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Feminist Pedagogies and Gender Sensitive Teaching Practices in Pakistani Higher Education

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Abstract

This study has been designed to explore the role of feminist pedagogies and gender sensitive teaching practices in changing higher education in Pakistan. Drawing on a qualitative inquiry design, it analyzes published research articles and policy documents extracted from reputable academic catalogues using content analysis. The findings reveal that responsiveness of gender equality has been increasing in higher education discourse, the integration of feminist pedagogical principles including as reflexivity, inclusivity, and empowerment remains partial. Teaching practices and curricula continue to reflect androcentric biases and patriarchal norms, with few institutional initiatives aimed at promoting gender sensitive pedagogy. The study identifies lack of faculty training, cultural resistance, and institutional inertia as major barriers to implementation. Further, theoretical insights from critical pedagogy and feminist, particularly the works of hooks, Freire, and Bourdieu, claim how education serves as a site of power relations and potential transformation. The study clinches that adopting contextually pertinent feminist pedagogies enhance student engagement, gender equity, and critical consciousness within Pakistan's higher education institutions and other similar developing settings.

Keywords: Feminist Pedagogy, Higher Education, Gender Equity, Gender Sensitivity, Critical Pedagogy

Introduction

In current years, the discourse on gender equality in higher education has been expanding beyond issues of access and representation to include profounder questions of classroom dynamics, pedagogy, and knowledge production (Harding, 1991; Shoaib & Zaman, 2025). Within this perspective, feminist pedagogies have appeared as a critical framework that challenges traditional hierarchies in teaching and learning (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025c; Steinberg, 1994). Embedded in feminist theory, these pedagogies advocate for inclusive, participatory, and reflective approaches that empower learners, recognize diverse experiences, and deconstruct gendered power relations within educational settings (McCall, 2005; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025b). Feminist pedagogy is not merely about teaching female's issues, but about transforming the structures of education itself to social justice, promote equity, and critical consciousness among all learners (Harding, 2008; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025b). In Pakistan, the higher education sector has been experiencing significant growth over the past two decades, accompanied by increasing participation of females as both students and faculty members (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025a). Despite this progress, gender inequalities remain deeply embedded in institutional cultures, curriculum design, and teaching practices (Lewis, 2011; Shoaib, Waris, &

Iqbal, 2025a). Patriarchal norms, androcentric curricula, and limited gender sensitivity among educators continue to shape the educational experience of students, often reinforcing rather than challenging traditional gender roles (Shoaib & Ullah, 2025; Stevens, 2012). This situation calls for a critical examination of how teaching practices reoriented to foster gender sensitivity and inclusivity within Pakistani universities (Shoaib, Tariq, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025).

The integration of gender sensitive teaching practices within higher education provides a promising pathway for addressing these issues (Grenfell, 2014; Shoaib, Tariq, & Iqbal, 2025b). Similarly, practices aim to create learning environments that respect and value gender diversity, encourage equitable participation, and acknowledge the social and cultural realities that influence students' learning experiences (Hartsock, 2017; Shoaib, Tariq, & Iqbal, 2025a). Feminist pedagogies, when localized and contextualized, play a transformative role in reshaping teaching practices and institutional cultures in Pakistan's higher education sector (Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025). It has been observed that feminist pedagogical principles and gender-sensitive teaching practices are conceptualized, implemented, and experienced in Pakistani higher education institutions (Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025). It is asserted that the extent to which educators integrate feminist values including collaboration, reflexivity, and empowerment in their classrooms, and how these practices influence students' engagement and learning outcomes (Shoaib, Rasool, Zaman, & Ahmed, 2025). By situating the study within the broader context of gender and education in Pakistan, it purposes to contribute to ongoing debates about the role of pedagogy in advancing gender equity and social transformation in academic spaces.

