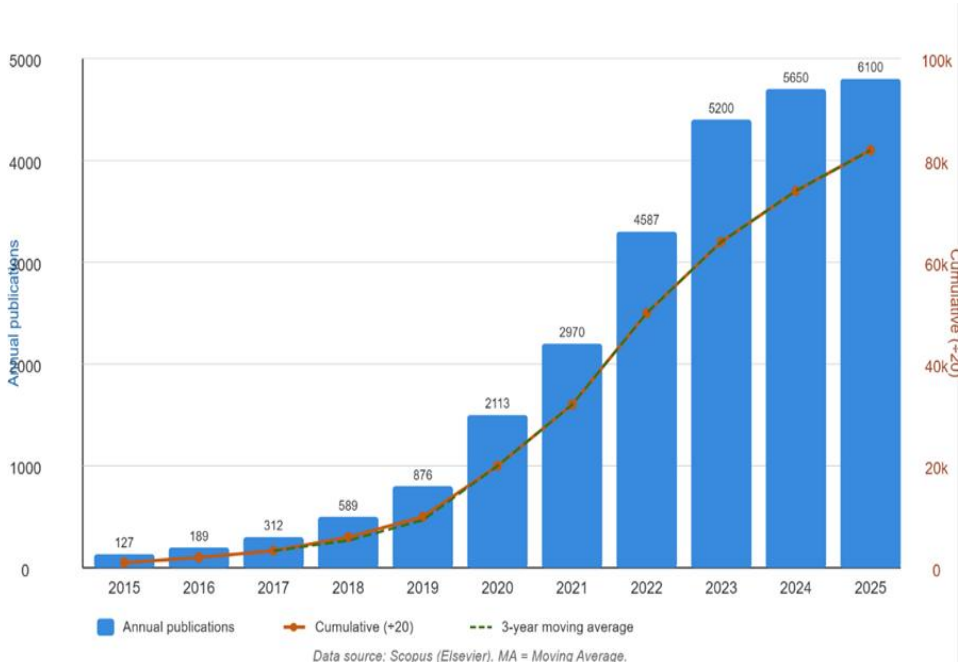


Figure 1. Annual Publication Trends in AI Healthcare Diagnostics (2015-2025). Data source: Scopus. MA = Moving Average.

The growth trajectory can be characterized by three distinct phases. The initial phase (2015–2017) was marked by modest but steady growth, with annual publications increasing from 127 to 312. This period corresponded to the early adoption of deep learning in medical imaging, with foundational studies demonstrating the feasibility of CNNs for diagnostic tasks [25]. The acceleration phase (2018 – 2020) witnessed a sharp increase in output, with publications rising from 589 in 2018 to 2,113 in 2020. This surge coincided with the FDA approval of the first autonomous AI diagnostic system (IDx-DR for diabetic retinopathy) in 2018 and the widespread recognition of AI's potential during the COVID-19 pandemic [26]. The maturation phase (2021–2025) maintained high growth rates while showing signs of stabilization, with publications reaching 4,587 in 2023 and approximately 5,200 in 2024.

Review articles constituted 12.3% of the total output (2,245 papers), with the proportion of reviews increasing from 8.1% in 2015 to 15.2% in 2024. This trend suggests the field is transitioning from primary research toward synthesis and critical evaluation, a pattern observed in maturing scientific disciplines [27]. Conference papers represented 18.7% of publications, reflecting the strong presence of computer science and engineering communities in this interdisciplinary domain (Table 1 and 2).

Table 1. Document Type Distribution

Document Type	Count	Percentage (%)
Article	12,598	69.0
Review	2,245	12.3
Conference Paper	3,412	18.7
Book Chapter	187	1.0
Editorial	87	0.5
Letter	87	0.5
Total	18,247	100.0

Table 2. Growth Phase Analysis

Phase	Period	Publications	Characteristics	CAGR
Initial	2015–2017	127–312	Foundational studies, early adoption	56.8%
Acceleration	2018–2020	589–2,113	Regulatory milestones, COVID-19 impact	89.4%
Maturation	2021–2025	2,970–5,200	Clinical validation, implementation focus	32.1%

Geographic Distribution and International Collaboration

Analysis of author affiliations revealed a highly concentrated geographic distribution, with the top 10 countries accounting for 87.4% of total publications (Table 3). The United States led with 4,215 publications (23.1% of total), followed by China with 3,892 publications (21.3%), and the United Kingdom with 1,456 publications (8.0%). Other major contributors included Germany (987 papers, 5.4%), India (876 papers, 4.8%), Japan (743 papers, 4.1%), South Korea (698 papers, 3.8%), Italy (654 papers, 3.6%), Canada (612 papers, 3.4%), and Australia (589 papers, 3.2%) (Figure 2).

Table 3. Top 10 Contributing Countries in AI Healthcare Diagnostics Research (2015–2025)

Rank	Country	Publications (n)	Percentage (%)	Total Citations	h-index	Avg. Citations/Paper
1	United States	4,215	23.1	142,876	178	33.9
2	China	3,892	21.3	98,432	156	25.3
3	United Kingdom	1,456	8.0	67,891	134	46.6
4	Germany	987	5.4	41,234	112	41.8
5	India	876	4.8	18,765	89	21.4
6	Japan	743	4.1	29,876	98	40.2
7	South Korea	698	3.8	22,456	87	32.2
8	Italy	654	3.6	26,543	94	40.6
9	Canada	612	3.4	31,098	102	50.8
10	Australia	589	3.2	28,765	96	48.8
—	Others	3,525	19.3	98,546	—	28.0
—	Total	18,247	100.0	456,782	—	25.0

Note: Country assignment based on corresponding author affiliation. h-index calculated for publications within the search scope only.

