

Promoting Epistemic Justice Through Open Pedagogy: A Pathway to Inclusive and Equitable Education

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Abstract

This study explored the concept of epistemic access as a fundamental human rights issue, particularly within the field of education. Despite growing recognition of epistemic justice, there remains a lack of clarity on how to implement it effectively in educational settings. The study investigated how Open Pedagogy serve as a practical framework to advance epistemic justice in teaching and learning environments.

A qualitative thematic synthesis approach was employed to analyse relevant literature and educational practices. This method enabled the identification of recurring themes and principles that connect Open Pedagogy with the goals of epistemic justice. The synthesis focused on extracting insights for stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, students, instructional designers, and researchers.

The thematic synthesis revealed that Open Pedagogy offers a promising pathway for enhancing epistemic access at macro, meso and micro educational levels. It concludes with practical guidance on how Open Pedagogy principles could be integrated into educational practice to foster more inclusive, participatory and just learning environments.

Keywords: Epistemic justice, epistemic access, open pedagogy, inclusion, teaching and learning.

Introduction

The Open Access (OA) movement represents a dynamic and multifaceted initiative aimed at making scientific knowledge freely available to all, removing barriers to information and promoting equity in education and research. OA is associated with Open Pedagogy (OP) which is described as “any pedagogy informed by the practitioners’ conscious identification with the open movement, open access, and OER... open pedagogy describes the interaction between the open movement and pedagogy, where OEP and OER-enabled pedagogy describe the actual practices arising from that pedagogical approach” (Witt, 2020).

The premise of this article is that the benefits offered by OP can be used to enhance epistemic access in diverse classrooms.

Epistemic Access

Epistemic is a term related to knowledge, justification and belief. It is related to the term epistemology which is described as the theory of knowledge and a branch of philosophy concerned with a general treatment of the nature, origins, scope and limits of human knowledge, its presuppositions and bases, and investigates the methods by which it is acquired.

Epistemic Access is a term that is related to epistemic justice or epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007); characterised by testimonial injustice and hermeneutic injustice. Testimonial injustice is associated with credibility deficit and credibility excess grounded in positionalities such as race and social class. On the other hand, Hermeneutic injustice is a form of injustice that hinders the ability of individuals to make their experiences intelligible and meaningful to themselves and others due to language and expressions.

Globally, the importance of epistemic access has not been adequately addressed in the literature. Quoting (Boughey, 2010), Du Plooy and Zilindile (2014) describe literature on epistemic access as under-researched in the South African context. D'Arma et al. (2024) further explain that the evolution of epistemic access prominence during the digital age has resulted in the proliferation of content driven by biased algorithms, digital surveillance and inaccessibility of digital content for most of the world's population, which in turn stifles the human right to be heard (D'Arma et al., 2024). Epistemic access in higher education settings has been investigated in recent years with varying perspectives, such as the means through which students gain access to academic success through resilience (Maniram, 2022), and self-regulated practice (Francis & Afful, 2023). Research further looks at the impact of students' epistemic beliefs on their engagement and satisfaction in online learning (Sheehy et al., 2022). Academics' epistemic cognition was studied by Stoten (2023) and the findings suggested limited epistemological underpinnings in academics' heutagogical professional practice (Stoten, 2024). Further, research has investigated the development of higher order thinking in higher education in Latin America. The findings suggest that, in this case, scholarship is characterised by "an epistemic disjuncture that favours theories and methodologies produced in the Global North, overshadowing well-recognised traditions of critical pedagogies in the region." (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2023). A study carried out by Lu et al. (2024) focused on building equitable practices in environmental initiatives within the University of California. Their findings suggest there is a need for increased awareness in order to identify, analyse and challenge barriers to inclusivity in environmentalism (Lu et al., 2024; Heasley et al, 2025).