Study Context

The context of higher education in Pakistan presents a complex intersection of rapid institutional expansion, policy reforms, and persistent gender inequalities (Shoaib, Rasool, & Zaman, 2025). Over the past two decades, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has undertaken substantial efforts to promote access, quality, and gender equity in universities (Shoaib, Rasool, Kalsoom, & Ali, 2025). Female's enrollment in higher education has increased significantly, with female students now comprising nearly half of total enrollments in many public and private universities (HEC-Vision-2025, 2017; Shoaib, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025). Likewise, the number of female faculty members has also developed, particularly in the social sciences and humanities disciplines (Shoaib, Kausar, Ali, & Abdullah, 2025). Despite these encouraging trends, gender inequalities remain obvious in disciplinary representation, leadership roles, institutional culture, and pedagogical practices (Freire, 2018; Shoaib, Iqbal, & Iftikhar, 2025). Universities in Pakistan endure to operate within broader socio-cultural structures shaped by religion, patriarchy, and traditional gender based norms (Shoaib, Batool, Kausar, & Abdullah, 2025). These structures influence not only the contribution of females in academia but also the ways in which teaching and learning are accompanied (Ho & Tseng, 2022; Shoaib & Bashir, 2025). The classroom, as a microcosm of society, often reflects existing gendered based hierarchies (Ma, 2023; Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025). For example, male students dominate discussions, female's voices marginalized, and course content prioritize male experiences and perspectives (Shoaib, Ahmed, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025; Verwiebe & Hagemann, 2025). Furthermore, institutional policies and faculty training programs have yet to fully incorporate feminist perspectives or gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches (Shoaib, Ahmed, & Usmani, 2025b).

National policies advocate gender mainstreaming in education, their translation into teaching practices at the university level remains uneven (Shoaib, Ahmed, & Usmani, 2025a). Many faculty members lack formal training in gender sensitive pedagogy, and few teaching evaluation mechanisms assess inclusivity or equity in classroom interactions (Shoaib, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025). Additionally, research on feminist pedagogies in Pakistan is still in its formative stages, with most studies focusing on gender access, representation, or workplace discrimination rather than on classroom practices or curriculum design (Shoaib, Ahmed, & Iqbal, 2025). Given this background, Pakistani higher education institutions represent a vital space for exploring how feminist pedagogies contribute to social transformation (Shoaib, 2025a). The integration of feminist principles including

collaboration, critical reflexivity, and the recognition of diverse experiences has the potential to reshape not only teaching methods but also institutional cultures (Shoaib, 2025b). Investigating the adoption and challenges of such pedagogical practices in Pakistan illuminate the broader struggle for gender justice within education and society at large (Ali, Shoaib, & Kausar, 2025).

Objective

The main objective of this study is to critically examine how feminist pedagogies and gender-sensitive teaching practices are conceptualized, implemented, and experienced within Pakistani higher education institutions. The study seeks to explore the extent to which educators integrate feminist principles including equality, inclusivity, empowerment, and reflexivity into their teaching approaches and classroom interactions.

The Data and Method
Study Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore and critically analyze the integration of feminist pedagogies and gender-sensitive teaching practices within Pakistani higher education. A qualitative approach is most suitable for this inquiry as it allows for an in-depth examination of existing knowledge, conceptual frameworks, and discursive patterns found in published scholarly literature. It also facilitates the interpretation of contextual meanings, ideological underpinnings, and cultural nuances that shape pedagogical practices in the Pakistani academic environment.

Data Sources

The study is based on secondary data, comprising published research documents, including journal articles, policy reports, and academic papers related to gender, pedagogy, and higher education in Pakistan. These materials were collected from reputable databases including JSTOR, Scopus, Taylor & Francis Online, Springer Link, Google Scholar and local repositories including the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan digital library and university archives. Only peer-reviewed publications were included to ensure the credibility and academic rigor of the analysis.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select relevant documents that directly address issues of feminist pedagogy, gender sensitivity, and teaching practices in higher education within the Pakistani context. The selection criteria included research focusing on higher education institutions in Pakistan, papers addressing gender dynamics, pedagogy, or educational reform, and the English language publications available in full text. A total of 87 research published documents have been used in the study.

