

Feminists' Perspectives on Gender Gap in Education

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Abstract

Gender inequality is a universal phenomenon in contemporary society. It is evident in all cultures and forms – social, economic, cultural, and political. The accepted view is that expanding educational access to women will produce an equalizing effect in an unequal gendered society. However, contrary to the established belief, education reproduces many forms of inequality in society, and gender inequality is one. The phenomena of gender inequalities in educational achievement and the gendered character of the educational system have been some of the significant concerns of feminist struggles. The feminists have exposed the hidden agendas of various academic dogmas, policies, and practices. They not only focus on the unequal achievements of girls but also on areas of potential changes in the educational system, which teaches women 'to lose' through gendered curriculum and other such practices. The present paper attempts to explore some of the feminist underpinnings of gender inequalities reproduced through the educational system in society. This paper traces some major feminist perspectives about gender inequality in education and examines the feminist pedagogical propositions and their potential for transforming the prevalent deviances in the education system.

Keywords: Feminist, Feminism, Education, Inequality, Patriarchy, Pedagogy

Introduction

Social scientists have investigated the causality of different forms of inequalities reproduced through education and its social ramifications from different standpoints. The major insights on inequality through education have focused on reproductive models - the economic, cultural, and the hegemonic-state. The economic reproductive model has been mainly produced by Bowles and Gintis (1976), who focus on schooling as a producer of a skilled and compliant workforce for the capitalist economy. Bourdieu's (1973) cultural-reproductive model portrays education as a mediator in creating and legitimating dominant class culture. The hegemonic-state reproduction model by Giroux (1983) adopts Gramsci's understanding of the hegemonic state, which constantly performs the reproductive function in capitalist society through its intervention. All these inequality approaches, having primarily emerged from the dominant male worldviews, have grossly overlooked the phenomenon of gender inequality in educational and economic attainment. Therefore, the onus came on feminist scholars to expose the realities of gender inequalities in education.

Gender inequality is a universal phenomenon in contemporary society. It is evident in all cultures and forms – social, economic, cultural, and political. The accepted view is that expanding educational access to women will produce an equalizing effect in an unequal gendered society. However, contrary

to the established belief, education reproduces many forms of inequality in society, and gender inequality is one. The schools as leading cultural institutions are not genderless or gender surpassing. As Bourdieu (2002) observes:

The culture that is being delivered in the school system ... is still ceaselessly transmitting the timeworn way of thinking and the model, for example, of the Aristotelian tradition that makes the male as the positive element while the female as the negative element (quoted in Desheng, 2009).

Gender inequality in education has found significant exposition in feminists' perspective. The feminists contend that schools, as cultural institutions, not only reflect gender injustices that exist in society and reproduce these injustices through their practices and institutions. The phenomena of gender inequalities in educational achievement and the gendered character of the educational system have been some of the significant concerns of feminist struggles. The feminists have exposed the hidden agendas of various academic dogmas, policies, and practices. They not only focus on the unequal achievements of girls but also on areas of potential changes in the educational system, which teaches women 'to lose' through gendered curriculum and other such practices.

The present paper attempts to explore some of the feminist underpinnings of gender inequalities reproduced through the educational system in society. The paper has two sections. The first section will trace some major feminist perspectives about gender inequality in education. The second section will examine the feminist pedagogical propositions and their potential for transforming the prevalent deviances in the education system.

1. Feminism: Major Perspectives

'Feminism' is a highly contested term (Acker, 1987). Similarly, feminist theories have been highly complex and multidimensional constructs. Feminist theories have been the only source for understanding the phenomena of women's subordination to men and men's oppression of women, which have been perpetuated in societies through centuries. The feminists' commitment to explore strategies for women's liberation and empowerment has been a major guiding force for not only gender injustices but also for other forms of social injustices such as racial and sexual. The middle-range feminist theories have focused mainly on the aspects of gender relations in some specific sectors, such as education, family, or politics. It is undoubtedly a fact that the feminist theories perform a dual role - as guides to understanding social injustices in modern society and as directives for social action for emancipation and transformation.

Feminism is not a modern phenomenon. Even though the term has been of a recent origin, it has a long history. It is derived from the Latin word *Femina* (woman), reflecting the meaning 'having the quality of females.' It was first used in the 1890s, established by Rossi (1974) in her book review *Athenaeum*, published in 1895. However, it did not hint at the start of any woman's movement. Before the term feminism, 'womanism' was more commonly used to symbolize interest in gender equality issues. Women's equality issues have been present from the seventh century BC through the Middle Ages to the modern and even postmodern times. One can infer that there has been a distinctive feminist presence in human history (Weiner, 1997).

