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Gendering Bourdieu's Cultural Capital in Higher Education in Pakistan

Muhammad Shoaib
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Pakistan
shoaibsoc@uog.edu.pk

Abstract

This paper has been designed to examine gender disparity in academic performance in Pakistani higher education through the lens of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. It reveals that female students outperform and male students underperform at all levels generally and higher education particularly. In this study, 253 university teachers participated from the University of the Punjab, Pakistan based on the classified random sampling technique. A cross-sectional survey has been conducted and a structured questionnaire has been constructed to measure the response of the university teachers. Pilot testing has also been done to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The rapport development method has been opted to introduce the study and researcher. Further, statistical analysis has been done to draw results and conclusions. The study findings have been presented and discussed based on the basic characteristics of the sample, descriptive statistics, and non-parametric Chi-square statistical test. The results indicate that there are multiple factors contributing to gender disparity in academic performance. The overall conclusion that I reached from the analysis of primary data is that there is a gender disparity in academic performance in Pakistani higher education. These findings of the study have also been aligned with Bourdieu's cultural capital theory.

Keywords: *Gender Disparity, Academic Performance, Higher Education, Cultural Capital, Sociological Analysis*

1. Introduction

The recent decades have shown a variation in female and male educational performance across Pakistan (Shoaib, 2021; Shoaib & Ullah, 2021a, 2021b). The change shows females' outperformance and males' underperformance in education. Educational results on every level (secondary, higher secondary, graduate, and post-graduate levels), show vivid females' outperformance, unlike the developed world (Johnson, 2017; Legewie & DiPrete, 2012; Lortie, Castrogiovanni, & Cox, 2017; Mead, 2006; Saa, 2016; Skelton, 2012). Nevertheless, the phenomenon/issue has not received serious academic attention in Pakistan. Before engaging and explaining the key concept, it is important to highlight the gender reverse change in education performance in the broader Pakistani context. Girls/women in Pakistan, since 1947, have limited access to education in general and higher education in particular (Shoaib, 2021). The last fifteen years, despite unequal access to education, demonstrate a gender reverse change in education performance (girls are outperforming boys in education). Hence, this study intends to examine how teachers explain gender disparity in academic performance in Pakistani higher education. This gender reverse change in education performance is a very important issue and needs to be examined and highlighted with great academic sophistication.

2. Review of Literature

Female outperformance and male underperformance have also been seen in developing countries depending on multiple factors (Irving & Hudley, 2005). Several researchers report different factors regarding the argument about females' successes in higher education in developing countries (Einarsson & Granström, 2002; Irving & Hudley, 2005; Jacob, 2002). Sommers (2013) asserts that favoritism and praise are the main factors of female outperformance and male underperformance in higher education in developing countries. Teachers' communication is also a major factor in the academic expectations of females and males (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Shoaib, Rasool, Anwar, & Ali, 2023). These factors are discussed in detail in the context of female outperformance and male underperformance in higher education institutions of developing countries in several studies (Shoaib, 2023a, 2023b; Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2023).

Several factors of gender reversal change have also been identified in several studies in Muslim countries (Bennett & Wright, 2010; De-Jesus, 2016; Greenberg, 2004; Hussain, Johnson, & Alam, 2017; Shah & Sobehart, 2008; Ullah, Shoaib, Ali, & Ullah, 2022; Yousif, 2011). The factor includes socio-economic background (Alam, Ibrar, & Khan, 2016; Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022), cultural factors (Al-Manea, 1985; Alsuwaida, 2016; Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2022), family backgrounds (De-Jesus, 2016; Kirk, 2013; Shoaib, Anwar, & Rasool, 2022), parental involvement (Igei & Yuki, 2015; Kaus, 2018; Purewal & Hashmi, 2015; Shoaib, Anwar, & Mustafa, 2022), educational factors (Haghighi & Jusan, 2013; Salameh, Al-Omari, & Jumia'an, 2011; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Abdullah, 2022), educational self (Abdallah & Ahmed, 2015; Al-lawati, 2019; Al-Thani, Al-Thani, & Semmar, 2014; Anwar, Shoaib, & Mustafa, 2022; Zaid, 2020), and teacher's motivations (Al-Sahel, 2005; Ashraf, Khaki, Shamatov, Tajik, & Vazir, 2005; Mohamed Emam & Al-Mahdy, 2020; Shoaib, Rasool, & Anwar, 2021; Siddiqi, 2005; Ullah, 2018, April 19). Similarly, Yousif (2011) also reports multiple factors and supports the argument that female students outclass males in higher education in Arab states.

