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## **Practicing Feminist Pedagogical Approach in Pakistani Literature Classroom: Possibilities and Challenges**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The current pedagogical approaches prevalent in Pakistan are largely teacher-centered which do not encourage students as active learners in the teaching-learning processes. The current study attempts to explore the effectiveness of feminist pedagogical approach for the enhancement of critical skills of students of literature by utilizing contemporary Pakistani Anglophone fiction as a pedagogical tool. The novels selected for the current study include Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy Man and Kamila Shamsie's Broken Verses. The feminist pedagogical approach emphasizes the active participation of the learners, and the revision of the entire teaching-learning paradigm from a feminist standpoint. Furthermore, it also insists on the inclusion of marginal perspectives as a significant means of knowledge – making through interaction, collaboration, and negotiation (hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1988; Gore 1991; Mohanty, 1991). Using feminist pedagogical approach's conceptual framework, a mixed-method approach comprising of a quantitative and qualitative phase was used for the current study. Four normally distributed classes of BS (English) and MA, (English) in the Department of English, Female Campus (IIUI) were selected for the current study. A pretest, posttest design was used, and the students of the experimental groups were taught according to feminist pedagogical approach whereas the students of the control groups were taught according to the traditional lecture method for a period of three months. The results of the pretest posttest of the experimental groups and the control groups were analyzed using t-test to measure the impact of the treatment. The students were also assigned reflective journals for the entire treatment period and at the end of the experiment, semi-structured interviews were conducted to further understand the impact of feminist pedagogical approach. Findings of the pretest posttest data and students' reflective journals and interviews show that the experimental groups performed better than the control groups, in terms of enhanced critical skills, increased collaboration, improved relationship with the teacher and increased respect for diverse*

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*perspectives. Henceforth, this paper argues that feminist pedagogical approach as an alternative instructional model can become an important means to develop critical skills of young learners and make them agents of positive social transformation.*

**Keywords:** *feminist pedagogy, critical/reflective skills, teacher's authority, collaborative learning environment, community building, social justice*

## **Teaching Practices in Pakistani Classroom**

Teaching practices predominantly widespread in Pakistani classrooms are teacher-centered whereby students do not get the opportunity to become actively involved in the classroom processes. The teachers even at the higher academic settings such as universities, largely adhere to lecture method or "banking model" of education, in Freirean terms (Freire, 1970). The "transmission style teaching" and "memory-oriented assessment system" make students passive recipient of the information and they are accustomed to reproducing the same information in their exams, according to Siddiqui (2016:29). In a like vein, Hoodbhoy (2009) also ascertains that the teaching methodologies prevalent in Pakistan's higher academic settings are outdated and do not encourage active critical reflection on the part of the learners. He vehemently criticizes the obsolete pedagogies and emphasizes the need to inculcate the "spirit of healthy questioning" among the students, to make Pakistan's education system at par with the modern mindset (587). Similarly, other research studies also indicate that the current teaching practices in Pakistan are not student-centered due to which students remain disinterested in their classroom learning and consider it irrelevant to their actual socio-cultural realities (Ahmad et. al., 2014; Tarar, 2006).

The pedagogical approach mostly employed for teaching of English literature in majority of Pakistani universities and colleges is also teacher-centered and lecture method is used in the classroom (Yaqoob, 2010). Although literature could be used effectively as an important tool to make students analyze and understand various socio-cultural and political hegemonies, however, it is not the case in Pakistani universities. In this paper, we argue that feminist pedagogical approach could be employed as an alternative instructional model to teach Pakistani Anglophone women's fiction in the university settings as it provides a rich resource to enable female learners to understand the imbalanced socio-cultural structures in general, and the oppressive patriarchal patterns in particular. Regarding the significance of women's fiction, Mohanty (1991) argues that women's fiction, narratives and testimonios could be important means to understand the peripheral perspectives which could help to deconstruct the meta-narratives. Similarly, Yaqoob (2015) also argues that contemporary Pakistani women's fiction is significant as it particularly focuses on the denial of rights to women and therefore it can "bring about such consciousness whereby women should be

able to analyze their situation" (5). In this paper, we argue, that feminist pedagogical approach can be employed in Pakistan's university settings by using Pakistani women's fiction as an effective tool to enhance female learners critical/reflective skills so that they could learn to analyze and deconstruct various socio-cultural hierarchies through dialogue and create a collaborative learning environment which emphasizes the inclusion of different voices and perspectives to make the classroom learning an egalitarian experience for all the learners. Classroom learning, it is argued, could become an effective means to enable students to become active agents of sustainable social transformation for the establishment of a more inclusive, equitable, and just social order.

