

RESEARCH NOTE

Open Access, Closed Discourses? A Study of Epistemological Hierarchies in Southern Scholarly Publishing

Kenneth Paul Charman¹ | Mansoureh Bahadori²¹Professor, CamEd Business School, Phnom Penh, Cambodia²Lecturer, CamEd Business School, Phnom Penh, Cambodia**Correspondence**Corresponding author Kenneth Paul Charman.
Email: kcharman@cam-ed.com**Abstract**

Purpose - This study investigates the types of research discourses and thematic content published in a Southern open access journal, with the aim of understanding how knowledge is produced, framed, and legitimated in non-elite academic settings. It explores whether such journals offer space for diverse epistemologies or reinforce dominant, technocratic paradigms.

Design/Methodology/Approach - Using a mixed-methods approach, the study analyses 47 articles published between 2020 and 2024 in the Journal of Accounting, Finance, Economics, and Social Sciences (JAFESS). Topic modelling (LDA and NMF) was used to identify dominant themes, while qualitative discourse analysis, guided by Deetz's (1996) four-quadrant model, was employed to classify epistemological orientations as normative, interpretive, critical, or dialogical.

Findings - The results reveal a strong predominance of normative discourse, with limited representation of interpretive discourse, no critical perspectives and no dialogical contributions. Thematic analysis shows a focus on performance, financial governance, and technocratic solutions. These patterns suggest that open access publishing in the Global South, while expanding access, may reproduce global epistemic hierarchies and marginalize alternative modes of inquiry.

Originality/Value - This study provides one of the few empirical examinations of discourse diversity in open access journals based in developing countries. It contributes to debates on open access, epistemic inequality, and the politics of academic publishing, highlighting the need for structural changes that support pluralism in knowledge production.

KEYWORDS

Open access publishing, Epistemic inequality, Knowledge production, Discourse analysis, Topic modelling, Global South, Academic publishing, Deetz discourse model, Southern journals, Epistemological diversity.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent years, open access (OA) publishing has been championed as a pathway to democratize global knowledge production, particularly by improving access to scholarly research for academics and institutions in the Global South (Chan and Costa 2005, Nobes and Harris 2019). The underlying promise of OA is to remove financial and structural barriers that have long favoured researchers in the Global North

and marginalized voices from developing countries (Kirsop 2008). Indigenous study from the Global South provides context-rich insights and challenges the dominance of Western methodology and theories, which may not completely represent the complexities of non-Western cultures (Rodriguez-Escobar 2024). As scholars have increasingly noted, access to publication does not equate to equity in knowledge production (Lund 2022). While open access journals may enhance visibility and availability of research, the kinds of research that get published—and the discursive norms they embody—remain shaped by hegemonic academic conventions.

A growing body of work has begun to critically examine how global epistemic inequalities persist in academic publishing. Inefuku et al.

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(2024) highlight the challenges faced by Southern-based journals in gaining legitimacy and recognition within global scholarly systems that are deeply skewed toward elite, English-language journals. Lund (2022) further argues that researchers from developing countries often lack the structural, linguistic, and financial support to publish in high-impact outlets, and that even within open access platforms, discursive and editorial standards are often modelled on Western academic norms. However, empirical investigations into what types of knowledge are actually being produced and disseminated by OA journals based in the Global South remain scarce. In particular, there is limited insight into their epistemological orientation and whether such journals offer a platform for alternative, critical, or locally grounded discourses, or whether they reproduce dominant, technocratic paradigms.

Despite existing research on the center-periphery dynamics in scientific publishing (Salager-Meyer 2008), little is known about the discourses embraced by non-elite Southern journals. Given the practical constraints on collaboration (Matthews et al. 2020) and the financial burdens of journal publishing (Kamerlin et al. 2021), it is critical to understand whether such journals replicate dominant paradigms or offer innovative alternatives. This study addresses this gap by exploring the thematic and discursive landscape of one such journal: the *Journal of Accounting, Finance, Economics, and Social Sciences* (JAFESS), an open access publication based in a developing country in Southeast Asia. Through a combination of topic modelling and discourse analysis, we examine what kinds of knowledge are being published in JAFESS and how they are framed.

Research Question: *What kinds of research discourses and thematic structures are prevalent in an open access journal based in a developing country, and what does this reveal about its epistemological positioning within global scholarly communication?*

By applying Deetz's (1996) four-quadrant framework of organizational discourse and using computational techniques to map the thematic content of 47 articles published between 2020 and 2024, this study provides empirical insights into the type, orientation, and diversity of scholarly contributions within a non-elite OA journal. In doing so, we contribute to the broader debate about how open access platforms might either reinforce or disrupt prevailing hierarchies of knowledge production—and what that means for the pursuit of epistemic justice in global academia.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Open Access and Epistemic Inequality

Open access (OA) publishing has become a central pillar of global research dissemination policies, with proponents arguing that it democratizes knowledge by removing financial barriers to scholarly communication (Suber 2012). OA is associated with increased citations and

enhanced visibility, particularly for researchers from less developed nations (Evans and Reimer 2009).

