



The Veiled Yoke: An Examination of Neocolonialism in the Framework of Global Academic Citation

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Abstract

The global academic enterprise, despite its professed ideals of universalism and meritocracy, operates within a system of knowledge production and validation that perpetuates historical power imbalances. This article argues that the dominance of Western-centric citation indexes and evaluation metrics constitutes a form of neocolonial imperialism. By examining the historical origins and contemporary practices of major databases, we illuminate how they systematically marginalize scholarship from the Global South—encompassing Asia, Africa, and Latin America. We identify four principal mechanisms of this hegemony: bibliometric bias, linguistic imperialism, the perpetuation of intellectual dependency, and digital paywalls coupled with the suppression of shadow libraries. This article posits that a true decolonization of knowledge demands not only the acknowledgment of these biases but also the resolute re-evaluation and reform of the structures governing global research recognition.

Keywords: Neocolonialism, bibliometric bias, linguistic imperialism, intellectual dependency, citation indexes, Global South

1. Introduction: The Continuation of Imperial Power by Other Means

In the post-colonial era, overt political and military dominion has been supplanted by subtler forms of control. Within the academic sphere, this manifests in the architecture of research validation. While scholars worldwide labor under the guise of an equitable arena, the worth of their endeavors is often determined by visibility within a select group of Western-based citation indexes, such as Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, and PubMed (Clarivate, 2023; Elsevier, 2023; National Library of Medicine, 2023). These repositories, though invaluable for organizing knowledge, serve as gatekeepers, decreeing which scholarship is deemed "preeminent" and, by extension, who is accounted a scholar of renown. This system mirrors the economic and political dynamics of neocolonialism, wherein former colonial powers exert influence through indirect means, guiding the global flow of academic capital and recognition.

The roots of this imbalance trace back to the mid-20th century with the establishment of citation databases like the Science Citation Index by Eugene Garfield, which laid the foundation for modern bibliometric evaluation (Bornmann, 2025). These instruments were designed to chart scientific progress but unwittingly embedded Western priorities, primarily indexing journals from North America and Europe. Today, this legacy endures, with metrics

such as the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index serving as proxies for quality, yet often failing to capture the full spectrum of global scholarship (Alfasoft, 2024). As a result, scholars from the Global South face systemic barriers, their contributions undervalued or invisible in dominant metrics, perpetuating a cycle of intellectual subordination.

This article critically examines these dynamics through the lens of neocolonialism, drawing on dependency theory and the concept of the "captive mind" to elucidate how citation architectures reinforce global inequalities (Alatas, 2003; Altbach, 1975). By analysing bibliometric bias, linguistic imperialism, intellectual dependency, and the emergent barriers of digital paywalls and shadow library bans, we aim to unveil the "veiled yoke" that binds non-Western academia and propose pathways for reform.

2. The Mechanisms of Hegemony

The neocolonial nature of research evaluation is not a deliberate machination but the consequence of deeply embedded historical and structural biases.

2.1 Bibliometric Bias

The metrics employed to gauge research impact are intrinsically skewed. The Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index, cornerstones of academic evaluation, are tied to journals predominantly published in the West, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. Bibliometric indicators, such as citation z-scores, reveal disparities in citation patterns, often favouring topics and methodologies that disproportionately benefit Western scholarship (Simko, 2015). For instance, many regionally specific journals—prevalent in the Global South—are excluded from major databases, limiting their visibility and impact (Simko, 2015). This exclusion engenders a skewed distribution of citations, wherein research from non-Western regions garners lower scores due to reduced accessibility.