### **Significance of the Study**

Feminist pedagogical approach has been widely employed globally in different disciplines such as sociology, gender studies, anthropology, language learning, music, and history etc. to evaluate its effectiveness. However, any research has not been conducted in Pakistan whereby feminist pedagogical approach is used as an instructional model in the literature classroom in university settings to evaluate its effectiveness. This study is therefore significant, since such a research has not been carried out in our context. This research could also be significantly used by researchers, educational policymakers, teachers, and teacher-trainers etc.

### **Conceptual Framework: Feminist Pedagogical Approach and its Core Principles**

The feminist movement in the 1960s paved way for the establishment of Gender and Women Studies departments in many European and American universities. Consequently, different pedagogies were used for teaching which gradually resulted in feminist approach to teaching. There are different perspectives regarding the origin and evolution of feminist pedagogy. It is believed to have been inspired by diverse traditions such as women's consciousness-raising groups in 1960s, Deweyan educational philosophy and Paulo Freire's liberatory pedagogy etc. (Maher & Tetreault, 2001:3). Many of the feminist pedagogues draw their inspiration from Freirean pedagogy or critical pedagogy such as bell hooks (1994), Weiler (2001), Gur-Ze'ev (2005) and Chandra Mohanty (1991) etc. though not uncritically.

As far as the definition of feminist pedagogy is concerned, different scholars have given different definitions, since it is believed that there are as many feminist pedagogies as there are feminist classrooms. However, feminist pedagogical approach is primarily concerned with women as learners and their role in the entire teaching learning paradigm, a right which has been denied to them in the respected house of academia. It provides an alternative approach to teaching by placing women at the center of its inquiry with the aim to introduce such a pedagogical approach that transforms the

academic settings from a feminist perspective. Elizabeth J. Tisdell (1992) has discussed the psychological, structural, and post-structural models of feminist pedagogy. While psychological models insist on psychological safety of women learners, and structural models discuss the over-arching role of structures in academic settings, post-structural models move beyond both psychological and structural models and add complexities to the different dimensions of the feminist pedagogical approach. For the current research, we draw upon both structural as well poststructural models of bell hooks (2010), Weiler (2001), Gore (1990), Lather (1991) and Mohanty (1991) which guided our classroom practice.

There are no text-book ways or specific classroom recipes to practice feminist pedagogical approach, however, there are certain core principles that have been discussed by different feminist scholars (hooks; 1994, 2010; Weiler, 1988, 2001; Rathgen, 1996; Light et.al, 2015; Hrepich; 2015; Pujari; 2017; Bailey, 2017). Following are the core principles of the feminist pedagogical approach.

1. Critical Reflection
2. Teacher's Authority
3. Personal Experience as a Source of Knowledge
4. Dialogue
5. Collaboration and Community Building

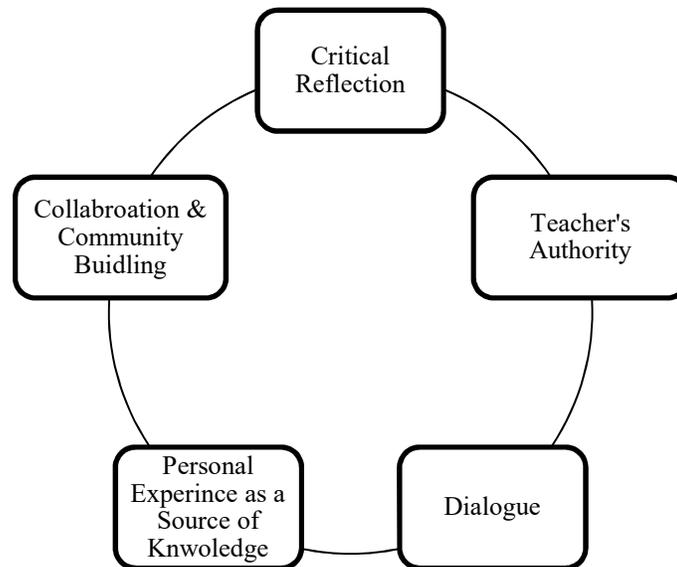


Figure 1: Feminist Pedagogical Approach: Core Principles

The detail of feminist pedagogical paradigms is discussed below:

### **1. Critical Reflection**

Teaching against the grain/critical reflection is at the core of feminist pedagogical approach like critical pedagogy (hooks, 1994; Mohanty, 1991; Weiler, 2001; Rathgen, 1996; Gore, 1991; Lather, 1992). For Freire (1970), “conscientização” (conscientization) which is generally translated as ‘critical consciousness’ and defined as human beings’ ability to “perceive social, political, and economic contradictions” to critically intervene into their situation in order to transform it which determines their humanization or subjectivity (p. 19). According to Weiler (2001), it is “coming to a consciousness of oppression” with the vision to devise strategies to end that oppression (p. 454). Different feminist pedagogues have also highlighted the importance of critical reflection in the classroom whereby students are taught to reflect on their lived experiences in order to understand the varied dominant discourses and oppressive hierarchies that shape their worldview (hooks, 1994; Weiler, 2001; Mohanty, 1991; Lather, 1992; Hanson, 2009; Pujari, 2017). Strategies such as problem-posing, revolving interrogation, and self-reflexivity etc. have been proposed by different feminist pedagogues (hooks, 2010; Rathgen, 1996; Light et.al. 2015). These strategies prove helpful in enhancing the critical/reflective skills of the learners.

### **2. Teacher’s Authority**

The feminist pedagogical approach particularly emphasizes the development of a more egalitarian relationship among the teacher and the learners although it is fraught with numerous challenges (hooks, 1994, 2011; Weiler 1988; Light et.al, 2015). Instead of exercising ‘power-over’ the students, sharing ‘power-with’ the students is a strategy proposed by Jennifer Gore (1990:125). The feminist pedagogical approach considers it important to create a more egalitarian environment in the classroom whereby the power of the teacher is recognized, named, and shared by the students. Certain techniques have been suggested by different scholars such as changes in the seating arrangement, pair and group formation, collective decision-making and calling the teachers by their name etc. to create an inclusive and democratic classroom environment (Manicom, 1992; Crabtree & Sapp, 2003). Different research studies ascertain that an egalitarian classroom environment enables learners to become active participants in the learning processes. For the current research, different strategies such as changed seating arrangement, pair/group work, inclusion of all voices and collective decision making etc. were employed to share the power-with-the students, which helped create a democratic learning environment.

### **3. Personal Experience**

The epistemological validity of women’s experiences is one of the important aspects of feminist pedagogical approach (Light et.al, 2015; Crabtree & Sapp, 2003). Building upon Beauvoir (1972)’s famous slogan of personal is political, women’s consciousness-raising groups gave particular attention to women’s

experiences to understand patriarchal structures. Since women and other marginal groups have been historically excluded from knowledge production, so feminist pedagogues also lay emphasis on marginal experiences as a valid form of knowledge construction, though not uncritically (hooks, 2010; Weiler 1988; Bailey 2017). The learners, in feminist pedagogical approach, are considered as creators of knowledge and their perspectives are valued in the analysis of various hierarchal and oppressive structures (Manicom, 1992; hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1988; Lather, 1991; Mohanty, 1991). So feminist pedagogical approach enables the learners to critically engage with their personal stories and experiences to understand how experiences are constructed and how could they be deconstructed to understand various forms of oppressive structures. In the present study, lesson plans and worksheets were designed which specifically included activities that emphasized reflection on students' personal experiences. Such activities enabled learners to understand the constructedness of their own perspectives and henceforth the power and control of the hegemonic discourses.