Feminist theories have adopted different interpretations of gender inequality and oppression in society. In addition, they have prescribed different action programs to deal with them. In 1987, Weiner and Arnot identified three significant perspectives on feminism that made a great impact on gender inequality perspectives: *liberal feminism* claiming equal rights for women, *Marxist/socialist feminism* identifying class, race, and gender structures and ideologies, and *radical feminism* bringing out the true character of patriarchal relations in the society. However, they have been criticized for marginalizing other prevailing feminist perspectives, such as black, gay, and postmodern. Some other feminist works have also categorized feminism. Measor and Sikes (1992) find four strands in feminism – liberal, radical, socialist, and psychoanalytic. Tong (1989) identifies seven forms of feminism which are liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, and postmodern feminisms. Weiner (1997) comments that feminism is a highly shifting amoeba-like concept, and Hooks (1982) calls it a ‘theory in the making’ as it is always open to newer possibilities of understanding. However, the three main feminist perspectives – liberal, radical, and socialist - cover effective forms of gender inequalities in society. Eisenstein (1984) very clearly encapsulates three strands of feminism.

Recent analysts seem to agree on the distinction between radical feminism, which holds that gender oppression is the oldest and most profound form of exploitation, which predates and underlies all other forms including those of race and class; and socialist feminism, which argues that class, race and gender oppression interact in a complex way, that class oppression stems from capitalism, and that capitalism must be eliminated for women to be liberated. Both of these, in turn, would be distinguished from a liberal or bourgeois feminist view, which would argue that women’s liberation can be fully achieved without any major alterations to the economic and political structures of contemporary capitalist democracies (quoted in Acker, 1987).

Gaby Weiner (1997) traces the development of feminists’ perspective. The feminist movement came into existence in two historical waves: the first wave, in the nineteenth century, stretching through the first two decades of the twentieth century—the second wave, which was from the late 1960s until 1990, and the third wave after that. However, the third wave of feminism arose as a response to the failure of the second wave. It has different engagements, which emphasize diversity and differences. Our concern is to understand the feminist perspectives on gender inequality in education, which have been the major struggles of the first and second waves of feminism.

The first wave of the feminist movement has been associated with the emergence of liberal individualism and Protestantism of the enlightenment era (late eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century). The ideas of natural rights, justice, and democracy emerged and prevailed during this period. The concerns of women were addressed by extending legal, political, and employment rights to middle-class women. Liberal feminism has been the most accepted paradigm of feminist perspectives, which asserts that individual women shall be free as men to determine their social, political, and educational roles. Equal rights and opportunities shall be extended without any discrimination. Access to education for all is the fundamental demand of liberal feminists, which democratic reforms can achieve without any revolutionary changes in economic, political, or cultural life (Weiner, 1997).

The second wave of women's movement emerged in the USA in the 1960s under political 'new' Left movements - the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam war movements. A group of disillusioned women deeply distressed with the male dominance in the democratic political system and their so-called egalitarian practices organized their autonomous movements for liberating women. Their ideas came from the perspective of radical feminism. They adopted the concept of 'patriarchy' to unearth the principles of underlying women's oppression in society. The idea of patriarchy had become highly crucial to radical feminists. As Humm (1989) pointed out, 'feminism needed a term by which the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations that affect women could be expressed' (quoted in Weiner, 1997). The second presupposition of radical feminism has been that women's oppression is a universal phenomenon, and if men suppress all women, women become the oppressed class. Some radical writings attributed the distinction between males and females to biological realities, thus relating women to nature while men are related to culture and civilization. The third central assumption of radical feminism has been that it is because of male dominance, women have to focus on women-oriented education known as 'conscious-raising,' which Weiner describes as the means of sharing information about female experience and was used as means of education for women in the absence of comprehensive knowledge-base on women (Weiner, 1997). During the 1970s, the radical feminist second wave dominated the Western world, and many women-centric issues got prominence. The need was felt to create a knowledge base with women-focused studies. As Mitchell (1986) writes:

One of the most striking features of women's liberation and radical feminism was their recourse to a new language – the language of liberation rather than emancipation, of collectivism rather than individualism (quoted in Weiner, 1997)

However, by the end of the 1970s, newer feminist perspectives emerged that challenged the authority of radical and liberal feminism. The socialist/Marxist feminist perspective began to surface, which Juliet Mitchell articulated within the British Left. It focused on the issues of women's position in the labor market, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization. Later, it also incorporated the ideas of patriarchal forms of women's oppression into its classic Marxian fold. Socialist feminism claims that gender and class are inevitably drawn together within capitalism. MacDonald (1981) comments:

Both class relations and gender relations, while they exist within their own histories, can nevertheless be so closely interwoven that it is theoretically very difficult to draw them apart within specific historic conjunctures. The development of capitalism is one such conjuncture where one finds patriarchal relation of dominance and control over women buttressing the structure of class domination (quoted in Weiner, 1997).