Abrahams et al. (2010) highlighted that most southern African countries, apart from South Africa, exhibited low levels of research output. Even in South Africa, research activity was concentrated in a few well-funded universities, while many institutions remained under-resourced and unable to contribute significantly to the global knowledge pool. Similarly, Alcadipani et al. (2012) found that organizational scholars outside the Western academic core rarely appeared in elite management journals, further underscoring the systemic exclusion of Southern researchers.

There is broad consensus that OA journals offer alternative publication avenues at reduced cost and reflect a changing scholarly communication landscape (Czerniewicz and Goodier 2014). In Nigeria, Obuh and Bozimo (2012) observed that library professionals increasingly favored OA journals due to their thematic relevance and accessibility. Czerniewicz and Goodier (2014) further argued that OA platforms eliminate many traditional licensing barriers and provide free, digital access to research content.

However, recent critiques question whether access alone can redress deep-rooted structural inequities in academic publishing. Southern-based OA journals, though more accessible, often lack the legitimacy and prestige afforded to Northern outlets. Salager-Meyer (2008) warned that the pressure to adhere to elite academic norms may lead these journals to mimic hegemonic standards, thereby reinforcing epistemic hierarchies. Despite calls for greater inclusion, researchers from the Global South continue to be underrepresented in leading journals indexed in major citation databases (Matthews et al. 2020).

Ili (2025) noted that although OA has improved access for scholars in the South, the global research infrastructure—including funding mechanisms, editorial practices, and epistemological preferences—still favors Northern institutions. These imbalances are both material (e.g., limited access to databases, high article processing charges) and discursive, with editorial expectations shaped by Western academic traditions. Lund (2022) elaborated on these challenges, emphasizing the linguistic, cultural, and institutional obstacles that compel Southern scholars to conform to dominant methodological and rhetorical norms in order to gain recognition.

2.2 | The Context of Publishing in Southern Countries

Ethical standards involving research in developing countries can also shape academic discourse. Benatar (2002) emphasized the need for universal standards in medical research to ensure that disadvantaged groups are not marginalized or exploited by dominant research paradigms. These standards aim to give vulnerable populations a voice in shaping research agendas, even though prior studies have shown that standards are more often than not set by the most powerful players (Lissillour 2017).

The challenges associated with scientific publishing in the Global South are closely linked to the center-periphery dynamics of global science and the relationship between research production and socio-economic development. According to Salager-Meyer (2008), Southern-based journals are often relegated to the periphery due to perceived lower article quality and limited indexing in high-ranking citation databases. This peripheral status reinforces systemic disparities in global knowledge production.

Collaboration, though frequently cited as a mechanism for enhancing research output and influence, remains inconsistently practiced. Matthews et al. (2020) found that while international collaboration is widely praised, actual participation rates are low due to bureaucratic hurdles, data protection concerns, and even political tensions.

Furthermore, financial hierarchies remain a persistent barrier. Although OA platforms improve visibility and access, they shift the financial burden onto authors or their institutions. Kamerlin et al. (2021) argued that only well-funded researchers are able to consistently publish in top-tier journals, reinforcing inequities. Ili (2025) called for systemic reforms to promote fairness—such as increased support for alternative OA models, dismantling monopolistic publishing structures, compensating peer reviewers and editors, and expanding language support for non-native English speakers.

Beyond access and cost, the literature also points to restrictions in *epistemic* and *participatory openness*. Pinfield (2024) argues that truly inclusive OA must recognize diverse forms of knowledge and redefine scientific legitimacy to accommodate varied epistemologies. Similarly, Inefuku et al. (2024) highlight the overrepresentation of white male voices—primarily from the Global North—in academic journals. They advocate moving beyond Western positivism toward a more inclusive and pluralistic research paradigm.

2.3 | Discourse and the Politics of Knowledge Production

The inequalities in scholarly publishing are not merely a function of access but also of *discourse*—the forms of reasoning, modes of argument, and epistemological frameworks that are legitimized within academic spaces. As Bourdieu (1991) notes, academic discourse is never neutral; it constitutes a field of symbolic power in which certain forms of knowledge (e.g., quantitative, universalizing, managerial) are privileged over others (e.g., critical, situated, or narrative-based). In the context of open access (OA) publishing, this raises a pressing question: Do Southern-based journals offer space for alternative discourses, or do they internalize and replicate the normative expectations of the global research economy?

