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**Barriers for Library and Information Science Researchers from Developing Countries:
What the “Library Philosophy and Practice Phenomenon” Tells Us**

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Abstract

This short commentary introduces and discusses the “Library Philosophy and Practice (LPP) Phenomenon,” wherein a scholarly journal published in a developed country has an extremely large number of authors from developing countries, relative to the typical journal. Elements of journals that fit the LPP phenomenon are discussed, as well as what this phenomenon says about barriers to scholarly publishing for researchers from developing nations. Implications for journals that lack diverse authorship from developing nations are listed. This phenomenon may be studied in other disciplines to further illuminate divides in the scholarly realm.

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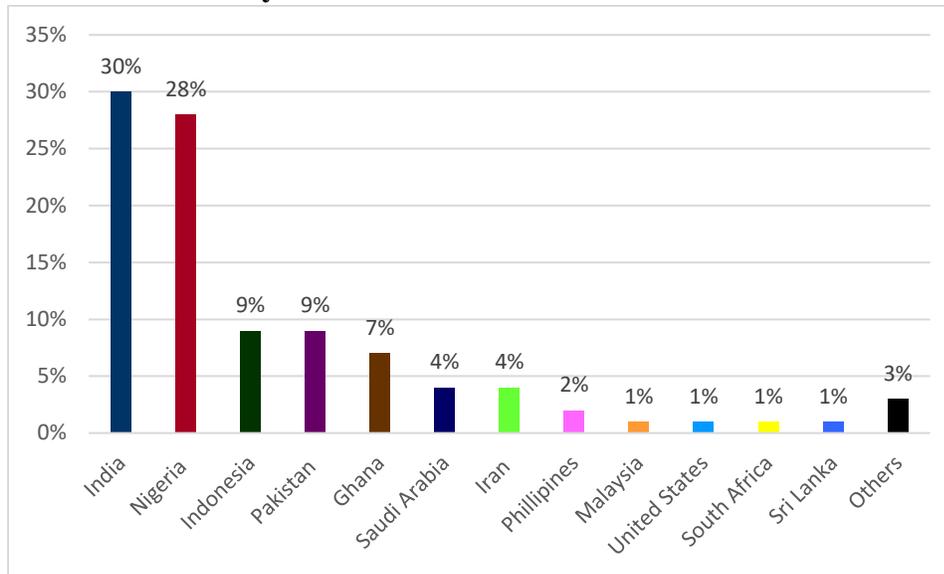
Over the past four years that I have been active in conducting research and publishing in library and information science (LIS) journals, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with many authors from developing countries. It was from these collaborators that I first learned of the journal *Library Philosophy and Practice* (LPP). I was surprised to find, in researching more about the journal, that LPP is published in the United States, as most of the LIS researchers that I know in the U.S. are unfamiliar with the publication. However, this journal appeared to be extremely popular among researchers from developing countries.

In 2021, a colleague and I conducted a study that analyzed the research topics and publications for LIS school faculty in five large nations that utilize English as an official language: the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Nigeria, and India (Lund & Shukla, 2021). Among the two developing nations, Nigeria and India, LPP was, by far, the most popular publication venue for LIS school faculty, with 60 publications compared to 20 for *DESIDOC Journal* (second-most among these two countries). However, only one article in LPP came from LIS school faculty in any of three other, developed countries.

I followed this study by looking at the nationality of authors in LPP for the year 2020, shown in Table 1 below. As will be discussed in more detail below, nearly 2/3 of LPP authors come from two very large countries – India and Nigeria – that have English as an official/professional language, though most of the population speaks a different primary language. These two countries are rapidly growing in terms of overall population as well as interest in conducting and disseminating LIS research. Of the 12 nations that represent at least 1% of all LPP authors, only one, the United States, is NOT a developing country. The findings of these two studies led me to ask the question, “Why is *Library Philosophy and Practice* so

prominent among LIS authors from developing countries compared to other journals published in developed countries?”

Table 1. Nationality of Authors in LPP for the Year 2020



This question gets to what I have come to call the “Library Philosophy and Practice (LPP) Phenomenon,” where a journal has a very large number of authors from developing countries, publishing in a journal that is published in a developed country. *Library Philosophy and Practice* is not the only journal to exhibit this phenomenon, but it is a very clear example based within the discipline of library and information science. To learn more about why this phenomenon exists, I reached out to some of the LPP authors to get their perspective. I spoke with about a dozen authors from a variety of different African and Asian countries. Six general themes emerged that represent the majority of their responses to my question:

1. The journal is published in the United States, which among many researchers in these developing countries is seen as the “LIS research capitol” – it is really something to say that you have been published in a journal in the United States.
2. It is indexed in Scopus, which is often a consideration for tenure and promotion decisions. Very few journals in developing countries are included in Scopus.

3. It has a prompt review period, generally taking only a month or two max.
4. It will accept papers on any LIS topic (not just those of current interest to researchers in developed countries).
5. It is open access – free to publish and free to read/access.
6. It does not require editing for language.