#### **4. Dialogue**

Dialogic teaching forms the basis of feminist pedagogical approach. Like Freirean pedagogy, feminist teacher encourages the inclusion of all voices and perspectives since certain voices have been historically silenced and marginalized (hooks, 1994:185). Light et. al (2015) emphasize the need to introduce dialogue among the students, the teacher and the students, and among the students and the text, as it is the basic unit of learning. The concept of 'facilitated dialogue' has been suggested by different feminist pedagogues whereby the teacher mediates the dialogue and encourages all the students to take part in the class discussion to ensure that the socio-cultural hierarchies are not replicated in the classroom whereby some voices become more privileged than the others (hooks, 2010). Students, in this research, were encouraged to interact with each other, the text and the teacher and create an environment of democratic dialogue. The teacher's role in this regard was particularly significant, as her skillful facilitation helped enable all the voices to be included in the classroom discussion to avoid replication of socio-cultural hierarchies.

#### **5. Collaboration and Community Building**

The feminist pedagogical approach particularly emphasizes the creation of an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration within the classroom where different perspectives are heard and respected (Maher, 1981; hooks, 2011; Weiler, 1988; Light et. al, 2015; Bailey 2017). The teacher in a feminist classroom encourages the students to learn to agree to disagree and respect differing viewpoints to create an environment whereby pluralism and diversity is celebrated (Hrepich, 2015). This is not easy to achieve in any classroom where power relations and social hierarchies are at play. So, Manicom (1992), suggests that the teacher should work consciously to dismantle such hierarchies and make the learning environment more egalitarian where different perspectives could be

deconstructed and celebrated. According to Zhao (2010), a non-competitive learning environment would disrupt the hierarchical structures and enable learners to voice their opinions. This research particularly emphasized the creation of a non-competitive environment whereby students were encouraged to listen to and respect different perspectives and become more openminded and tolerant to build a community of learners who could devise collective action plans for social transformation.

### **Methodology: Mixed-Method Design**

Mixed-method design used for the present study comprised of two phases, i.e., a quantitative phase, and a qualitative phase. The quantitative phase included a survey and experiment whereas the qualitative phases comprised of reflective journals of students and semi-structured interviews. This design was used for the present study as it helps to cross-check the data gathered from different sources to validate the findings of the study (Cohen et. al 2007; Creswell, 2013). It also helps the researchers to gather the qualitative and quantitative data separately and then converge the findings during interpretation and feel more confident about the findings of the research.

### **Quantitative Phase**

#### **Survey**

In the quantitative phase, a survey was conducted to analyze the perception of students of Department of English (Female Campus) regarding the current teaching practices prevalent in the Department which helped us to take informed decision about our research. Using purposive sampling technique (Kalton, 1983), the students of Department of English were selected as the sample. After pilot study and the required revisions of the questionnaire, the survey was conducted in which 322 students participated. The survey was conducted to investigate students' perception regarding teaching method in practice, interpretation of the text, students' participation, reflection on the text, and assessment and evaluation etc.

The survey findings confirmed that lecture method was predominantly used in the Department to teach literature courses. An overwhelming majority, i.e., 83.6% students confirmed that lecture method is used for teaching. A similar percentage of students also consider their teachers to be the best authority on the subject. The survey findings also confirmed that majority of the students, 67.2% do not feel confident to take part in the class discussion, and 69.6% students also think that some of the students take more time to speak and participate in the class discussion as compared to others which shows that hierarchical structures are replicated in the academic settings whereby all the students do not get equal opportunity to participate in the class discussions. Similarly, 46.2% are of the view that their teachers do not encourage them to think critically about their course contents which

again implies that critical reflection is not encouraged among the students. As far as relating classroom materials to the real-life situations, is concerned, 46.9% students confirmed that their teachers do not relate classroom discussion to real life situations. So, the findings of the survey confirmed that lecture method is predominantly used for teaching, whereby critical thinking and students' perspectives are not encouraged in the classroom.

### **Quasi-Experimental – Pretest-Posttest Design**

Since a quasi-experimental design ensures realistic classroom settings whereby participants are not required to be selected randomly, so it was used to observe the impact of the treatment on the experimental group (Loewen & Plonsky, 2016). Similarly, a pretest, posttest design was used to analyze the impact of the treatment on the experimental groups. The pretest was conducted on all the groups at the start of the treatment and a posttest was conducted after the treatment. t-test was used to analyze the results of pretest and posttest and to measure the impact of feminist pedagogical approach.