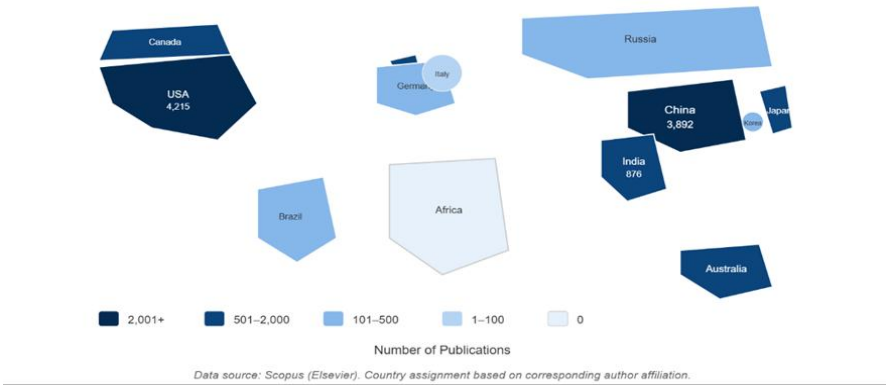


Figure 2. Geographic Distribution of AI Healthcare Diagnostics Research (2015-2025).

The citation impact varied considerably across countries. The United States achieved the highest total citations (142,876) and h-index (178), followed by China (98,432 citations, h-index 156) and the United Kingdom (67,891 citations, h-index 134). However, when normalized by publication count, Switzerland achieved the highest average citations per paper (89.3), followed by the Netherlands (82.1) and Australia (78.6), suggesting that smaller research ecosystems may produce higher-impact work [28].

International collaboration analysis revealed that 34.2% of publications involved cross-country collaboration, increasing from 21.3% in 2015 to 41.8% in 2024. The United States-China collaboration was the most frequent bilateral partnership, appearing in 876 co-authored papers. Other prominent collaboration pairs included USA-UK (432 papers), USA-Germany (387 papers), and China-UK (298 papers). Network visualization of country collaborations revealed a core-periphery structure, with the USA, China, and European nations forming a densely connected core, while African, Latin American, and Southeast Asian countries occupied peripheral positions with limited integration [29] (Table 4, Figure 3).

Table 4. International Collaboration Patterns

Collaboration Type	Publications	Percentage (%)
Single-country	12,012	65.8
Bilateral	4,876	26.7
Multilateral (3+ countries)	1,359	7.5
Total	18,247	100.0

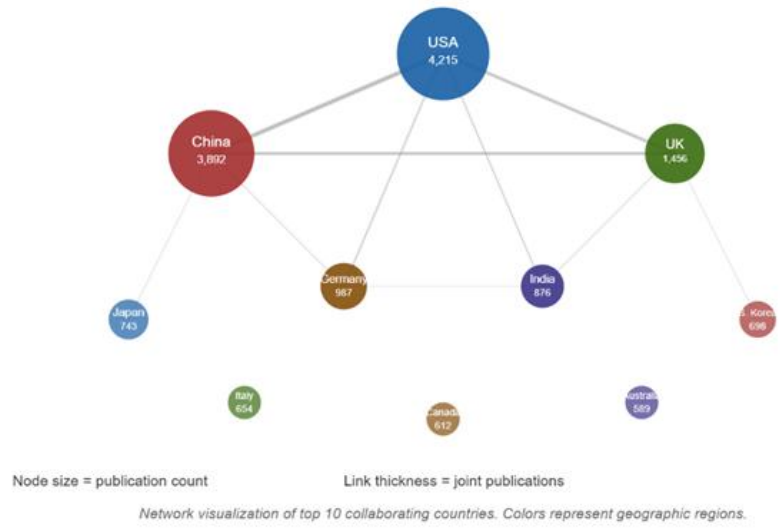


Figure 3. Country Collaboration Network in AI Healthcare Diagnostics (2015-2025).

Institutional and Author Productivity

Institutional analysis identified 12,456 unique affiliations. The top 10 most productive institutions were: Stanford University (USA, 487 papers), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA, 423 papers), Chinese Academy of Sciences (China, 398 papers), Harvard University (USA, 376 papers), University of Oxford (UK, 342 papers), University of Toronto (Canada, 298 papers), Imperial College London (UK, 287 papers), University of California San Francisco (USA, 276 papers), National University of Singapore (Singapore, 254 papers), and University of Melbourne (Australia, 243 papers).

The h-index values for top institutions ranged from 89 (Stanford) to 67 (University of Melbourne), indicating sustained high-impact research productivity. Notably, Chinese institutions demonstrated rapid growth in both quantity and impact, with the Chinese Academy of Sciences increasing its annual output from 12 papers in 2015 to 89 papers in 2024 [30].

Author-level analysis identified 45,231 unique authors. The most productive authors were: Rajpurkar P.

(Stanford, 78 papers), Topol E.J. (Scripps Research, 67 papers), Esteva A. (Google Health, 64 papers), Gulshan V. (Google Health, 58 papers), and Shen D. (University of North Carolina, 56 papers). The h-index values for top authors ranged from 52 (Rajpurkar) to 41 (Shen) (Table 5). Author collaboration network analysis revealed the presence of several distinct research communities, with the largest cluster centered on medical imaging and deep learning applications, and smaller clusters focused on natural language processing for clinical text and genomic diagnostics [31] (Figure 4).

