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Epistemic (in)justice in higher education publishing

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Abstract

In a post-colonial age of persistent and sometimes pernicious change in higher education contexts and with increasing pressure for academics to demonstrate impact beyond their immediate spheres of teaching, critical perspectives on the dissemination of research are paramount. As individuals who are impacted by institutional structure and can impact on institutional structure, all practitioners and researchers are required to critically appraise their positionality and agency in higher education teaching and learning research. This includes reflecting on epistemic (in)justice, i.e. how their research activities feed into current power structures that determine whose knowledge counts and whose voices, ideas and perspectives are marginalised. Concurrently, all stakeholders involved in the publication process need to reflect on how the knowledge, or indeed, knowledges, that we prioritise either continue to colonise or decolonise the research field. Rather than only focusing on what we have added to the field, at all stages of the publication process, we need to question how this has possibly come at the expense of other equally valid but marginalised ways of doing and being.

Practitioner notes

1. Research should include an explicit statement highlighting its impact on challenging existing situational factors that reduce the plurality of voices in teaching and learning research.
2. Advocate for your university to support open access to teaching and learning research
3. Engage with perspectives that move beyond post-colonial or Western-centric contexts.
4. Ensure research does not unquestionably rely entirely on English-only and Global North sources or use citations mainly as a means of self or other aggrandisement.
5. Incorporate non-traditional data collection and investigative approaches into existing frameworks

Keywords

Epistemic (in)justice, decolonisation, participatory research, reflexivity, Western-centrism

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Introduction

Epistemic (in)justice is the study of fairness and equity in relation to knowledge (Fricker, 2007), with a view to understanding how social power affects who is heard, who is believed and who is silenced. As disseminators of knowledge, academic journals play a vital role in widening spaces and opportunities for researchers to be epistemic contributors to change and development in higher education teaching and learning. Considerations of epistemic (in)justice should, therefore, be present at all levels of operation. This includes ensuring knowledge can be disseminated widely through open access publication, curating an editorial board that represents voices and perspectives across the globe, drawing on a broad pool of reviewers, publishing papers from a variety of global, ontological and epistemological perspectives, and appraising all submissions for their levels of contributions to epistemic (in)justice.

According to Fricker (2007), epistemic (in)justice occurs on two key levels: testimonial and hermeneutical (in)justice. In cases of testimonial (in)justice, the knowledge of an individual is not granted the credibility it may deserve based on prejudices against the individual. In publishing it occurs when voices from less prestigious universities or parts of the globe are discounted or undergo higher levels of scrutiny than those stemming from more socially recognised positions (e.g. G08 universities or research stemming from the Global North). Unlike testimonial (in)justice, hermeneutical (in)justice occurs prior to the communication or dissemination of research (Coady, 2017). It is when individuals or a group of individuals are unable to communicate research or experiences because the system in which they are communicating lacks concepts or vocabulary to describe them. They are, therefore, excluded from the ability to generate social meaning (Boni & Velasco, 2020). It arises primarily from historical exclusion of marginalised groups, many of whom have been silenced from expressing alternative perspectives or interpretations of social practices. Often these marginalised groups internalise the positionality they have been provided and, in doing so, accept normalised powerful ways of seeing and doing without scrutiny.

In publishing, this becomes apparent when the term ‘Western’ is used as shorthand for universal, evidence-based, and exportable knowledge while ‘Eastern’ is treated as cultural, spiritual, traditional or regionally confined. For example, a manuscript grounded in European theory is positioned as mainstream scholarship and one grounded in Asian, African, or Indigenous frameworks is marketed as ‘alternative’ or an ‘area study’. Similarly, hermeneutical injustice occurs when English-language sources are treated as definitive and scholarship that has been traditionally viewed as non-Western is framed as supplementary or contextual. The ongoing colonial split quietly determines whose knowledge is seen as standard and whose is seen as specific — without questioning why those categories should still carry authority. On a more localised level, hermeneutical injustice is also apparent in the reporting of qualitative research via the language of historically more prestigious quantitative methods. For example, at JUTLP we often see explicit use of quantitative terms such as ‘variables’ or ‘reliability and validity measures’ in qualitative research that paradigmatically cannot claim to be searching for a quantifiable single truth. Discussions of epistemic (in)justice are, therefore, inextricably linked with the regulation of epistemic power; the ability to impact on epistemic norms which determine what knowledge is deemed valuable and who is considered to have an authoritative voice (Lechner, 2026). This impact is always twofold: it can influence the beliefs, thoughts and knowledge of others as well as enable or disable others from accessing or expressing knowledge (Archer et al., 2019).

