

Exploring the Experience of Epistemic Injustice in the Classroom and Its Implications for Education: A Philosophy of Education Approach

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to explore university students' lived experiences of epistemic injustice in classroom settings and to elucidate the educational implications of these experiences from the perspective of philosophy of education.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study employed an interpretive phenomenological design. Participants were 20 undergraduate and postgraduate students from public universities in Tehran, Iran, selected through purposive maximum-variation sampling. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews focusing on students' experiences of credibility, voice, classroom participation, interpretive exclusion, and educational authority. Interviews lasted approximately 45–75 minutes, were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Coding was primarily inductive, while concepts derived from epistemic injustice and philosophy of education served as sensitizing theoretical frameworks. MAXQDA 2024 was used to organize and analyze the data. Credibility, dependability, and confirmability were enhanced through participant reflection, peer review of coding, analytic memoing, and maintenance of an audit trail.

Findings: Analysis identified six interconnected themes: credibility injustice and devaluation of student testimony, epistemic silencing and unequal participation, hermeneutical marginalization and interpretive exclusion, hierarchical distribution of epistemic authority, consequences for epistemic agency and educational engagement, and conditions required for epistemically just education. Participants' accounts indicated that repeated credibility deficits and dismissive classroom interactions encouraged self-silencing, reduced intellectual risk-taking, weakened academic confidence, and undermined students' sense of belonging as legitimate knowers. Hermeneutical marginalization was reflected in difficulties naming problematic experiences and in the normalization of exclusionary practices. Participants emphasized dialogical teaching, transparent justification of judgments, epistemic pluralism, equitable opportunities for participation, and recognition of students as knowledge contributors as central requirements of educational justice.

Conclusion: Epistemic injustice in the classroom is a relational and structural educational phenomenon that affects students' voice, interpretive agency, academic identity, and participation; therefore, epistemically just education requires pedagogical authority to be exercised through dialogue, reason-giving, recognition, and equitable participation rather than positional hierarchy alone.

Keywords: *Epistemic Injustice; Philosophy of Education; Classroom Experience; Epistemic Agency; Hermeneutical Injustice; Testimonial Injustice; Educational Justice.*

1. Introduction

Education is not merely a process of transmitting information; it is also a social, moral, and epistemic practice through which individuals learn what counts as knowledge, whose voice is recognized as credible, how disagreement is negotiated, and which forms of experience are considered worthy of academic attention. Classrooms therefore operate not only as instructional spaces but also as epistemic communities in which knowledge is produced, interpreted, evaluated, and authorized. Within these communities, teachers and students occupy unequal but interdependent positions, and the distribution of epistemic authority can significantly shape students' opportunities to speak, question, interpret, and participate in knowledge-making. From the perspective of philosophy of education, this raises fundamental questions concerning justice, recognition, autonomy, dialogue, authority, and the ethical responsibilities of educational institutions. Contemporary educational philosophy increasingly emphasizes that curricula and pedagogical practices are never epistemically neutral; rather, they embody assumptions about legitimate knowledge, appropriate ways of knowing, and the relationship between institutional authority and the learner (Ariwido, 2023; Guilherme Duarte Da Silva & Niu, 2025). Accordingly, the quality of education cannot be evaluated solely through learning outcomes or curricular coverage, because educational processes also influence whether students come to understand themselves as legitimate knowers and participants in collective inquiry.

The concept of epistemic injustice provides a powerful framework for analyzing these dimensions of education. Epistemic injustice refers broadly to forms of unfairness that affect individuals specifically in their capacities as knowers. In educational settings, such injustice may occur when a learner's testimony is granted less credibility than it deserves, when certain students are treated as epistemically less competent because of their social position, when institutional discourse excludes particular interpretive resources, or when dominant curricular structures make some experiences difficult to articulate or recognize. Recent scholarship has increasingly applied the concept to higher education, teacher education, science education, medical education, multilingual classrooms, and curriculum studies, demonstrating that epistemic injustice is not confined to exceptional or overtly discriminatory incidents. Rather, it may be reproduced through ordinary pedagogical routines, credibility judgments, disciplinary norms, curricular

omissions, assessment practices, and asymmetrical classroom relations (Burst & Taylor, 2023; Sato, 2023; Stroupe et al., 2024). These patterns suggest that epistemic injustice should be examined not only as an individual interpersonal problem but also as a structural and pedagogical phenomenon embedded in the organization of education.

One of the most significant manifestations of epistemic injustice in the classroom concerns credibility. Students frequently enter educational spaces in which teachers possess legitimate forms of disciplinary expertise and institutional authority. However, legitimate pedagogical asymmetry can become epistemically problematic when authority operates in ways that systematically discount student contributions before their content has been adequately considered. Research on educational contexts has shown that learners may experience exclusion when their speech, interpretations, or questions are treated as less credible because of identity, institutional status, language, background, or deviation from dominant academic expectations (Schey, 2022; Solano-Campos, 2023). In such circumstances, students may be physically present and formally permitted to participate while remaining epistemically marginalized. Their participation becomes conditional upon conformity to pre-established norms of expression or knowledge, and their lived experiences may be treated as supplementary rather than genuinely knowledge-bearing.

This problem is particularly important because classroom participation is not reducible to the opportunity to speak. Meaningful epistemic participation requires that students' contributions be heard, interpreted charitably, engaged with seriously, and evaluated according to relevant reasons rather than prejudicial credibility assumptions. Yamaguchi's discussion of epistemic legitimation in pluriversal mathematics education highlights the importance of movement from voice toward validation, suggesting that inclusion requires more than merely allowing learners to articulate perspectives; those perspectives must also enter legitimate processes of recognition and knowledge construction (Yamaguchi, 2025). Similarly, research on epistemic authorship in bilingual education demonstrates that students' capacity to see themselves as authors of knowledge is closely related to whether educational environments recognize their linguistic, cultural, and interpretive resources as epistemically valuable (Solano-Campos, 2023). These insights are highly relevant to classroom justice because they shift attention from access to

participation toward the deeper question of whether students are recognized as persons capable of producing meaningful knowledge.

The issue of recognition is closely related to curricular structures. Curricula determine not only what students study but also which traditions, perspectives, histories, languages, and forms of knowing are normalized. Critical scholarship on decolonization has shown that curricular structures can reproduce epistemic hierarchies by privileging dominant knowledge systems while marginalizing alternative intellectual traditions and lived experiences (Ajani, 2023; Nyoni & Chiramba, 2024). In teacher education, decolonial perspectives have emphasized that inclusive education requires more than representational diversity; it requires critical attention to the epistemic assumptions embedded in professional knowledge, curriculum design, and institutional practice (Sepadi & Masenya, 2025). Similarly, work on medical education has demonstrated how curricular arrangements can reproduce systemic exclusions through the erasure or devaluation of particular groups and knowledge traditions (Razack et al., 2024). Such findings reveal that epistemic injustice may be enacted not only in teacher-student interaction but also through the conceptual architecture of curricula themselves.