Data Analysis

The collected documents were analyzed through qualitative content analysis, guided by feminist theoretical perspectives. This method involved systematically coding and categorizing textual data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and discourses related to feminist pedagogical approaches and gender-sensitive teaching practices. The analysis focused on how gender issues are conceptualized in academic literature, the types of pedagogical strategies discussed, and the barriers or enablers identified in their implementation. Manual thematic coding procedures were used to organize data into meaningful categories.

Limitations of the Study

The study relies exclusively on published research and does not include primary data from direct classroom observations or interviews, it limit the depth of empirical understanding. Only peer-reviewed and accessible the English language publications were analyzed and exclude relevant studies published in local or institutional journals. Higher education institutions in Pakistan differ widely in

terms of resources, culture, and governance; hence, the findings may not capture the full diversity of pedagogical experiences across all universities.

Results and Discussion
The analysis of published research documents on feminist pedagogies and gender-sensitive teaching practices in Pakistani higher education reveals several interrelated themes that reflect both progress and persistent challenges in transforming the educational landscape. The findings are organized around five major thematic areas: 1) awareness and conceptualization of feminist pedagogy, 2) gender sensitivity in classroom practices, 3) curriculum and institutional structures, 4) barriers to implementation, and 5) transformative potential and future directions.

Awareness and Conceptualization of Feminist Pedagogy
The reviewed studies indicate that feminist pedagogy remains a relatively underdeveloped and under-theorized concept in Pakistan's higher education discourse (Ahmed, Shoaib, & Zaman, 2025; Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2024b). However, there is growing recognition of the need for gender equity, most educators and policymakers conceptualize it narrowly focusing on access, representation, or harassment prevention rather than transformative teaching practices (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2024a; Shoaib, Zaman, & Abbas, 2024). Few studies explicitly employ the term feminist pedagogy; instead, they discuss related notions including inclusive teaching, student-centered learning, or gender-sensitive approaches (Shoaib, 2024e; Shoaib, Ali, & Abbas, 2024). This limited conceptual clarity attributed to the broader socio-political context in which feminism itself is often misunderstood or viewed with skepticism (Shoaib, 2024b, 2024d). Feminist pedagogical principles including critical reflection, dialogical learning, and empowerment are seldom incorporated systematically into teaching philosophy statements or faculty training modules (Shoaib, 2024c). As a result, feminist pedagogy exists more as an implicit practice adopted by individual educators rather than as a formally recognized framework within universities (Shoaib, 2024a).

Gender Sensitivity in Classroom Practices
Several studies highlight how classroom environments in Pakistani universities often reproduce traditional gender hierarchies (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2023; Shoaib, Usmani, & Abdullah, 2023). Male students are frequently more vocal, dominate classroom discussions, and receive greater attention from instructors, however female students tend to self-censor or remain passive, particularly in co-educational settings (Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2023; Shoaib, Rasool, Anwar, & Ali, 2023). Some teachers unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes through examples, humor, or differential treatment (Shoaib, 2023c; Shoaib, Mustafa, et al., 2023). However, a few progressive educators have begun integrating participatory and reflective methods that align with feminist pedagogy including group discussions, peer learning, and experience-based assignments (Shoaib, 2023a, 2023b). These practices create spaces where both male and female students engage critically with social issues, question dominant norms, and develop confidence in expressing their viewpoints (Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022). Yet, initiatives remain sporadic and largely dependent on individual commitment rather than institutional policy support (Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2022).