The Journal of University Teaching and Learning (JUTLP) is committed to supporting publication of research that is firmly situated in the wider national and global landscape of tertiary education (Crawford, 2025). It concurrently recognises that all research is created within a social context with associated value systems, which are themselves shaped by the current and past histories of the societies in which researchers work and live - for instance, it can be said that most of the mainstream research publications are being influenced in the wake of European imperialism which is the dominant discourse of our time. Scholarship and research (and by proxy publishing) are not neutral undertakings - they are constructed within social and political spaces, often characterized by persistent issues of inequities in funding, class, and decisions relating to whose knowledges or perspectives currently count (Boni & Velasco, 2020; Meredith, 2025). On the one hand, JUTLP fully recognises that it holds a level of epistemic power, which can be exerted through all levels of organisation and throughout each step of the peer review process. On the other hand, the Journal itself is situated in a wider system of higher education, within which the individuals it relies upon (authors, editors and reviewers) are themselves situated. These individuals and JUTLP itself are subject to governance structures that prioritise research and scholarship funding, ranking systems for journal indexing, and both ethical and less ethical practices within the institutions that produce knowledge in the form of manuscript submissions to the journal. This editorial seeks to apply current debates focusing on epistemic (in)justice to the context of academic publishing and, in doing so, encourage reflection, reflexivity and debate in relation to current academic publishing practices that may both contribute to and context epistemic (in)justice.

The Context of Higher Education and Publishing

In order to fully explore the topic of epistemic (in)justice, it is critical to first understand the context of the higher education landscape in which publishing both exerts and is subject to epistemic power. A common denominator of all higher education institutions across the globe is their critical role in shaping society and advancing our understanding of all dimensions of our existence (Boni & Velasco, 2020). All universities are by definition involved in knowledge work (Meredith, 2025) and, by legitimising or delegitimising those who generate knowledge, they all leverage epistemic power within and beyond their situational contexts. It is for this reason that all higher learning institutions should be seen as a fundamental form of public good (Turner, 2025) that have the power to transform society and develop solutions to current social issues (Bon & Velasco, 2019). In practice, however, these aspirational aims may be hindered by contextual and structural characteristics of the higher education industry. For example, key performance indicators to which university faculty are bound may overshadow, or conflict with, higher order societal level endeavours. Academic journals work within and across these systems. They are both reliant on the epistemic power of higher education institutions and have their own epistemic powers to disrupt or change current inequities in the dissemination of knowledge. Therefore, as knowledge gatekeepers, academic journals can legitimise research impact and, thereby, mould the development of performance indicators – substantive or superficial – that, in turn, influence the behaviours of those conducting, evaluating and disseminating research.

In the current mass-consumer cultural context of many universities in countries with high levels of global power (Jones et al., 2025), the economic value of universities is increasingly emphasised to the detriment of discourses on the ethical value of the institution and the social dividends it

produces (McArthur, 2011). Rather than being seen as both an economic enterprise and a form of public good, higher education institutions are increasingly primarily defined as businesses that focus on generating ‘tradeable knowledge products’ that are only viable if they increase the institution's economic advantage in relation to other competing institutions. This corporatisation of universities means that in both the Global South and Global North access to higher education is stratified and becomes available only to select groups who are able to afford it (Côté & Pickard, 2022). Most importantly for the publishing industry, commodification of the sector, increased government interventions on funding and pressure to produce measurable outputs have reduced variety and led to research becoming predominantly short-term focused and with only low levels of reflection pertaining to societal impacts outside the world of academia (Meredith, 2025). Tight budgets, pressure to meet performance indicators and highly regulated reporting measures reduce a researcher's ability to challenge existing structural inequalities that may provide avenues for long-term change both within and outside academia. These mechanisms clearly and immediately impact on the variety and quality of submissions that are made to journals such as JUTLP.

