

Teaching 'development' and the terms to use

There are different perspectives on development issues and how these are explored and presented in the classroom. These perspectives span different approaches to development; what development is and the different ways in can be measured; why some places prosper whilst others do not; the changing characteristics of developing countries; and the nature and impact of local, national and global inter-connections. But one of the most hotly debated issues by teachers is the terminology to use associated with development.

For many years geography teachers have used the descriptions of: 'less' and 'more' developed countries (LEDCs and MEDCs); 'developed' and 'developing' countries; and the global North and South. You might find any of these used in texts, especially if they were written some years ago. But in the 21st century there has been a global convergence between the 'developed' and 'developing worlds', so these terms no longer fit. Indeed, they are factually incorrect. If we use them we risk leaving students with a flawed view of the world that ignores recent economic and social change that has affected billions of people.

So, what do we mean by 'developing country'? How is this measured? Which countries are 'developing'? Do different countries have less and more developed regions within them? These are questions that should be asked about the meaning of 'development'. Defining which countries are 'developing' is complex, and many believe that such terms are becoming less useful. As countries make rapid progress in their development, dividing the world up into North and South, or more or less developed, has less and less validity. The Gapminder website illustrates this graphically and highlights the significant progress many countries have made over recent decades. Similarly, it can be difficult to say what are the characteristics of 'developing countries' as a homogenous group. It may be more productive to start with investigating individual places, what they are like, how they are linked and compare to the rest of the world and how they are developing.

Young people need an understanding of their diverse and changing world and to use descriptions that are drawn from reliable data. So we need to challenge assumptions, change mindsets and use a different vocabulary to describe the world.

Roberts (2023) pp 58-61 discusses 'othering and global development' and the use of different terminology. Study Figure 7.2 and the descriptions used.

What terminology is used in your school? Discuss the ideas expressed in this paper with your geography mentor.

What terms should we use?

- **Low income country (LIC) and High income country (HIC).** This subdivision of countries is based on the World Bank income classifications (GNI per capita), which in 2013 were Low Income \$1045 or below, and High Income \$12746 or above.
 - **Newly emerging economies (NEEs).** These are countries that have begun to experience high rates of economic development, usually with rapid industrialisation. They differ from LICs in
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that they no longer rely primarily on agriculture, have made gains in infrastructure and industrial growth, and are experiencing increasing incomes and high levels of investment e.g. the BRICS countries. *E.g. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the so-called BRICS countries).*

- Read Lowe, P. 'The rise of the BRICS in the global economy', *Teaching Geography*, Summer 2016.

Definitions used by the geography examination boards

AQA

AQA uses the terms:

- Higher income countries (HICs).
- Newly emerging economies (NEEs).
- Lower income countries (LICs).

Edexcel

Edexcel uses the terms:

- **Developing country:** a country with low human development* (LHD), a poor country.
- **Emerging country:** a country with high or medium human development* (HMHD).
- **Developed country:** a country with very high human development* (VHHD).

*Human development is measured by the Human Development Index (HDI). For further information on which countries are categorised as Low, Medium, High and Very High Human Development by HDI, visit <http://hdr.undp.org>.

OCR

OCR uses the terms:

- **Advanced countries (AC):** countries which share a number of important economic development characteristics including well-developed financial markets, high degrees of financial intermediation and diversified economic structures with rapidly growing service sectors. 'ACs' are as classified by the IMF.
- **Emerging and developing countries (EDC):** classified by the IMF – countries which neither share all the economic development characteristics required to be advanced, nor are eligible for the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust.
- **Low-income developing countries (LIDC):** classified by the IMF – countries which are eligible for the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT) from the IMF.

WJEC

WJEC uses the terms:

- **Newly industrialised countries (NIC):** middle income countries where the pace of economic growth outstrips that of other developing countries. NICs are characterised by: the relatively rapid growth of the manufacturing sector of the economy; rapid urban growth; strong trading relationships with other countries; and the operation of foreign owned multinational companies (MNCs) within the country.
- **Low income countries (LIC):** defined by the World Bank as having a GNI per capita income of \$1,045 or less in 2013. In 2015 there are 31 LICs. WJEC suggests that learners use one or more of the following LICs when following this specification: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Gambia, Haiti, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda.

Reading for new teachers

- [*The shape of the world*](#) – based on the GA Presidential Lecture 2011 by John Hopkin. (see support sheet).
- [*Keeping up to date with subject knowledge: rich world, poor world*](#) - based on the GA conference lecture 2012. This resource sheet is available on the Geographical Association website, under *Support and guidance, Initial Teacher Education, Support for trainees and ECTs*.
- Taylor. E. (2004) *Re-Presenting Geography*. London: Chris Kington Publishing pp103–112. If you have access to this book, this exemplar lesson on ‘Challenging assumptions about development’ is well worth reading. It is a study of the lifestyle of the Hadza hunter-gathers that challenges standard ways of measuring ‘development’. It is also an excellent reflective piece of writing about the choices a teacher made in choosing resources and evaluating students’ responses and thoughts on alternative sources for comparison.

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