### **Sample of the Experiment**

For this study, four normally distributed classes of BS (5<sup>th</sup> Term) section A and B, and MA (2<sup>nd</sup> Term) section A and B, were selected as random distribution was not possible. The classes had been divided at the start of their degree program in their first term, by the Department's office on the basis of International Islamic University's admission criteria.

All the classes were taught the selected fiction for a period of three months, i.e., twelve (12) weeks by the same teacher (one of the researchers). A coin test determined which sections would be assigned to the control groups and which sections would be assigned to the experimental groups. So, thirty (30) students of section A of BS (English) and twenty-eight (28) students of section A of MA (English) were assigned to the experimental groups and twenty-nine (29) students of section B of BS (English) and twenty-nine (29) students of MA were assigned to the control groups.

Before the treatment, a pilot study was carried out and on the basis of the pilot study, required revisions were made in the classroom activities and the time allocation of different activities. After the pilot study, the treatment procedure was started, and traditional lecture method was used to teach the students of the control groups whereas feminist pedagogical approach was used to teach the students of the experimental groups. The experiment continued for a period of three months, i.e., twelve (12) weeks.

### **Treatment Procedure: Worksheets and Classroom Activities**

The treatment procedure included preparation of lesson plans and worksheets according to the main principles of feminist pedagogical approach and the students of the experimental groups were taught through the lesson plans and worksheets for a period of three months (twelve weeks).

The areas which were focused in the worksheets included, explicit teaching, positioning of the participants, reflection on the text/course contents which was followed by reflection on the personal experiences of the learners to analyze the constructedness of learners' experiences which ultimately enabled them to analyze the larger hierarchal oppressive structures and devise possible action plans for social transformation.

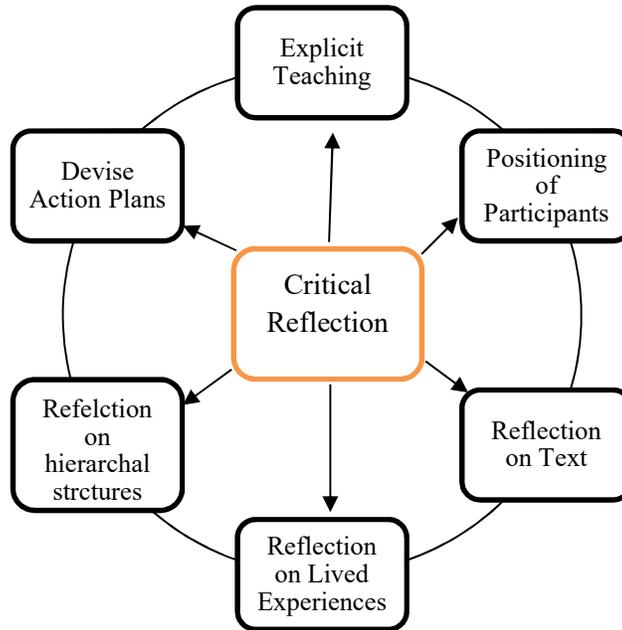


Figure 2: Critical Reflection Cycle

The strategies that were used for teaching the experimental groups were explicit teaching in which the students were involved in the entire learning process, i.e., course contents, teaching methodology and evaluation strategies etc. were discussed with the students. The students were encouraged to position themselves as equal partners in the learning process with the teacher and trust their potential to become producers of knowledge instead of being passive recipients of information. The critical reflection was introduced in different classroom activities which started with reflection on the text, to reflection on the experiences of the learners which was followed by reflection on the larger socio-cultural hierarchal structures. An important component of the worksheets was classroom activities which were specifically aimed to encourage learners to devise possible action plans for social change.

## **Qualitative Phase**

In the qualitative phase, students' reflective journals were analyzed and semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand students' perception regarding feminist pedagogical approach, its advantages and the challenges that they faced while studying through this particular approach.