Curriculum and Institutional Structures
The curriculum across most universities in Pakistan remains predominantly androcentric, with limited inclusion of feminist theory or gender perspectives, especially in disciplines outside the social sciences (Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Abdullah, 2022; Shoaib & Ullah, 2021a). Gender studies programs exist but are often marginalized and lack institutional backing (Shoaib & Ullah, 2021b). Textbooks and reading lists frequently overlook contributions from female scholars or feminist thinkers, thereby perpetuating epistemic inequalities in knowledge production (Shoaib, Rasool, & Anwar, 2021). Institutional structures including recruitment practices, evaluation systems, and administrative hierarchies also reflect patriarchal patterns (Shoaib, Iqbal, & Tahira, 2021). Female faculty members often encounter

challenges in advancing to leadership roles, influencing curricular reforms, or initiating feminist pedagogical programs (Shoaib, Fatima, & Jamil, 2021). However, the Higher Education Commission promotes gender equity through policy directives, there is minimal monitoring or evaluation of their implementation at the pedagogical level (Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Shaukat, 2021; Shoaib, Ali, & Akbar, 2021).

Barriers to Implementation of Feminist and Gender-Sensitive Pedagogies
Several structural, cultural, and ideological barriers hinder the adoption of feminist pedagogies in Pakistani higher education (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2021; Shoaib, Ahmad, Ali, & Abdullah, 2021; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, Rasool, et al., 2021);
➢ **Cultural Resistance:** Feminism is frequently perceived as a Western or anti-traditional ideology, leading to apprehension among faculty and administrators.
➢ **Lack of Professional Training:** Teacher education and faculty development programs rarely address gender sensitivity or feminist pedagogical frameworks.
➢ **Institutional Inertia:** Bureaucratic governance structures and rigid curricula limit academic freedom and pedagogical innovation.
➢ **Resource Constraints:** Overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching aids, and a lack of research funding impede efforts to introduce participatory teaching methods.
These barriers collectively reinforce the status quo, preventing the systemic transformation required for feminist pedagogies to take root (Shoaib, 2021).

Transformative Potential and Future Directions
Despite these challenges, the reviewed literature points to a growing awareness among academics particularly younger and female faculty regarding the importance of inclusive and equitable teaching practices (Abdullah & Shoaib, 2021). Feminist pedagogies hold transformative potential to democratize classroom spaces, challenge epistemic hierarchies, and foster critical thinking among students (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2020). Emerging examples of best practices include the integration of gender modules across disciplines, the use of student-led discussions on social justice, and collaborative assessment models that value experiential learning (Shoaib & Ullah, 2019). These approaches not only make learning more participatory but also help students reflect on power dynamics and social inequalities (Anwar, Shoaib, & Javed, 2013; Shoaib, Latif, & Usmani, 2013). For feminist pedagogy to become mainstream in Pakistan, universities must institutionalize gender-sensitive teaching through policy frameworks, training programs, and curriculum reforms (Shoaib, 2024b). Collaboration between gender studies departments, faculty development centers, and the Higher Education Commission facilitate the dissemination of feminist pedagogical models suited to local cultural and institutional contexts (Shoaib, 2024d).
Drawing on feminist theoretical insights particularly from scholars including Hooks (2014), Freire (2018), and Bourdieu (1986), the study highlights that education is not a neutral process but a site of power negotiation. Feminist pedagogy, rooted in critical pedagogy, challenges the symbolic violence embedded in traditional classroom structures and promotes the co-construction of knowledge. Bourdieu (1983) concept of habitus is particularly relevant in explaining how gendered socialization shapes students' dispositions toward participation, confidence, and authority within academic spaces. Feminist pedagogy seeks to disrupt these ingrained patterns by creating reflexive and dialogical learning environments where marginalized voices are legitimized and valued. In the Pakistani context, adopting feminist pedagogies represents both a pedagogical and political act a way to resist patriarchal ideologies, expand intellectual horizons, and reimagine education as a transformative practice (Shoaib, 2024e). It demands not only methodological innovation but also a shift in institutional culture, where teaching becomes an act of social justice rather than mere knowledge transmission (Muhammad Shoaib, Noreena Kausar, et al., 2025).