Closely connected to this is the problem of hermeneutical injustice. Learners may experience situations that feel exclusionary, silencing, or unfair but lack the recognized conceptual vocabulary necessary to make sense of those experiences. When the educational environment privileges a narrow set of interpretive categories, students may struggle to articulate experiences that fall outside established academic frameworks. This has been particularly evident in studies of marginalized identities and educational contexts where learners' experiences cannot easily be expressed through dominant institutional language (Davies, 2023; Schey, 2022). Hermeneutical injustice is therefore significant for education because conceptual resources are themselves educational goods. Education shapes not only what learners know about the world but also the conceptual means through which they interpret themselves and their relations with others. If educational institutions fail to provide adequate interpretive resources, students may internalize structural problems as individual inadequacies.

The epistemic dimension of classroom injustice also intersects with language. Multilingual and language-minoritized learners may encounter environments in which dominant linguistic norms operate as implicit criteria for intelligence, competence, or academic legitimacy. Studies of

translanguaging practices have shown that language use can become a site of onto-epistemic violence when multilingual students' ways of knowing and expressing knowledge are constrained by monolingual assumptions (Chronaki et al., 2022). Likewise, work on global Englishes and language-minoritized practitioners has called attention to the need for reparative approaches that address historical and structural inequalities embedded in language education (Imperial, 2024). Critical discourse approaches in English as an additional language contexts further emphasize the importance of epistemological diversity, especially when learners navigate multiple cultural and linguistic frameworks (Chen & Du, 2025). These studies indicate that epistemic injustice is frequently intertwined with communicative norms: whose language is considered academic, whose expression is seen as clear, and whose knowledge requires translation into dominant forms before it becomes acceptable.

Pedagogical practices can either reinforce or challenge these inequalities. Dialogical traditions in education, particularly those influenced by Paulo Freire, emphasize the learner as a subject rather than an object of education and conceptualize teaching as a relational process in which knowledge is constructed through critical engagement (Marques et al., 2022). Such a perspective is directly relevant to epistemic justice because dialogue requires more than turn-taking; it presupposes that participants recognize one another as capable of contributing meaningfully to shared understanding. In contrast, pedagogies that rely heavily on passive reception, unquestioned authority, or superficial reproduction of information may restrict opportunities for epistemic agency. Balarin and Rodríguez conceptualize shallow pedagogies as a form of epistemic injustice because uncritical forms of learning can limit education's capacity to contribute to justice and sustainable development (Balarin & Rodríguez, 2024). From this perspective, epistemic injustice is not only about interpersonal disrespect but also about educational practices that inhibit critical inquiry and deprive learners of opportunities to develop as epistemically autonomous agents.

This concern is particularly important in the context of teacher responsibility. Educators possess epistemic power because they evaluate, authorize, explain, correct, and define standards of legitimate participation. Such authority is necessary for teaching, but it also entails ethical responsibilities. Brust and Taylor argue that college educators have responsibilities to recognize and resist epistemic injustice, particularly in institutional contexts

shaped by longstanding inequities (Brust & Taylor, 2023). Similarly, Stones and Pearce connect teacher preparation with the promotion of epistemic justice, suggesting that teacher education must include attention to how educators support students as knowers and create conditions for equitable epistemic participation (Stones & Pearce, 2022). The implication is that pedagogical expertise should include not only subject knowledge and instructional skill but also sensitivity to credibility distribution, interpretive exclusion, and the ethical use of classroom authority.

Teacher responsibility is further complicated by emotional and relational dimensions of education. Experiences of being dismissed, shamed, ignored, or delegitimized can affect how students subsequently participate in learning. Lusk's analysis of shame in medical education highlights the close relationship between emotion, ethics, and epistemology, demonstrating that emotional experiences can shape learners' epistemic positioning and willingness to engage (Lusk, 2022). Similarly, recent work on affect in science education has emphasized that educational relations involve not only cognition but also processes of being affected by and with others (Avraamidou & Olave, 2025). These perspectives are significant because students may respond to epistemic injustice through withdrawal, silence, strategic compliance, or reduced intellectual risk-taking. Therefore, the consequences of epistemic injustice extend beyond immediate feelings of unfairness and may influence long-term patterns of participation, academic identity, and self-perception as a knower.

The relational character of epistemic injustice is especially visible in mentoring. Fackler's analysis of a doctoral mentoring relationship illustrates how failures of recognition and credibility can destabilize educational relationships that are expected to support intellectual development (Fackler, 2026). Mentoring is an intensified form of epistemic dependence, but similar dynamics also operate in ordinary classroom settings whenever students rely on teachers to validate, critique, and develop their ideas. If this authority is exercised without openness to students' epistemic agency, the educational relationship may become one in which learners learn primarily to anticipate authority rather than engage in inquiry. This possibility raises a central philosophical problem: how can education preserve legitimate expertise without transforming expertise into epistemic domination?

Contemporary debates about curriculum and educational quality reinforce this question. Gabi and Chikwa argue for

rethinking dominant understandings of quality in higher education by attending to dimensions that conventional metrics may overlook (Gabi & Chikwa, 2025). From an epistemic justice perspective, educational quality should include the extent to which learners can participate meaningfully in knowledge practices, experience recognition, and develop intellectual autonomy. Likewise, educational philosophy emphasizes the need to balance procedural knowledge, substantive knowledge, and broader philosophical purposes of education rather than reducing learning to measurable acquisition alone (Guilherme Duarte Da Silva & Niu, 2025). In this regard, epistemic justice offers a normative criterion for evaluating education beyond performance indicators: an educational environment may be efficient in transmitting content while still being unjust in its distribution of voice, authority, recognition, and interpretive opportunity.

The growing technological transformation of education adds another layer to these concerns. Discussions of technology integration in higher education have emphasized that technology should be interpreted through culturally and philosophically grounded frameworks rather than treated as epistemically neutral (Bekele et al., 2023). Technologies can widen access to information and diversify participation, but they can also reproduce pre-existing hierarchies if dominant assumptions about knowledge, language, and expertise remain unexamined. More broadly, culturally responsive approaches to educational design emphasize the importance of creating learning environments that recognize diverse experiences and representations rather than imposing a singular model of legitimate knowledge (Cromarty et al., 2022). These debates reinforce the broader claim that epistemic justice concerns the design of educational environments as a whole, including curriculum, pedagogy, language, technology, assessment, and institutional culture.

Several scholars have therefore proposed more restorative and reparative approaches to epistemic justice. Sato argues that in non-ideal and corruptive educational environments, the aim cannot be limited to preventing isolated injustices; education must also work toward restorative epistemic justice by repairing damaged epistemic relations and capacities (Sato, 2023). Related discussions of reparative redress in language education similarly emphasize that historical and structural patterns of exclusion require more than formal inclusion (Imperial, 2024). This orientation is particularly valuable for educational philosophy because it frames epistemic justice as a positive educational project. The goal is not simply to eliminate overt

forms of silencing but to establish conditions under which students can develop confidence, conceptual resources, dialogical capacities, and a sense of legitimate epistemic membership.

This positive project also requires pluralism. Contemporary educational contexts are marked by cultural, linguistic, social, and epistemological diversity, and the assumption that a single knowledge tradition can adequately represent all learners is increasingly challenged. Afrocentric approaches, decolonial curricula, culturally responsive teaching, and pluriversal pedagogies all emphasize the need to broaden what counts as legitimate knowledge while maintaining the possibility of critical evaluation (Ajani, 2023; Nyoni & Chiramba, 2024; Yamaguchi, 2025). At the same time, pluralism does not imply epistemic relativism. The philosophical challenge is to create educational practices in which diverse claims can be heard and examined according to transparent and defensible criteria rather than accepted or rejected because of the social identity or institutional status of the speaker.