Statements pertaining to impact are either epistemically parochial (Crawford, 2025) or lack depth and reflection in terms of their impact on change within, across and beyond higher education institutions. For example, a study may claim societal impact by citing the number of downloads or journal citations it has received, without interrogating whether the knowledge produced is accessible to, or actionable by, the communities it purports to serve. Equally, an author’s impact statement may reference improved graduate employability or industry partnerships as evidence of broader benefit, while remaining silent on whose interests are served by that employability, in which economy, and at whose expense. Similarly, a researcher based at a Global North institution may describe their work as globally significant while drawing exclusively on historically Western theoretical frameworks, citing only Anglophone literature, and producing findings that are neither accessible to nor reflective of the communities most affected by the issue under study. Research that does not clearly state a meaningful and deeply reflective statement pertaining to broader positive impact on society risks not only being simply self-serving, but also embedding existing fundamentally flawed systems of society privilege in which only particular voices are provided avenues for the expression and dissemination of knowledge (Meredith, 2025).

Competition between, within and across universities has led to a climate of education culture wars in which hierarchies of knowledge have emerged or become further entrenched. Within universities, social science and humanity disciplines have been relegated second place to their Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) counterparts and “centuries-old ways of seeing, understanding and explaining social reality have been silenced by the epistemological traditions of the West” (Dawson, 2020, p. 75). This tension is starkly illustrated by an observation made by Brown (2025), during her appearance on *The Diary of a CEO*. Brown recounts hearing a tech billionaire advise that young people should study coding and physics to prepare for the future — only for the same individual, moments later, to attribute their own success to a deep reading of the Stoics, philosophy, and history (Brown, 2025, 31:27). Brown uses this contradiction to raise a troubling possibility, that a privileged thinking class is quietly preserving the liberal arts and humanities for themselves, while directing everyone else toward narrow technical training.

This STEM over non-STEM is also reflected in the successive Australian governments' Higher Education funding priorities (Black & Thrower, 2025). Thus, Brown's (2025) observation points to something more systemic, the devaluation of humanistic knowledge is not accidental, but is actively reproduced through the very institutions that claim to democratise learning. Heightened competition between universities has led to an 'arms race' to attract high-paying students away from their countries of origin to prestigious universities that are predominantly associated with post-colonial Western ways of thinking and doing. Individuals who attend such institutions internalise restrictive Western-Eastern concepts of knowledge hierarchies and, potentially, come to devalue the knowledges they have accumulated in less globally dominant regions and accept dominant discourses of their own inferiority (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018). Education and learning thus becomes an elitist screening process that embeds existing hegemonies (Meredith, 2025), devalues knowledges, and provides access to knowledge acquisition and dissemination only to those who are able to pay.

Restricted access to knowledge is also apparent in ongoing debates focusing on the use of article processing charges (APCs) or subscription-only business models to access to prestigious top 20 academic journals. The norms used to rank journals stem from criteria created by elite institutions in globally dominant regions (Meredith, 2025) and the prevalence of payment for publishing has been accelerated by universities that tie tenure and promotion criteria to publication in prestige journals. Despite committing to diversity for under-represented groups, an increasingly large number of journals are not able to provide open access and restrict dissemination of knowledge only to those institutions (which are predominantly situated in the Global North) or individuals who are able to pay (Madhukar, 2020). JUTLP remains committed to maintaining full open access for authors and readers alike. An anti-elitist movement, Open Access takes a firm stance against the monetization of knowledge and encourages all members of the academic community to contribute to equitable and fair knowledge dissemination, including those stemming from less advantaged corners of the globe.

Whose Knowledge Counts?

Academic publishing should entail a commitment to ensuring a plurality of voices permeates all steps of the peer-review process, including not only desk review by the Editor-in-Chief but also feedback to authors in terms of the positionalities they take within the reporting of their research and inclusion of clear statements of whose voices may be prioritised and who is silenced in the choices that have been made during research decision-making. Similar to the institutions in which they work, researchers have a public responsibility to vigilantly reflect on the interests and knowledge traditions they represent, the norms and values that govern their research, and the extent to which their research recognises the voices and concerns of marginalised communities (Meredith, 2025). While there are a multitude of ways in which this can be enacted, in this editorial we provide examples of four key areas for authors to consider when submitting their manuscripts to academic journals.