It is evident from the studies cited that there is literature that addresses epistemic inclusion from individuals' deficit perspectives. It offers solutions based on individual students' adaptations such as resilience and self-regulation, rather than on the role institutions need to play in enhancing student success. The conceptualisation of students as needing development to succeed is characterised as the deficit perspective. This perspective generates stigmatisation of students who are atypical and are regarded as 'less than' and deficient. Furthermore, the literature on epistemic access presents a fragmented approach due to geographical, digital and pedagogical disparities. These disparities call for more inclusive, context-specific research and the recognition of diverse knowledge systems. The role of higher education institutions is

to provide learning environments that respond to the epistemic and contextual needs of all their students.

The democratisation of knowledge creation and validation is enabled through open truth-seeking dialogue, complexity of governance and personal development (Gardner, 2022). When juxtaposed to pedagogical approaches, the ideals align with OP. In the following section, OP is explained as an approach to enabling epistemic access.

Open Pedagogy

Pedagogy is a critical and effective tool that is designed to foster positive change in the learning process (Knif & Kairavuori, 2020). This assertion is supported by Miedema (2017), whose study illustrated the role of pedagogy drivers such as teachers in using pedagogy for sustainable change (Miedema, 2017; Salite et al., 2025). Against the backdrop of limited research, existing literature focusing on various means of enhancing epistemic access has been conducted across various disciplines. Open Pedagogy (OP) is considered a possible approach that includes epistemic justice in teaching and learning.

OP has been defined across the literature field by the benefits it affords. Maultsaid and Harrison (2023) explain that OP is a practice where trust, care, and inclusion can be acquired. It is characterised as a collaborative and democratic educational approach where students and teachers jointly create learning and knowledge through the use of openly licensed resources, open platforms and various open methods (Maultsaid & Harrison, 2023). Werth and Williams in comparing the definitions of OP as provided by Derosa and Jhangiani (2018) and Clinton-Lisell (2021), explain that OP is comprised of educational practices which are enabled by the open licensing of materials (Clinton-Lisell, 2021) and by both philosophical and practical alignment with education that is “access-oriented” and “learner-driven” (Derosa & Jhangiani, 2018). Witt (2020) provides a comprehensive definition of OP which is adopted for this study:

“Open pedagogy describes the interaction between the open movement and pedagogy, whereas open educational practices (OEP) and OER-enabled pedagogy describe the actual practices arising from that pedagogical approach.” (Witt, 2020).

In recognising the relationship between OP and Open Education Resources (OERs) this research accepted the term OER-Enabled Pedagogy as a form of OP. In this regard, sources containing the term OER-Enabled Pedagogy were included in the sample.

In explaining OP, Hollister (2020) quoting Hegarty (2015) provides specific elements characteristic to OP, “participatory technologies, openness and trust, innovational and creativity, sharing ideas and resources, connected community, learner-generated, reflective practice, and peer review.” (Hollister, 2020).

Research on Epistemic Access

In a study on equity and sustainability, Belaid (2025) asserts that creating an equitable educational environment “is not merely a moral imperative but a core element in achieving sustainable development”. This is acceptable for various ways in which equity and justice are addressed in research. Literature on the achievement of epistemic access in educational settings has been conducted from various perspectives, making valuable contributions to the field. Research on inclusive educational practices in linguistically diverse settings conducted by Bisai and Singh (2020) focusing on the perspective of language diversity, has established that using a Framework for

Multilingual Pedagogy as a guide to teaching and learning in diverse linguistic classrooms has a positive impact on student learning (Bisai & Singh, 2020). Linguistic inclusion was addressed in the systematic literature review carried out by Wensuh (2023), where translanguaging, continuous professional development and inclusive policies contributed to the advancement of linguistic access in linguistically diverse classrooms (Quinta Kemende Wunseh, 2023). The importance of teachers' professional development in translanguaging is evident in the work of Kiramba and Harris (2019), who state that legitimising multilingual pedagogies "capitalizes on the strengths of learners, teachers, and linguistic communities by embracing students' languages and language varieties in language learning and literacy development" (p.1). Investigating the use of multilingual resources such as glossaries, Nomlomo and Katiya (2018) established that glossaries are insufficient on their own to advance epistemic access, particularly when applied in the absence of students' biliteracy skills.