The same concern appears in peace-oriented and justice-oriented pedagogy. Bicultural peace pedagogy highlights both opportunities and obstacles involved in developing educational practices that take difference, recognition, and coexistence seriously (Standish, 2024). Studies addressing professional development for inclusive education likewise indicate that teachers require critical capacities to identify and challenge exclusionary assumptions rather than merely implement technical inclusion strategies (Sepadi & Masenya, 2025). These perspectives suggest that epistemic justice is inseparable from broader educational commitments to democratic participation, inclusion, and dignity. A student whose voice is systematically discounted is not only disadvantaged cognitively but also positioned differently within the moral and political order of the classroom.

Moreover, the philosophical analysis of epistemic injustice requires attention to how educational subjects are formed. Learners do not enter classrooms with fixed epistemic identities; they develop understandings of themselves through interaction with teachers, peers, curricula, and institutional norms. Educational practices communicate whether students are capable of interpretation, whether their experiences matter, and whether questioning authority is a legitimate part of learning. Critical pedagogical scholarship has long emphasized the transformative potential of education when learners are treated as active participants in meaning-making rather than passive

recipients (Marques et al., 2022). More recent work on epistemic injustice extends this insight by showing that the denial of epistemic participation can itself become a form of educational harm (Balarin & Rodríguez, 2024; Stroupe et al., 2024). Thus, epistemic justice should be understood as constitutive of education rather than peripheral to it.

There is also a need to examine epistemic injustice as it is actually experienced by students rather than only at the level of philosophical theory. Much of the existing literature has offered important conceptual analyses or has focused on particular identity groups, disciplinary contexts, curricular structures, language settings, or institutional histories (Davies, 2023; Poudel, 2024; Razack et al., 2024). Poudel's work on decolonizing assessment, for example, demonstrates the importance of teacher agency in creating more equitable learning conditions (Poudel, 2024), while studies in science education highlight how prevailing ideas about the nature of science can reproduce epistemic exclusion (Stroupe et al., 2024). These contributions establish the significance of the issue, but there remains a need for phenomenologically oriented research that explores how students themselves identify, interpret, and respond to credibility deficits, silencing, interpretive marginalization, and unequal epistemic authority in everyday classroom life.

Such an inquiry is particularly important because educational injustice may remain invisible when it is normalized as ordinary academic practice. Students may interpret repeated dismissal as evidence of their own incompetence; teachers may interpret silence as lack of preparation; and institutions may regard unequal participation as a matter of individual confidence rather than epistemic structure. A qualitative investigation can illuminate these subtle processes by examining how students describe the situations in which they feel heard or unheard, recognized or dismissed, capable or delegitimized. It can also clarify how experiences of epistemic injustice affect participation, identity, academic confidence, and relationships with educational authority. Theoretical work that brings together epistemology, ethics, curriculum, and pedagogy further suggests that such experiences should be interpreted within the broader normative purposes of education rather than treated merely as communication problems (Lupinacci et al., 2022; Stones & Pearce, 2022).

Accordingly, examining epistemic injustice in the classroom provides a means of reconnecting philosophy of education with students' lived experiences. It enables questions of justice to be analyzed at the level where educational values become concrete: who is allowed to

define a problem, whose interpretation counts, how disagreement is handled, which voices receive uptake, and how students learn to perceive themselves in relation to knowledge. By integrating phenomenological accounts with philosophical analysis, research can move beyond abstract endorsement of inclusion and identify the relational and institutional mechanisms through which epistemic recognition is either enabled or denied. Such an approach can also contribute to the development of educational practices in which expertise and authority remain present but are exercised through dialogue, justification, reflexivity, and recognition rather than through epistemic closure.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore university students' lived experiences of epistemic injustice in the classroom and to elucidate the educational implications of these experiences from the perspective of philosophy of education.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretive phenomenological approach to explore students' lived experiences of epistemic injustice in classroom settings and to clarify the educational implications of these experiences from the perspective of philosophy of education. The phenomenological approach was selected because epistemic injustice is experienced through interpersonal encounters, communicative practices, credibility judgments, participation opportunities, and the recognition or marginalization of students as knowers within educational environments. Accordingly, the study sought to move beyond the description of observable classroom inequalities and examine how participants interpreted situations in which their knowledge, testimony, perspectives, questions, or interpretive resources were ignored, undervalued, misunderstood, or excluded. The study population consisted of university students studying at public universities in Tehran, Iran, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Participants were selected through purposive sampling with maximum variation in terms of gender, field of study, educational level, and academic background to obtain a diverse range of classroom experiences. A total of 20 students participated in the study, including undergraduate and postgraduate students from the humanities, social sciences, education, engineering, and basic sciences. Eligibility criteria included being at least 18 years of age, having completed at least two semesters of

university education, having regular experience of face-to-face or blended classroom instruction, and being able and willing to describe experiences related to being heard, ignored, believed, discredited, included, or excluded in classroom knowledge practices. Participants who did not complete the interview or requested withdrawal were excluded from the study. Sampling and interviewing proceeded concurrently, and recruitment was discontinued when analysis indicated that additional interviews no longer generated substantively new meanings or conceptual dimensions and sufficient interpretive saturation had been achieved. Before data collection, the purpose and procedures of the study were explained to all participants, participation was voluntary, confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and informed consent was obtained. Participants were also informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study without consequence.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews developed specifically for the purposes of the present study. The interview guide was constructed on the basis of the conceptual literature on epistemic injustice and key concerns in philosophy of education concerning recognition, epistemic agency, classroom authority, dialogue, participation, equality, and the ethical dimensions of teaching and learning. The interview protocol was designed to elicit concrete descriptions of participants' experiences rather than abstract judgments about educational justice. Initial questions focused on participants' general experiences of speaking, asking questions, expressing disagreement, offering interpretations, and contributing knowledge in classroom settings. Subsequent questions explored situations in which participants perceived that their statements were taken less seriously, their competence was questioned without adequate grounds, their perspectives were dismissed because of their social or educational position, or they lacked appropriate concepts and opportunities to articulate particular experiences. Particular attention was given to experiences corresponding to testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, credibility deficits, silencing, exclusion from classroom dialogue, unequal recognition of knowledge, and restrictions on epistemic agency. Probing questions such as "Can you describe a specific situation?", "How did you interpret the teacher's or classmates' response?", "How did that experience affect your willingness to participate?", and

“What would a more educationally just response have looked like?” were used to deepen the interviews and clarify the meaning attributed to the experiences. The guide was reviewed by three specialists in philosophy of education and qualitative research to assess conceptual relevance, clarity, and correspondence with the research purpose, and minor revisions were made before the formal interviews. Two pilot interviews were subsequently conducted to refine the sequence and wording of questions; because these interviews resulted in methodological adjustments, they were not included in the final analysis. Formal interviews were conducted individually in a quiet and confidential setting and lasted approximately 45 to 75 minutes. With participants’ permission, all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim immediately after completion. Field notes were also prepared to document contextual information, significant pauses, emotional emphasis, and the researcher’s preliminary reflections. Data collection and preliminary analysis were conducted simultaneously so that emerging concepts could inform subsequent interviews and allow progressively deeper exploration of salient experiences.