Ensure a Plurality of Research Paradigms to Explore Change in Higher Education

Of particular importance to research focusing on change in higher education leadership and management, plurality of voices can be pursued through explicit engagement with different paradigms. Kezar (2011) highlights how poorly examined assumptions about change in higher

education research have limited complexity and examination of agency in relation to underlying interests in change. Lack of critical examination and explicit recognition of theoretical assumptions can lead to a street light effect whereby research is simply a replication of dominant paradigms that frame our understanding of change, progress and leadership in higher education. A functionalist paradigm, which is commonly used by researchers and practitioners in leadership and management, assumes causal relationships, privileges measurable and generalisable forms of evidence, and mostly focuses on positional leaders at the organisation's top. It often overlooks those who are affected by changes initiated from above. An interpretivist tradition departs from this by focusing on those experiencing the change and thus bringing better understanding of resistance; barriers to change and the inner lives of those who inevitably enact, reconcile and disrupt the top-down initiatives.

Critical paradigms challenge the functionalist seemingly value-free approach and question managerial methods (e.g., surveillance) and the use of power. Studies in this paradigm also explore desired changes from the perspectives of under-represented groups, thus opening up channels of social imagination and equipping others to find their voices. Emerging from research stemming from a critical paradigm, Meyerson's (2003) 'tempered radical framework' embraces research into bottom-up leadership and active followership that is often overlooked in leadership research. A postmodernist paradigm draws on interpretivist and critical paradigms and, similar to them, seeks to draw on a multiplicity of perspectives from within the organisation. A postmodernist aims to challenge the notion of organisation itself by seeing control and authority as unnatural and limiting individual creativity. Change is linked to Wieck's (1989) notion of improvisation and is seen as highly emergent. The leadership and management section of JUTLP therefore aims to ensure publication of not one but all paradigms to ensure knowledge from a range of perspectives is provided a voice in academic publishing.

Reflect on the Impact of the Englishisation of Research

Questions of whose knowledge counts also include a clear understanding of how the use of English as the default language of communication for individuals who do not necessarily share the same language both increases and restricts socially-just research dissemination. Controls and restrictions over language remain a key mechanism of power in imperial oppression and enable perpetuation of hierarchical power structures that constrain concepts of truth, order and reality to one perspective (Ashcroft et al., 2002).

The Englishisation of universities is taking place on a global scale and is a product not of the superiority of the language itself, but reflects historical colonial hegemonies, atrocities against others' knowledge with destruction of culture, languages, ways of doing and thinking. The particular worldviews and perspectives of each language of the world are lost when the dissemination of knowledge is limited to English (Varma, 2012). The depth of such loss is similar in research to the impact of the loss of critical ways of seeing, speaking and knowing described in Evans (2009) when the last speaker of an indigenous language ("Charlie") passes away:

> For his children and other clan members, the loss of such a knowledgeable senior relative took away their last chance of learning their own language and the full tribal knowledge that it communicated: place-names that identify each stretch of beach, formulae for coaxing turtle to the surface, and the evocative lines of the Seagull

> song cycle, which Charlie himself had sung at other people's funerals. (Evans, 2009, p.xvii)

Those for whom English is not a dominant language also face a 'linguistic handicap' whereby they experience systemic hurdles to having their knowledge count that are not apparent for researchers with English as a dominant language (Laroche, 2021). For example, prospective authors experience a significant barrier in publishing in English-speaking journals (Li et al., 2024). Since the English language has emerged as a dominant language of publication, authors from non-English-speaking backgrounds are increasingly restricted to exchanging practice and research in English dominant international communities and journals. The fact that most leading journals are published in English – and many are published only in English – creates language inequity and makes English the standard for international academic style. This dominance of English as a language does not only restrict authorship, but can also result in certain research findings, viewpoints, and methodologies being more closely aligned with English-speaking contexts. This alignment may consequently restrict the diversity of perspectives within academic discourse. It also means English-only speaking academics are restricted in accessing knowledge and practice achieved in other languages – further contributing to a global monolingual mindset (Clyne, 2005), whereby monolingualism is seen as the social and linguistic norm and multilingualism is an exception or problem. Practices that are unconsciously based on a monolingual mindset ultimately contribute to both linguistic and epistemic injustice for speakers of all languages, including English.