This question is particularly relevant in interdisciplinary fields such as accounting, finance, and management studies, where dominant methodologies often lean toward performance-oriented, positivist approaches (Gendron 2008). Research that challenges prevailing assumptions—by addressing inequality, power dynamics, marginalization, or postcolonial critique—remains limited and is frequently confined to niche journals.

Rodriguez-Escobar (2024) advocates for the advancement of global management knowledge through the production of context-rich insights grounded in the origins of the studied phenomena. Such contributions may serve to enhance, challenge, or complement the predominantly Western-derived theoretical frameworks, an argument that resonates with the principles of engaged scholarship and collective inquiry (Van de Ven 2007, Van de Ven et al. 2018). The inclusion of cases from rapidly changing regions such as Africa and Asia—especially those undergoing organizational and societal transformation—offers opportunities for research that is both contextually embedded and theoretically generative (see also Desmarchelier (2024) and Liu (2024)). Boyer (2024) similarly underscores the importance of indigenous perspectives in future research, particularly in fields like supply chain sustainability. This reinforces the call for epistemological pluralism and the recognition of diverse research traditions within the global scholarly ecosystem.

2.4 | Deetz's Model of Organizational Discourse

To investigate the discourses present in academic publications, we apply Deetz's (1996) model, which categorizes organizational scholarship along two axes: consensual vs. dissensual, and elite/a priori vs. local/emergent. This produces four discourse types:

- **Normative** (consensual + elite/a priori): Focused on generalizable truths, often using quantitative methods.
- **Interpretive** (consensual + local/emergent): Seeks understanding of situated practices through qualitative inquiry.
- **Critical** (dissensual + elite/a priori): Aims to expose domination and ideology.
- **Dialogical** (dissensual + local/emergent): Highlights contradictions and marginalized perspectives.

Deetz's typology is widely used to assess epistemological diversity in management and communication research (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, Prichard 2000). While normative and interpretive discourses are dominant, critical and dialogical types remain marginal—especially in non-elite journals (Mingers 2000).

Building on this literature, the present study contributes to the empirical understanding of how OA publishing in developing countries shapes not only what is published but also how it is framed. By applying Deetz's discourse model and topic modelling to 47 articles from a Southern OA journal, we respond to calls for epistemological pluralism and academic decolonization in global scholarship (Connell 2007, Bhambra 2014).

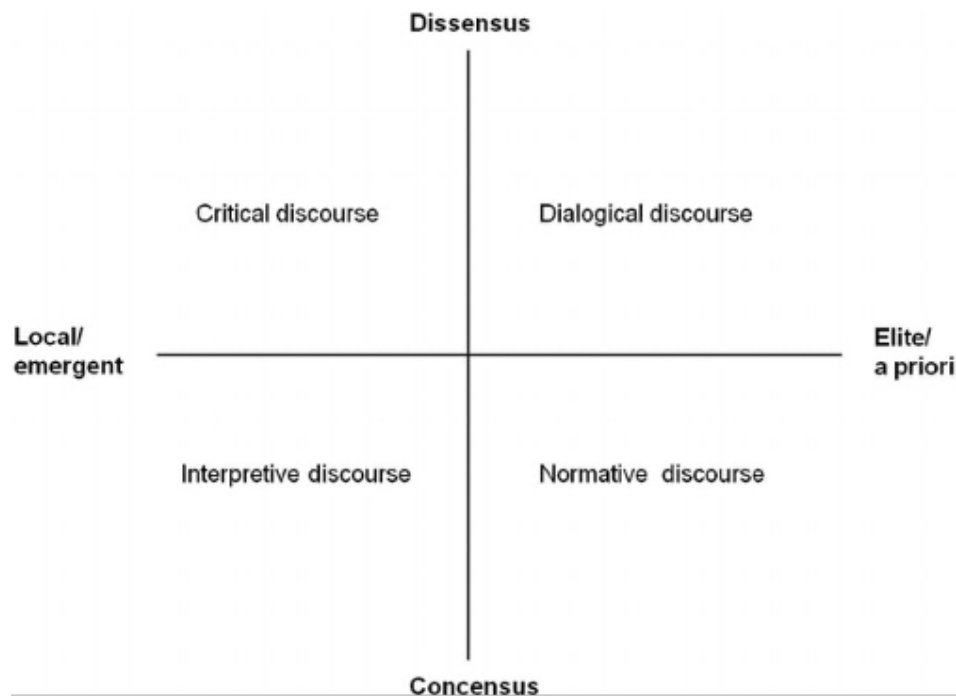


FIGURE 1 Four Types of Discourse (Adapted from Deetz, 1996)

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Topic Modelling

This study adopts a text mining approach to explore the thematic landscape of JAFESS. A total of 47 articles were retrieved from the journal's official website, covering publications from 2020 to 2024. For each article, key metadata such as the title, authorship, institutional affiliation, abstract, keywords, publication year, and DOI were extracted and compiled into a structured dataset. The primary sources for the topic modelling were the article abstracts, which serve as concise summaries of each study's thematic content.

