

Pride and Prejudice in Higher Education: Countering Elitist Perspectives in the Curriculum at Imperial College London

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Abstract : In peer review, there is a skew toward research from high-income countries, otherwise known as geographic bias. Research from well-known and prestigious institutions is often favored in the peer review process and is more frequently cited in biomedical research. English clinicians have been found to rate research from low-income countries worse compared to the same research presented as if from high-income countries. This entrenched bias, which is rooted in the perceived superiority of academic institutions in high-income countries is damaging in many regards. Crucially, it reinforces colonial roots by strengthening the dominance of knowledge bases in high-income contexts and perpetuates the perceived inferiority of research from low-income settings. We report on the interventions that Imperial College London is conducting to “decolonize” the higher education curriculum – a root and branch review of reading material in the Masters of Public Health course; identification of unconscious bias against low-income country research in faculty and staff; in-depth interviews with faculty members on their experiences and practices with respect to inclusion of low-income country research in their own teaching and learning practice; and exploring issues surrounding entrenched biases and structural impediments for enabling desirable changes. We intend to use these findings to develop frameworks and approaches, including workshops and online resources, to effect sustainable changes to diversify the curriculum at Imperial College London.

Keywords : curriculum design, diversity, geographic bias, higher education, implicit associations, inclusivity

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