Literature on differentiated instruction as a means of addressing access is extensive. Differentiation, as a study by Celik (2019) focuses on inclusive classrooms and demonstrates that differentiated instruction is beneficial for creating a positive learning environment. This finding is complemented by Tupiño et al. (2023) Who found that differential instruction used in teaching students with physical disabilities benefits learning? However, differentiated learning has been found by Olanrewaju (2024) to be beneficial to all students regardless of ability (Olanrewaju Adebisi, 2024). In concurrence with this view, the inclusion of all students in differentiated instruction may guard against the deficit approach to inclusion and also benefit high performing students (Ziernwald et al., 2022).

Literature shows that authors have addressed epistemic access from various pedagogical positions. Badoi-Hammami and Colareza (2023)'s report on a study investigating the nexus between three axes of process, pedagogy, psychology and education indicates that the findings of the study suggest epistemic access is achieved through the linking of psychological theories with pedagogy through immersive learning strategies. Pedagogical models that advance epistemic access are also promoted in literature, including the use of epistemic artefacts (Rost & Knuuttila, 2022) and epistemic resource negotiation (Taylor et al., 2022)

The particular interest of the researcher of this article was the utilisation of OP as a tool to grow epistemic access in practice. Literature presents examples of success cases with reference to inclusion but limited research outputs place the focus on epistemic access and how it can be achieved in educational institutions. It is because of this that a Thematic Synthesis was carried out. The following section explains the methodological processes used to carry out the synthesis.

Methodology

This study was guided by the research question, *How can epistemic access be achieved in the classroom using open pedagogy?*

The research method used to address this question was Thematic Synthesis. As explained by Flemming et al. (2019), Qualitative Evidence Synthesis is increasingly acknowledged as crucial in tackling questions about intervention or system complexity, as well as in the processes of guideline development. The particular type of synthesis applied in this study was a Thematic Synthesis as described by Nicholson et al. (2016). The protocol for a Thematic Synthesis is described in Figure 1.

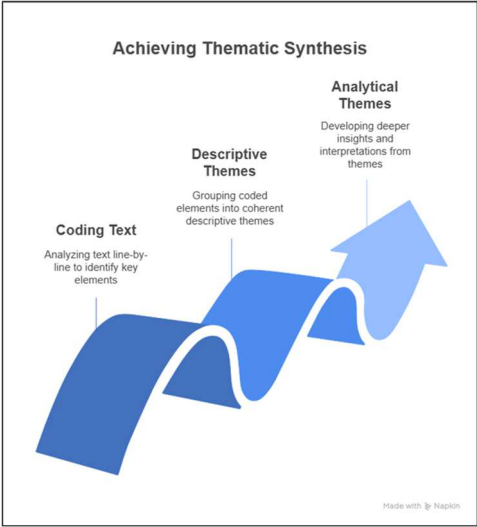


Figure 1. Thematic Synthesis Process Source: (Thomas & Harden, 2008)

A search of literature carried out in May 2025 using the research question yielded a total of 101 resources. The research question was: *How can epistemic access be achieved in the classroom using open pedagogy?*

The AI tool Scispace was used to source the research outputs. The inclusion criteria was:

- Research outputs not older than 5 years old.
- Types of outputs: Books, Book Chapters, Journal Articles, Conference Proceedings.
- In pdf format.
- In the English language.

The search term was the research question, *How can epistemic access be achieved in the classroom using open pedagogy?*

The research outputs sourced and excluded from the synthesis are categorised in table 1.

Table 1.
Categories of Research Outputs in the Initial Search and Excluded Outputs.

Categories of Sources	Number	Excluded
Book Chapters	8	0
Journal Articles	81	0
Posted Content	5	5
Preprints	5	5
Conference Proceedings	1	0
Dissertation	1	0
Report	1	1

The following research outputs published in languages other than English were excluded:

Table 2.