The socialist form of feminism had greater explanatory power than the radical form. However, it could not draw much support from women as socialist feminism, under the Marxist influence, became more concerned with theoretical sophistication rather than emancipatory engagements.

These three major feminist paradigms – liberal, radical, and socialist - have not been without shortcomings. Liberal feminism has been criticized for protecting elitism and maintaining the status quo. Its policy suggestions have further marginalized women as the structures of oppression have been left unchanged. O' Brien (1983) criticizes liberal feminists for converting the concept of equality of outcomes to equality of opportunity. The radical feminist paradigm has been criticized for

institutionalizing sex differences by celebrating women's extraordinary capacity for nurture, cooperation, and affective attachment to peace while men's persistent attachment to aggression. Eisentein (1984) criticizes the radical feminists' tendencies that imply female physiological superiority, relegate rationality and logic as devices of men, and constantly portray women as victims of evil men. Socialist feminism has been criticized by the radicals who find that socialist feminists are keen to ally with men. MacKinnon (1982) remarks that the socialists' focus on capitalism fails to do justice to the myriad ways men hold power over women through control of sexuality and the threat of violence. These three traditional perspectives of feminism have been criticized for upholding the causes of Western white middle-class women. They have grossly neglected other forms of women's oppression and struggles under racism and imperialism, and sexism in different contexts. After mapping the perspectives of three significant feminisms engaged with gender inequality, examining their engagement with gender inequalities in the modern education system becomes pertinent.

Feminism and Education

All three feminisms – liberal, socialist, and radical – have provided significant insights into gender inequality in education.

The liberal feminist perspective on education advocates equal opportunities for schooling for the sexes. Its major commitment is to eradicate the barriers that hamper girls from realizing their full potential at all levels – family settings, school, or workplace. However, their demands for equal treatment provisions have never resulted in comparable outcomes. Girls have always been at a loss from the start through prior socialization practices that ensure initial differences in competence or interest in a given subject. The scholarship under this perspective focuses mainly on the issues of equal opportunities, socialization, sex stereotyping, and sex discrimination in educational attainment. Theorists under this approach establish that the schools have failed to provide equal opportunities to both sexes; institutions, such as family, school, and media, socialize males and females differently into traditional mindsets that impede girls' future occupational and family roles. These studies find schooling a major source of sex stereotyping through sexual biases in curricular material and teaching practices. In addition, liberal feminist works find socialization practices as the major determinants of the rules of interpersonal relationships where females are viewed as dependent and caregivers under their affective qualities. One of the major works under this paradigm is by Rendel (1980), whose work on British academics demonstrates that women are only 14% of the university teachers and disappearing rapidly in the upper grades to less than 2% of professors. She argues that it is improbable due to women's limitations (Acker, 1987). In another work, Whyte et al. (1985) merge all three themes of liberals. Teachers' attitudes contribute to school sex-stereotyped subject choices, eventually leading to sex-stereotyped occupations for school leavers.

The liberal feminists' educational reform strategies include evolving changes in socialization practices, attitudes of people, and enforcing government legislation. It emphasizes reforming texts, practices, and state policies toward education. The strength of the liberal perspective lies in its documenting the biases and distortions of texts and the sexism that underlies such practices as course and career counseling for girls and boys. Classroom ethnographies and textbook analyses have emerged from this tradition (Weiler, 2003).

However, liberal feminist perspectives on education have been severely criticized for their indeterminate features. Its exclusive focus on books and institutional structures has narrowed its application to broader contexts. It is criticized for its implicit assumption that the inequalities of gender exist only in the texts, practices, ideas, and mindset. If the texts, school practices, ideas, and mentalities are changed, the social relationships of boys and girls will become equal. This approach fails to see the underlying social, economic, and political power structures involved in the structure and functioning of the schools. It also ignores the constraints of the material world, various forms of power, dominations, complexities of human consciousness, and the nature of ideologies and culture. Liberal feminists greatly ignore the depth of sexism in power relationships and the relation of gender with class. Arnot (1982) pointedly comments:

This literature does not search too deeply into the class basis or inequality of opportunity which boys suffer... The implication then appears to be that girls should match the class differentials of educational achievement and access to occupations which boys experience. Equality of opportunity in this context therefore appears to mean similar class-based inequalities of opportunity for both men and women or, one could say, equal oppression. (quoted in Weiler, 2003).