Prior to topic modelling, the texts were pre-processed using Python-based tools, notably the `nltk` and `scikit-learn` libraries. The pre-processing steps involved converting text to lowercase, removing stop words, punctuation, and numerical digits, followed by tokenization and lemmatization. This standard natural language processing (NLP) pipeline was necessary to ensure that the text inputs were clean and semantically coherent (Manning et al. 2008).

Two distinct topic modelling techniques were employed to identify latent thematic structures within the corpus: Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and Non-negative Matrix Factorization (NMF). LDA, introduced by Blei et al. (2003), is a probabilistic generative model that treats each document as a mixture of topics and each topic as a mixture of words. The implementation was carried out using the LDA module from `scikit-learn`, with the number of topics set to five. This choice was informed by exploratory coherence testing and interpretability assessments.

NMF, as an alternative method, decomposes the term-document matrix into two lower-rank non-negative matrices that represent document-topic and topic-word distributions, respectively (Lee and Seung 1999). Unlike LDA, NMF is not probabilistic but has been found effective in identifying interpretable topics, particularly when used with TF-IDF vectorization (O'Callaghan et al. 2015). The NMF model from `scikit-learn` was used, also specifying five components to facilitate comparison with LDA.

Vectorization for the LDA model was based on the Bag-of-Words (BoW) representation, while the NMF model used a Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF) matrix to capture word importance across the corpus. Both models were trained and evaluated using the same pre-processed input data to ensure consistency in comparative analysis. The results were manually examined for topic coherence, thematic distinctiveness, and alignment with the journal's thematic scope.

All analyses were conducted using Python (v3.X) in a Jupyter Notebook environment. The key libraries utilized include `pandas`, `nltk`, `scikit-learn`, `matplotlib`, and `gensim`. This approach aligns with best practices in computational text analysis and builds on a growing body of research employing topic modelling to examine scholarly communication (Jacobi et al. 2015, DiMaggio et al. 2013).

3.2 | Discourse Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach to discourse analysis, drawing on Deetz's (1996) typology of scientific discourses

in organizational research. Deetz's model provides a conceptual framework for mapping research texts along two axes: (1) consensual vs. dissensual orientation, and (2) local/emergent vs. elite/a priori orientation. The intersection of these axes yields four discourses: normative, interpretive, critical, and dialogical. The objective of this analysis is to determine which of these discourses dominate in the selected body of literature and to identify underrepresented forms of theorizing in the journal's knowledge production.

The dataset consists of 47 articles published in JAFESS between 2020 and 2024. These articles were extracted from the journal's publicly available archives and compiled into a spreadsheet, including titles, author name(s), abstracts, keywords, publication dates, and full-text references. The inclusion criteria required that articles be original research papers; editorial notes, teaching cases, or conference summaries were excluded.

Each article was subjected to a qualitative content analysis based on its abstract, keywords, and full text. The goal was to assess the orientation of the research discourse using Deetz (1996)'s criteria, particularly:

A coding scheme was developed to identify textual cues. For example:

- Terms such as *hypothesis testing*, *modelling*, and *performance indicators* indicated normative discourse.
- Language like *meaning-making* or *interpretation* suggested an interpretive orientation.
- References to *power*, *domination*, or *social justice* were linked to critical discourse.
- Expressions like *conflict*, *contradiction*, or *local voices* signaled dialogical discourse.

A coding framework was developed to identify textual markers of each discourse type. For example, references to hypothesis testing, statistical modelling, and performance indicators were coded as indicative of normative discourse; terms such as "interpret," "meaning-making," and "contextual understanding" suggested an interpretive orientation; mentions of "power," "domination," or "social injustice" were treated as signs of critical discourse; while phrases highlighting "conflict," "contradiction," "disjointed narratives," or "local voices" were associated with dialogical discourse.