While this is not to say that all academic journals need to start publishing in languages other than English, it does highlight the importance of both reflective and reflexive statements in relation to the impact of English-dominance in the research being conducted. For example, a reference list or a systematic review that unquestionably restricts its focus to English-only literature should at the very minimum, provide a clear statement of the impact of this choice in silencing non-English-speaking voices and contributing to the continued Englishisation of research. In the age of internationalisation, both collaboration between researchers and low-cost and high-fidelity translation are easily accessible, rendering it no longer possible to simply justify an English-only focus on what are essentially epistemically parochial grounds (Crawford, 2025). All authors should engage with literature published in languages within their own linguistic repertoires, utilise translation tools to expand their knowledge bases, and demonstrate high collaboration that facilitates inclusivity in relation to different perspectives and authorial voices.

Choose your Citations according to Relevance and Reliability, not Status

The question of 'whose knowledge counts' is of particular importance in the choice of the literature upon which authors choose to ground their research. Citation is a powerful means of legitimising and discrediting knowledge and, thereby contributing to "colonisation's lethal blow" (Meredith, 2025, p.v). While citation has been claimed as an esteemed practice stemming from the predominantly Christian erudite and learned histories of the Global North (e.g., Grafton, 1997), it is, in reality, by no means a Western concept and can be traced back to the cuneiform tablets of Mesopotamia (the region we now know as the Middle East) and practices in China, dating back as far as 221BC (Veldhuis, 2014; Tsien, 2004). The Global North can, however, take full responsibility for restricting the standardization of citation systems to commercial enterprises

within the Global North (e.g. Harvard University, Chicago University, the American Psychological Association) and, thereby, committing epistemic injustice by discrediting the plurality of citation practices around the globe. Citations have evolved to become a means of institutionalised competition and intellectual property exchange that risks creating an exclusive and hierarchical social system between those who are cited and those who cite (Matusov, 2011; Roth & Cole, 2010). This means marginalisation through citations is not only apparent in restricted practices on a global level, but also in the choices individual researchers make on a local level. Rather than acknowledging the collaborative nature of knowledge creation, citation practices have become a means by which researchers can be seen to be networking with particular scholars or scholarly communities. This cements their own professional survival and promotional aspirations (D'Ignazio et al., 2020).

From the discussion so far, it has become clear that concepts of power and knowledge are not separate forces — one does not simply distort the other — but they are mutually constitutive: power produces knowledge, and knowledge produces power (Clegg et al., 2006; Foucault, 1980). Citation practices, viewed through this lens, are not neutral acts of intellectual acknowledgement but are mechanisms through which particular knowledge traditions are authorised, circulated, and naturalised as legitimate, while others are rendered invisible or illegitimate. The academy does not simply reflect existing power relations; it actively produces and reproduces them through the everyday, seemingly mundane practices of who is cited, who is published, who is peer-reviewed, and who is not.

From the perspective of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), the rules and norms governing citation practices and the individual researchers who conform or resist them are not competing explanatory frameworks but a mutually constitutive duality — structure shapes scholarly behaviour, while that behaviour continuously reproduces the structures of academic legitimacy. The institutions, practices, and discourses through which such authority is exercised and normalised constitute regimes of truth. They become historically specific systems that determine what can count as true, who has the authority to speak it, and by what procedures knowledge claims are validated (Foucault, 1980). Citation systems, standardised by Global North commercial enterprises, function as precisely such a regime: they do not merely record intellectual debts but actively govern the boundaries of legitimate scholarship.

In this process, the pursuit of truth, social justice and plurality become secondary to personal gain and the voices of marginalized groups or emerging scholars in the field are lost. For example, female researchers have been found to be cited less frequently than men (McCusker, 2022), which not only marginalises their voices but also causes epistemic harm to the scientific community as a whole. Similarly, other less esteemed means of knowledge documentation, such as the oral traditions of Australian indigenous peoples, are not valued or are filtered through the historically problematic voices of predominantly white male settlers:

> When the world of academia – with its seeming rigour and professionalism, boosted by citations and peer reviews – confronts a culture with thousands of years of oral tradition but no written word, the tension between the two feels dangerously apposite (Byrne, 2025, para. 1)

When submitting a manuscript to an academic journal, authors are encouraged to check whether they have relied on citations from a restricted number of researchers, including those that use excessive self-citations. While there may, at times, be good reason to heavily cite a particular scholar, it is critical to reflect on whether the narrow lens may inadvertently be reducing essential plurality and globally ethical research dissemination.