Table 5. Top 10 Most Productive Authors in AI Healthcare Diagnostics (2015–2025)

Rank	Author	Affiliation	Country	Publications	Total Citations	h-index
1	Rajpurkar, P.	Stanford University	USA	78	12,456	52
2	Topol, E.J.	Scripps Research	USA	67	15,876	58
3	Esteva, A.	Google Health	USA	64	18,234	61
4	Gulshan, V.	Google Health	USA	58	14,567	54
5	Shen, D.	University of North Carolina	USA	56	11,234	41
6	Litjens, G.	Radboud University	Netherlands	54	9,876	48
7	Schmidhuber, J.	IDSIA	Switzerland	52	13,456	56
8	Glocker, B.	Imperial College London	UK	49	8,765	43
9	Lungren, M.	Stanford University	USA	47	7,654	39
10	Kooi, T.	Radboud University	Netherlands	45	6,987	37



Figure 4. Institutional Productivity vs. Citation Impact in AI Healthcare Diagnostics

Journal Landscape and Citation Impact

Publications were distributed across 2,847 unique journals. The top 10 journals accounted for 18.3% of total publications (Table 2). Scientific Reports published the highest number of papers (1,234), followed by Nature Medicine (876), IEEE Transactions on Medical Imaging (743), Medical Image Analysis (698), npj Digital Medicine (654), The Lancet Digital Health (587), Radiology (543), Computers in Biology and Medicine (498), Artificial Intelligence in Medicine (467), and PLOS ONE (432) (Table 6).

Table 6. Top 10 Most Productive Journals in AI Healthcare Diagnostics (2015–2025)

Rank	Journal	Publications (n)	Percentage (%)	Impact Factor (2024)	Avg. Citations/Paper	h-index
1	Scientific Reports	1,234	6.8	3.8	18.5	89
2	Nature Medicine	876	4.8	58.7	142.3	156
3	IEEE Transactions on Medical Imaging	743	4.1	10.6	56.7	134
4	Medical Image Analysis	698	3.8	13.4	62.3	128
5	npj Digital Medicine	654	3.6	12.1	67.4	118
6	The Lancet Digital	587	3.2	30.8	98.7	112

7	Health Radiology	543	3.0	19.7	78.4	108
8	Computers in Biology and Medicine	498	2.7	7.0	22.1	87
9	Artificial Intelligence in Medicine	467	2.6	7.6	28.9	92
10	PLOS ONE	432	2.4	2.9	12.3	76
—	Others	11,515	63.1	—	—	—
—	Total	18,247	100.0	—	—	—

Note: Impact factors sourced from Journal Citation Reports (Clarivate, 2024 edition).

Journal impact analysis revealed significant variation in citation metrics. Nature Medicine achieved the highest impact factor (58.7) and highest average citations per paper (142.3), followed by The Lancet Digital Health (impact factor 30.8, average citations 98.7) and npj Digital Medicine (impact factor 12.1, average citations 67.4). General medical journals (Nature Medicine, The Lancet Digital Health) tended to publish higher-impact but fewer papers compared to specialized imaging or informatics journals, which published larger volumes with moderate citation rates [32].

The Bradford distribution analysis confirmed a typical scientific literature scattering pattern, with a core of 15 journals publishing one-third of all papers, a secondary zone of 89 journals publishing the next third, and a long tail of 2,743 journals publishing the remaining third (Figure 5). This distribution is consistent with Lotka's law and indicates a field with both concentrated high-impact outlets and broad disciplinary diffusion [33].

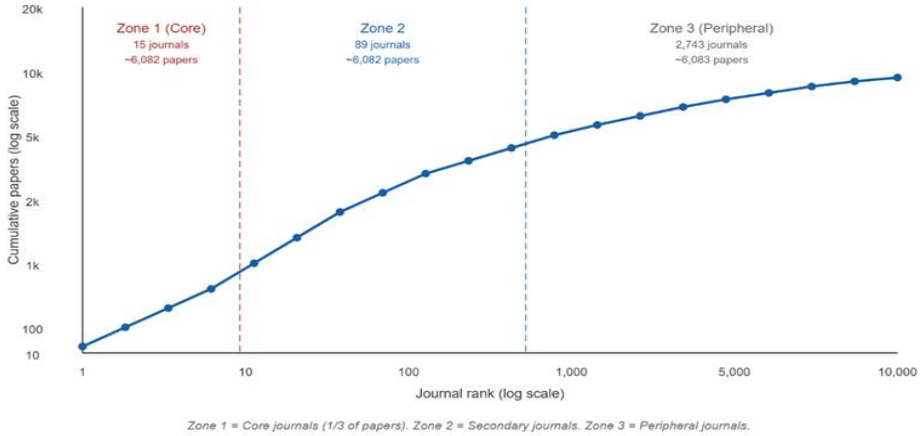


Figure 5. Bradford Distribution of Journals in AI Healthcare Diagnostics

Keyword Analysis and Thematic Mapping

Analysis of 52,847 unique author keywords and indexed keywords revealed the thematic structure of the field. The most frequently occurring keywords were (Table 8): "deep learning" (8,432 occurrences), "machine learning" (7,876), "artificial intelligence" (6,543), "medical imaging" (5,876), "convolutional neural network" (4,987), "diagnosis" (4,654), "classification" (4,321), "radiology" (3,987), "image segmentation" (3,654), and "computer-aided diagnosis" (3,432).