During the experimental phase, students were guided to keep reflective journals and they were assigned to write reflective essays on the given topics along with the difficulties that they faced while studying according to the feminist pedagogical approach. The journals were checked by the teacher every week and the progress of the students was recorded by the researchers.

At the end of the experiment, the students of the experimental groups were interviewed in order to understand their perception of studying according to the feminist pedagogical approach. The interviews were encoded, and a thematic analysis of the interviews was done.

## **Analysis of Pretest, Posttest**

The analysis of the pretest and posttest results indicate that the students of the experimental groups of both BS and MA outperformed the control groups of these levels. In order to analyze the results of the pretest and posttest of the experimental and the control groups, t-test was used. The t-test is used to analyze if two means or proportions are equal or not. The SPSS for windows (version 21.0) which is the latest version, was used to process and analyze the data.

## **Results of t-test of Experimental Group of BS (English)**

In case of BS (English), the Mean of pretest is 49.2667 whereas for post-test it is 75.1000 which shows that the results improved to approximately 25% which is further clarified by the paired sample t-test. The relevant results for the paired t-test are  $t = -21.051$ , and  $p = 0.000$ ; i.e., which indicates a very small probability of this result occurring by chance. Since  $p < 0.05$  (in fact  $p = 0.000$ ) which indicates that intervention really made a difference (Field, 2009).

So it could be inferred that there is a strong evidence ( $t = -21.051$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) that the teaching intervention had an impact on the performance of the experimental group. In this data set, it improved marks, on average, by approximately 25 points which is clear from the Mean difference of -25.8333. Therefore, it could be concluded that the t-test proves that the intervention helped improve the performance of the experimental group as compared to the control group.

## **Results of t-test of Experimental Group of M.A (English)**

The t-test of the experimental group of M.A was also conducted, and the results show that the value of Mean also differed from 42.4286 of pre-test to 75.5 of Post-test which is statistically significant.

The relevant results for the paired t-test are  $t = -42.130$ , and  $p = 0.000$ ; i.e., which indicates that there is a very small probability of this result occurring by chance. Since  $p < 0.05$  (in fact  $p = 0.000$ ) which shows that intervention really made a difference (Field, 2009).

Thus, there is strong evidence ( $t = -42.130$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) that the teaching intervention improved the performance of the experimental group. In this data set, it improved marks, on average, by approximately 33 points which is clear from the Mean difference of -33.07. Therefore, the t-test indicates that intervention helped improve the performance of the experimental group as compared to the control group.

## **Analysis of Students' Reflective Journals**

As mentioned above, students of both experimental groups were guided to keep reflective journals. For reflective journals, they were given two assignments every week i.e., to write a reflective essay on a given topic and to write the challenges or problems faced in the class during that particular week. The students' reflective journals were analyzed at the end of the experiment.

The analysis of the students' journals shows that there is a gradual progress as far as their critical skills are concerned. The essays were less critical and more descriptive in the beginning, however, gradually, the critical analysis started improving which seems quite mature towards the end of the experimental phase. The students were assigned essays on topics which were relevant to the course content discussed in the particular week. So, they were given essays on topics such as "Women and Street Harassment", "Wages of Domestic Workers in Pakistan", "Intolerance in Pakistani Society: Causes and Solutions" etc. The essays were evaluated by the teacher and with detailed feedback to improve their essays. The maximum development in terms of critical analysis of different topics is seen in the last month of the experiment, i.e., the last four weeks of the experimental phase.

As far problems and challenges faced by the students during the experimental phase are concerned, the analysis of students' reflective journals show interesting developments with the passage of time. The challenges recorded in the earlier weeks of the experiment are more detailed as compared to the positive aspects of the feminist pedagogical approach. The students in the first couple of weeks write about the difficulties faced by them as far as circular seating arrangement, new group members, increased talk time, critical reflection on their lived experiences and hierarchal structures are concerned. They

specifically highlight the problems they faced while devising action plans of different problems due to different viewpoints of the group members. The students of both the experimental groups wrote about the difficulties faced by them in the first few weeks such as Ep3, Ep9, Ep12, Ep24, Ep27, Mp3, Mp5, Mp11, Mp16, Mp23, Mp28 and Mp29. However, it is interesting to note that after the third week, there is considerable increase in the positive remarks of the same students regarding seating arrangement, group work, talk time, and different critical reflection exercises etc. which shows that students took some time to get adjusted to the new pedagogical approach, which was student-centered and encouraged their active involvement in the classroom, but as the time passed, they gradually showed increased satisfaction with the alternative instructional approach. The detailed responses of the students in the analysis of the semi-structured interviews further clarifies their perspectives regarding the feminist pedagogical approach.