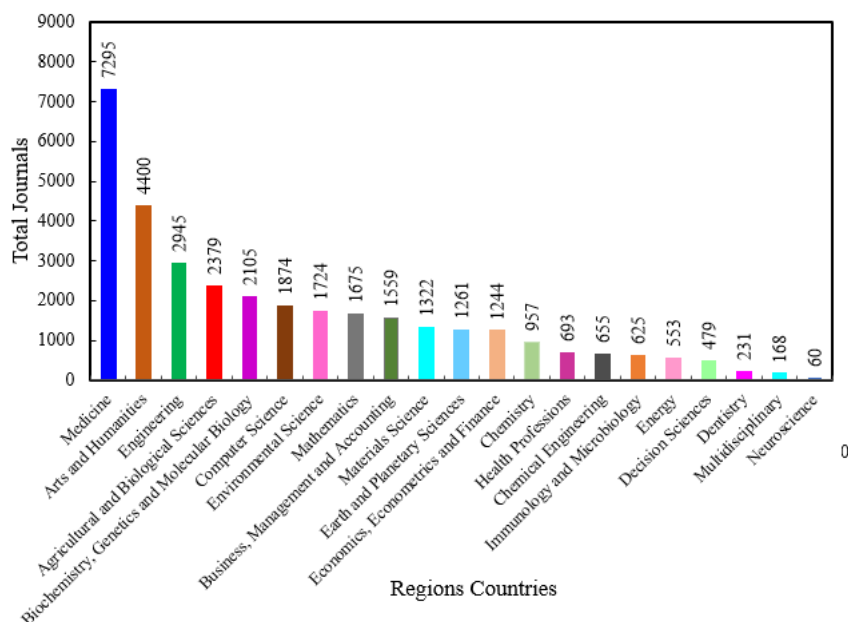


Figure 1: Distribution of Active Scopus-Indexed Journals by Geographical Region

Moreover, these metrics can disadvantage high-calibre departments and researchers from underrepresented regions, introducing a statistical regression that undervalues

exceptional work (Thelwall, 2023). In biomedical research, citation bias favours positive outcomes and high-impact journals, further marginalizing studies from developing nations

where resources for publication in such venues are scant (Urlings, 2021a, 2021b). This bias, coupled with random "citation noise," distorts the true flow of knowledge and reinforces Western dominion (Bornmann, 2025). The scale of this bias is quantitative. The distribution of Scopus-indexed journals reveals that the Global North accounts for approximately 79.5% of total journals indexed, while the Global South constitutes only 20.5% (Bharadwaj et al., 2021). This disparity is evident in geographical and subject-wise breakdowns (Figure 1), with disciplines like Medicine (7,295 journals) and Engineering (2,945 journals) heavily represented, often aligning with Western research priorities Figure 2 (Nwagwu, 2025).

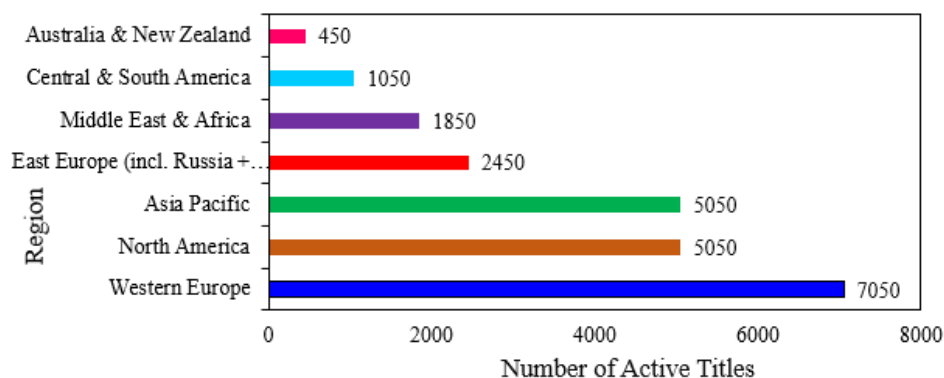


Figure 2: Number of Scopus-Indexed Journals by Subject Area

The dominion of Western citation indexes is further illustrated by comparing their scale to regional counterparts. Western platforms such as Web of Science (~34,000 journals; Clarivate, 2023), Scopus (~30,000 journals; Elsevier, 2023), and PubMed (~30,000 journals; National Library of Medicine, 2023) vastly overshadow regional systems in scope and influence. In contrast, regional indexes such as China's CNKI (~8,000 journals; CNKI, 2023), India's Indian Citation Index (1,464 journals; Indian Citation Index, 2023), and Latin America's SciELO (1,249 journals; SciELO, 2023) and Redalyc (1,572 journals; Redalyc, 2023) serve localized needs but lack global reach. This disparity systematically marginalizes Global South nations (Figure 4), as seen in the comparative number of journals indexed (Bharadwaj et al., 2021) by select countries shown in Figure 3