In Pakistan, multiple factors of female students outshining males in examination results have been reported by several studies (Choudhary, 2014; Education, 2018; Khan & Hussain, 2019; Klitgaard & Currimbhoy, 1978; Qureshi, 2003; Shoaib, Iqbal, & Tahira, 2021). It is pertinent here to mention that the literacy level of females has been low to males historically. In Pakistan, gender differences exist on a large scale because most of the population lives in rural areas with typical patriarchal structures of society (Azhar, 2009; Malik & Courtney, 2011; Shoaib, Ali, & Akbar, 2021). The performance of boys and girls is to be debated because there is always a low performance of the boys and a high performance of girls at the school level whether in science or arts and higher education as well (Afzal, Butt, Akbar, & Roshi, 2013; Ahmed, 2009; Latif, 2009; Mateju & Smith, 2015; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Shaukat, 2021). A larger number of females have joined higher education and they are performing well in Pakistan (Afzal et al., 2013; AyubBuzdar, Ali, Akhtar, Maqbool, & Nadeem, 2013; Azhar, 2009; Batool, Sajid, & Shaheen, 2013; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, Rasool, et al., 2021). They are achieving higher positions in the exams than males (Shoaib & Ullah, 2019). The enrolment of students in higher education reveals that more females are getting admission, which is also proof of females' outshining in higher education in Pakistan (Afzal et al., 2013; *Economic Survey of Pakistan*, 2018; Education, 2018; Latif, 2009; Shaikh, Baghat, & Gill, 2015). With time, the gap between the performance of male and female students is widening, and male students seem to be lagging (Shoaib & Ullah, 2019; Ullah & Ullah, 2019).

There are multiple factors of female students outplaying males in educational examinations. The study findings of Purewal and Hashmi (2015) reveal that parental support is a main factor in

females outscoring male students in examinations. Similarly, Siddiqui (2016) argues that the change in educational policies in Pakistan is a factor in females achieving better scores in examinations. Furthermore, Ullah and Ullah (2019) assert the socio-cultural context of females outplaying male students in examinations in Pakistan. Likewise, family and economic conditions of students' families are also contributing to female students' outshining males in educational examinations in Pakistan (Batool et al., 2013; Shoaib, Ahmad, Ali, & Abdullah, 2021).

3. Data and Methods

In this study, 253 university teachers participated from the University of the Punjab, Pakistan based on the classified random sampling technique. A cross-sectional survey has been conducted and a structured questionnaire has been constructed to measure the response of the university teachers. Pilot testing has also been done to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The rapport development method has been opted to introduce the study and researcher. Further, statistical analysis has been done to draw results and conclusions. The study findings have been presented and discussed based on the basic characteristics of the sample, descriptive statistics, and non-parametric Chi-square statistical test.

4. The Results and Data

Table 1 describes the distribution of the respondents by their gender and residential area. Data reported that 56.9 percent of the respondents were male and 43.1 percent were females who were working in the university as a faculty member. The data also reveal similar results regarding the residential areas of the respondents. It is pertinent to mention that more than half of female teachers belonged to urban areas and male teachers' residential backgrounds were rural.