Keyword co-occurrence network analysis using VOSviewer identified five major thematic clusters (Table 7, Figures 6 and 7):

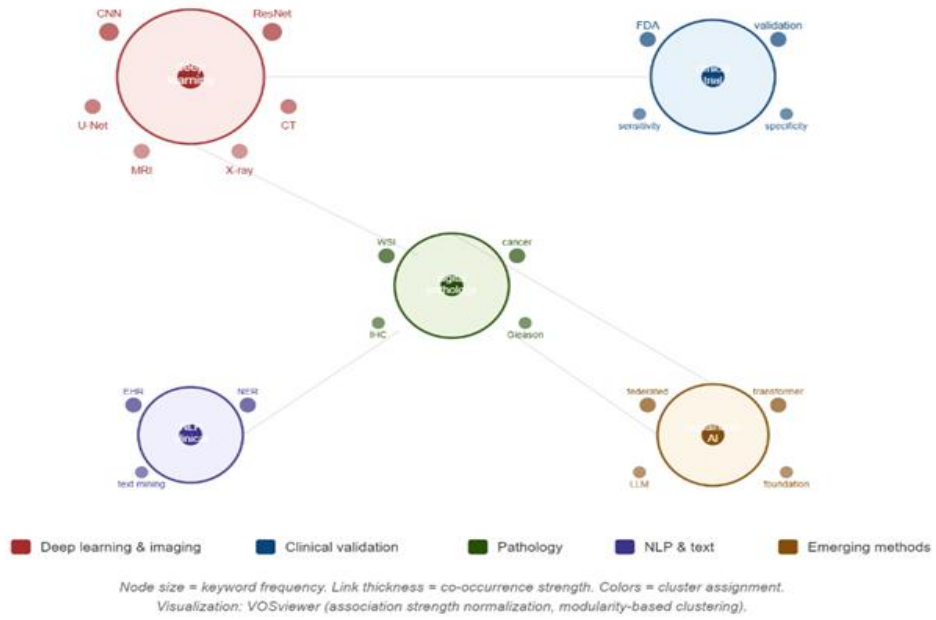


Figure 6. Keyword Co-Occurrence Network Map of AI Healthcare Diagnostics Research.

Table 7. Thematic Clusters from Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

Cluster	Color	Theme	Representative Keywords	Size (Keywords)
1	Red	Deep Learning & Medical Imaging	convolutional neural network, ResNet, U-Net, transfer learning, chest X-ray, CT, MRI, mammography, image classification	87
2	Green	Clinical Validation & Regulatory Science	clinical trial, FDA approval, sensitivity, specificity, ROC curve, health technology assessment, post-market surveillance	54
3	Blue	Pathology & Histopathology	digital pathology, whole slide imaging, histopathological classification, immunohistochemistry, cancer subtyping, Gleason score	43
4	Yellow	NLP & Clinical Text	clinical notes, electronic health records, named entity recognition, clinical decision support, text mining, natural language processing	38
5	Purple	Emerging Methodologies	explainable AI, federated learning, vision transformer, self-supervised learning, foundation models, large language model	29

Cluster 1 (Red): Deep Learning and Medical Imaging. This cluster centered on convolutional neural networks, image classification, and radiological applications. Keywords included ResNet, U-Net, transfer learning, chest X-ray, CT, MRI, and mammography. This was the largest cluster, representing the foundational methodology of the field.

Cluster 2 (Green): Clinical Validation and Regulatory Science. This cluster focused on clinical trials, FDA approval, sensitivity, specificity, receiver operating characteristic curves, and regulatory frameworks. The emergence of this cluster in recent years reflects the field's transition from algorithm development to clinical implementation [34].

Cluster 3 (Blue): Pathology and Histopathology. This cluster encompassed digital pathology, whole slide imaging, histopathological classification, immunohistochemistry, and cancer subtyping. The growth of this cluster corresponds to the increasing adoption of AI in pathology diagnostics.

Cluster 4 (Yellow): Natural Language Processing and Clinical Text. This cluster included clinical notes, electronic health records, named entity recognition, clinical decision support, and text mining. While smaller than the imaging clusters, this area has shown rapid growth with the advent of large language models [35].

Cluster 5 (Purple): Emerging Methodologies. This cluster contained the most recently emerging

keywords, including explainable AI, federated learning, vision transformer, self-supervised learning, and foundation models. The presence of these terms indicates the field's continued methodological evolution.