Each article was initially coded independently by the researcher. In cases where classification was ambiguous or multiple discursive elements were present, interpretive decisions were guided by the dominant orientation expressed in the problem framing and theoretical positioning. The articles were then grouped under the four discourse types, and in-text references were generated for reporting purposes. The year of publication was extracted from each article's bibliographic metadata. Overall, this methodological process not only enabled the mapping of the journal's discursive landscape but also facilitated reflection on epistemological plurality in the field of accounting, finance, and social sciences.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Topic Modelling

To explore the thematic structure of JAFESS publications, we conducted topic modelling on the abstracts of 47 articles using two methods: Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and Non-negative Matrix Factorization (NMF). Both models were configured to extract five topics, allowing for a direct comparison of their thematic outputs.

4.1.1 | Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)

The LDA model produced five distinct topics, each defined by a set of high-probability keywords. These topics reflected diverse areas of research within the journal, including sustainability reporting, regional economic integration, tax policy, and financial technology. Table 2 presents the top keywords for each topic extracted by the LDA model.

These topics broadly align with the journal's stated thematic focus. Notably, Topic 1 reflects growing academic interest in Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting and corporate responsibility in the Southeast Asian context. Topic 2 explores regional economic and political dynamics. Topic 3 relates to market behaviour and investment in Cambodia. Topic 4 focuses on public sector finance, tax policy, and regulatory governance. Topic 5 highlights innovation and entrepreneurship in small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1.2 | Non-negative Matrix Factorization (NMF)

The NMF model produced comparable yet partially distinct topics. Table 3 summarizes the most salient keywords for each NMF topic.

While both models captured similar high-level themes, NMF tended to group semantically tighter clusters, with clearer separation of sustainability issues (Topic 1), regional issues (Topic 2), taxation and compliance (Topic 3), education (Topic 4), and financial institutional analysis (Topic 5). This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that NMF often yields more interpretable results for short texts like abstracts (O'Callaghan et al. 2015).

4.1.3 | Comparative Interpretation

Overall, both LDA and NMF revealed the multidisciplinary nature of JAFESS. Common themes included:

- Corporate sustainability and governance
- Regional political economy and ASEAN–China relations
- Taxation and financial oversight
- Innovation, education, and entrepreneurship
- Digital and financial technologies

TABLE 1 Dimensions of Discourse Orientation Based on Deetz's Criteria

Discourse Dimension	Discourse Orientation
Research objectives	Performance optimization vs. conflict exposure
Methodological approach	Quantitative modelling vs. ethnographic exploration
Use of theory	Stakeholder, practice, or critical theory
Framing of research	Sustainability as performance vs. discursive construction
Problems addressed	Operational efficiency vs. power/marginalization

TABLE 2 Top Keywords per Topic (LDA Model)

Topic	Top Keywords
1	reporting, sustainability, economic, Cambodia, financial, CSR, performance, corporate, practices, indicators
2	ASEAN, China, economic, study, research, country, south, political, region, influence
3	study, Cambodia, financial, results, paper, survey, institutions, market, investment, value
4	tax, rate, audit, revenue, variables, avoidance, CSR, reforms, income, governance
5	factors, innovation, pandemic, covid, growth, small, challenges, education, entrepreneurship, business

The two models offered complementary perspectives: LDA highlighted broader thematic intersections (e.g., linking CSR and tax avoidance), while NMF provided more focused groupings with clearer policy and sectoral implications.

4.2 | Discourse Analysis

This section presents the results of the discourse analysis conducted on the articles published between 2020 and 2024 in JAFESS, applying Deetz's (1996) four-quadrant model of organizational discourse. Each article was classified into one of the four discourse categories—*normative*, *interpretive*, *critical*, and *dialogical*—based on its epistemological orientation, methodological approach, theoretical framing, and problematization.

4.2.1 | Dominance of Normative and Interpretive Discourses

The analysis revealed a clear dominance of **normative discourse**, which accounted for approximately 94% of the sample (44 articles). Articles in this category primarily sought to optimize operational performance, enhance decision-making processes, or evaluate measurable impacts of sustainability practices within supply chains or corporate settings. For example, studies such as Singh (2020 2021 2023ab), Lim (2020 2021 2023), Sviatko (2020ab 2021), and Makhija (2020 2021ab 2022) employed regression analysis, simulation modelling, and structured metrics to quantify relationships between internal audit, investment risk, or information systems. These studies were largely *a priori* in orientation, relying on established theoretical frameworks and methodologies such as stakeholder theory (Ma'aji 2020, Dash 2020), the resource-based view (Azhar 2022ab 2023ba), and dynamic capabilities theory (Güngör 2022) to address well-defined research problems. The metaphor of sustainability in these articles typically reflected an external, measurable phenomenon amenable to standardization and benchmarking.