The radical feminist perspective covers two major themes in education: the male dominance of knowledge and culture; and the sexual politics of everyday life in schools. Spender (1980), a prominent radical advocate of male domination in the field of knowledge, argues that what ‘we know’ is dangerously deficient, for it is the record of decisions and activities of men, presented in the guise of human *knowledge*. Despite female resistance, women’s contributions and understandings have been ignored or disparaged for centuries. She uncovers the logic of male dominance, the school’s contributions, and how gatekeeping processes silence women and allow men to dominate decision-making in educational and other contexts. In addition, she sees language as a male agent in controlling how women conceptualize themselves and their world (Acker, 1987). Spender (1982) has also worked on the theme of sexual politics in everyday schooling. She uncovers two underlying processes: teachers’ unequal attention in schools to both sex advantages boys moreover girls, and potential mixed advantages of single-sex schooling. Radical feminist scholarship on education has exposed many such sexist practices in the schools and made it a major area to be explored by education sociologists. Weiner (1986) points out that radical feminists have successfully legitimated discussions of sexuality and sexual harassment in schools, the topics that were formerly ignored. The significant contribution of the feminist radicals in the field of education has been the agenda-setting for women’s issues and making them the central concerns. The Women Studies Movement in higher education has commenced under the impact of radical-feminist analysis of knowledge. Their insights set the pace for reform actions such as revising curricula, texts, pedagogical changes, single-sex schools, and colleges to make education non-hierarchical, less competitive, and participatory.

Radical feminist approaches are more popular as they avoid the dullness of liberal-feminist research and the cloudiness of socialist feminist works. However, it has its share of the dark side too. Middleton (1984) criticizes radical feminism for being the least articulated of the three perspectives, as it is descriptive rather than explanatory. Radicals contest this by revealing the apparent explanation in their outlook – the universality of patriarchy or male dominance – and the male power and control over women is not simply ideological but the material (Acker, 1987). The radicals have also been

accused of biological reductionism or essentialism and for using generalizations such as (all) men and (all) women ignoring the diversity of class, race, nationality, or age. Mahony (1985) has countered the accusation of reductionism by constructing the term ‘social maleness’, but her said usage traps her into the fold of the socialization approach, which is flawed in defending claims such as men are bad because they have learned to be that way (Acker, 1987).

The socialist feminist perspective about gender inequality in education has been greatly inspired by neo-Marxist understandings within the sociology of education. It locates the role of education in reproducing gender divisions and enforcing resistance attitudes among females within capitalism. Their first assumption under the socialist feminist reproduction framework is that schooling is deeply connected to the class structure and economic system of capitalism that determines the modalities of the relationship between women’s schooling and women’s work. The second assumption is that capitalism and patriarchy are interrelated and reinforce each other. Socialist feminism asserts that both men and women exist in interconnected and overlapping relationships of gender, class, and race (Weiler, 2003). The scholarship under this approach has been preoccupied with analyzing how schooling, by various mechanisms, reproduces class divisions within the workforce. It claims that schools function as potent instruments in perpetuating sexual inequalities in the family and the workplace. The basic assumption behind this paradigm is that women’s oppression in paid work and domestic work is reproduced through what happens in the schools. Thus, women’s inferior position in the economy is tied to sexist texts and discriminatory practices in schools. Arnot (1982) asserts that socialist feminism brings out ‘the diversity of class experience and the nature of class hegemony in education. AnnMarie Wolpe (1978) is one of the earliest socialist feminists who strongly attacks the so-called ‘stratification’ theories, which look at women’s position as the result of innate psychological differences such as lack of aggression, excessive anxiety, or orientation toward ‘intrinsic’ rewards such as nurturing relationship. She further adds that such interpretations fail to recognize the powerful forces of the capitalist economy with its need for unpaid domestic work and the reserve army of labor. Wolpe’s work depicts schools as the mechanism for reproducing women who will accept their role as workers in paid and unpaid work. She writes:

I want to consider the educational system first as a mechanism of *reproduction* of “agents” in the sense that it operates, more or less successfully, to qualify them both “technically” and ideologically; and second, as a mediating agency in the allocation of agents into division of labour” (quoted in Weiler, 2003).