2.3. Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis with an interpretive orientation. Analysis began with repeated reading of the verbatim transcripts to achieve immersion in the data and develop an overall understanding of participants’ accounts. Each transcript was then examined line by line, and meaningful segments associated with experiences of recognition, credibility, exclusion, voice, interpretation, participation, knowledge authority, and educational relationships were assigned initial codes. Coding was primarily inductive so that themes could emerge from participants’ descriptions, while the concepts of epistemic injustice and philosophy of education functioned as sensitizing theoretical resources rather than predetermined coding categories. Initial codes were compared across interviews and grouped into broader conceptual clusters on the basis of similarity, difference, recurrence, and underlying meaning. These clusters were progressively refined into preliminary themes representing recurrent patterns in participants’ experiences, including forms of credibility deprivation, epistemic silencing, unequal distribution of classroom authority, limitations on interpretive participation, and consequences for students’ educational agency and sense of belonging. The themes were

subsequently reviewed against both the coded extracts and the complete data set to ensure internal coherence, conceptual distinctiveness, and adequate representation of participants’ accounts. In the interpretive stage, the finalized themes were examined through the conceptual lens of philosophy of education in order to identify their implications for pedagogical authority, dialogical education, recognition of learners as epistemic agents, educational justice, and the ethical organization of classroom relationships. Data organization, coding, retrieval, and comparison were facilitated using MAXQDA 2024 software. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the interview material, member reflection on summarized interpretations with selected participants, and peer review of the coding structure by two researchers familiar with qualitative educational research. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions, theme revisions, analytic memos, and methodological decisions throughout the research process. Reflexive notes were also maintained to identify and critically examine the researcher’s assumptions regarding authority, justice, knowledge, and classroom participation. Transferability was addressed by providing sufficiently detailed descriptions of the participants, educational context, data-generation procedures, and interpretive process to enable readers to assess the relevance of the findings to comparable educational settings.

3. Findings and Results

A total of 20 university students participated in the study. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 34 years, with a mean age of approximately 25.8 years. Eleven participants were female and nine were male. In terms of educational level, eight participants were undergraduate students, seven were master’s students, and five were doctoral students. To ensure maximum variation in classroom experiences, participants were drawn from different disciplinary backgrounds, including the humanities and social sciences, education and psychology, engineering and technology, and basic sciences. Six participants studied in the humanities and social sciences, five in education and psychology, five in engineering and technology, and four in basic sciences. Their length of university experience ranged from two to ten academic semesters or more, enabling participants to reflect on a variety of classroom encounters involving teaching practices, assessment, academic discussion, interaction with

faculty members, and participation in formal and informal knowledge exchanges. Analysis of the interviews indicated that experiences of epistemic injustice were not limited to explicit rejection or discrimination. Rather, they appeared across a continuum ranging from subtle credibility discounting, interruption, selective acknowledgment, and restricted opportunities to speak to more complex forms of interpretive exclusion in which students found it difficult to

articulate their experiences using the conceptual language recognized as legitimate within the classroom. Participants repeatedly emphasized that such experiences influenced not only immediate classroom participation but also their confidence as learners, willingness to ask questions, sense of academic belonging, and perception of themselves as legitimate contributors to knowledge.

Table 1

Main Themes and Subthemes of Students' Experiences of Epistemic Injustice in the Classroom

Main Theme	Subthemes	Participants Referring to the Theme (n)	Percentage
Credibility injustice and devaluation of student testimony	Presumption of insufficient knowledge; credibility deficits based on educational status; selective acceptance of student contributions; privileging authoritative voices	18	90.0
Epistemic silencing and unequal participation	Interruption and dismissal; self-silencing; unequal opportunities to speak; fear of negative evaluation	17	85.0
Hermeneutical marginalization and interpretive exclusion	Difficulty naming educational experiences; lack of shared interpretive resources; normalization of problematic classroom practices; marginalization of experiential knowledge	15	75.0
Hierarchical distribution of epistemic authority	Teacher-centered ownership of knowledge; resistance to disagreement; disciplinary gatekeeping; privileging formal expertise over lived experience	18	90.0
Consequences for epistemic agency and educational engagement	Reduced participation; diminished academic confidence; emotional withdrawal; strategic compliance; weakened sense of belonging	19	95.0
Conditions for epistemically just education	Dialogical teaching; recognition of student voice; transparent justification of judgments; pluralism of perspectives; redistribution of classroom authority	20	100.0

As shown in Table 1, six interrelated themes emerged from the analysis. The most widely shared theme concerned the consequences of epistemic injustice for students' agency and educational engagement, which was identified in the accounts of 19 participants (95.0%). Participants commonly described a gradual movement from active engagement toward caution, silence, compliance, or selective participation when their epistemic contributions were repeatedly undervalued. Credibility injustice and hierarchical distributions of epistemic authority were each identified in 18 interviews (90.0%), indicating that students frequently experienced classroom knowledge as structured through unequal assessments of whose speech was considered reliable, academically valuable, or worthy of extended discussion. Epistemic silencing and unequal participation were evident in 17 participants' accounts (85.0%). These experiences included direct interruption but also more subtle patterns in which students learned to restrict

their own participation because they anticipated dismissal or negative evaluation. Hermeneutical marginalization appeared in 15 interviews (75.0%) and was particularly visible when students attempted to communicate experiences that did not fit dominant academic categories or established assumptions about legitimate educational problems. Importantly, all 20 participants articulated conditions that they believed could support a more epistemically just educational environment, particularly dialogical teaching, meaningful recognition of student perspectives, transparent justification of academic judgments, and greater openness to multiple forms of knowledge. The findings therefore indicate that epistemic injustice was experienced as both an interpersonal phenomenon and a structural feature of classroom relationships involving credibility, authority, participation, interpretation, and recognition.

Table 2
Forms of Testimonial Injustice, Credibility Deficits, and Epistemic Silencing

Subtheme	Description of the Experience	Participants (n)	Representative Pattern in Participants' Accounts
Presumption of insufficient knowledge	Students' statements were discounted before their reasoning or evidence was fully considered	16	Contributions were treated as preliminary or uninformed primarily because they came from students
Credibility deficit based on academic status	The same or similar argument was taken more seriously when presented by a teacher, senior student, or published authority	14	Academic hierarchy affected perceived credibility independently of the content of the claim
Selective acknowledgment	Some students' contributions received detailed engagement while others were ignored or passed over without explanation	13	Recognition was distributed unevenly across classroom participants
Interruption and premature correction	Students were interrupted before completing an argument or were corrected before their intended meaning was clarified	12	Students perceived that classroom authority could terminate their epistemic participation
Fear-induced self-silencing	Students deliberately avoided asking questions, disagreeing, or presenting alternative interpretations	15	Anticipated dismissal became a mechanism of self-censorship
Devaluation of experiential knowledge	Personal, practical, or context-specific knowledge was treated as less legitimate than textbook or formally authorized knowledge	13	Lived experience was accepted only when translated into approved academic language
Unequal response to disagreement	Disagreement with the instructor was interpreted as resistance, disrespect, or lack of understanding	11	Critical participation was constrained by the hierarchical interpretation of dissent