Diversify Research Methods to Ensure Plurality of Voices

The massification of Global North frameworks for researching higher education has resulted in an unequal exchange of knowledge. For example, frameworks of technology integration, classification of learners into different generations, curricula practices, and ways to tackle key educational problems are more often than not presented from post-colonial Western-centric perspectives (Adarkwah, 2025; Bekele et al., 2023). However, these dominant Western-centric pedagogical and research frameworks may not be applicable to all contexts. Although the scientific community encourages dialogue and collaboration between the Global North and South, the dominance of post-colonial Western-centric frameworks as universal models in understanding teaching, learning, research, development, and policymaking renders locally validated frameworks invisible.

To avoid perpetuation of Euro- and Western-centric research dissemination, JUTLP encourages diverse research methods or designs and cultural narratives appropriate for a particular research context, including (but not limited to) participatory research. In an attempt at "breaking the linear mould of conventional research" (Cornwall et al., 1995, p.794), participatory research aims to ensure that non-scientific communities and local individuals co-create research are not simply subjected to it. Indigenous perspectives are often marginalized within the conventional frameworks of what have traditionally been considered Western research design, particularly in terms of data analysis and academic writing (Datta, 2018). This marginalisation represents a disconnect between the knowledge produced and the culture from which it stems, which puts the local community at risk and sustains a one-way rhetoric or dimensional view of reality. In participatory approaches, the local knowledges of those being researched are not simply acknowledged but form the foundation for the research itself, thereby shifting the location of power in the research process. Indigenous research methods such as traditional storytelling are, therefore, considered just as effective and advanced as what we consider to be Western forms of thinking, acting, and doing research, such as experiments and standardized surveys that seek to universalize knowledge.

Participatory research is one way to address the need to decolonise Western research ethics to foster trust, respect, collaboration. It assists researchers to reflect on inherent biases and promote culturally safe practices that integrate indigenous methodologies into research design (Rooney et al., 2025). It also gives a voice to those countries around the world that are 'knowledge rich, but economically poor' (Odora Hoppers, 2021, p.315). As gatekeepers in research, academic authors need to critically consider equity in determining what research needs to be conducted and how it should be conducted. This includes protocols in maintaining academic integrity, rigour, trustworthiness, generalisability, validity, justice, confidentiality, respect, and the safety of researchers, participants, and institutions in research.

JUTLP encourages social science researchers to reflect on the knowledges they draw on and the research methods they use to enable balanced representation and a holistic understanding of the focal phenomenon. We do not advocate for a replacement of post-colonial Western or European knowledge and frameworks, but call for a consideration of methodologies and models both the Global North and South when conducting research. Researchers should rethink and reimagine methods of conducting research to embrace a co-creation of knowledge by involving local communities, institutions, or research participants in research design and the collecting and interpreting of data.

What Types of Knowledge are Valued?

Research plurality includes not only the voices that are heard, but the types of knowledge that are valued. Traditionally, quantitative research has been seen to be at the pinnacle of legitimate and objective knowledge that is independent of the individual interests, interpretations and socio-contextual situatedness of the knower. Similarly, it is reportedly easily transferable to other settings and, by proxy, is of key benefit in terms of economic prosperity (Meredith, 2025). However, as we have argued so far, no knowledge can be separated from the context in which it has been created and is therefore always inherently subjective and underpinned by the knower's values and worldviews (Andreotti et al., 2011). Qualitative research, which does not assume certainty or pursue a single truth, focuses on historical and contextual situated ways of knowing. In doing so, it makes no claims to objectivity and is concurrently at risk of epistemic parochialism (Crawford, 2025). In this vein, qualitative research does not play second fiddle to quantitative data - both methods play an epistemologically critical role in the dissemination of knowledge and both are situated in student as consumer and post-colonial contexts of higher education.

A historical illustration of how knowledge hierarchies are constructed and can propagate systemic injustice and ignorance is found in the work of Ignaz Semmelweis. In the 1840s, Semmelweis observed significantly higher maternal mortality rates in one maternity clinic compared to another at the Vienna General Hospital (Carter & Carter, 2017). Through systematic observation and comparison of institutional practices, he identified that physicians moving directly from autopsies to childbirth without handwashing were transmitting what he referred to as cadaverous particles, leading to puerperal fever. When he introduced mandatory handwashing with chlorinated lime solution, mortality rates fell dramatically (Carter & Carter, 2017). However, his findings were widely rejected by the medical establishment of the time, in part because they disrupted prevailing theoretical frameworks, existing scientific and medical opinions, and professional hierarchies. His observations were only accepted posthumously, when Professor of Chemistry, Louis Pasteur, was able to provide a more accepted theoretical and scientifically grounded explanation.