Research Outputs Excluded due to Language

	Type of output	Title of the research output	Journal
1	Journal Article	Revisão por pares aberta: uma análise dos periódicos científicos indexados no Directory of Open Access Journals (Open peer review: an analysis of scientific journals indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals).	
2	Journal Article	Prueba libre, justificación epistémica y el noble sueño de los estándares de prueba (Free testing, epistemic justification, and the noble dream of testing standards).	Revista De Derecho (valdivia)
3	Journal Article	Práticas epistêmicas no ensino de ciências por investigação: contribuições necessárias para a alfabetização científica (Epistemic practices in inquiry-based science education: necessary contributions to scientific literacy).	
4	Journal Article	Análisis de la filosofía, pedagogía y epistemología: Hacia la horizontalidad en la relación docente-estudiante (Analysis of philosophy, pedagogy and epistemology: Towards horizontality in the teacher-student relationship).	
5	Journal Article	Una aproximación epistemológica a la educación pedagógica y andragógica en entornos virtuales (An epistemological approach to pedagogical and andragogical education in virtual environments).	Espergesia
6	Journal Article	Concepções Epistemológicas e Práticas Docentes no Contexto da Educação Inclusiva: (Epistemological Conceptions and Teaching Practices in the Context of Inclusive Education).	Diálogos e Perspectivas Interventivas

7	Journal Article	Obstáculos epistemológicos e imaginarios pedagógicos dentro de las actividades profesionales de los docentes (Epistemological obstacles and pedagogical imaginaries within the professional activities of teachers).	Revista Cientific
8	Conference Proceeding	Agência epistêmica como um construto da área de educação em ciências: questões teóricas e proposições analíticas (Epistemic agency as a construct in the field of science education: theoretical issues and analytical propositions).PUT IN BRACKETS IN ENGLISH	Investigações em ensino de ciências

Data Collection and Analysis

A total of 62 resources were initially identified as meeting the predefined inclusion criteria for this study. These criteria were established to ensure that only materials directly relevant to the research objectives of research outputs not older than 5 years old, books, book chapters, journal articles and conference proceedings available in English and in PDF format were considered.

Following this initial selection, a secondary, more rigorous review was conducted to assess the methodological quality and relevance of each resource. During this phase, three resources were excluded. The reasons for exclusion were insufficient methodological quality, such as lack of transparency in data collection or analysis procedures, ambiguity or lack of clarity in the description of research methods, which made it difficult to assess the validity of the findings and limited relevance to the core research questions, indicating that the content did not meaningfully contribute to the study's analytical goals.

As a result, 59 good quality and relevant resources remained and were deemed suitable for in-depth qualitative analysis. These documents were then imported into Atlas.ti 23 for qualitative data management and analysis. The analytical process employed was open coding, a foundational technique in qualitative research. This method involves a line-by-line examination of the textual data to identify and label recurring themes, concepts, ideas and patterns. Each segment of text that conveyed a distinct idea was assigned a code that captured its essence.

Through this iterative and interpretive process, a total of 54 unique codes were generated. These codes were not treated in isolation; instead, they were systematically reviewed, compared, and grouped into broader thematic categories based on their conceptual similarities and relationships. This categorisation helped to organise the data into a coherent analytical framework, enabling a deeper understanding of the underlying issues and dynamics explored in the study.

Ultimately, the coding and categorisation process played a critical role in shaping the key insights and findings, offering a structured lens through which the data could be interpreted and synthesised into meaningful conclusions.

Findings

The filtering of papers using the inclusion and exclusion criteria led to 59 sources being exported to Atlas.ti 23 edition. The 54 codes were generated from the papers and are depicted in Table 2. The coding entailed the assignment of a label to a segment of text representing a concept or theme. The analysis process involved open coding followed by axial coding.

The Open Coding stage linked segment of data to a generated, related theme. The themes were then grouped into groups. An example of the generation of code groups is the grouping of the following codes; service learning, audio-visual resources, open-ended tasks, online discussion grouped under the code group “teaching approaches”.