One of the influential theorists under this approach, Madeleine Arnot (1982), has used Gramsci’s concept of hegemony instead of reproduction. She writes:

By putting the concept of hegemony, rather than “reproduction” at the fore of an analysis of class and gender, it is less easy in research to forget the active nature of learning process, the existence of dialectical relations, power struggles, and points of conflict, the range of alternative practices which may exist inside, or exist outside and be brought into the school. (cited in Weiler, 2003).

The most overt exposition of women’s lived experiences in schools and outside has come from the resistance approach under socialist feminism. This approach rejects the conventional resistance

perspective to describe public counter-school or antisocial actions. For socialist feminists, resistance has different meanings for boys and girls, arguing that girls 'resistance' can only be understood with gender and class position (Weiler, 2003). They insist that women and men negotiate social forces and possibilities to meet their needs. However, as women are doubly oppressed by sexism and class, the form of resistance will significantly differ from that of men. In addition, schooling has a different meaning of resistance for girls than for boys of a similar class or race. Gaskell (1985) remarks:

Schools, operating in their traditional function, do not simply reproduce sex-stereotypes or confirm girls in subordinate positions. Certainly, they do that much of the time. But they have also long been a vehicle for women who wish to construct their own intellectual lives and careers. (cited in Weiler, 2003).

The major works on women's resistance have been undertaken by McRobbie (1978) and her associates in England and Thomas (1980) in Australia. McRobbie worked with 16-18-year-old girls at Birmingham youth club for six months while Thomas studied two groups of antischool and antiacademic girls – one group from the middle-class and the other from the working-class school – for an academic year. Both McRobbie and Thomas started their study with an awareness of the dual oppression of working-class girls through capitalism and patriarchy. They examined the gender-specific nature of their oppression and their resistance by focusing on their private and domestic world of sexuality, family, and the public world of street and paid work. Both studies found that the girls rejected school values of propriety and behavior by challenging the dominant views of what 'proper girls' should be like by asserting the value of sexuality in sites where it was not appropriate (Weiler, 2003). The works of resistance under the socialist feminism framework have provided valuable insights by establishing that people constantly negotiate to understand their life situations and resist oppression. The theorists under this approach have demonstrated that the ability to fight and understand one's status in society is often constrained by class, race, and gender. Also, they have revealed that the acts of resistance may lead to deeper forms of domination as Willis's lads end up celebrating masculinity defined by sexism and racism. Likewise, McRobbie's and Thomas's girls' rejection of school ideology leads them to express their sexuality, which throws them back to the oppressive sexism of working-class culture (Weiler, 2003).

It has been contested that the socialist feminist understanding has a limited role in prescribing actions for changes in the educational structure and practices compared to other feminist perspectives. Weiner points out that socialist feminists' analyses have been theoretical rather than classroom-oriented. Acker (1997) defends the socialists' position by arguing that theorizing itself can be regarded as a strategy, which calls for attention to the role of schooling in mediating and reproducing gender, class, and other divisions. However, all feminist perspectives accept the idea that to bring substantive changes in gender inequality, the ways must be evolved to communicate with teachers. To understand the role of feminists teacher in redressing gender inequalities in society, the feminists' pedagogical underpinnings must be explored. The feminist pedagogy seems to have far-reaching implications for transforming the traditional ways of teaching, teacher-student relationship, and the forms of knowledge creation.

2. Feminist Pedagogy

Feminist pedagogy seems to have enormous possibilities for counter-hegemonic transformation of society. It has the potential to create a self-conscious analysis of a situation, develop collective practices, and organize resistance against the hegemonic social order. The feminists assign a gigantic job to teachers to recognize the inherent potential of social transformation in teaching, as Connell (1985) remarks:

The doctrine that tells teachers the schools are captive to capitalism and exhorts them to get on with the revolution outside, could not be more mistaken; it is teachers' work as teachers that is central to the remaking of the social patterns investing education (quoted in Wieler, 2003).

Feminist scholars have asserted that schools provide the sites for feminist teachers to raise gender discrimination and sexism issues. Schools can become fitting locations to initiate women's movement through girls' action. Schools can also provide suitable platforms to open discussions on emancipatory and transformative strategies. In this way, teachers and students together can contribute to building alternative forms of rationality under feminist pedagogy. Feminist pedagogy ultimately seeks a transformation of the society that can be achieved through classroom interactions that foster empowerment, community, and leadership (Shrewsbury, 1987).