Table 2 shows the designation and educational qualifications of the respondents. The statistics describe that more than 50 percent (53.0 %) of respondents were Assistant Professors and 27.3 percent were Lecturers. Only a smaller number (9.5 %) of the respondents were Professors and 4.0 percent were Lecturer cum Research Associate. The sample size was proportionally distributed as per the designation of the respondents. Further, data in the table also revealed that 64 percent of the respondents had more than 18 years of educational qualification. Only 3.2 percent had 16 years of education.

Table 3 depicts the age, experience, and monthly income of the respondents. The primary data reveals that the age of the respondents ranged from 24 to 57 years with a mean of 36.18 years. Further, the teaching experience of the respondents ranged from one year to 30 years in the academic field with a mean of 8.28 years. Moreover, the monthly income of the respondents ranged from 45000 to 245000 Pakistani rupees with a mean of Rs. 119901.19.

Table 1

Respondents' Gender and Geographical Location

Area	Gender		Total
	Male *f* (%)	Female *f* (%)	*f* (%)
Rural	96 (37.9)	13 (05.1)	109 (43.1)
Urban	48 (19.0)	96 (37.9)	144 (56.9)
Total	144 (56.9)	109 (43.1)	253 (100.0)

Table 2

Designation and Educational Qualification of the Respondents

Designation	Frequency	Percentage	Education	Frequency	Percentage

Professor	24	9.5	16 Years	08	3.2
Associate Professor	16	6.3	18 Years	83	32.8
Assistant Professor	134	53.0	Above 18 Years	162	64.0
Lecturer	69	27.3	Total	253	100.0
Lecturer/ Research Associate	10	4.0			
Total	253	100.0			

Table 3

Distribution of the Respondents by Their Age, Experience, and Monthly Income

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Vari
Age	253	24	57	36.18	6.354	40.
Teaching ce	253	1	30	8.28	6.212	38.
Monthly (PKR)	253	45000	245000	119901.19	40198.541	1615922

This section provides the results and statistical analysis of the data. Table 4 presents overall descriptive statistics of variables and their codes were used for further analysis. It showed the names of the independent and dependent variables and the number of items for each. Further, the minimum and maximum value of each variable along with mean and standard deviation was also provided. The items of each variable ranged from six to nine items. At the end of the table, household determinants consisting of three sub-variables and educational determinants were calculated on four sub-variables. Similarly, motivation commitment and self-fulfilling prophecy were also combined as motivational factors. Along with these variables, sociological analysis was calculated on its four sub-variables named historical, cultural, structural, and critical factors.

Table 4

Overall Descriptive Statistics and Codes of Variables (n=253)

Variable name	Codes	Items	Mini.	Maxi.	Mean	Std. Devi.
Students' home background (favorable socialization)	SHB	6	9	36	26.15	4.681
Socio-economic status of the family	SES	6	9	36	23.92	5.715
Parental involvement (favorable to females)	PAI	6	9	36	25.23	3.783

Role of social media	RSM	6	12	36	25.25	4.708
Role of peer group	RPG	6	12	36	27.59	4.094
Role of the social construction of educational self	RSC	6	12	33	24.53	3.999
Educational background of the students	EDB	6	6	35	25.75	4.271
Student-teacher interaction	STI	6	12	35	24.98	4.570
Teachers' competency and gender	TCG	7	7	40	27.25	5.706
Classroom environment	CLE	6	6	36	26.51	4.658
Role of gender-specific study culture	RGS	6	6	36	27.50	4.593
Motivation and commitment	MOC	6	12	36	27.07	4.321
Self-fulfilling prophecy	SFP	6	10	34	24.07	4.432
Gender differentials in academic performance	GDI/ GDA	9	15	54	38.72	6.230
Historical factors	HIF	6	12	34	23.77	4.287
Cultural factors	CUF	6	11	36	25.06	4.176
Structural factors	STF	6	15	36	26.65	4.229
Critical factors	CRF	6	13	36	27.11	4.421
Household Determinants	HHD	18	32	97	75.31	10.293
Educational Determinants	EDU/ EDD	25	49	135	104.50	14.706
Motivation & Commitment and Self-fulfilling Prophecy	MSF	12	24	69	51.13	7.430
Sociological Factors	SOF	24	61	131	102.60	12.167