Table 2 demonstrates that testimonial injustice emerged through both explicit and anticipatory processes. Sixteen of the 20 participants described circumstances in which they believed that their contributions had been evaluated through a prior assumption that students possessed insufficient knowledge. Participants explained that even when they presented relevant evidence or well-developed arguments, the epistemic status associated with being a student sometimes appeared to outweigh the substance of what they were saying. Fourteen participants further reported situations in which an idea that had previously received little attention became acceptable when restated by a faculty member, a senior student, or an established author. Such experiences were interpreted as evidence that credibility was attached not only to the quality of an argument but also to the institutional position of the speaker. Selective acknowledgment was reported by 13 participants, who observed that classroom discussion was often distributed unevenly, with some students repeatedly receiving opportunities for elaboration while other contributions were acknowledged only superficially or not at all. Twelve participants specifically referred to interruption or premature correction, describing moments in which their statements were evaluated before they had sufficient opportunity to complete or clarify them.

A particularly significant finding was that epistemic silencing did not require explicit prohibition. Fifteen participants described forms of self-silencing that developed after repeated experiences of being ignored, corrected in a dismissive manner, or publicly evaluated in ways perceived as humiliating. These students reported becoming increasingly strategic about whether, when, and how they spoke. In some cases, they participated only when they were confident that their views aligned with the instructor's position, while in other cases they avoided asking questions that might expose uncertainty. Thirteen participants additionally described the devaluation of experiential knowledge. They perceived that examples derived from personal experience, professional practice, family background, or social observation were frequently granted less epistemic legitimacy than formal theoretical statements, even when those experiences were directly relevant to classroom discussion. Eleven participants emphasized that disagreement itself could be treated as evidence of misunderstanding or inappropriate behavior. Taken together, these findings suggest that testimonial injustice operated through credibility judgments embedded in academic hierarchy, while epistemic silencing emerged as both an immediate response to exclusion and an adaptive strategy developed by students to protect themselves from further credibility loss.

Table 3
Hermeneutical Injustice and the Marginalization of Students' Interpretive Resources

Subtheme	Description	Participants (n)	Educational Manifestation
Difficulty naming problematic classroom experiences	Students sensed unfairness or exclusion but lacked an accepted conceptual vocabulary to describe it	12	Experiences were initially interpreted as personal inadequacy rather than epistemic injustice
Lack of shared interpretive resources	Students' experiences were not adequately represented in the concepts commonly used in classroom discourse	11	Certain experiences remained difficult to communicate or validate
Normalization of epistemically harmful practices	Dismissal, ridicule, or exclusion was understood as a normal part of rigorous education	13	Harmful practices became institutionally or culturally invisible
Marginalization of experiential interpretation	Students' own interpretations of educational situations were replaced by externally imposed explanations	12	Students were told what their experiences "really meant" without sufficient dialogue
Disciplinary gatekeeping	Only interpretations conforming to dominant disciplinary frameworks were treated as academically meaningful	10	Alternative conceptual perspectives were excluded from serious consideration
Conceptual dependence on authority	Students felt that an interpretation became legitimate only after being validated by an instructor or recognized academic source	13	Independent meaning-making was weakened
Retrospective recognition of injustice	Students understood the epistemic dimension of earlier experiences only after acquiring new concepts or theoretical frameworks	9	Conceptual development enabled reinterpretation of previously normalized experiences

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that epistemic injustice also occurred at the level of interpretation. Twelve participants reported experiences that they initially recognized as uncomfortable, unfair, or silencing but were unable to describe adequately at the time they occurred. Several participants explained that they originally interpreted such situations as evidence of their own lack of confidence, insufficient knowledge, or inability to adapt to university expectations. Only later, after encountering concepts related to authority, discrimination, voice, participation, or epistemic injustice, were they able to reinterpret these encounters as relational or structural rather than purely individual problems. Eleven participants specifically emphasized the absence of shared interpretive resources. In these situations, students possessed an experience that felt educationally significant, yet the available classroom discourse did not provide an acceptable language through which it could be expressed without appearing overly personal, emotional, or academically irrelevant.

Normalization represented another important dimension of hermeneutical injustice. Thirteen participants reported that certain forms of ridicule, authoritarian correction, dismissal of questions, or unequal distribution of speaking opportunities were implicitly justified as normal features of academic rigor. This normalization limited students' ability to identify such practices as educationally problematic. Twelve participants described circumstances in which their own interpretations of classroom events were replaced by

authoritative explanations offered by teachers or more senior academic actors. In these instances, students reported being told that they had misunderstood an interaction, taken criticism too personally, or failed to appreciate the educational purpose of a particular practice, even when they attempted to explain its impact on their participation. Ten participants additionally identified disciplinary gatekeeping, whereby interpretations outside the dominant theoretical orientation of the course were treated as conceptually weak or irrelevant before being fully examined.

The findings also revealed an important form of conceptual dependency. Thirteen participants indicated that they sometimes trusted their own interpretations only after finding confirmation in a scholarly source or receiving approval from an instructor. This dependence suggested that epistemic authority had been internalized to the extent that students' independent meaning-making required external validation. Nine participants explicitly described retrospective recognition, explaining that they understood earlier classroom experiences differently after becoming familiar with concepts such as epistemic injustice, voice, recognition, power, or hidden curriculum. This retrospective reinterpretation is especially significant from the perspective of philosophy of education because it indicates that access to conceptual resources influences not only students' capacity to communicate educational experiences but also their capacity to understand themselves as legitimate interpreters of those experiences.

Table 4
Educational Consequences of Epistemic Injustice and Implications for Epistemically Just Classroom Practice

Dimension	Identified Consequence or Requirement	Participants (n)	Philosophical-Educational Implication
Epistemic agency	Repeated credibility loss reduced students' confidence in producing and communicating knowledge	18	Education should cultivate learners as epistemic agents rather than passive recipients
Classroom participation	Anticipated dismissal reduced questioning, discussion, and intellectual risk-taking	17	Participation requires conditions of epistemic safety and meaningful recognition
Academic identity	Some students began to view themselves as less capable or less legitimate members of the academic community	14	Recognition is constitutive of the learner's developing academic identity
Emotional engagement	Experiences of dismissal produced frustration, embarrassment, anger, and withdrawal	15	Epistemic and emotional dimensions of education are closely interconnected
Relationship with authority	Excessively hierarchical authority weakened dialogue and critical engagement	18	Educational authority should be justificatory and dialogical rather than merely positional
Recognition of plurality	Participants emphasized the legitimacy of diverse experiences and interpretive perspectives	17	Educational justice requires epistemic pluralism within reasonable disciplinary standards
Transparent judgment	Students requested explanations for rejection, correction, and evaluation of their contributions	16	Epistemic authority gains legitimacy through reason-giving and procedural transparency
Dialogical pedagogy	Participants favored classrooms in which disagreement and questioning were treated as resources for learning	19	Dialogue is a condition for the development of autonomy and critical rationality
Redistribution of epistemic opportunities	Students emphasized equitable opportunities to speak, interpret, question, and respond	18	Justice requires equitable participation in knowledge practices, not merely equal physical access
Recognition of the student as a knower	All participants emphasized the importance of being treated as persons capable of meaningful knowledge contribution	20	Epistemic recognition constitutes a fundamental dimension of educational justice