The feminist pedagogy starts with the belief that all knowledge produced by the male is essentially based upon 'gendered' human experiences. It not only emphasizes gender justice but also seeks to remove oppressions inherent in the genderedness of all social relations in the social institutions and structures. In its objective to empower women, feminist pedagogy suggests that women will have to learn to bring out 'women's way of knowing that is knowledge based on their subjectivities, truths, and experiences. They should not simply become adding-on agents of the male-directed academic world. In creating knowledge, the feminist pedagogy rejects the scientific rational paradigm and advocates for the constructionist framework. It will facilitate the emergence of multiple respected realities without being compared or judged as superior or inferior forms of understanding. Hence under feminist pedagogy, the primary objective of knowledge creation becomes, as Maher (1987) asserts, 'a tapestry, not an umbrella, in which given perspectives and experiences are seen as equally valid, partial and subject to elucidation by comparison with each other' (quoted in Sandell, 1991).

Feminist pedagogy starts with a vision of education, which does not exist. Shrewsbury (1987) captures the vision of feminist pedagogy that encompasses the classroom 'as a liberatory environment in which teacher-student and student-teacher, act as a subject, not as objects.' The liberatory classroom is built on the experiences of the participants (teacher and students) actively involved through a democratic process in which at least some power is shared. Feminist pedagogy endorses the ideas of Paulo Freire and John Dewey, who promote the involvement of students in constructing and evaluating their system of education. It asserts that each student has a natural right and potential contribution to the subject matter. It advocates for student-centered as opposed to teacher-based knowledge and experience. In its being passionate about democratic values, feminist pedagogy differs from the authoritarian banking model and the adversarial doubting model in education that fosters alienation rather than the connection of women (Sandell, 1991).

The feminist pedagogical prescriptions for evolving changes in the presentation of the subject matter, roles of teacher and student, and the class structure have far-reaching promises for the present-day education system. Its prescription for changes in the presentation of subject matter necessitates a connection between theory, research, and the presenters' (teacher or student) own reflexivity and subjectivity. This will significantly liberate individual minds and empower them. In teacher-student relations, the preferred approach is to see students as 'experts using the 'self-as-inquirer' framework (Sandell, 1991). Maher (1985) furthers this point by arguing that teachers would ask students not only to answer questions but also to pose them; to become creators and constructors, and learners of knowledge. In Sandell's words, the teacher will function as a 'simultaneous translator,' who interprets multiple perspectives and operate as both a facilitator and a communicative role model for students to emulate (Sandell, 1991).

Feminist pedagogy has been endorsed for its emancipatory and transformative potential for society's marginalized and exploited sections. It brings rich insights into the discipline by introducing the concept of reflexivity into social analysis and identifying routes for social action. However, critics find feminist pedagogy more effective in critiquing than identifying action and change strategies. Based on the Freirean principle of 'education as conscientization, feminist pedagogy assumes that teachers and students can become agents of transformative change. The critics find that feminists, in adopting Freirean thesis, have significantly failed to consider the cultural and political arrangement of relationships within which Freire's thesis emerged. It has ignored the required trade-off between politics and policy to bring changes in other contexts. In addition, feminist pedagogy is charged for over-simplifying the power relations within education. It fails to take the holistic view of the education system, as transformative education cannot occur unless other educational subsystems, including curriculum structures, management structures, organization systems, teacher education, and state action, are simultaneously changed. This feature leads Lynch (2005) to remark that the feminist pedagogy is silent about the interface of pedagogical practices with other systems – politico-economic or subsystems within the education system – in effecting change.

When feminist pedagogy is compared with the traditional mainstream scientific education, it appears fragile. Still, it can potentially expose the underlying gender prejudices concealed in the traditional science-based mainstream education model. The feminist pedagogy should not be taken as vengeance against the male-dominated knowledge world. Its underpinnings reflect the necessities of the human education system, which perhaps have been overlooked under the dominant male cognitive arrogance. The greatest need for the modern education system is to search for new forms of knowledge creation that incorporate female sensitivities, cognition, experience, and understanding. The strategies for fostering gender equality in educational institutions should be the prime priority as Wollstonecraft has rightly reasoned 'if half of the human beings are doomed to sink into the abyss, then, even though morality is based on the rock, it is still unstable because they will constantly erode its base by fatuity and arrogance' (quoted in Desheng, 2009).

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