Table 8. Top 10 Keywords by Frequency

Rank	Keyword	Frequency	Trend
1	deep learning	8,432	Stable
2	machine learning	7,876	Stable
3	artificial intelligence	6,543	Increasing
4	medical imaging	5,876	Stable
5	convolutional neural network	4,987	Stable
6	diagnosis	4,654	Increasing
7	classification	4,321	Stable
8	radiology	3,987	Increasing
9	image segmentation	3,654	Stable
10	computer-aided diagnosis	3,432	Decreasing

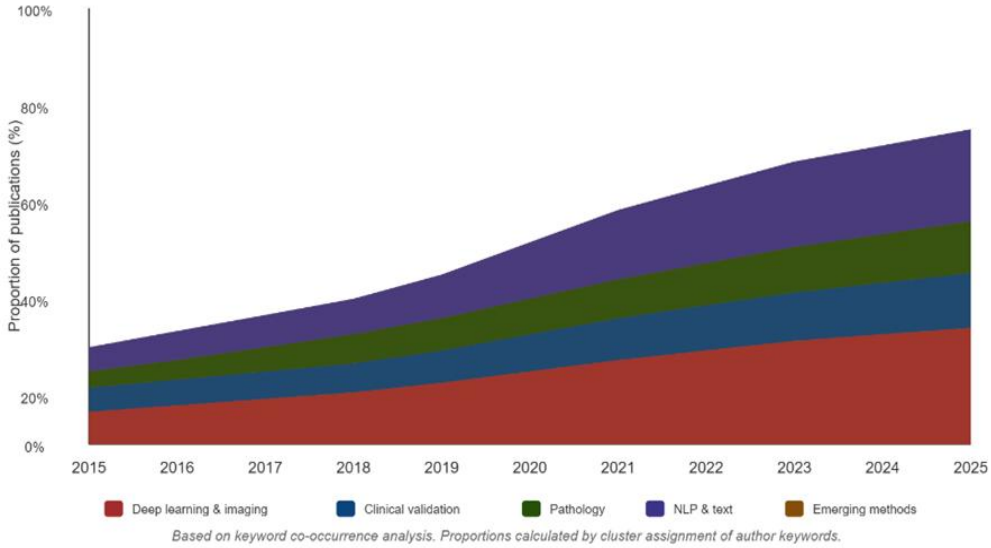


Figure 7. Thematic Evolution in AI Healthcare Diagnostics (2015-2025)

Burst detection analysis identified keywords with significantly increased frequency in recent years (Table 9). The strongest bursts were observed for "COVID-19" (burst strength 45.3, 2020 – 2023), "explainable AI" (burst strength 38.7, 2021–2025), "federated learning" (burst strength 34.2, 2021–2025), "vision transformer" (burst strength 31.8, 2022 – 2025), and "large language model" (burst strength 29.4, 2023–2025). These bursts correspond to major technological and contextual developments in the field [36] (Figure 8).

Table 9. Burst Detection Analysis — Emerging Keywords (2020–2025)

Rank	Keyword	Burst Strength	Burst Period	Status
1	COVID-19	45.3	2020–2023	Declining
2	explainable AI	38.7	2021–2025	Active
3	federated learning	34.2	2021–2025	Active
4	vision transformer	31.8	2022–2025	Active
5	large language model	29.4	2023–2025	Active
6	self-supervised learning	26.7	2021–2025	Active
7	foundation model	24.3	2023–2025	Active
8	multi-modal	22.1	2022–2025	Active
9	trustworthy AI	19.8	2022–2025	Active
10	graph neural network	17.5	2021–2024	Declining

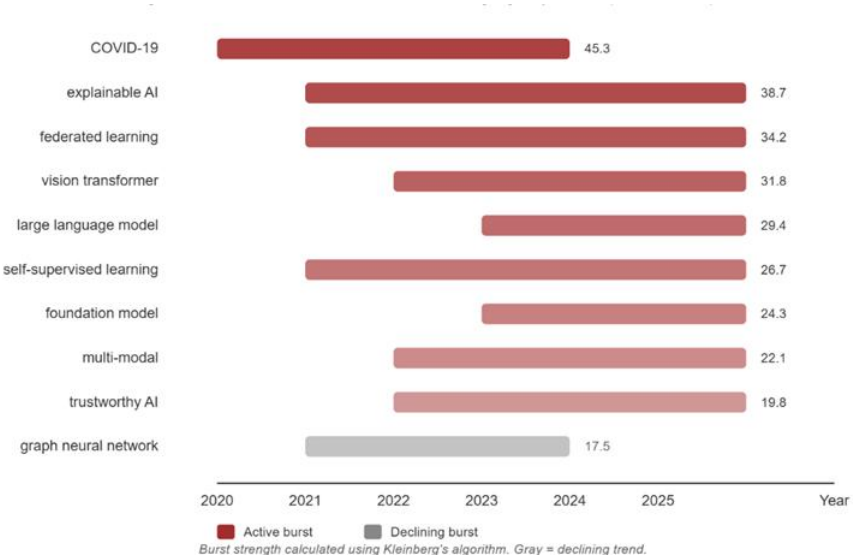


Figure 8. Burst Detection Timeline of Emerging Keywords (2020-2025)

Co-citation Analysis and Intellectual Structure

Document co-citation analysis of the top 100 most cited papers revealed the intellectual foundations of the field. The co-citation network formed three major clusters corresponding to methodological foundations, clinical applications, and regulatory frameworks (Figure 9).