As indicated in Table 4, the effects of epistemic injustice extended considerably beyond isolated negative classroom interactions. Eighteen participants reported that recurrent credibility deficits affected their epistemic agency, particularly their confidence in generating, defending, and communicating knowledge. Rather than interpreting themselves as legitimate participants in academic inquiry, some students gradually adopted the position of recipients whose role was primarily to reproduce already authorized knowledge. Seventeen participants linked these experiences directly to reduced classroom participation. They described avoiding questions, withholding alternative interpretations, and refraining from intellectual risk-taking when uncertainty existed about how their contributions would be received. Fourteen participants reported changes in academic identity, including doubts about whether they belonged in a particular discipline or possessed the intellectual capacities expected of a university student. These accounts demonstrate that the consequences of epistemic injustice may become internalized, transforming institutional experiences of exclusion into personal judgments concerning competence and belonging.

The emotional consequences were also substantial. Fifteen participants referred to frustration, embarrassment, disappointment, anger, or emotional withdrawal following

experiences in which they believed their voices had not been taken seriously. These emotional responses were closely linked to subsequent epistemic behavior; participants frequently reduced their participation not because they had lost interest in the academic topic itself but because participation had become associated with relational or evaluative risk. Eighteen participants identified the structure of educational authority as a central concern. Their accounts did not reject teacher authority as such. Instead, they distinguished between authority grounded in expertise and pedagogical responsibility and authority exercised through unquestionable positional superiority. Participants generally regarded educational authority as legitimate when instructors explained their judgments, listened before correcting, permitted reasoned disagreement, and demonstrated willingness to reconsider a position when presented with compelling arguments.

The participants' accounts further generated a set of constructive educational implications. Seventeen participants emphasized the need to recognize multiple forms of knowledge and diverse interpretive perspectives, while simultaneously acknowledging that disciplinary standards and evidentiary requirements remain necessary. Sixteen participants specifically requested greater transparency in academic judgment, arguing that when an

answer, interpretation, or argument is rejected, students should be given a sufficiently clear explanation of the relevant epistemic criteria. Nineteen participants identified dialogical pedagogy as an essential condition of a just classroom. For these participants, dialogue did not mean that every opinion should be treated as equally valid; rather, it meant that students should have genuine opportunities to present reasons, ask for clarification, challenge assumptions, and revise their views through reciprocal engagement. Eighteen participants emphasized the redistribution of epistemic opportunities, including more equitable access to speaking time, questioning, interpretive participation, and response to criticism. Most importantly, all 20 participants identified recognition of the student as a knower as a fundamental condition of educational justice. Their accounts consistently suggested that students expected neither unconditional validation nor the abandonment of academic standards. What they sought was recognition as persons whose contributions deserved fair hearing, reasoned assessment, and meaningful participation in the collective production of classroom knowledge.

Across the four tables, the overall structure of the findings indicates that epistemic injustice in the classroom can be understood as a multidimensional educational phenomenon involving credibility, voice, interpretive resources, epistemic authority, and learner identity. The experiences reported by participants suggest that testimonial and hermeneutical forms of injustice are closely interconnected. When students repeatedly experience credibility deficits, they may become less willing to articulate their interpretations; when they lack legitimate interpretive resources, they may be less capable of contesting credibility judgments that disadvantage them. These processes can reinforce one another and progressively restrict students' participation in the epistemic life of the classroom. Conversely, the participants' descriptions of more just educational relationships point toward a conception of education in which learners are treated as developing epistemic agents whose voices are subject to critical examination but not presumptively devalued.

From a philosophy of education perspective, the findings demonstrate that epistemic justice is not reducible to interpersonal politeness, equal speaking time, or the absence of overt discrimination. Rather, it concerns the normative organization of knowledge relations within education. The classroom functions as an epistemic community in which authority, credibility, interpretation, and participation are continuously distributed among teachers and students. When

these resources are distributed in ways that systematically restrict students' capacity to contribute to inquiry or understand their own educational experiences, the educational process may undermine the very capacities for autonomy, critical judgment, and rational participation that higher education is expected to cultivate. The findings therefore suggest that an epistemically just classroom requires a balance between legitimate pedagogical authority and student epistemic agency. Such a balance is achieved not by eliminating asymmetries of expertise but by ensuring that those asymmetries do not become automatic hierarchies of human credibility. In this sense, educational justice requires teachers to exercise authority through reason-giving, responsiveness, openness to contestation, and recognition of students as emerging members of a shared community of inquiry.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explored university students' lived experiences of epistemic injustice in classroom settings and examined the educational implications of these experiences from the perspective of philosophy of education. The findings revealed that epistemic injustice was experienced as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing credibility injustice, epistemic silencing, hermeneutical marginalization, hierarchical distributions of epistemic authority, and subsequent effects on students' participation, academic identity, emotional engagement, and sense of themselves as legitimate knowers. At the same time, participants articulated a coherent set of conditions associated with epistemically just education, including dialogical teaching, transparent justification of academic judgments, recognition of students as epistemic agents, greater openness to plural perspectives, and more equitable distribution of opportunities to speak, interpret, and question. These findings demonstrate that epistemic injustice in the classroom cannot be reduced to isolated instances of disrespect or interpersonal misunderstanding. Rather, it operates through the organization of credibility, authority, interpretive legitimacy, and participation within educational relationships.

One of the most prominent findings concerned credibility injustice and the devaluation of student testimony. Most participants reported that their contributions were sometimes discounted not because of the quality of their reasoning but because of their position as students. The same argument could receive greater recognition when articulated by a

faculty member, a senior academic, or an established source. This suggests that classroom credibility is not always distributed solely according to epistemic merit and may instead be mediated by institutional hierarchy. This finding is consistent with research showing that educational environments can reproduce credibility deficits when learners' contributions are assessed through assumptions concerning status, identity, linguistic background, or conformity to dominant academic expectations (Brust & Taylor, 2023; Schey, 2022). The result also accords with Solano-Campos's emphasis on epistemic authorship, according to which students require more than an opportunity to express themselves; they must also be recognized as persons capable of making legitimate contributions to knowledge production (Solano-Campos, 2023). From this perspective, testimonial injustice occurs when the learner is permitted to speak but is not granted an appropriately serious epistemic hearing.

The findings further indicated that credibility injustice frequently resulted in epistemic silencing. Participants described both direct forms of silencing, such as interruption and premature correction, and indirect forms, particularly self-silencing after repeated experiences of dismissal or negative evaluation. This is important because silencing was not necessarily imposed through explicit prohibition. Instead, participants often learned to anticipate the possible consequences of speaking and subsequently adjusted their behavior by withholding questions, minimizing disagreement, or restricting participation to situations in which they expected their views to be accepted. Similar dynamics are evident in studies of epistemic injustice in education, where students may remain formally included in the classroom while becoming substantively excluded from knowledge-making practices (Balarin & Rodríguez, 2024; Stroupe et al., 2024). The present findings therefore support the view that participation should not be understood merely in behavioral terms. A student who is physically present and occasionally speaks may still occupy a marginal epistemic position if participation is constrained by fear, anticipated discrediting, or unequal possibilities for uptake.