Table 5 describes the results of the non-parametric Chi-square statistical test. It presented the association between two categorical variables. It stated that the p-value (.000) was less than the significance level (0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, it was concluded that there was an association between students' home background (favorable socialization) and gender differentials in the academic performance of the students. Similarly, results supported the hypothesis with a p-value of .000 that there was an association between parental involvement and gender differentials in academic performance. Further, Pearson's Chi-Square value (44.359 [a]) with a p-value of .000 proved an association between the role of social media and gender differentials in students' academic performance.

Moreover, non-parametric test results also supported the argument that the role of the peer group and gender differentials in the academic performance of the students were associated with a p-value (.000) less than the level of significance (0.05). It was also observed that there was an association between the role of the social construction of the educational self and gender differentials in the academic performance of the students. These results were supported by a Chi-square value of 29.770 and a p-value of .000. Similarly, the alternate hypothesis was also proved

with a p-value of .000 that there was an association between the educational background of the students and gender differentials in the academic performance of the students.

Table 5

Chi-Square Statistical Test (Dependent Variable = Gender Differentials in Academic Performance)

Independent Variables	Pearson Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Students home background	20.933[a]	4	.000
Socio-economic status of the family	12.868[a]	4	.012
Parental involvement	58.693[a]	4	.000
Role of social media	44.359[a]	4	.000
Role of peer group	29.623[a]	4	.000
Role of the social construction of educational self	29.770[a]	4	.000
Educational background	49.056[a]	4	.000
Student-teacher interaction	20.410[a]	4	.000
Teachers' competency and gender	38.722[a]	4	.000
Classroom environment	63.661[a]	4	.000
Gender-specific study culture	46.933[a]	4	.000
Motivation and commitment	65.109[a]	4	.000
Self-fulfilling prophecy	62.167[a]	4	.000
Historical factors	12.027[a]	4	.017
Cultural factors	34.918[a]	4	.000
Structural factors	18.930[a]	4	.001
Critical factors	23.742[a]	4	.000
Household Determinants	61.799[a]	4	.000
Educational Determinants	75.975[a]	4	.000
Motivation, Commitment, and Self-fulfilling Prophecy	204.646[a]	4	.000
Sociological Factors	91.298[a]	4	.000
Total number of observations (n) = 253			

Further, Chi-square results proved that there was an association between student-teacher interaction and gender differentials in the academic performance of the students. Here again, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted with a p-value of .000. Similar results were calculated to support the hypothesis that there was an association of teachers' competency and gender with gender differentials in the academic performance of the students with a p-value of .000 that was less than the significance level (0.05). Moreover, the p-value of .000 proved an association between classroom environment and gender differentials in academic performance.

In the table, data reflected that the null hypothesis was rejected with a p-value of .000 less than the significance level (0.05). Conversely, the alternate hypothesis was accepted that there was an association between gender-specific study culture and gender differentials in academic performance. Further, results also supported in the same way that there was an association of motivation and commitment with students' academic performance concerning their gender. It was concluded that the results proved significant, with a p-value of .000. Here, it was noted that

the self-fulling prophecy of the students also had an association with their gender differentials in academic performance.

Moreover, non-parametric test results also supported the argument that the cultural factors and gender differentials in the academic performance of the students were associated with a p-value (.000) less than the level of significance (0.05). It was also observed that there was an association between structural factors and students' academic performance by their gender. These results were supported with a Chi-square value of 18.930 and with a p-value of .001. Similarly, the alternate hypothesis was also proved with a p-value of .000 that there was an association between critical factors and gender differentials in the academic performance of the students.

