

From theory to practice: A taxonomic approach to epistemic injustice in education

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Abstract

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The concept of epistemic injustice, characterized by discrimination and exclusion within the epistemic sphere, manifests in various ways depending on the nature of epistemic interactions and the contextual social environment. It is of interest to analyze this phenomenon in the educational context, given the focus on individuals as generators and transmitters of knowledge. While this concept has gained wide recognition and utilization in academic circles, the growing variety of related terms and typologies has led to a certain degree of fragmentation in the field. To address this fragmentation, this study aims to systematize and interconnect these concepts by proposing a comprehensive taxonomy tailored to the educational context. Using meta-analysis and content analysis methods, this research identifies core areas of interest and prominent scholars in the field of epistemic injustice within the educational context. Building upon this foundation, the study formulates a taxonomy encompassing the diverse typologies of epistemic injustice delineated in academic discourse related to the educational context. This effort seeks to facilitate the practical application of these concepts in education and the development of strategies and policies conducive to cultivating more equitable and just environments in contemporary society.

Keywords: education, epistemic injustice, hermeneutical injustices, taxonomy, testimonial injustices.

Introduction

The concept of epistemic injustice, coined by Miranda Fricker in 2007, delineates the credibility deficit faced by individuals due to their social identity and highlights the absence of necessary concepts to comprehend their unique experiences. Epistemic injustice, encompassing discrimination and exclusion, manifests in various ways depending on the nature of epistemic exchanges and the societal context in which they occur.

Since its inception, this concept has found widespread utilization within scholarly literature to fathom the epistemic injustices experienced by individuals. It serves to identify a multitude of epistemically unjust acts in various realms, including individual interactions, the doctor-patient relationship, educational settings, and other scenarios. The academic-scientific endeavor surrounding this concept has yielded a diverse array of concepts and typologies, intended to provide clarity regarding these forms of injustice.

It is of particular interest to scrutinize this phenomenon within the educational domain, given its focus on individuals as knowledge generators and transmitters. However, the multiplicity of concepts, while useful for understanding the phenomenon, can hinder disciplinary progress due to a lack of cohesion and integration.

Consequently, this work aims to contribute to the organization and articulation of pertinent constructs in the literature on epistemic injustice by constructing a taxonomy tailored to the educational context. This endeavor involved a meta-analysis to identify key areas of interest and prominent authors in the scientific production of epistemic injustice, followed by content analysis of relevant academic texts. Drawing from recognized approaches and typologies, a taxonomic proposal specific to epistemic injustice in education was formulated.

This research aspires to facilitate the practical application of concepts related to epistemic injustice, including the development of strategies and policies conducive to fostering more equitable educational environments.

Materials and Methods

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach to address the phenomenon of epistemic injustice. In the initial phase, a meta-analysis of scientific literature published in the Scopus database from 1998 to July 2023 was conducted to gain an understanding of the state of knowledge, identify trends in scientific production, the knowledge areas most closely related to epistemic injustice, and the most relevant authors in this field.

Subsequently, a content analysis was carried out on the most impactful publications within this area of study. This review aimed to identify concepts, typologies, dimensions, and approaches associated with epistemic injustice, with the potential to aid in recognizing instances of epistemic injustice in educational contexts. Through the review of relevant literature, additional pertinent documents were identified and reviewed for the purposes of this study.

These identified approaches and typologies were then integrated into the knowledge generation process to construct a taxonomic proposal on epistemic injustice specifically tailored to the educational context.

Results

The meta-analysis of scientific literature on epistemic injustice revealed a growing attention to this topic in the last decade.

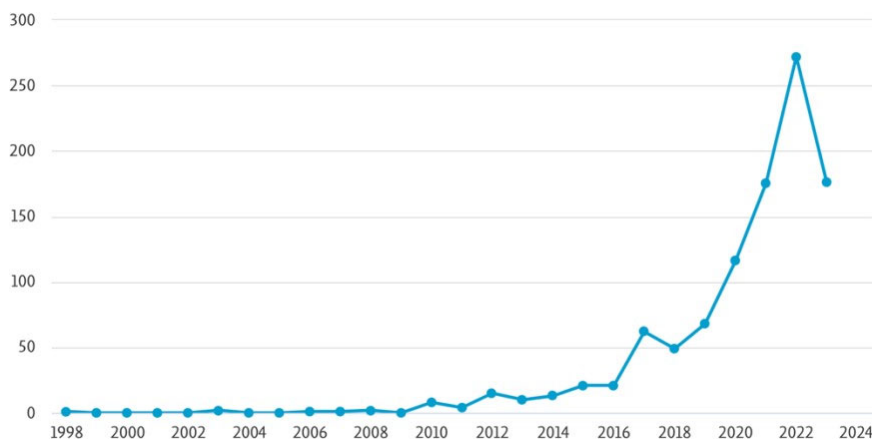


Figure 1. Scientific Production on Epistemic Injustice
Source: Scopus (2023)

The results indicated that the areas with the highest scientific production in this field were related to social sciences and humanities, followed by health sciences, environmental sciences, and business.