Theoretical Insights
The findings of this study better understood through key theoretical perspectives within feminist and critical pedagogy. These frameworks offer deeper explanations of how power, gender, and knowledge intersect within the structures of higher education in Pakistan. By drawing upon the works of Hooks (2014), Freire (2018), and Bourdieu (1986), the analysis situates feminist pedagogies not merely as teaching strategies but as critical interventions that challenge entrenched hierarchies and promote social transformation.

Feminist Pedagogy as a Transformative Framework
At its core, feminist pedagogy seeks to dismantle traditional power relations in education and to create spaces where learning becomes a participatory, dialogical, and empowering process. As Hooks (2014) argues in teaching to transgress, education should be a practice of freedom that encourages critical reflection, mutual respect, and co-creation of knowledge. In the Pakistani context, where gender norms are deeply ingrained and often restrict open dialogue, feminist pedagogy offers a radical departure from conventional lecture-based and authority centered teaching models. Through feminist pedagogy, the classroom becomes a site of consciousness-raising a place where students and teachers collectively interrogate social hierarchies and cultural assumptions about gender. This approach aligns with Freire's concept of conscientization, the process through which individuals become aware of social injustices and develop the agency to challenge them. In Pakistan, this pedagogical transformation empowers both male and female students to question the gendered social order and envision more equitable academic and social relations.

Critical Pedagogy and Empowerment
Freire (2018) theory of critical pedagogy provides a foundational lens for understanding feminist pedagogical practice. Freire criticizes the banking model of education where teachers deposit information into passive students and instead advocates for dialogical learning, in which teachers and students learn from one another as co-investigators of reality (Stevens, 2012). Feminist pedagogy expands this idea by emphasizing the intersections of gender, power, and identity in the learning process (Grenfell, 2014). In Pakistani universities, applying critical pedagogy means recognizing how educational systems reproduce patriarchal power structures. For example, male-dominated discussions, gender-biased examples, and male-centered curricula perpetuate symbolic domination (Freire & Macedo, 2002). By contrast, feminist pedagogical approaches through collaborative projects, narrative inquiry, and reflective writing enable marginalized voices to articulate their experiences, thereby promoting agency and empowerment (Boyd, 2012).

Habitus, Capital, and Symbolic Power of Bourdieu's Theory
Sociological theory of Bourdieu (1986) offers valuable insights into how gendered inequalities in education persist despite formal commitments to equality. His concepts of habitus, capital, and field help explain the subtle, often invisible mechanisms through which gendered dispositions are reproduced in higher education (Grenfell, 2014). In Pakistani academic culture, the habitus of both students and faculty is shaped by broader patriarchal norms, influencing behaviors including participation in class, confidence levels, and perceptions of authority. Male students possess greater cultural capital confidence, assertiveness, and linguistic fluency that aligns with the dominant academic norms, however female students internalize more restrained patterns of self-expression due to social conditioning (Wiltshire, Lee, & Williams, 2019). Feminist pedagogy seeks to disrupt this symbolic violence by creating learning environments that value emotional intelligence, empathy, and mutual respect forms of cultural capital traditionally devalued in patriarchal systems (Verwiebe & Hagemann, 2025). In doing so, it broadens the definition of legitimate knowledge and challenges the gendered hierarchies that shape academic success (Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007).

Intersectionality and Contextual Feminism

Drawing from intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 2013), it is important to recognize that gender does not operate in isolation but intersects with class, ethnicity, religion, and region in shaping educational experiences. In Pakistan, females from rural or lower socio-economic backgrounds face compounded barriers compared to their urban, middle-class counterparts. A feminist pedagogical approach that ignores these intersections risks reproducing elitist or Westernized notions of empowerment (Crenshaw, 2013). Therefore, feminist pedagogy in Pakistan must be contextualized and localized sensitive to cultural values whereas challenging oppressive practices. It integrates indigenous feminist perspectives, Islamic feminist thought, and South Asian epistemologies to create pedagogical models that resonate with local realities and avoid cultural alienation (McCall, 2005).