Similarly, the results of household determinants had a significant association with the academic performance of the student by their gender. Here, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted with a p-value of .000, less than the significance level (0.05). On the other hand, educational determinants and motivational factors also had an association with gender differentials in the academic performance of the students. The association of these variables was approved with a p-value of .000, less than the significance level (0.05). In the last part, the Chi-square test proved that the association of sociological factors with gender differentials in the academic performance of the students was significant with a p-value of .000.

5. Discussion

Feminism proponents demand equal rights and opportunities for females and males in masculine structures. They demand social equality regardless of sex (Acker, 1987). So, they attracted the attention of the world towards the differences created in femaleness and maleness in society (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2021). In compliance with the hegemonic masculine structure of society, several feminist voices came into existence to support women's participation in different arrays of life (Anwar, Shoaib, & Javed, 2013). Similarly, the feminists argued that the male hegemony and masculine structures are major components of women's subjugation generally in society and particularly in education (Shoaib, Latif, & Usmani, 2013). In the past, the failure of females in every single field was more likely associated with their biological and sexual variations while the feminine and masculine factors were not considered. Currently, feminists argue that the variation of femininity and masculinity is mainly because of male hegemonic values and culture (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996; Lorber, 2000; Shoaib & Ullah, 2019). The female and male were dealt with in different ways which created a clear rift in gender construction. Further, it prevailed in every field including education.

The study findings are similar to the findings reported in the empirical review that previously female and male educational performance was more likely linked with biological variations but later in a gender-neutral culture females started performing better in examinations. Hence, it is argued that biological differences are less likely to affect the performance of female and male students rather than shaped by cultural differences. Accordingly, females' deprivation of education was due to the traditional and cultural practices in male hegemonic society. Moreover, feminist proponents raised their voices to provide equal opportunities for females to get an education and perform equally to males.

I argue that girl's lagging in the past was based on traditional cultural practices and normative value structures of society. Thus, culture and society both created an inappropriate environment for females to learn and come up with better opportunities. Females were born and treated differently to develop different images of society. At this point, my argument is that no one is born a genius but rather socialized and prepared in a particular socio-economic environment.

It is concluded from the above discussion that gender is mainly influenced by the masculine culture of society. Females are mainly disturbed by male perspectives as males dominate in every walk of life. Males design and execute policies in almost every sphere of life. Owing to this, females have been subjugated and kept at the margins in every field in the past. Simultaneously, males got an education and outperformed females while females were excluded from education. It is hence argued that masculine and cultural differences have a pivotal role in socializing the girls for education and competition of males rather than innate differences.

To précis the discussion as per the theories to study gender and education, females were deprived in the past based on cultural practices and normative value structure of the societies. As access and cultural practices provided a gap to females, they try to perform not only at the school and college level but also at the university level. Therefore, I argue that females were not supported by their families and cultural practices for education. The proponents of feminism struggled for female education, and space was provided. Currently, female students are outshining males in examination results almost at all levels. Therefore, the performance of female male students in education is not linked with biological determinism and inborn characteristics. Based on the above empirical and theoretical review, I argue that the difference in educational performance among female and male students at the tertiary level is not linked with biological characteristics. It has roots in the difference of psycho-social, socio-economic, and cultural factors of socialization among female and male students.

It is important here to mention that the theory of Bourdieus' Cultural Capital Theory has also been linked with the study findings. The main theoretical tools of Bourdieu are habitus, fields, and different forms of capital. It may be applied to the concept of cultural capital, i.e. economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. The data presented above are full of the assertion that the behavior of students is not determined by the educational institutions but rather by the social structure, rural and urban society, where they were born, bred, and socialized. Thus, the primary habitus of students induced in childhood is more durable to learn behaviors regarding social structure rather than learn at a later stage.

It is further asserted in the study context that students from rural and urban backgrounds may bring changes in certain behaviors to ensure coexistence and avoid maladjustment in a new setting i.e. educational institutions. After spending some time, students from rural backgrounds adopt the new environment and gradually become part of the new structure and perform better. Thus, the analysis of data presented asserts that females perform better than male students and they mostly belong to urban areas. Likewise, males underperform and mostly belong to rural geographical locations.