Once the codes were generated, they were classified into code groups (Table 3). The code groups were aligned with the activities that introduce, shape and sustain Open Pedagogy across the macro, meso, and micro levels of higher education institutional processes. At the macro level, this alignment demonstrates the roles of national and international policy frameworks, accreditation requirements, funding, support and institutional governance structures. This creates an environment in which pedagogical innovation can be legitimised, resourced, and scaled, thereby situating Open Pedagogy within broader discourses of educational reform and knowledge democratisation.

At the meso level, the alignment highlights the organisational practices of institutional governance structures, faculties, schools and departments. Here, the emphasis is placed on leadership strategies, curriculum design processes, and professional development initiatives that mediate institutional mandates and classroom realities. Such practices determine the extent to which open pedagogical approaches are operationalised and embedded within disciplinary cultures.

The micro level focuses on the pedagogical interactions between educators and learners. This encompasses instructional design, assessment practices and collaborative knowledge production; all of which embody the principles of openness, participation and co-creation. By mapping code groups to these three interrelated levels, the analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how epistemic access can be addressed. It is simultaneously shaped by structural imperatives, organizational dynamics, and individual agency within higher education.

Table 2.
Code Co-occurrence and Classifications

CODES	GROUPS	LEVELS	COMMENTS
	ADAPTATION AND ADJUSTMENT	MACRO AND MESO	
Adaptation and Adjustment: Adaptive Adjustments in Peer Review		Micro	
Adaptation and Adjustment: Adaptive Adjustments to Assessment and Impact Metrics		Meso	
Adaptation and Adjustment: Adaptive Adjustments to Peer Review		Micro	

Adaptation and Adjustment: Instructor Reflexivity		Meso	
Adaptation and Adjustment: Iterations		Micro	
	CAPACITY BUILDING	MESO	
Training and Motivation		Meso	
Training of Instructors		Meso	
Training of Instructors: Removal of Bias		Meso	Discrimination changed to Bias
	COLLABORATION	MICRO	
Collaboration: Collaborative Efforts		Micro	
Collaboration: Collaborative Invention		Micro	
Collaboration: Concept Mapping Collaboration		Micro	
	DIVERSITY	MICRO	
Diversity: Diverse Participation		Micro	
Diversity: Diverse Profiles		Micro	
Diversity: Diversity in Invention Processes		Micro	
Epistemic theoretical and conceptual framework		Micro	
	GOVERNANCE	MACRO	
Governance: Adapt Incentive Systems and Funding			
Governance: Change Epistemic Governance Structures			
Governance: Democratization of Invention			
Governance: Funding			
Governance: Funding and Support			
Governance: Governmental Institutional Support			
Governance: Investment and Championing			
Governance: OA Policy Mandate Strategy			
Governance: Support and Funding			
Localisation and Contextualisation			
	MANAGEMENT	MESO	
OER Open Access		Meso	
Degree of Openness		Meso	

Management: Recognition and Acknowledgement		Meso	
Management: Recognition of Efforts		Meso	
Management: Support and Material Resources		Meso	
Management: Professional Development		Meso	2025/06/01 20:18:47, merged with Training 2025/06/02 08:25:14, merged with Building Capacities
	TRAINING AND MOTIVATION	MESO	
Training of Instructors		Meso	
Training of Instructors: Removal of Bias		Meso	
	OER ACCESS AND EQUITY	MICRO	
OER Customisation and Adaptation		Micro	
OER Diverse Formats		Micro	
OER Global Collaboration		Macro	
OER Innovation and Experimentation		Micro	
Open Educational Resources		Micro	
	PLANNING	MICRO	
Planning: Contextualisation		Micro	
Planning: Deliberate Actions		Micro	
Planning: Planning and Scaffolding		Micro	
Planning: Transdisciplinary Exchanges		Micro	
	TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES	MICRO	
Teaching and Learning Approaches: Creative Externalisation		Micro	
Teaching and Learning Approaches: Online Discussions		Micro	
Teaching and Learning Approaches: Open-Ended Tasks		Micro	
Teaching and Learning Approaches: Personal Experiences		Micro	
Teaching and Learning Approaches: Service Learning		Micro	

Technological Infrastructure		Meso	2025/06/01 20:02:37, merged with CoNavigator- enabled collaboration
Miro-enabled Collaboration			
Using Physical Resources		Micro	
Participatory Video		Micro	

Conclusions

The use of the data for decision-making and planning occurs at macro, meso and micro levels. The macro level represents governmental policies that drive educational institutions strategies and operational plans. The meso level represents the leadership of educational institutions and the micro level is the teaching and learning level and related pedagogies.