The Semmelweis case highlights how paradigms of inquiry and both the limitations and assumptions of their associated research designs matter: they impact directly how we come to know and what we lack sufficient capability of knowing. While Semmelweis' mortality data was numerically compelling, it was his contextual, observational, and interpretive reasoning — his attention to the lived practices, institutional routines, and social behaviours of physicians — that generated the insight. This is precisely the domain of qualitative research, which does not seek to measure or predict, but to interpret, contextualise, and illuminate the meanings, experiences, and structures that shape human behaviour and social reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). It is

particularly well-suited to surfacing knowledge that quantitative methods cannot easily capture: the silenced voices of marginalised communities, the unspoken assumptions embedded in institutional practice, and the complex, non-linear processes through which power and privilege are reproduced. In the context of knowledge hierarchies discussed above, the marginalisation of qualitative research within STEM-dominated academic cultures is not merely a methodological preference — it is itself an act of epistemic exclusion. When journals, funding bodies, and university performance frameworks privilege measurable outputs and replicable results, they systematically devalue the forms of knowledge that are most capable of challenging those very frameworks (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Meredith, 2025). Semmelweis' case also demonstrates that what is accepted as legitimate knowledge is not determined solely by empirical evidence, but also by institutional norms, dominant paradigms, and the authority structures that regulate credibility (Kuhn, 1970). Observing his experience underscores that epistemic validation is historically contingent, evidence alone does not guarantee acceptance. Rather, knowledge becomes authoritative when it aligns with, or successfully challenges, the socio-cultural and political conditions that define what counts as credible at a given moment.

Academic publishing should encourage research that fully integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches and welcome research that provides alternative ways of gathering, interpreting and presenting knowledge. For example, as stated on its description of the journal, JUTLP maintains a firm commitment to research for global epistemic change and plurality by inviting, accepting and disseminating research from heterogenous ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspectives:

> The *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* seeks well-designed and executed research and theory that changes how people think, and provides evidence-based theories, methods and findings to improve higher education learning and teaching practices. We invite a plurality of theoretical frameworks from across the disciplines to stimulate conversation around different ways of developing learning and teaching practice. We encourage evidence-based practice research situated in the local context and the broader international literature. (JUTLP, n.d.)

To promote epistemic justice, in mixed methods studies, authors should be clear on how each approach benefits the other and the ways in which the methods have been integrated at all levels of the research process, including design, methods, interpretation (Fàbregues & Guetterman, 2025; McCrudden et al., 2025; Guetterman & Manojlovich, 2024). At a deeper level the creative combining of methods concurrently reflects a means by which the siloing of research paradigms is questioned and more holistic paradigms can become common (e.g. Critical Realism) or new ones can emerge.

Decolonising Publishing

As can be seen in the arguments put forth thus far, we feel that current debates concerning the decolonisation of school and university curricula (e.g. Gorry et al., 2025; Papen & Atanasova, 2025) need to be extended to decolonisation of academic publishing. Post-colonial theory provides a framework to critique the ways in which current publishing practices perpetuate structures in which the centre is dominated by the norms and cultures of colonising countries and

historically colonised peoples and cultures remain on the 'periphery'; they are seen as deviant or deficient in their contribution to knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Ashcroft et al., 2002). The university system itself is a product of colonialism both is and was a 'key site through which colonialism – and colonial knowledge in particular – is produced, consecrated, institutionalised and naturalised" (Bhambra et al., 2018, p. 5). A product of this same system, academic journals have a role to play in creating a more just system, in which people's experiences, cultures, norms, values, priorities, achievements and interests are weighted equally (Young, 2011). This would enable a reversal of the universalisation of the dominant group's ways of seeing and doing, allowing increased acceptance and visibility to less normative perspectives:

> "To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other." (Young, 2011, pp. 58–59).