### **Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews**

At the completion of the experimental phase, the students of experimental groups were interviewed to have an in-depth understanding of their experience of studying through feminist pedagogical approach. The data gathered through the interviews was coded and categorized into different themes. The following themes emerged from the data gathered.

1. Egalitarian Classroom Environment
2. Development of Students' Critical Skills
3. Critical Reflection on Personal Experience
4. Dialogic Classroom
5. Community Building
6. Social Action Plans and Strategies
7. Challenges and Limitations

The analysis of the responses of different participants is given below.

- As far as development of an egalitarian relationship between the teacher and the learners is concerned, it was quite challenging for the students in the beginning of the experiment. A student Ep 9 said, "I felt uncomfortable at the start of the course that the teacher was not giving lecture and was asking us to give our interpretation of the text". However, many respondents agreed that gradually they started getting adjusted to the transformed role of the teacher and found it "exciting" (Ep7) and "interesting to have the attention towards us" (Mp27). So, the respondents discussed in detail their initial reluctance with the transformed role of the teacher, and their gradual adjustment with the new roles in the classroom activities.
- The data gathered through the interviews indicates that different classroom activities helped students to enhance their reflective/critical

skills. Many of them frankly discussed, that previously they completely relied on teacher's interpretation of the text, took notes, and reproduced it in the final exams. For instance, Ep6 said that they are so used to the lecture method that they do not "think about any other possible interpretation of the text". Another respondent admitted that there were so many student-centered activities in the classroom that she had to make an extra effort as she "has never been so active during the lectures" (Mp27). Another student Ep22 said that it had been an important learning experience for her to study through this approach as it helped her "acquire knowledge by using critical thinking in the class". So, the respondents expressed their satisfaction with the nature of the classroom activities which enabled them to enhance their critical/reflective skills.

- Regarding using their personal experience as a source of reflection, the interview participants discussed their initial hesitation to discuss their personal lives in the classroom. However, with the passage of time, with increased collaboration among the class members and with the teacher, they started to feel more comfortable to share and analyze their personal stories in the classroom. For instance, Ep1 said that "for me the best part of the class activities was when I used to reflect on my personal experiences". Another one reported that "we learnt how to relate textual events to our personal lives which was helpful in understanding how we are actually controlled by different ideologies" (Ep21). Additionally, however, a student informed that the critical reflection had added a critical lens to her thinking due to which she said, "I learnt about various kinds of oppressive structures that exist in my society and it depresses me to become aware of such inequalities" (Mp15). So majority of the students expressed their satisfaction as far as enhancement of critical skill through reflection on personal experience is concerned.
- The analysis of the interviews indicates that participants were satisfied with the introduction of dialogue in the classroom. The feminist pedagogical approach, they reported, had given them the opportunity to express themselves in the classroom where all perspectives were heard and respected. A participant Mp9 shared that she had never shared her perspective before in the classroom because she thought it was "so irrelevant and everybody will laugh at me if I share it with others". However, the nature of activities, the learning environment and "continuous encouragement from the teacher", she said, enabled her to overcome her hesitation and she felt confident to express her opinion in the class. Another student, Ep22 said, that if she had been taught in the school through this approach, "I would have been a more confident individual". So, the respondents overall, expressed their satisfaction as far as the introduction of dialogue in the classroom is concerned.
- The development of collaboration among the learners also proved effective in the enhancement of their confidence in themselves to become active equal partners in the classroom processes, according to many of the participants. The group work and working with new group members in a non-competitive environment, enabled them to understand the

significance of collaboration and community building. One of the respondents said that in this course she understood that “if you are guided to cooperate instead of compete, the classroom dynamics transform completely and becomes more comfortable for all the participants” (Mp15). Other respondents also expressed their satisfaction with the classroom activities which involved collective group work where all viewpoints were given due consideration and everybody used to get a chance to share their opinion (Ep9, Ep21, Ep28, Mp7, Mp8, Mp11, Mp23).