The **interpretive discourse** emerged as the second most common, comprising 6% of the sample (three articles). These articles emphasized understanding organizational practices related to sustainability and viewed sustainability as a socially constructed process embedded in specific cultural and historical contexts. For instance, Prum (2020) used a textual lens to explore the limitations of Cambodia's decentralization process, while Po (2023) analyzed ASEAN's geopolitical positioning through the lens of regional discourse. Hap (2021) investigated how institutional frameworks of land registration in Cambodia perpetuate exclusion. These studies employed qualitative methodologies, including case study design and document analysis, and were oriented toward making sense of organizational transformation and the conditions for sustainable governance.

4.2.2 | Underrepresentation of Critical and Dialogical Discourses

Surprisingly, **critical discourse** was not represented, highlighting a significant underrepresentation of studies that challenge dominant power structures or critique systemic inequalities within organizational practices. Articles in this category would typically explore power relations, marginalization, and institutional domination, particularly in contexts like land governance or corporate sustainability.

Similarly, **dialogical discourse**, characterized by its focus on conflict, contradiction, and disjointed narratives, was entirely absent. This indicates a potential gap in the journal's ability to capture marginalized voices, conflicting epistemologies, and non-consensual forms of knowledge.

To facilitate further scholarly engagement, Table 4 summarizes the in-text references of articles classified under each discourse type.

TABLE 3 Top Keywords per Topic (NMF Model)

Topic	Top Keywords
1	sustainability, reporting, companies, practices, performance, disclosure, financial, indicators, transparency, stakeholders
2	ASEAN, pandemic, economic, China, covid, countries, region, political, trade, integration
3	tax, revenue, CSR, avoidance, earnings, policies, reforms, audit, compliance, efficiency
4	students, percent, research, factors, performance, results, education, motivation, learning, surveys
5	IC, efficiency, banks, commercial, financial, capital, technology, services, innovation, risks

TABLE 4 Type of Discourse in JAFESS Articles

Type of Discourse	JAFESS Articles
Dialogical Discourse	—
Critical Discourse	—
Interpretive Discourse	Prum (2020); Hap (2021); Po (2023)
Normative Discourse	Singh (2020), Lim (2020), Sviatko (2020a), Makhija (2020), Ky (2020), Sviatko (2020b), Dash (2020), Ma'aji (2020), Lim (2021), Makhija (2021a), Singh (2021), Sviatko (2021), Lim and Barnett (2021), Flores (2021), Makhija (2021b), Ma'aji and Hi (2021), Azhar (2022a), Ratana and Lim (2022), Ma'aji (2022), Mara (2022), Kosal and Lim (2022), Azhar (2022b), Makhija (2022), Güngör (2022), Cadungog-Uy (2022), Lim (2023), Singh (2023a), Azhar (2023b), Cornet (2023), Azhar (2023a), Flores (2023), Singh (2023b), Song and Lim (2023), Azhar (2024), Thath (2024), Flores and Mean (2024), Hamza (2024), Cadungog-Uy and Flores (2024), Thath et al. (2024), Azhar and Siem (2024), Alwindaru et al. (2024)

5 | DISCUSSION

The topic modelling using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and Non-negative Matrix Factorization (NMF) categorized the 47 articles in JAFESS in a largely consistent distribution, with the majority falling under the *normative* discourse category (44 articles), and only a small number identified as *interpretive* (three articles). There is broad acceptance in the literature that topic modelling is a powerful tool for detecting patterns in discourse in the social sciences (DiMaggio et al. 2013, Jacobi et al. 2015). Nevertheless, reservations remain, especially concerning topic coherence and the interpretability of algorithmic output (O'Callaghan et al. 2015). Additionally, the distinction between discourse types may not always be clear-cut, as they can be “both alike and different” (Deetz 1996, p. 203). Despite these limitations, our findings demonstrate that topic modelling can be a robust method for mapping the discursive terrain of knowledge production in a Southern-based open access journal.

5.1 | Interpreting the Dominance of Normative Discourse

The results highlight a striking predominance of the normative discourse in JAFESS. Over 90% of the articles analysed focused on performance optimization, measurement, and the identification of best practices. Although JAFESS is an open access journal based in a developing country, it largely reproduces the elite, a priori, and consensual expectations of mainstream academic publishing (Lissillour 2024). This epistemological

orientation reflects a preference for technocratic solutions and nomothetic methodologies, often at the expense of alternative perspectives that explore the social, ethical, or cultural dimensions of sustainability—domains typically addressed by *critical* or *dialogical* discourse (see Sahut et al. 2023ab).

This dominance resonates with Deetz's (1996) critique of the institutionalization of managerialist paradigms in organizational research. Here, normative discourse is not merely a methodological choice; it signals deeper epistemological alignment with dominant academic cultures that prioritize replicable models and performance metrics. For example, corporate sustainability and public-sector finance were often framed through instrumental lenses that aimed to “optimize” rather than “critique” or “transform.”