Toward a Culturally Responsive Feminist Pedagogy

The theoretical synthesis of Hooks (2014), Freire (2018), Bourdieu (1983), and intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 2013) suggests that feminist pedagogy in Pakistan must operate on three interlinked levels;

➢ Epistemic transformation redefining what counts as valid knowledge by including marginalized voices and feminist scholarship.
➢ Pedagogical transformation reshaping classroom interactions to foster dialogue, critical reflection, and mutual learning.
➢ Institutional transformation reforming university structures and policies to support inclusive, gender-sensitive teaching and leadership.

Ultimately, feminist pedagogy represents not only a teaching philosophy but also a social justice movement within education one that challenges epistemic domination and cultivates spaces for equality, reflexivity, and critical consciousness.

This study critically examined the ways in which feminist pedagogies and gender-sensitive teaching practices are conceptualized, implemented, and experienced within Pakistani higher education. By analyzing published research and theoretical perspectives, the study reveals that gender equality has gained visibility in national education policy and academic discourse, the pedagogical dimensions of gender justice remain underexplored and inconsistently practiced across universities. The findings indicate that most higher education institutions in Pakistan continue to operate within traditional, hierarchical, and androcentric frameworks that marginalize feminist perspectives. Although there has been progress in female's enrollment and participation, genuine transformation in teaching and learning practices remains limited. Feminist pedagogies anchored in principles of equity, empowerment, and critical dialogue are yet to be systematically integrated into institutional structures, curricula, and faculty development programs.

Educators who apply feminist or gender-sensitive teaching approaches often do so individually, without formal institutional support or recognition. The absence of professional training on gender-inclusive pedagogy, lack of curricular reform, and resistance from conservative social and cultural forces further constrain progress. Nevertheless, emerging examples of reflective and participatory teaching practices across some disciplines demonstrate a growing awareness of the transformative potential of feminist approaches in creating inclusive and empowering learning spaces. The theoretical insights drawn from bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and Pierre Bourdieu underscore that pedagogy is a site of power negotiation where knowledge, identity, and authority are continuously constructed. Feminist pedagogy challenges this symbolic domination by advocating collaborative learning, reflexivity, and critical engagement. Once contextualized within Pakistan's socio-cultural realities, feminist teaching practices become tools of social change helping both male and female students question entrenched hierarchies and develop critical consciousness about gender relations.

In conclusion, the study argues that feminist pedagogies offer a powerful framework for reimagining higher education in Pakistan, not merely as a process of knowledge transmission but as a transformative practice grounded in social justice, equality, and mutual respect. To realize this vision,

universities must:

➢ Institutionalize gender-sensitive pedagogy through faculty training and curriculum reform.
➢ Promote interdisciplinary collaboration between gender studies and other academic fields.
➢ Establish policy mechanisms for monitoring gender inclusivity in teaching and learning.
➢ Encourage context-specific feminist scholarship that reflects local realities and cultural diversity.

By embedding feminist pedagogical principles into the heart of higher education, Pakistan move toward a more equitable academic culture one that not only enhances learning outcomes but also contributes to broader societal transformation.

Conclusion

This study highlights that gender equality has gained policy attention in Pakistan's higher education, the pedagogical dimension remains insufficiently addressed. Feminist pedagogies and gender-sensitive teaching practices are still sporadic and largely dependent on individual efforts rather than institutional commitment. The findings show that traditional hierarchies, androcentric curricula, and limited faculty training continue to hinder transformative teaching. However, feminist pedagogy offers a powerful framework to make classrooms more inclusive, participatory, and socially conscious. Once contextualized to Pakistan's cultural realities, it fosters critical thinking, empower marginalized voices, and promote gender justice in education. Integrating feminist principles into teaching, curriculum design, and institutional policies is essential for achieving meaningful and sustainable gender equity in higher education.

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