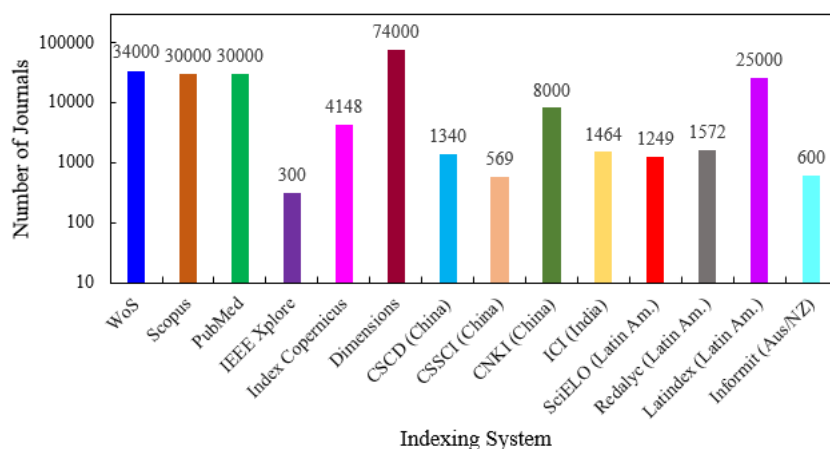


Figure 3: Number of Journals Indexed in Major Western and Regional Systems

To further elucidate the neocolonial bias, the distribution of journals by country within these citation indexes underscores the marginalization of Global South nations. Figure 4 illustrates the number of journals indexed in major systems, focusing on select countries to highlight disparities. For instance, the United States and United Kingdom dominate Western indexes,

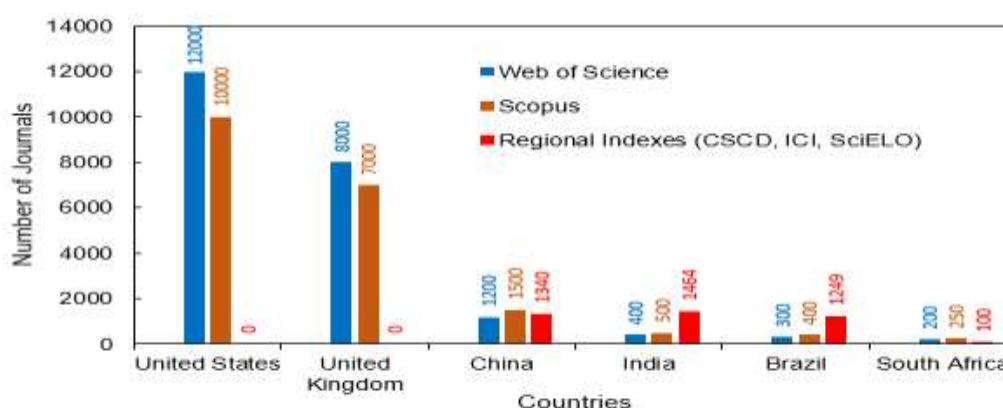


Figure 4: Number of Journals Indexed by Select Countries in Major Citation Indexes while countries like China, India, Brazil, and South Africa have significantly fewer journals in global databases compared to their regional counterparts (Bharadwaj, et al. 2021, CNKI 2023, Indian Citation Index. 2023, SciELO. 2023)

This bias operates through several mechanisms:

- **Exclusion of Regional Journals:** A vast number of high-quality scholarly journals from Asia, Africa, and Latin America are not indexed in global databases. Consequently, even a highly cited article in a prominent regional journal receives no recognition within dominant global metrics (Alfasoft, 2024).
- **The "Brain Drain" of Publications:** To garner professional acclaim, scholars from the Global South are compelled to publish in Western journals, effectively exporting

their intellectual contributions and diverting attention from journals in their own regions ([Bornmann, 2025](#)).

- **Skewed Citation Counts:** Articles in Western journals garner more citations by virtue of greater visibility and accessibility, further inflating their perceived impact and reinforcing the bias ([Urlings, 2021a](#)).

2.2 Linguistic Imperialism

The overwhelming preference for the English language in preeminent journals is a potent instrument of intellectual subjugation. Scholarship published in other languages, regardless of its rigor or originality, is often marginalized or wholly ignored. English dominance in academia, with over 98% of SCI-indexed journals in English, enforces a linguistic neo-imperialism that requires non-English journals to provide English abstracts for indexing, thereby excluding many ([Rao et al., 2020](#)). This is compounded by economic pressures from major publishers who prioritize English for profitability ([Rao et al., 2020](#)). Linguistic imperialism leads to language shift and the erosion of indigenous tongues, marginalizing minority cultures and creating social inequalities in access to knowledge ([Ahmed et al., 2023](#)).

