

VIEWPOINT

Rethinking the use of the term 'Global South' in academic publishing

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Abstract

'Global South', a term frequently used on websites and in papers related to academic and 'predatory' publishing, may represent a form of unscholarly discrimination. Arguments are put forward as to why the current use of this term is geographically meaningless, since it implies countries in the southern hemisphere, whereas many of the entities in publishing that are referred to as being part of the Global South are in fact either on the equator or in the northern hemisphere. Therefore, academics, in writing about academic publishing, should cease using this broad, culturally insensitive, and geographically inaccurate term.

Keywords: cultural insensitivity, discrimination, Global South, mass mentality, open access

The term 'Global South' in academic publishing

The term 'Global South' is frequently encountered in academic publishing, and tends to refer to nations in the southern hemisphere with lower economic status, expressed in terms of total GDP or GDP per capita, than several of their counterparts with higher economic status in the northern hemisphere.¹ This neocolonial geopolitical term was created in a bid to de-territorialize such nations, and to refer to each as "a transnational political subject that results from a shared experience of subjugation under contemporary global capitalism".² As one example, the term Global South was used to contrast the policies related to ethical use of photographic images as adopted by some countries with those used in North America and Europe, but countries that fell short of the robust ethical policies were not specified,³ weakening the reliance on, and the use of, the term Global South.

The term Global South as used in literature on 'predatory publishing'

Within the context of 'predatory publishing', the term Global South appears to have been widely adopted, spurred by a 'seminal' paper (already cited in 66 papers according to Google Scholar, as on 12 August 2021¹) by 'Frank Truth', a pseudonym.⁴ Using the term Global South, 'Truth' promoted ethical profiling, for example: "authors are mainly from Iran, China, Turkey, Malaysia, Jordan and other research ecologies in the Global South" (p57), although some of these countries are not in the geographic south (that is, they are not in the southern hemisphere). Relying exclusively on the now-defunct blacklists by Jeffrey Beall, 'Truth' claimed that the *African Journal of Biotechnology's* "research input is almost exclusively from the Global South" (p62), once again making the geographically erroneous claim that "we need to confront and avoid racist innuendos about 'rackets' based 'mainly' in the Global South, particularly West Africa and South Asia" (p70; South Asia is not in the southern hemisphere). 'Truth' stated further that "it is clear that some 95% of papers accepted in these journals are from the Global South" (p77), referring to "authors from Brazil, Ghana, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Kenya, Iran, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Brunei, Mexico, Argentina, Philippines, Belgium, Indonesia, Malaysia, Namibia, Taiwan, China, India, Egypt and Oman". Several of these countries are not located in the geographical south. 'Truth' further repeats this geographic error on p79 of the paper, stating that "largely authored from the Global South [...] Iranian and Chinese authors are heavily represented". A bibliometric analysis of the papers that cite and rely on these erroneous and potentially discriminatory claims by 'Truth' is urgently needed to avoid further propagation of such inaccuracies (disinformation) in indexed and so-called non-predatory academic literature.

Bell classified India as a member of the Global South although India lies in the northern hemisphere ("along with those in India and other countries in the global South", p 658).⁵ Unfortunately, a highly cited paper on predatory publishing⁶ merely reproduced an unsubstantiated claim made by 'Truth', namely that "many authors who publish in these dubious "new 'pay big, publish fast' e-journals are younger scholars based in the Global South and particularly in the Muslim world" (p1408; from Truth, p56). The exact same quote is also reproduced by Kurt.⁷

There are other examples of papers that are part of the literature on predatory publishing that do not cite 'Truth' but use the geographically erroneous and potentially discriminatory term Global South as in, for example, "marginalization of scholarship from the global South and the strong bias toward research from mainstream Northern countries" (p5).⁸

The demeaning, potentially racist, and discriminatory nature of the term Global South

The term Global South is demeaning because it assumes, to some extent, *intellectual* inferiority alongside *economic* inferiority, and that 'southern' ideologies need to 'upgrade', improve, or strive to meet the standards of 'northern' ideologies. This implies that primarily southern societies, or low-GDP countries, as implied by the use of the term Global South by these researchers, are somehow less than or inferior (intellectually or otherwise) to the northern or high-GDP countries.

1 As confirmed by email on December 9, 2020 by the journal's (*Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*) Chief and Founding/ Managing Editor, Professor Dave Hill: <http://www.jceps.com/>

Not only is the term demeaning, it is also discriminatory, dividing global intellect into two crude groups, or at least creating a separate lower, or southern, group. The term invokes an image of arrogance and superiority by members of the 'North', which makes charitable causes to help the 'South' not only insulting but culturally degrading. Great intellectual nations may be found with brilliant minds in the South American, African, and Australasian continents and countries within them, such as India, including countries frequently profiled by 'Truth' and others that have cited this pseudonymous entity. In other words, the term Global South attempts to assign a label of inferiority that debases the greatness of academics and intellectuals from countries in South America, southern and equatorial Africa, and Australasia.

Academia is in a state of great transformation, if not revolution. Whether that is a state of cancel culture,⁹ political correctness, or intellectual eradication is not yet entirely clear, but terms that classify human intellect based on a meaningless two-tier North-South divide should be abolished. If there is a need to characterize academics or institutes of higher education for bibliometric or other scholarly purposes, that need can be effectively met at different levels – individual author, journal, publisher, or country – without having to cluster them on either side of a North-South axis, especially when characterizing them with a term such as 'predatory', which is being used in a derogatory sense and is causing academic divisiveness.¹⁰

Conflicts of interest

None.

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