Researchers in developing countries take pride in publishing in a journal in a developed country, especially the United States. Given the relatively high standards of most journals published in developed countries, not necessarily regarding the quality of the research itself but certainly in terms of language proficiency, most journals are not accessible to researchers from developing countries like India and Nigeria. While English may be an official language in these countries, it is not the primary language of most people. There are over 600 native languages in Nigeria, with Pidgin English, Fula, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba being among the most common. In India, Hindi is the most common primary language, with about one-half of Indians speaking it as their first language. Less than one million Indians actually speak English as their primary language. Certainly, language editing services exist, but the cost is often unattainable for researchers in developing countries.

LIS research topics vary widely across countries, in no small part due to differences in cultural values and economic situations (Lund & Shukla, 2021). 20% of research published by researchers in the United States and Canada focused primarily on the topic of social media, while 21% of that in the United Kingdom focused on information seeking. Very little research in these three countries focused on general library topics (12% on average) or informetrics (8%). However, in Nigeria, 46% of articles were found to be related to general library topics, while 36% of articles in India focused on the topic of informetrics. These discrepancies in research

topics may make certain topics that are popular in developing countries of little interest to readers in developed countries.

Language and topics, however, are not factors that really speak to the quality of the actual research. Certainly, there need to be minimum standards of language for readability purposes, but this is something that can be worked on with the authors and editorial team, it really should have no impact of the acceptance of a manuscript unless it is so poorly written that the content is unintelligible. Some journals are dedicated to a specific country (e.g., the Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science) or topic (e.g., Scientometrics), but there are many catch-all journals, that allege to welcome a diversity of LIS topics, but tend to tell authors, ‘we meant any topic *except* that one.’ This too is harmful to diversity of thought in LIS.

In a recent letter, Rousseau (2021) notes that it is common practice in LIS journals (at least those journals published in the U.S. and western Europe) to include a literature review section and that failing to do so often leads to a “major revision” or even rejection. This section is not always required, or even recommended, in all disciplines and in all countries. In some countries, the formatting of papers can vary quite widely, as well as acceptable practices relating to figures and images used in articles. In some countries and schools, library programs are affiliated with medical schools or other programs where the standard structure of social science papers is not followed. In fact, as Rousseau (2021) notes, many disciplines do not follow the LIS standard paper format (ILMRDC, or Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion), but instead follow a IMRC (Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusion) format, where an extended introduction takes the place of the literature review. All of these formatting differences are extraneous to the actual purpose of the research article: to

share the significance of research findings. Nonetheless, editors can (and do) use these elements to justify rejected a paper that might otherwise present novel and important ideas.

Journals should not compromise quality standards in terms of the content of the research. If a study really does not past muster or fit with the stated scope of a journal, then it should not be accepted solely for the sake of increasing diversity of authorship. However, if a study does meet the threshold in terms of research quality, then it should not be rejected on the basis of other factors that can be readily addressed: language differences, paper structure, new or uncommon subject matter.

Editorial boards should consider the message they are sending to researchers in developing countries, as well as the innate bias that they may hold in terms of the topics and standards they implement. The Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology (JASIST) is broadly considered the premier journal for library and information science and also has one of the more geographically-diverse editorial boards. However, even its representation is sorely lacking when it comes to developing countries and countries outside of the Europe-North America-China purview (including western Europe, U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, Hong Kong). Four of the 78 members of its editorial board are from a developing country, all from China. Another four are from a country outside of the Europe-North America-China group: one each from Japan and South Korea, and two from Singapore. Notably, there is no representation of India, Nigeria, Brazil, or Pakistan, though all these nations have large and rapidly-growing populations as well as a growing interest in LIS research. South America, Africa, and the Middle East are all completely absent from the board.

Editors must also use better judgment when recruiting and selecting peer reviewers and considering the results of a peer review. There is an issue (somewhat tangential to the main point

of this paper) with the inconsistent “expertise” and quality of peer reviews, especially when it comes to less popular topics and methods (especially statistical analysis). Many journals have authors, ostensibly, review each other’s work (i.e., they ask someone who just submitted a manuscript to review another manuscript that has been submitted). This approach is fraught with potential pitfalls. Certainly, it is difficult for journals to recruit quality reviewers with diverse perspectives, but many journals do not make a good faith effort to try. Conversely, journals like the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* and *Information Technology and Libraries* regularly recruit for new reviewer applications. This approach seems much more likely to be successful in attaining a diverse reviewer pool.

The phenomenon of an overwhelming number of researchers from developing countries publishing in *Library Philosophy and Practice* indicates some serious problems with the nature of scholarly publishing and communications within the discipline of library and information science. It perhaps even tells us less about the journal LPP itself, and more about the significant problems of other LIS journals published in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. It will improve the quality, diversity, and equity of the discipline as a whole if editorial boards of these journals consider prioritizing the quality of research over elements like language and paper structure.

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