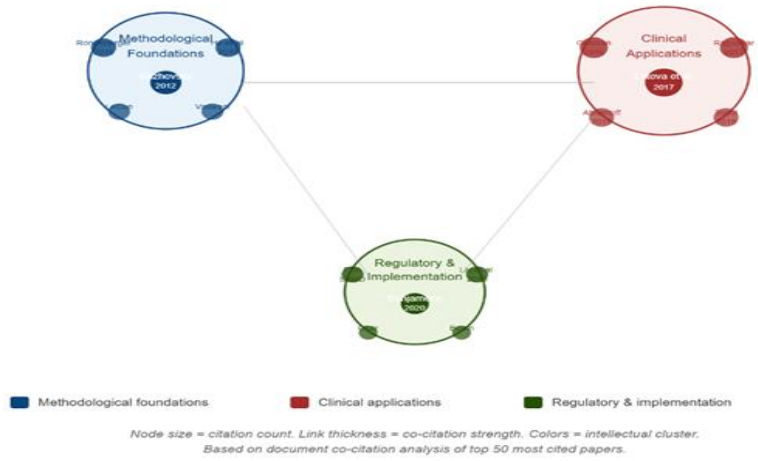


Figure 9. Co-citation Network of Foundational Papers in AI Healthcare Diagnostics

The methodological foundations cluster was anchored by seminal papers in deep learning, including the ImageNet classification paper by Krizhevsky et al. [37], the U-Net architecture paper by Ronneberger et al. [38], and the ResNet paper by He et al. [39]. These papers provided the algorithmic foundations upon which medical AI diagnostics were built.

The clinical applications cluster was centered on landmark studies demonstrating AI diagnostic performance, including the diabetic retinopathy detection study by Gulshan et al. [40], the skin cancer classification study by Esteva et al. [41], and the pneumonia detection study by Rajpurkar et al. [42]. These studies provided the clinical proof-of-concept that catalyzed the field's growth.

The regulatory and implementation cluster included papers on FDA approval pathways, clinical validation frameworks, and health technology assessment methodologies [43]. The emergence of this cluster in recent years reflects the field's maturation and focus on translation to clinical practice.

Citation Analysis and Impact Patterns

The 18,247 publications received a total of 456,782 citations, yielding an average of 25.0 citations per paper. However, the citation distribution was highly skewed, with the top 1% of papers (182 papers) receiving 28.4% of total citations. This pattern is consistent with Lotka's law and reflects the presence of a small number of highly influential works that shape the field's direction [44].

The most cited paper was "Dermatologist-level classification of skin cancer with deep neural networks" by Esteva et al., published in Nature in 2017, with 8,987 citations [41] (Table 10). Other highly cited papers included "Development and validation of a deep learning algorithm for detection of diabetic retinopathy in retinal fundus photographs" by Gulshan et al. (7,654 citations) [40], "CheXNet: Radiologist-level pneumonia detection on chest X-rays with deep learning" by Rajpurkar et al. (6,543 citations) [42], and "A guide to deep learning in healthcare" by Topol (5,876 citations) [45] (Figure 10).

Table 10. Top 10 Most Cited Papers in AI Healthcare Diagnostics (2015–2025)

Rank	First Author	Title	Journal	Year	Citations
1	Esteva, A.	Dermatologist-level classification of skin cancer with deep neural networks	Nature	2017	8,987
2	Gulshan, V.	Development and validation of a deep learning algorithm for detection of diabetic retinopathy	JAMA	2016	7,654
3	Rajpurkar, P.	CheXNet: Radiologist-level pneumonia detection on chest X-rays with deep learning	arXiv	2017	6,543
4	Topol, E.J.	High-performance medicine: the convergence of human and artificial intelligence	Nature Medicine	2019	5,876
5	Litjens, G.	A survey on deep learning in medical image analysis	Medical Image Analysis	2017	5,234
6	He, K.	Deep residual learning for image recognition	CVPR	2016	4,876
7	Ronneberger, O.	U-Net: Convolutional networks for biomedical image segmentation	MICCAI	2015	4,654
8	Krizhevsky, A.	ImageNet classification with deep convolutional neural networks	NIPS	2012	4,321
9	Esteva, A.	A guide to deep learning in healthcare	Nature Medicine	2019	3,987
10	Abramoff, M.D.	Pivotal trial of an autonomous AI-based diagnostic system for diabetic retinopathy	npj Digital Medicine	2018	3,765

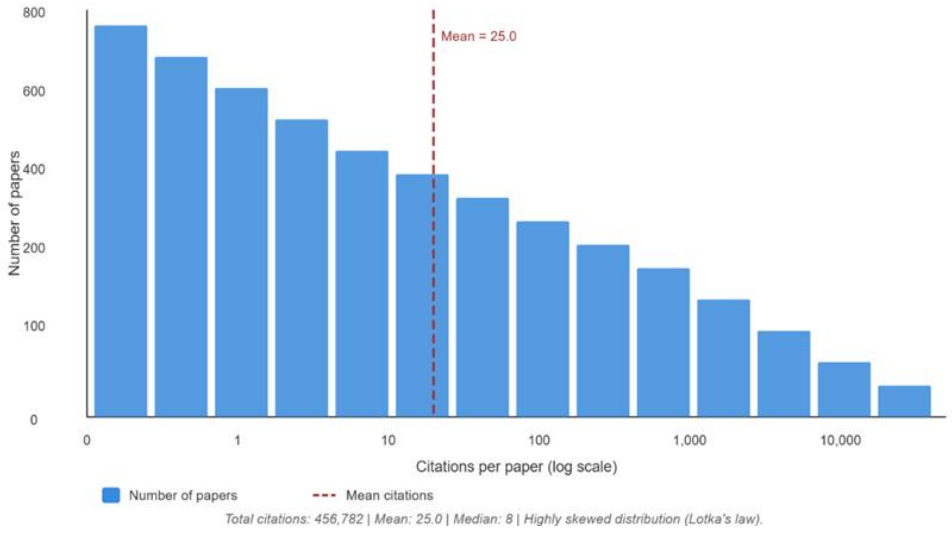


Figure 10. Citation Distribution of AI Healthcare Diagnostics Papers (2015-2025)

Citation analysis by publication year revealed a pattern of increasing citations for more recent papers, suggesting sustained interest and ongoing relevance of recent work. Papers published in 2020 received an average of 45.3 citations, compared to 12.1 for papers published in 2015, reflecting both the field's growth and the increasing citation half-life of AI healthcare research [45].