- Devising action plans, according to some of the respondents, was the most challenging part of the worksheets as different group members came up with different solutions to the same problem. It was a gradual process for them to learn to listen to different solutions and then devise a collective strategy or action plan. For instance, EP23 said that in this course they “started learning how to devise action plans that were practically doable”. Another said, “My perspective was heard and discussed in the classroom which gave me immense happiness” (Ep7). So, the respondents found it an important strategy that this pedagogical approach had enabled them to acquire.
- As far as problems and challenges are concerned, the respondents reported that initially they had difficulties as far as class duration and the number of activities, reluctance to speak and take part in class discussion, hesitation in sharing personal experiences, problems in critical reflection exercises and devising action plans etc. were concerned. However, they admitted that after a couple of weeks, they started getting adjusted to the new learning environment and gradually started finding different classroom activities interesting and enlightening for their personal growth and development as positive agents of social transformation (Ep6, Ep11, Ep19, Ep22, Mp1, Mp3, Mp17, Mp24, Mp28).

The challenges and the limitations of the current research are as follows:

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- Although the feminist pedagogical approach proved effective in enhancing students’ reflective skills, however, the study also highlights that our students are so accustomed to ‘banking model of education’ (in Freirean terms), that it a challenging task to enable them to learn to critically reflect on course materials, their personal lives, and different socio-cultural hierarchies to become empowered individuals who could combat with the challenges of the complex postmodern realities.
- Class duration and class size was an important challenge faced during the course of this research. In the beginning of the research, extra classes had to be arranged to complete the activities, however with the passage of time, when students became familiar with the classroom activities, the problem was reduced to a great extent.

- Institutional pressures such as completion of course contents, teachers' evaluation and standardized methods of students' assessment were also important challenges faced during this research. Besides the assessment done through feminist pedagogical approach, students' performance had to be assessed according to the traditional mid-term examination method practiced in our parent institution.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The analysis of the data gathered for current research from different sources such as experimental phase, students' reflective journals and semi-structured interviews highlights important developments as far as students' altered relationship with the teacher, enhancement of critical/reflexive skills, dialogic method of learning, creation of a collaborative learning environment, community building and devising collective action plans for social transformation are concerned. The study shows that:

- There were significant improvements as far as the core principle of transformation of teacher's authority is concerned, although it was quite challenging for the teacher of the experimental groups. Jennifer Gore (1992)'s idea of exercising 'power-with' the students proved effective in enabling students to realize their role as active equal partners in the process of learning. However, it was a gradual process, as mentioned earlier, since the authority of the teacher is so well-established in the Pakistani classroom according to Siddiqui (2016), that students find it difficult to transform their role from submissive receivers of information to active constructors of knowledge who could enter as subjects and intervene into their social reality to transform it (Freire, 1970). So, the findings of the study show that there was marked development as far as the transformation of the teacher student relationship is concerned.
- The findings of the current research show that there was considerable improvement as far as the enhancement of students' reflective skills are concerned. It was difficult to change their mindset from "transmission style teaching" in Siddiqui's words (2016:29) to critical reflection on textual material through different classroom activities which required students' active involvement. However, as the findings show, there was considerable improvement as far as students' reflective and critical skills are concerned.
- The findings of the study also show that feminist pedagogical approach helped in introducing dialogue in the classroom. As discussed earlier in the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, some students found it more challenging to speak and express their viewpoint as compared to others, however different classroom activities and strategies such as group work, peer support, and teacher's role proved helpful in involving

the students in the class discussion. Although the teacher had confined herself to the role of the facilitator, however, her role proved crucial to distribute time for class discussion equally among different group members and also among different groups.

- A significant finding of this research is that an environment of collaboration and cooperation can prove effective to create a community of learners who learn to respect different perspectives and work collectively to devise different action plans for social transformation. The strategy of non-competitive culture in the classroom could help dismantle competition and control and enable learners to realize their potential as a team of individuals who could work together for social justice and equality.

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