The finding concerning self-silencing also has implications for understanding the emotional dimensions of epistemic injustice. Participants associated experiences of dismissal with embarrassment, frustration, anxiety, anger, and withdrawal. These emotional responses, in turn, affected future epistemic behavior. Students became less willing to take intellectual risks, challenge dominant interpretations, or expose uncertainty. This is compatible with Lusk's account

of the relationship between shame, ethics, and epistemology in educational settings, where emotional experiences may alter learners' willingness to participate and their perception of themselves as legitimate members of a knowledge community (Lusk, 2022). It also aligns with Avraamidou and Olave's emphasis on the affective dimensions of educational relationships and the importance of understanding how individuals are affected through interaction with others (Avraamidou & Olave, 2025). The present findings extend these insights by indicating that emotional injury and epistemic marginalization can become mutually reinforcing. When credibility loss produces shame or embarrassment, the resulting withdrawal can further reduce students' visibility as contributors, thereby perpetuating their marginal epistemic position.

Another major finding concerned hermeneutical marginalization. Participants frequently described situations in which they sensed that an educational interaction was unfair, dismissive, or silencing but lacked an accepted conceptual language through which to articulate the experience. Some initially interpreted these experiences as personal weakness, excessive sensitivity, or academic inadequacy. Only later, after encountering concepts related to authority, voice, discrimination, or epistemic injustice, were they able to reinterpret those situations differently. This finding closely parallels literature on hermeneutical injustice, especially studies showing that marginalized students may experience difficulty making sense of themselves when dominant educational frameworks fail to provide adequate interpretive resources (Davies, 2023; Schey, 2022). The result is particularly significant from a philosophy of education perspective because education itself contributes to the formation and distribution of interpretive resources. If students do not possess concepts through which to name and critically examine exclusionary experiences, they may internalize structural injustice as personal failure.

The participants' accounts of normalization reinforce this interpretation. Many reported that ridicule, dismissive correction, or severe hierarchical behavior was sometimes justified as part of academic rigor or as a legitimate expression of teacher authority. This normalization can obscure the distinction between demanding education and epistemically harmful education. Balarin and Rodríguez similarly argue that pedagogical practices may become unjust when they inhibit critical engagement and reproduce passive or shallow forms of learning (Balarin & Rodríguez, 2024). The present findings suggest that practices presented as intellectually rigorous may in some cases reduce rather

than deepen students' capacity for inquiry if they discourage questioning and restrict interpretive agency. Educational rigor, therefore, should not be equated with unquestionable authority. From a philosophical standpoint, genuine rigor requires exposure to reasons, standards, counterarguments, and opportunities for revision, rather than mere submission to authoritative judgment.

A closely related finding concerned the hierarchical distribution of epistemic authority. Participants did not generally reject the legitimacy of teacher expertise. Rather, they distinguished between authority grounded in knowledge and pedagogical responsibility and authority exercised in ways that made disagreement illegitimate. This distinction is theoretically important. Philosophy of education must account for the fact that classrooms are necessarily asymmetrical: teachers typically possess greater disciplinary expertise and institutional responsibility than students. However, asymmetry in expertise does not entail unrestricted epistemic superiority. Brust and Taylor emphasize educators' responsibilities to resist epistemic injustice within higher education and to recognize the effects of institutional power on knowledge relations (Brust & Taylor, 2023). Similarly, Stones and Pearce connect teacher preparation to the cultivation of epistemically just classroom practices, suggesting that educators should be prepared to use authority in ways that promote rather than suppress students' epistemic development (Stones & Pearce, 2022). The present findings support this distinction between pedagogical authority and epistemic domination.

This issue was also visible in participants' demand for transparent justification. Students did not expect every contribution to be accepted as correct. Rather, they wanted to understand why a claim, interpretation, or argument was rejected. This is an important finding because it clarifies that epistemic justice is not synonymous with unconditional validation or relativism. Participants accepted the legitimacy of correction when it was accompanied by reason-giving, clarification, and engagement. This finding resonates with Yamaguchi's model of movement from voice to epistemic legitimation, in which learners' contributions must enter processes of genuine evaluation rather than being either automatically accepted or dismissed without serious consideration (Yamaguchi, 2025). It is also compatible with Guilherme Duarte Da Silva and Niu's emphasis on balancing different forms of knowledge within curriculum and educational practice (Guilherme Duarte Da Silva & Niu, 2025). The educational implication is that epistemic justice

requires fair procedures for evaluating claims, not the abandonment of epistemic standards.

The findings concerning disciplinary gatekeeping and the devaluation of experiential knowledge further indicate that classroom injustice can arise when only dominant forms of knowledge are regarded as academically meaningful. Participants reported that lived experience, culturally situated knowledge, and alternative interpretations were sometimes discounted unless translated into established academic language. This is consistent with decolonial critiques of higher education that emphasize the persistence of epistemic hierarchies within curricula and professional knowledge (Ajani, 2023; Nyoni & Chiramba, 2024). Similar concerns appear in discussions of culturally responsive education and plural curricular frameworks, which challenge the assumption that one dominant epistemic tradition can adequately represent all learners and contexts (Cromarty et al., 2022). The present study does not imply that all experiential claims should be granted equal evidentiary status, but it does suggest that experiential knowledge should not be excluded merely because it originates outside the dominant disciplinary canon.

Language and communicative norms are also relevant to this finding. Students' experiences of being heard or dismissed are inevitably shaped by the forms of expression that institutions treat as legitimate. Studies of multilingual classrooms have shown that language practices can become mechanisms of onto-epistemic exclusion when certain ways of speaking and knowing are privileged over others (Chronaki et al., 2022). Likewise, Chen and Du emphasize the value of epistemological diversity in language education and the importance of discourse practices that permit multiple knowledge traditions to enter academic engagement (Chen & Du, 2025). Imperial's work on reparative approaches to language-minoritized practitioners similarly highlights how linguistic standards can reproduce broader epistemic inequalities (Imperial, 2024). Although the present study was not specifically designed around language minority experiences, participants' accounts of legitimacy, academic expression, and disciplinary vocabulary indicate that communicative norms represent an important mechanism through which epistemic authority is distributed.

The findings also showed that epistemic injustice influenced students' academic identity. Some participants reported beginning to perceive themselves as less capable, less intelligent, or less entitled to contribute to academic discussion after repeated experiences of dismissal. This

demonstrates that epistemic injustice can have formative consequences. Educational institutions do not simply assess pre-existing capacities; they participate in shaping how learners understand those capacities. Fackler's study of doctoral mentoring similarly illustrates how failures of epistemic recognition within educational relationships can destabilize learners' confidence and their position within academic communities (Fackler, 2026). The present study extends this concern to routine classroom settings and suggests that repeated credibility deficits can become internalized as self-doubt. Such an outcome is educationally significant because one of the central purposes of higher education is to cultivate intellectual independence, judgment, and participation in disciplinary communities.