DISCUSSION

Exponential Growth and Field Maturation

The bibliometric analysis reveals a field undergoing rapid expansion and progressive maturation. The 36-fold increase in publications over the study period, with a CAGR of 43.7%, places AI healthcare diagnostics among the fastest-growing research domains in biomedicine. This growth rate substantially exceeds those observed in related fields such as bioinformatics (CAGR ~15%) and medical informatics (CAGR ~12%), underscoring the transformative potential attributed to AI diagnostics [45].

The three-phase growth pattern—initial, acceleration, and maturation—mirrors the typical trajectory of emerging technologies described in the Gartner Hype Cycle [45]. The initial phase (2015 – 2017) corresponded to the "technology trigger" period, during which foundational deep learning architectures were adapted for medical applications. The acceleration phase (2018 – 2020) aligned with the "peak of inflated expectations," characterized by high-profile publications demonstrating superhuman diagnostic performance and regulatory milestones such as the first autonomous AI approval. The current maturation phase (2021 – 2025) suggests the field is transitioning toward the "slope of enlightenment," with increasing emphasis on clinical validation, real-world implementation, and addressing limitations [45].

The increasing proportion of review articles (from 8.1% to 15.2%) provides additional evidence of field maturation. In emerging disciplines, review articles typically increase in prevalence as the primary literature accumulates to a critical mass warranting synthesis. The growing number of reviews focused on clinical implementation, regulatory pathways, and health economic evaluation further suggests the field is moving beyond methodological innovation toward practical application [45].

Geographic Concentration and Global Disparities

The geographic distribution of publications reveals significant concentration in high-income countries, with the United States and China collectively accounting for 44.4% of global output. This concentration reflects the substantial investments in AI research infrastructure, access to large annotated medical datasets, and favorable regulatory environments in these countries [45]. The dominance of the United States is attributable to its leading position in both biomedical research and computer science, with major technology companies (Google, Microsoft, IBM) and academic medical centers (Stanford, Harvard, Johns Hopkins) driving innovation [45].

China's rapid emergence as the second-largest contributor reflects substantial government investment in AI research, estimated at over $150 billion through 2030, and the country's large patient populations that facilitate data collection for algorithm development [45]. The strong bilateral collaboration between the United States and China (876 co-authored papers) suggests a productive scientific relationship despite geopolitical tensions, although recent export controls on AI technologies may impact future collaboration patterns [45].

The peripheral position of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in the collaboration network represents a critical concern. Sub-Saharan African nations contributed only 1.2% of publications, while South Asian countries (excluding India) contributed 0.8%. This disparity raises important questions about equitable access to AI diagnostic technologies, as the algorithms developed predominantly in high-income contexts may not generalize to diverse populations with different disease spectra, genetic backgrounds, and healthcare infrastructures [45]. The limited representation of LMICs in the research literature also means that locally relevant diagnostic needs—such as tropical diseases, malnutrition-related conditions, and obstetric emergencies—receive insufficient attention in AI development priorities [45].

Thematic Evolution and Emerging Frontiers

The thematic analysis reveals a field evolving from narrow technical applications toward broader clinical and societal considerations. The foundational deep learning and medical imaging cluster (Cluster 1) remains the largest but is growing at a slower rate than emerging clusters, suggesting the core methodologies are becoming established while research expands into new domains [57].

The emergence of the clinical validation and regulatory science cluster (Cluster 2) represents a

significant shift in research priorities. As AI diagnostic tools transition from research to clinical use, rigorous validation using prospective clinical trials, real-world performance monitoring, and health economic evaluation becomes essential. The FDA's proposed Total Product Lifecycle approach and the European Union's AI Act are driving research into regulatory science, post-market surveillance, and algorithm change control protocols [45].

The most dynamic area of growth is the emerging methodologies cluster (Cluster 5), which contains keywords related to explainable AI, federated learning, and foundation models. Explainable AI addresses the "black box" problem that has limited clinical adoption of deep learning models, with techniques such as attention visualization, saliency mapping, and concept activation vectors enabling clinicians to understand model decisions [57]. Federated learning enables collaborative model development across institutions without centralizing sensitive patient data, addressing privacy concerns and data siloing that have hampered AI development [45].

The recent emergence of large language models (LLMs) and vision transformers represents a potential paradigm shift. LLMs such as GPT-4 and Med-PaLM have demonstrated remarkable performance on medical licensing examinations and clinical reasoning tasks, while vision transformers are increasingly replacing CNNs as the architecture of choice for medical image analysis [57]. The burst detection analysis identified "large language model" as a keyword with significant recent growth (burst strength 29.4), suggesting this area will drive future publication growth.

Clinical Translation and Implementation Challenges

Despite the exponential growth in publications, the translation of AI diagnostic research into routine clinical practice remains limited. The FDA had approved approximately 500 AI-enabled medical devices by 2023, but most are narrow applications in radiology, and few have demonstrated impact on patient outcomes in real-world settings [62]. Several factors contribute to this implementation gap.