In implementing changes in pedagogy and practice regarding the adoption of OA which OP is a constituent, decision-making and planning occur at the macro, meso and micro levels. The macro level represents governmental policies that drive educational institutions strategies and operational plans. The meso level speaks of the leadership of educational institutions and the micro level is the teaching and learning level and related pedagogies.

The macro level sets the national policies regarding the operations of the education sector. With regard to OA, the government would amend policies, impact institutional matrices regarding OA and in the case of publicly funded institutions, they would offer support and funding for OA initiatives. Macro-level implications for epistemic access using OP are governance-related. The main implications are related to the adoption of OA policies, that determine the degree of openness in educational institutions, funding and support for epistemic access. This support may be in the form of investments in epistemic research funding and changes in epistemic access governance structures. The adaption of incentive measures and funding to include research and innovation in the field of epistemic access research and funding would trickle down to the professional development of teaching staff and further lead to a more democratised institutional space.

The meso level represents the educational institutions from the executive management level. The adaptations implemented at the macro level find expression at the meso level. The policies should include the adaptation of recognition and rewards related to the adoption of OA practices, provision of the technological infrasture to enable access and adaptation of OA resources, professional development for instructors and related material support. The Continuous Professional Development of teaching staff is one of the important roles played by management at the meso-level in educational institutions. The training should empower teaching staff to manage their bias in the design of instruction and learning content as well as teaching approaches. Management should also action the recognition, incentives and awards celebrating achievement in enhancing epistemic access in teaching, learning and research. This aids in motivating instructors to pursue OP practices. What is also important is support in the form of necessary technological infrastructure for inclusive expressions of

curriculum, the generation of diverse knowledge through the customisation and adaptation affordances of OERs. The composition of teams for planning and adaptation of epistemic access content should be diverse and fit the context of the tasks.

The micro level represents the teaching and learning phase; where instructors undergo professional development to manage their own biases in the classroom, use various pedagogies and resources to highlight the diversity of the student population. The use of diverse teams in the planning and adaptation of curriculum content that reflects varied epistemic perspectives enhances OP for epistemic access.

Group Codes in Macro-, Meso- and Micro Levels in an Educational Institution

The findings concerning the promotion of epistemic access in classroom settings through the use of open pedagogy carry significant implications across all levels of educational practice—Macro, Meso and Micro. At the Macro level, they inform policy development and systemic reform; at the Meso level, they influence institutional strategies and curriculum design; and at the Micro level, they shape classroom interactions and teaching methodologies. These multi-layered implications highlight the transformative potential of open pedagogy in fostering inclusive and participatory learning environments. The following section presents a detailed discussion of these implications, offering insights for educators, administrators and policymakers alike.

The need for epistemic access in education is deeply rooted in the recognition of the collective human race as inherently equal, with every individual deserving the opportunity to engage meaningfully with knowledge. While existing research has made strides in addressing inclusivity within educational institutions, there remains a notable gap in studies that explore practical strategies for enhancing epistemic access at the classroom level. This article presents a thematic synthesis that identifies and outlines processes operating across the Macro, Meso and Micro levels of educational systems. At the Macro level, policy frameworks and national education strategies play a crucial role; the Meso level involves institutional practices and curriculum design; and the Micro level focuses on classroom interactions, pedagogical choices, and learner engagement. These interconnected processes offer a multi-dimensional approach to fostering epistemic access, emphasising the importance of systemic alignment and intentional practice. However, the theoretical nature of these findings calls for empirical validation. Future research should aim to implement the proposed strategies within diverse classroom contexts to evaluate their effectiveness, adaptability, and impact on learners. Such studies would contribute significantly to bridging the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that epistemic access becomes a lived reality for all students.

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