While open access journals are frequently celebrated for expanding participation in scholarly publishing, our findings suggest a more complex reality. Echoing Ili (2025), we argue that OA platforms based in the Global South may still reproduce the epistemological hierarchies of the Global North. The dominance of normative discourse and the absence of dialogical contributions point to the continued influence of imported norms of scholarly legitimacy (Lissillour 2022).

As Lund (2022) contends, scholars from developing regions often face strong pressures to conform to Western academic conventions—not only for international recognition but also to maintain institutional credibility at home. In this light, JAFESS may represent a case of *epistemic mimicry*, where methods, topics, and citation patterns mirror those of elite journals, even in contexts where alternative epistemologies might yield more socially relevant insights.

5.2 | The Absence of Critical and Dialogical Contributions

Perhaps the most striking finding is the complete absence of **dialogical discourse** and near absence of **critical discourse**. This absence is particularly noteworthy given the journal's thematic focus on accounting, finance, and the social sciences—fields that inherently intersect with questions of inequality, governance, and systemic reform.

Several explanations may account for this discursive gap. Editorial and institutional norms likely prioritize empirical, positivist approaches that appear more “publishable.” Authors may internalize these expectations and frame their research accordingly, avoiding reflexive or conflict-laden narratives. Furthermore, as a relatively young journal, JAFESS may adopt a cautious editorial stance, aligning with dominant discursive norms to build its academic reputation before expanding its epistemological scope.

Deetz's (1996) model proved useful not only for categorizing articles but also for highlighting these absences. Its utility lies in showing what forms of discourse are privileged—and which remain marginalized. The near invisibility of dialogical and critical discourse, which emphasizes multiplicity, contradiction, and contestation, is indicative of the constrained epistemic space available within much of the current publishing ecosystem. As Lissillour (2021) notes, such constraints may reflect the exclusion of dialogical and critical orientations from the dominant cognitive categories available to Southern researchers and editors.

Rather than viewing the absence of dialogical research as a gap to be filled through individual submissions, we interpret it as a symptom of deeper structural limitations. These include editorial policies, language barriers, and institutional incentives that discourage dissenting voices or epistemological experimentation. This observation supports calls in decolonial scholarship (Connell 2007, Bhambra 2014) for a radical rethinking of academic publishing—one that values local knowledge systems, dialogical reflexivity, and epistemic justice. Editors of Southern-based journals could respond to this challenge by encouraging submissions that address the four finalities of critical research, as illustrated in Figure 2.

6 | CONCLUSION

This study examined the thematic and epistemological landscape of JAFESS, an open access journal based in a developing country. By combining topic modelling with discourse analysis informed by Deetz's (1996) framework, we identified a strong predominance of *normative discourse*, a limited presence of *interpretive* and *critical* perspectives, and a complete absence of *dialogical* contributions. These findings reveal that even in platforms intended to broaden participation in academic publishing—such as open access journals in the Global South—there remains a marked bias toward elite, technocratic, and consensual modes of knowledge production.

The implications of this analysis are both theoretical and practical. At a theoretical level, it reinforces concerns raised by Ili (2025) and Lund (2022) regarding the paradox of open access: while these platforms may remove financial barriers to participation, they often replicate the discursive hierarchies established by Global North academic cultures. If epistemic pluralism is to be meaningfully achieved, increased access must be accompanied by a willingness to embrace diverse ways of knowing, including locally grounded, critical, and dialogical research traditions.

For journal editors and reviewers, the findings emphasize the importance of actively cultivating discursive diversity. This could include creating editorial space for critical and interpretive voices, encouraging methodological innovation, and reassessing peer review norms that may privilege narrow notions of academic rigor. A practical step in this direction could be the development of special issues that invite contributions aligned with a critical research agenda in management studies (Lissillour 2024). For researchers, particularly those situated in or engaging with the Global South, the study calls for greater reflexivity about the epistemological assumptions embedded in their work—and for collaborative efforts to broaden the boundaries of publishable scholarship.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the focus on a single journal limits the generalizability of the findings. While JAFESS provides a valuable case study, broader comparative analyses involving multiple open access journals in similar contexts would yield deeper insights into regional or disciplinary patterns. Second, although full-text content was included in the discourse analysis, some classification decisions relied on subjective interpretation, which may affect the precision of discourse categorization. Third, the exclusion of editorials or practitioner-oriented contributions may have omitted relevant discursive dynamics influencing the journal's intellectual direction.