As mentioned in empirical studies, scholars across the globe have identified cultural capital as a source of success and recognition and sorted out the factors that contribute to the achievement of female and male students. There is evidence indicating that cultural capital forms although interrelated to each other but different in terms of possession of every form carry different impacts on the lives of those who possess. However, the different research reviews examined a small number of variables (parental education, parental expectations, parental reading, and book possession) corresponding to types of cultural capital.

The study findings aligned with the social reproduction theory of Bourdieu and presented the interrelationship of education, family, and social status. Education is the main source of social inequalities and subversion. In this process, cultural capital has a pivotal role because the inequalities in the cultural capital refer to an imbalance in the social class. Such inequalities flourish in educational institutions as schools and teachers are also a source when explaining the role in pedagogic activities/roles that give rise to the perpetuation of classes by expounding the

rich. They encourage the learners by rewarding the haves of such capital and discouraging or degrading the have-nots. Therefore, schools serve as the main source of reproduction and omission. Thus female students belong to urban areas with high SES which results in their good performance in examinations as compared to male students at the tertiary level.

Moreover, the cultural capital denotes the coding culture supported by parents which is transmissible as well as the practices capable of a transmissible. It contains a body of aesthetic codes, conditionings, and habituations transferred to learners internalized through socializing or the inherent transfer of cultural traits. It shows the status of the class or the actors' location from various walks of life. It expedites the naturalization of structural possession. Family refers to class by its habitus. The cultural resource of only the middle or elite class can become a valuable *capital* in society. In 'highbrow' culture, knowledge and possession are unevenly found in class and education which is declared as legitimate. Distinctions and privileges are awarded to the possessors. Besides other capitals like human, social, and economic, cultural capital invokes the unequal social fabric of society. This highbrow culture is induced in school systems unevenly which results in better performance of female students as compared to males in their later education.

The findings assert that children of rich people are recognized as having high SES, parental education, urban place of residence, and good previous schooling. The teachers recognize this advantage of students and exclude those who lack such cultural capital. Their pedagogic actions cause them to take part in a competitive mechanism. Moreover, their pedagogic actions are considered meritocratic and legitimate. Therefore, elite culture seems to be contrary to being deprived or underprivileged. Due to unusual assessment, the teachers are biased when they grade the educational performances of the female and male students as they recognize the competencies of the elite, not their scholastic performances. In this way, educational institutions serve as a source of specific intergenerational social mobility and outcomes. Thus, based on the core assumption of this theory, I assert here that teachers perceive female students outperform at tertiary level examinations based on their cultural capital differences with male students.

6. Conclusion

The overall conclusion that I reached from the analysis of primary data is that there is a gender disparity in academic performance in Pakistani higher education. These findings of the study have also been aligned with Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. The data analysis outlines that there are multiple factors contributing to gender disparity in academic performance in higher education in Pakistan including familial factors, media exposure, peer influence, educational self, previous results, teacher competency, study culture, classroom environment, self-fulfilling prophecy, and other sociological factors. The data presented above are full of the assertion that the behavior of students is not determined by the educational institutions but rather by the social structure, rural and urban society, where they were born, bred, and socialized. Thus, the primary habitus of students as mentioned by Bourdieu induced in childhood is more durable to learn behaviors regarding social structure rather than learning at a later stage. It is further asserted in the study context that students from rural and urban backgrounds may bring changes in certain behaviors to ensure coexistence and avoid maladjustment in a new setting i.e. educational institutions. After spending some time, students from rural backgrounds adopt the new environment and gradually become part of the new structure and perform better. Thus, the analysis of data asserts that females perform better than male students and they mostly belong to urban areas. Likewise, males underperform and mostly belong to rural geographical locations.

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