The reduction of epistemic agency observed among participants also resonates with discussions of educational quality. If students learn primarily to reproduce authorized knowledge while avoiding disagreement, education may appear orderly and effective while failing to develop autonomy and critical judgment. Gabi and Chikwa's call to rethink quality in higher education is relevant here because conventional indicators may overlook relational and epistemic dimensions of teaching and learning (Gabi & Chikwa, 2025). Similarly, Ariwidodo's philosophical analysis of contemporary curriculum emphasizes that teaching must be examined in relation to broader educational purposes rather than reduced to technical content transmission (Ariwidodo, 2023). The findings of the present study suggest that epistemic justice provides one criterion for evaluating educational quality: a high-quality classroom should not only transmit accurate knowledge but also cultivate students' capacity to question, reason, interpret, and participate as emerging knowers.

Participants' emphasis on dialogical pedagogy provides an important constructive dimension to the findings. Nearly all participants described dialogue as a central condition of a just classroom, but they did not define dialogue as unrestricted expression. Rather, they emphasized reciprocal listening, reasoned disagreement, explanation, and the possibility of revising positions. This corresponds closely with Freirean traditions that conceptualize learners as active subjects of education and understand dialogue as a condition of critical consciousness and meaningful participation (Marques et al., 2022). It is also compatible with Standish's discussion of peace pedagogy, which emphasizes recognition, coexistence, and the educational management of difference (Standish, 2024). These perspectives support the interpretation that dialogical classrooms are not those

without authority or standards but those in which authority remains accountable to reason and responsive interaction.

The participants' emphasis on pluralism also aligns with contemporary discussions of decolonization, inclusion, and epistemic diversity. They repeatedly indicated that a just educational environment should make space for alternative interpretations, diverse experiences, and multiple knowledge traditions while retaining reasonable disciplinary criteria. This balance is reflected in research on plural curricula and decolonial educational reform (Ajani, 2023; Nyoni & Chiramba, 2024; Sepadi & Masenya, 2025). Poudel's work on decolonizing assessment similarly demonstrates that educators' agency is crucial in determining whether institutional practices reproduce or challenge epistemic inequalities (Poudel, 2024). The present findings suggest that pluralism should therefore be operationalized not simply through curricular inclusion but through everyday practices of listening, questioning, assessment, and classroom dialogue.

The findings further support the importance of restorative approaches to epistemic justice. Because some participants described long-term effects on confidence, identity, and willingness to participate, preventing future incidents may not be sufficient. Sato's concept of restorative epistemic justice is particularly relevant because it shifts attention from avoiding isolated injustice toward repairing damaged epistemic relations and capacities (Sato, 2023). In educational settings, restorative epistemic justice may involve rebuilding students' confidence as knowers, reopening opportunities for participation, acknowledging previous exclusions, and creating structures through which students can contest unjust credibility judgments. Related reparative approaches in language education also suggest that inclusion must address historical and structural patterns rather than merely permit formal access (Imperial, 2024). This provides a useful framework for interpreting the participants' demand not simply for kinder treatment but for more equitable epistemic relationships.

The implications of the findings also extend to teacher education and institutional design. Teachers need more than subject-matter expertise to create epistemically just learning environments. They require reflexive awareness of how credibility is distributed, how students may interpret correction, how disciplinary language can exclude, and how their institutional authority affects participation. Teacher education programs that incorporate epistemic justice can help future educators distinguish legitimate expertise from epistemic domination and develop pedagogical practices

that support student voice without abandoning academic standards (Sepadi & Masenya, 2025; Stones & Pearce, 2022). Furthermore, culturally grounded approaches to curriculum and technology suggest that educational design should be sensitive to the philosophical assumptions embedded in learning environments (Bekele et al., 2023). Thus, epistemic justice should be considered not only at the level of individual teaching behavior but also in curriculum development, assessment, mentoring, institutional policies, and educational technologies.

Overall, the present findings reinforce the view that the classroom is a normative epistemic space in which justice concerns who is recognized as capable of knowing, interpreting, questioning, and contributing. The findings are consistent with scholarship demonstrating that epistemic injustice can be reproduced through curricula, teacher-student relations, linguistic norms, disciplinary practices, and institutional structures (Davies, 2023; Razack et al., 2024; Stroupe et al., 2024). At the same time, they indicate that epistemic justice is achievable through dialogical authority, pluralism, transparency, recognition, and the deliberate cultivation of students' epistemic agency. From a philosophy of education perspective, this suggests that the ethical legitimacy of teaching depends not only on what knowledge is transmitted but also on how learners are positioned in relation to that knowledge. Education fulfills its emancipatory and formative potential when students are neither reduced to passive recipients nor granted uncritical authority, but are recognized as developing members of a community of inquiry capable of offering reasons, interpreting experience, questioning assumptions, and revising their views through dialogue.

A limitation of the present study is that it was based on a relatively small purposive sample of 20 university students from public universities in Tehran, and the findings therefore reflect experiences situated within a particular higher education context. The qualitative and phenomenological design was appropriate for obtaining detailed accounts of lived experience but does not permit statistical generalization to all university students or other educational populations. Participants' narratives were also retrospective and may have been influenced by memory, interpretation, or subsequent academic experiences. In addition, because the study focused primarily on student perspectives, it did not directly examine teachers' interpretations of the same classroom interactions or institutional policies that might shape epistemic practices. The study also addressed epistemic injustice across different disciplinary fields rather

than conducting an intensive comparison of specific disciplines, and therefore some field-specific mechanisms may not have been fully captured.

Future research should examine epistemic injustice across broader and more diverse educational contexts, including private universities, schools, vocational institutions, and culturally or linguistically heterogeneous learning environments. Comparative studies could investigate whether credibility deficits, silencing, and hermeneutical marginalization differ across disciplines, educational levels, gender groups, or institutional cultures. Longitudinal qualitative research could also explore how repeated experiences of epistemic injustice affect students' academic identity and participation over time. Mixed-method studies may be useful for developing and validating measures of classroom epistemic justice and examining its relationships with academic engagement, belonging, critical thinking, learning motivation, and psychological safety. Future research should also incorporate teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers so that epistemic injustice can be studied as a relational and institutional phenomenon rather than exclusively through student accounts. Intervention studies could further assess whether dialogical teaching, structured participation, reflective teacher training, and transparent feedback practices reduce experiences of epistemic marginalization.

In practice, universities should treat epistemic justice as an important dimension of teaching quality and classroom climate. Faculty development programs can train instructors to recognize credibility bias, avoid premature dismissal, explain the reasons underlying academic judgments, and distinguish disagreement from disrespect or lack of competence. Classroom practices should create multiple opportunities for students to ask questions, challenge interpretations, and contribute experiential or context-specific knowledge while maintaining clear standards of reasoning and evidence. Teachers should also monitor patterns of participation to ensure that the same students do not consistently dominate discussion and that quieter students have meaningful routes into classroom dialogue. Assessment and feedback procedures should be transparent enough for students to understand why particular claims are accepted, revised, or rejected. At the institutional level, curricula and teaching policies should encourage epistemic pluralism, reflexive pedagogy, and recognition of students as developing contributors to knowledge rather than only recipients of established content.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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