Chapter 7
The Role of Open Access in Enhancing Equitable Curricula and Research Outputs:
Global Context

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ABSTRACT

When educators have difficulty accessing peer-reviewed research, it is inequitable to expect them to compete with educators who have access to a plethora of resources. Inequities have been a historically-identified educational problem; however, the forced online learning that occurred during COVID-19 restrictions amplified discrepancies experienced by tertiary educators. Scholars who were forced to work without strong information communication technologies infrastructure and who experienced limited access to online resources struggled more than those that had 24-hour uninhibited access. Education came to a near standstill for those that could not easily move their activities online. Prior to the pandemic, individuals working with curricula were already feeling handicapped by the lack of access. When physical libraries were closed, it became nearly impossible for many to move forward. This chapter explores the changing publishing paradigms, particularly the role of OA and how increasing open dissemination of scholarly outputs can reduce inequities in curricula and research activities.

INTRODUCTION

Educators and researchers continue to adapt to the changes in how scholarly works are published, disseminated, and retrieved. Gone are the days of publications being housed predominantly as print copies of journals and books shipped directly to institutions, organizations, or individuals and stored on library shelves where researchers would spend full days looking through stacks to find specific articles, chapters, or books. Now most educators, researchers, and students use online databases to access digital resources; a process that can be done from anywhere in the world if the correct mechanisms are in place and available for individuals attempting to gain access.

Unlimited and unrestricted access to high quality scholarship is a critical component for effective and efficient curricula building and research in most disciplines. For educators and researchers in developed countries this access is almost a given; something often taken for granted. However, this is not the case for many educators who find themselves in less developed or lower-income countries. For these individuals, attempting to gain access to the desired and even required scholarship is an ongoing challenge.

In high income countries, educators and researchers may occasionally come across an article, chapter, or book that their library does not have immediate access to, and they run into a paywall. Most of these individuals have contacts and resources available to find a free way to gain access. Whether it is through an interlibrary loan, because their library is a part of a larger network, a colleague at another institution who has access, or some other means, this situation is resolved and the article, chapter, or even book are obtained and thus become available for use. This is not the case for individuals in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). These educators and researchers come across such resource restrictions more often due to the limited nature of their online libraries, and when they do experience such obstacles, they do not always have contacts and resources as readily available to assist them. This increases the chances that they will not gain access to the specific resources they seek.

When educators and researchers struggle to obtain the literature they need, it is not only frustrating, but it can also cause some individuals or even whole departments to be unable to complete the goals they have set for high-quality reviews and even for the foundational grounding of their own studies in the current literature. This may cause scholars to use limited or lower quality articles that are not quite as on target as ones that are blocked behind a paywall. The very nature of educational pursuits depends on access to established knowledge. When peer reviewed research is inaccessible or locked away for only certain privileged scholars, we are perpetuating not only the uneven distribution by blocking the less privileged from working with the information, but also blocking production of future research that could enhance areas of knowledge. This is a concern of equity, social justice, and epistemic justice.

The working definition of social justice to be used in this chapter comes from work examining Open Education, however, also applies in the context of Open Access (OA). The preferred definition of social justice is: "A process and also a goal to achieve a fairer society which involves actions guided by the principles of *redistributive* justice, *recognitive* justice or *representational* justice" (Lambert, 2018, p. 227). These principles will be explored later in this chapter with specific emphasis to issues and potential impacts, as well as the need for OA in particular. As to the understanding of epistemic justice, Fricker (2013) explains this as an area of philosophy that either values or devalues the ability of individuals or groups to be knowers. She goes on to explain that *distributive epistemic injustice* takes place when there is, "an unfair distribution of epistemic goods such as education or information" and further articulates that *discriminatory epistemic injustice* includes situations where individuals or groups experience a "deficit of credibility" and thus experience prejudice when sharing information (Fricker, 2013, p.1318). Both

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