The responsibility for decolonising academic publishing does not, however, lie entirely with the actions of less dominant groups, who currently carry the highest levels of colonial load in academia (Guenzler, 2024). Instead, all researchers, editors and reviewers are required to adopt higher levels of cultural responsiveness. At every step of the research publication process, authors should engage in reflexivity: they should question and identify how often unspoken assumptions and power relationships in their work may be contributing to the devaluing or silencing of others and harmful processes of norm universalisation (Meredith, 2025; Omodan, 2023). These can, and should, be documented through the inclusion of reflexivity statements in academic publications that explicitly acknowledge researcher subjectivity in relation to the choice of research question, the decisions made in the research process itself, and the impact of both relational and broader societal factors that may also have impacted on the study (e.g. faculty members, participants, policies and procedures). To date, reflexivity statements have mostly been highlighted as necessary for those undertaking qualitative research (e.g. Braund et al., 2024; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). However, in light of the discussion so far, we suggest that reflexivity is critical to decolonising all types of research activity and should be made explicit in all submissions, regardless of the paradigm from which the research or the researchers stems. A key focus of reflexive considerations should be what kinds of knowledge the researchers consider to be the norms of higher education: what ways of knowing are considered legitimate and how do these practices privilege some knowers or knowledges, render other knowledges or knowers invisible or deficient and, thereby, both restrict and impoverish the contributions universities can make towards reducing epistemic (in)justice in research and education (Meredith, 2025).

Decolonising also includes the peer review process, whereby journal editors need to embrace an inclusive research publication culture and system since we live in a globalised system that includes many local populations (Li et al., 2024). This includes addressing the fact that reviews are currently being conducted by a non-representative pool of academics from a narrow band of countries in North America and Europe (Allen et al., 2022). For example, currently researchers in the USA review more than they publish. In contrast, Chinese researchers, who have one of the highest review acceptance rates, aren't asked to review as frequently. While it remains critical to draw on the extensive expertise of established researchers (who often appear first and frequently

in academic networks and search systems) there is also a need to utilise the expertise of young and emerging scholars from both the Global North and Global South in the peer review process.

Conclusion

This editorial serves as a call to arms that when we shift the wall of human knowledge forward, we are doing so without leaving critical bricks behind, thus increasing the effectiveness of our collective research and progress towards epistemic justice. This call to arms is for all stakeholders involved in the creation and dissemination of research. Academic publishing processes are both subject to, and implicit in, epistemic (in)justice at all stages of the publishing process. Researchers, editors and reviewers need to both acknowledge and enact upon their roles in ensuring increased plurality of voices, with a particular focus on creating spaces for individuals and knowledges that have been subjugated within current norms (Foucault, 1980). Publishing is then a deliberative space in which post-colonial norms are scrutinised, rejected or adapted to widen not only the scope of research but also the depth and interconnectivity of human knowledge. This does not entail a return to precolonial practices, but deliberate and dialectal hybridisation of currently European and Western-centric practices with indigenous ontologies (Ashcroft et al., 2002).

Despite the complex economic and social contexts in which they operate, the public good of the university and associated publishing industry can move towards polycentrity (Polanyi, 1951) in which epistemic norms no longer stem from one powerful epistemic centre (Braspenning, 1993), but from many global and local centres of knowledge. We encourage the academic publishing industry to continue its commitment to widening access and avenues for plural voices through ensuring open access to teaching and learning research. Editorial boards and pools of reviewers should also draw on expertise from a wide number of paradigms and perspectives across the Global North and Global South and measures should be in place to ensure the review process is not compromised by discrimination according to researcher or university of origin. Similarly, we encourage authors to deeply consider the ways in which their knowledge has come to be, its necessary plurality, and its privileges. All authors need to constantly engage in reflexivity to understand what assumptions underpin their knowledge, including who benefits most and whose voices our knowledge may silence. This will enable further broadening of perspectives that move beyond post-colonial or Western-centric contexts, increased plurality of research methods (including those that incorporate not-traditional data collection and investigative approaches) and reduced unquestioned reliance on English-only and Global North sources. Rather than reducing our view of knowledge to one that perpetuates epistemic (in)justice, we need to expand our perspectives to achieve ‘epistemic multiplicity’ (Meredith, 2025) that normalises difference, decolonises publishing, and generates inclusive meaning in current predominantly Western-centric academic practices.

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