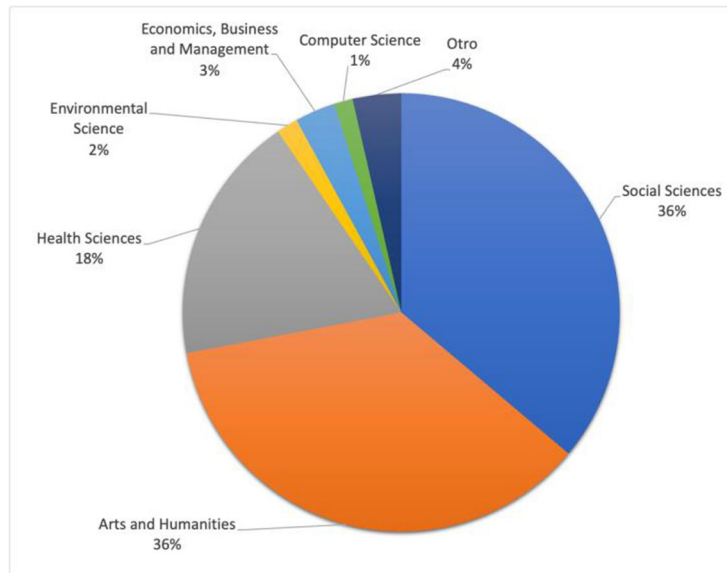


Figure 2. Scientific Production by Area
Source: Scopus (2023)

As relevant researchers, Miranda Fricker, José Medina, Ian Kidd, and Havi Carel stand out, whose works have significantly contributed to the understanding of this phenomenon.

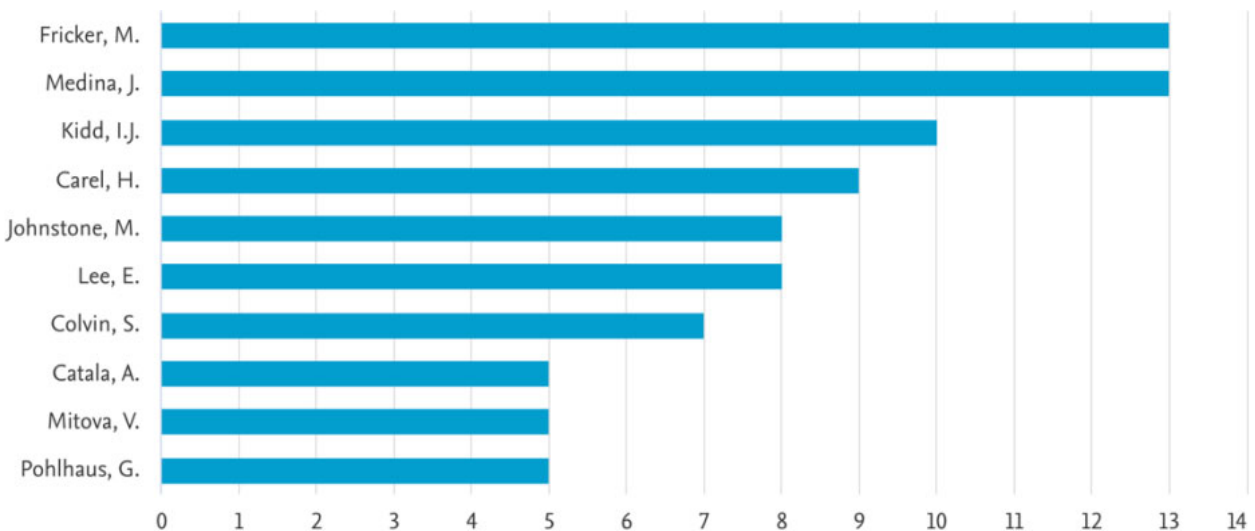


Figure 3. Key Authors
Source: Scopus (2023)

Regarding studies related to education, the topic has been relatively underexplored (Dunne, 2023). However, in the last decade (2013-2023), there has been a notable growth in publications in this area, increasing from 4 documents in 2013 to a peak of 43 publications in 2022, totaling 143 publications according to Scopus database records. These works have employed the concept of epistemic injustice to address early, secondary, and higher education from various perspectives, including the academic lives of students and teachers (Qiu & Zheng, 2023;

Donnelly, 2018), curriculum content and available study materials (Bernal, 2022), and the involvement of minority groups in knowledge production (Mwambari et al., 2022; Boni & Velasco, 2020).

From the content analysis of relevant scientific literature, testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice emerge as central categories. Testimonial injustice involves the credibility deficit assigned to a speaker due to identity-based prejudice on the part of the listener (Fricker, 2007; Mitova, 2020). On their part, hermeneutical injustice occurs when a gap in collective interpretive resources places someone at an unfair disadvantage in understanding their social experiences (Fricker, 2007; Catalá, 2020).

Additionally, the overarching concept of structural injustice is recognized, which refers to the generation of inequalities in opportunities for exercising full epistemic agency arising from social structures (Wanderer, 2017). Other types of epistemic injustice that may be considered as categories to better understand the phenomenon, particularly in the educational context, include participatory injustice, performative injustice, and the invalidation of epistemic labor as typologies of epistemic injustice.

- Participatory injustice refers to the denial of a listener's participation as an epistemic agent (Hookway, 2010).
- Performative injustice occurs when individuals are judged as unintelligible or less intelligible than others due to their communicative performance or expressive style (Medina, 2017).
- Invalidation of epistemic labor points to situations where the epistemic work of certain social groups is systematically ignored or unrecognized (Pohlhaus, 2017).

From the identification of various approaches and typologies resulting from multidisciplinary scientific work on the concept, it becomes evident that epistemic injustice can take on a wide variety of forms in educational settings. Building upon this foundation, a taxonomy will be developed to account for the diversity of epistemic injustice manifestations in educational environments, with the aim of contributing to the construction of a framework for understanding and addressing epistemic injustice in the educational context.

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