To highlight the extent of linguistic bias, [Figure 5](#) presents the distribution of languages in Scopus-indexed journals, illustrating the overwhelming dominance of English compared to other languages.

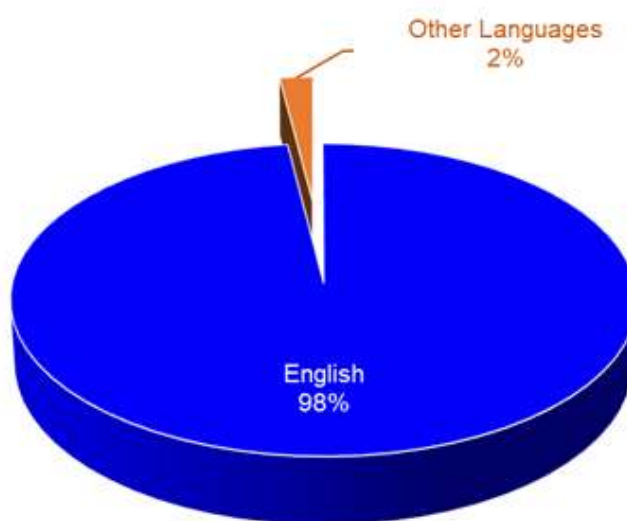


Figure 5: Distribution of Languages in Scopus-Indexed Journals

This bias transcends mere linguistic preference; it is a form of epistemological exclusion. It privileges knowledge communicated within a particular linguistic and cultural framework, often overlooking unique conceptualizations and knowledge systems inherent in non-English languages ([Ahmed et al., 2023](#)). For non-native English speakers, the act of writing for publication becomes a double burden, encompassing the conceptual labour of research and the linguistic challenge of expressing it in a foreign tongue, which can lead to a loss of nuance and the marginalization of local academic traditions ([Rao et al., 2020](#)). [Figure 6](#) compares the proportion of English versus non-English journals across select Western and regional indexes, highlighting the near-total dominance of English in global systems like Web



of Science and Scopus, contrasted with greater linguistic diversity in regional systems like SciELO and Redalyc ([SciELO. 2023](#), [Redalyc. 2023](#)).

2.3 Intellectual Dependency

The dominant system compels researchers in the Global South into a state of intellectual dependency. Their professional success becomes contingent upon conforming to external standards and publishing in outlets controlled by entities beyond their regions. This discourages the development of independent, locally relevant research agendas and intellectual leadership. The consequence is a global academy wherein the "centre" (the West) dictates research questions, methodologies, and benchmarks of success for the "periphery" ([Alatas, 2003](#)).

Academic dependency conditions knowledge production in the Global South upon Western frameworks, creating a global division of labour wherein theoretical work is dominated by the West, and empirical studies by the periphery ([Alatas, 2003](#)). The "captive mind" concept illuminates this, describing an uncritical, imitative mindset swayed by Western sources, leading to a paucity of creativity and original problem-solving in indigenous contexts ([Alatas, 2008](#)). Eurocentrism in curricula further entrenches this, marginalizing non-Western thinkers and reinforcing a subject-object dichotomy ([Alatas, 2003](#)).

2.4 The Digital Paywalls and Shadow Library Bans: The New Frontier of Exclusion

Compounding these biases, the proliferation of digital paywalls, the suppression of shadow libraries such as Sci-Hub and Library Genesis (LibGen) [Table 1](#), and exorbitant Article Processing Charges (APCs) represent a contemporary manifestation of neocolonialism ([Table 2](#)). These mechanisms systematically exclude scholars and students from low-income nations, perpetuating intellectual dependency and epistemic inequalities.

Sci-Hub and Library Genesis (LibGen), founded as acts of resistance against commodified knowledge, provide free access to millions of paywalled articles, serving as vital resources for the Global South where institutional subscriptions are scarce. Legal bans, such as the 2025 Delhi High Court order in India following lawsuits by major publishers, mandate blocking these sites, citing copyright infringement. Yet, for researchers in countries like India—where an estimated 66–77% rely on Sci-Hub—this edict denies access to essential literature, exacerbating knowledge gaps.