Future research could extend this work in several directions. Comparative discourse analyses across journals—both within and outside the Global South—could clarify whether the observed patterns are systemic or journal-specific, and how the dominant scientific “*homos*” is constructed (Lissillour et al. 2021). Longitudinal studies might investigate how discursive orientations evolve in response to shifts in editorial leadership, institutional affiliations, or international collaborations. Moreover, qualitative research involving interviews with editors and authors could shed light on the motivations and constraints shaping knowledge production in Southern-based open access journals, deepening our understanding of their social conditioning (Lissillour 2022).

Ultimately, the pursuit of epistemic justice in academic publishing demands more than equitable access and surface-level inclusion. It requires critical engagement with the forms, frameworks, and futures of the knowledge we produce and legitimize. Journals like JAFESS have the potential to lead this transformation—not simply by providing open access to research, but by cultivating epistemological openness and fostering scholarly diversity.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, writing, reviewing, editing and addressing reviewer comments.

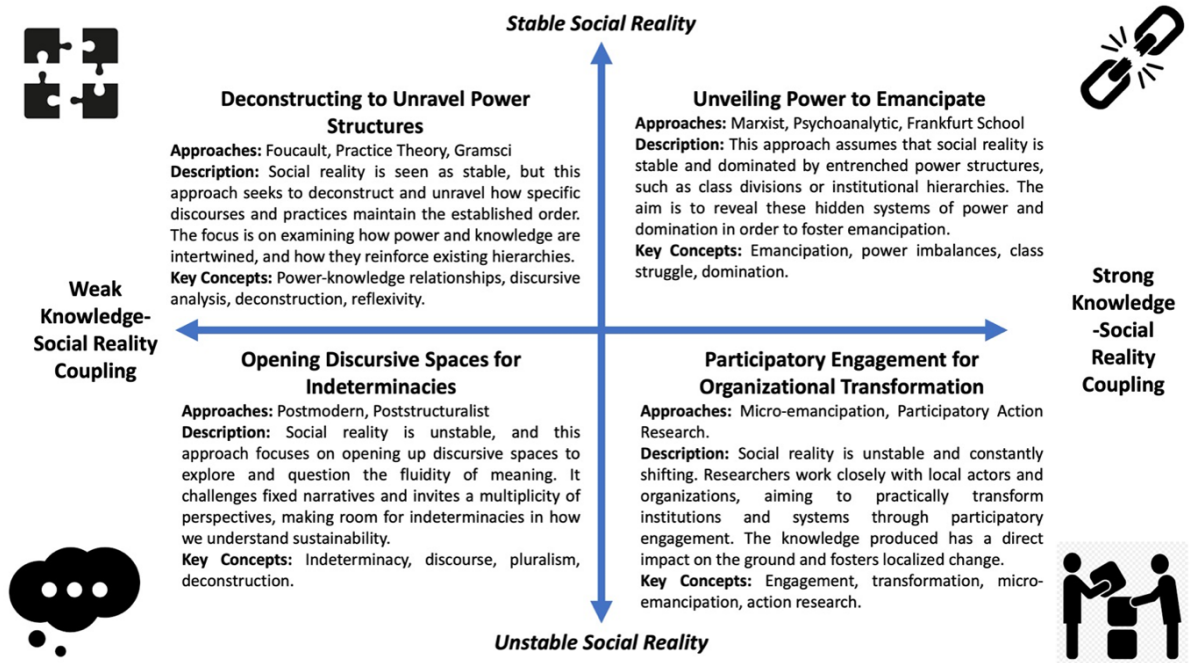


FIGURE 2 Conceptual framework for critical research in management science (Lissillour 2024).

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflict of interests.

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AUTHORS BIOGRAPHY

Kenneth Paul Charman is a professor of strategy at CamEd Business School in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where he has been based since 2018. Prior to this he taught for over a decade in Kazakhstan, where he was instrumental in establishing Central Asia's first international business school. He has managed several development projects for the multinational donor organizations, including many projects for the EU EuropeAid. He has an MBA and a doctorate in international business from London Business School, and he was appointed as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Royal Institution of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 2012. His current research interests focus on creating shared value, ESG, joint ventures, and public enterprises, and now focuses on developing case studies for teaching and research..

Mansoureh Bahadori is a lecturer in English for Academic Purposes at CamEd Business School in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and a doctoral candidate in Organizational Leadership at Meridian University, USA. With over 12 years of teaching experience and qualifications including CELTA and iPGCE, she has worked extensively in international education settings. Her teaching supports business students—particularly in finance and accounting—in developing academic writing and communication skills. Her research interests include learner agency, inclusive pedagogy, faculty development, and the role of English educators in multilingual higher education. She is also exploring the intersections between academic support, business psychology, and organizational learning in business schools. She has presented at international conferences and serves as an editor for the CamEd Business Review journal.

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