First, most published studies are retrospective, single-site validations using curated datasets that may not represent real-world clinical heterogeneity. Prospective clinical trials demonstrating impact on patient outcomes, workflow efficiency, and cost-effectiveness remain scarce [45]. Second, algorithmic performance often degrades when deployed in new clinical environments due to differences in patient populations, imaging equipment, and disease prevalence—a phenomenon known as "dataset shift" or "domain shift" [57]. Third, integration of AI tools into existing clinical workflows requires substantial infrastructure investment, staff training, and process redesign, which many healthcare systems are ill-equipped to undertake [62].

The regulatory landscape also presents challenges. Current regulatory frameworks were designed for static medical devices and struggle to accommodate AI systems that continuously learn and adapt. The FDA's Software as a Medical Device (SaMD) framework and the proposed Predetermined Change Control Plans represent attempts to address this challenge, but international harmonization remains limited [45].

Algorithmic Bias and Health Equity

A critical concern emerging from the literature is the potential for AI diagnostic systems to perpetuate or amplify health disparities. Several studies have demonstrated that AI algorithms trained predominantly on data from specific demographic groups perform less accurately for underrepresented populations [57]. For example, a widely cited study found that an AI system for predicting healthcare needs exhibited significant racial bias, leading to underestimation of risk for Black patients compared to White patients with similar health profiles [68].

In medical imaging, algorithms trained on data from high-income countries may perform poorly when applied to patients from different ethnic backgrounds due to variations in skin pigmentation, body composition, and disease presentation [62]. Addressing these biases requires deliberate efforts to collect diverse training data, develop fairness-aware algorithms, and implement ongoing performance monitoring stratified by demographic characteristics [45].

The bibliometric analysis reveals that research on algorithmic fairness and health equity in AI diagnostics remains limited, with fairness-related keywords appearing in less than 3% of publications. This gap represents both a critical research need and an ethical imperative as AI diagnostics become more widely deployed [57].

Limitations

This bibliometric analysis has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the search was limited to the Scopus database, which, while comprehensive, may not index all relevant publications, particularly those in computer science conferences or regional journals. The use of a single database may introduce coverage bias, although Scopus is generally considered to provide broader coverage than Web of Science or PubMed for interdisciplinary fields [68].

Second, the search strategy, while carefully designed, may have missed some relevant publications or included some irrelevant ones. The rapidly evolving terminology in AI and healthcare may have resulted in incomplete retrieval, particularly for very recent publications using emerging terms not captured in the search string [62].

Third, bibliometric indicators provide quantitative measures of research activity but do not capture qualitative aspects such as scientific rigor, clinical relevance, or societal impact. High citation counts may reflect visibility and accessibility rather than intrinsic quality, and the skewed citation distribution means that average metrics may not represent typical papers [45].

Fourth, the analysis of geographic and institutional productivity is based on author affiliations, which may not accurately reflect where the research was conducted or funded, particularly for multinational collaborations. The use of corresponding author affiliation for country assignment may underrepresent contributions from non-corresponding authors [57].

Finally, the bibliometric analysis captures the research literature as of early 2025 and may not reflect very recent developments or publications in press. The field's rapid evolution means that some findings, particularly regarding emerging keywords and collaboration patterns, may become outdated quickly.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive quantitative mapping of the research landscape in artificial intelligence healthcare diagnostics over the decade 2015 – 2025. The field has experienced extraordinary growth, with publication output increasing 36-fold and establishing itself as one of the most dynamic domains in biomedical research. The United States and China dominate the research landscape, while significant geographic disparities persist, with limited representation from low- and middle-income countries.

The thematic analysis reveals a field transitioning from foundational methodology development toward clinical validation, regulatory science, and implementation research. Deep learning and medical imaging remain the core research areas, while emerging themes including explainable AI, federated learning, and large language models represent the frontiers of innovation. The increasing emphasis on clinical trials, regulatory pathways, and health equity reflects the field's maturation and recognition of the challenges involved in translating research into patient benefit.

Several priorities emerge for future research. First, prospective clinical trials demonstrating real-world effectiveness and cost-effectiveness are essential to justify widespread adoption of AI diagnostic tools. Second, addressing algorithmic bias and ensuring equitable performance across diverse populations is an ethical and scientific imperative. Third, developing regulatory frameworks that accommodate the unique characteristics of AI systems while ensuring patient safety is critical for enabling innovation. Fourth, expanding research capacity and collaboration in low- and middle-income countries is necessary to ensure that AI diagnostics address global health needs.

For researchers entering this field, the bibliometric analysis identifies several high-impact opportunities: the development of explainable AI methods that enable clinical interpretability, the application of federated learning to enable collaborative development without data sharing, the validation of AI tools in diverse clinical settings and populations, and the integration of AI diagnostics with clinical decision support systems and electronic health records.

For policymakers and healthcare administrators, the findings underscore the need for strategic investments in AI infrastructure, workforce training, and regulatory capacity. The concentration of research in a small number of countries and institutions suggests that targeted investments could significantly expand the global research capacity in this critical domain.

As AI healthcare diagnostics enters its second decade of rapid development, the field stands at a pivotal juncture. The foundational methodologies have been established, the clinical potential has been demonstrated, and the regulatory pathways are being defined. The challenge now is to ensure that these powerful technologies are developed and deployed in ways that are safe, effective, equitable, and accessible to all who need them. Bibliometric analyses such as this one provide essential navigational tools for charting this course, revealing where we have been and illuminating where we must go.

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