The open access shift, while promising, has introduced APCs averaging \$2,000–\$5,000, with peaks exceeding \$11,000 for prestigious journals. For Southern scholars, these fees—often equivalent to months' or even years' stipends—transform OA into a new form of exclusion, with waivers inconsistent and limited to the poorest nations. This system perpetuates a division: the North publishes freely; the South pays or perishes.

Table 1: Global Bans on Sci-Hub and LibGen (2015–2025)

Year	Jurisdiction	Key Action	Impact on Global South
2015	USA (New York District Court)	Elsevier sues Sci-Hub/LibGen for copyright infringement; default judgment awards \$15M damages.	Sets precedent for international blocks; hinders US-based diaspora scholars.



Year	Jurisdiction	Key Action	Impact on Global South
2018–2020	Sweden, France, Austria, Belgium	Court orders ISPs to block sites following publisher complaints.	Limits European access for African/Asian migrants; reinforces paywall reliance.
2020	India (Delhi High Court)	Elsevier, Wiley, ACS file suit; initial injunction halts new uploads.	Indian researchers face immediate barriers to access.
2025	India (Delhi High Court)	Full ban on operations; ISPs ordered to block within 72 hours.	Affects the majority of Indian academics; exacerbates knowledge gap in low-income institutions.

Table 2: Average APCs in High-Impact Journals vs. Global South Affordability

Journal/Publisher	Impact Factor	APC (USD)	Waiver for Low-Income Countries	Equivalent Months' Salary (e.g., Indian PhD Stipend ~\$150/month)
Nature Communications (Springer Nature)	16.6	5,870	Partial (50% for lower-middle-income)	~39 months
PLOS Biology	9.8	3,000	Full for Group A (e.g., Ethiopia); 50% for India	~20 months
eLife	8.0	2,500	Full for low-income; none for upper-middle	~17 months
MDPI (Average)	Varies 3-5	2,000–2,200	Case-by-case; 50% for LMICs	~13–15 months

Note: Data adapted from publisher sites; illustrates APCs as multiple months of typical stipends in low-income settings.

3. Resistance and Reform: Pathways to a More Equitable System

The awakening to this neocolonial paradigm has spurred a movement toward decolonizing knowledge production.

- **Rise of Regional Indexes:** Regions have forged their own citation indexes to reclaim their academic identity. Systems like China's CNKI, India's Indian Citation Index, and Latin America's SciELO and Redalyc provide platforms for local validation and promote regionally relevant scholarship in local languages (CNKI, 2023; Indian Citation Index, 2023; SciELO, 2023).
- **The Open Access Movement:** The global push for Open Access is a potent antidote to this hegemony. By rendering scholarship freely available to all, it dismantles the



paywalls that have long served as instruments of intellectual control. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ, 2023), with over 21,000 journals, exemplifies this global endeavour.

- **Rethinking Evaluation:** There is a growing call to transcend quantitative metrics alone and adopt a more holistic view of research impact. This includes recognizing the local relevance, societal impact, and intellectual contribution of work that may not be highly cited in global databases (Alfasoft, 2024; Alatas, 2003).
- **National and Global Initiatives:** Proposals like national subscription models and government funds to cover APCs for researchers are bold steps toward ensuring equitable access to both reading and publishing research.

Efforts to counter Eurocentrism involve advocating for alternative discourses informed by local experiences, universalizing non-Western theories to foster autonomy (Alatas, 2003, 2008; Altbach, 1975, 1977; Garreau 1985, 1988, 1991).

4. Conclusion: A Call for Intellectual Sovereignty

The dominion of Western-centric citation and indexing is not a benign consequence of globalization but a modern form of intellectual imperialism. It distorts the global knowledge landscape, undervalues diverse intellectual traditions, and perpetuates a system wherein a few voices are heard while many remain silenced. The ongoing efforts by Asian, African, and Latin American scholars to forge independent systems of research validation are not merely about visibility; they are a struggle for intellectual sovereignty. A truly global and just academic community can only emerge when the "veiled yoke" of neocolonialism is cast off, allowing all forms of knowledge to be evaluated on their own merits, rather than their proximity to Western power.

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