

FEMINISATION OF SCHOOLING: UNDERSTANDING THE
DETRADITIONALIZED GENDER

Louiza Belaid, Hanane Sarnou

University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, Mostaganem, Algeria
louizacarter@ymail.com

Abstract. The present study examines the shift of gender roles at school. It studies the extent to which detraditionalization co-exists in the educational context. It is believed that male pupils are obliged to embrace feminine features to be accepted in society. In this regard, our main issue in this work assesses whether, in the classroom, girls and boys are equally prominent and the extent to which there is a displacement of power relations. Nowadays, schools are being feminized, whereby females outnumber males. A triangulation method is employed in this enquiry: the observation, an interview and a questionnaire. 80 pupils from Mohamed Boudhief secondary school (47 girls and 33 boys) were selected for this study. To sum up, males are victimized by feminising cultures in which the feminine is enhanced whereas the masculine is worsened. Gender equilibrium is required at school in order for high educational outcomes to be achieved.

Keywords: gender role, detraditionalization, feminized school, gender equilibrium

1. INTRODUCTION

The displacement of gender roles in the educational context has been and continues to be a trend for many researchers. Thus, we attempt to assess the extent to which gender is being detraditionalized in the Algerian schools. Male and female pupils do not share the same rights at school. Additionally, it is assumed that males are forced to adopt feminine features to be recognized in class. In this regard, our research examines whether, in the classroom, girls and boys are treated equally, to whom focuses the attention of instructors and the extent to which there is a displacement or modification of gender power relations. Boys and girls do not receive the same

treatment in class. However, the instructor has a central role in realizing such equity. Nowadays, schools are being feminized, whereby females outnumber males. To conduct this work, a triangulation method is employed. The research instruments are both quantitative and qualitative, namely the observation, the interview and a questionnaire. A two-stage cluster sampling is used, in which the researcher first samples the schools in Tissemsilt, province of Khemisti, and then the pupils from the schools. In this respect, 80 pupils from Mohamed Boudhiaf secondary school were selected (47 girls and 33 boys) to conduct this enquiry. In fact, discrimination among genders co-exists in the sense that power relations are usurped and male pupils are treated differently from females. In this vein, feminising cultures are leading to a masculinity crisis through the absence of gender awareness in the classroom. Hence, as a primary suggestion, it is mandatory to recruit male teachers in order to achieve equilibrium.

2. FEMINISED EDUCATION

It is recognized that boys are unenthusiastic to do work out of school and do not even revise their lessons, and this fact results in obtaining a negative feedback through their bad marks and deficiency of good performance. In addition, it is assumed by teachers and even parents that the males of the current generation care about the way they look more than their educational level and professional career.

According to a BBC report, Sewell's 2006 work about "feminisation of education" clarifies that the secret behind boys' low performance and dropout is the organization of the system of schools, which seems to be too feminine for male pupils. Sewell argues that school lessons are too feminized¹; they impose feminine qualities that dismiss male pupils from the school, a fact which entails an academic alarm. He suggests making more efforts to recruit male teachers in the field because male pupils cannot adapt to the

feminine world. While female pupils are more capable to adapt within the feminine environment, male pupils are different in biology and character. Since they are biased to action learning, teachers should grab their attention with things that generally attract them. Sewell assumes the co-existence of indifferent pupils in our schools, but some effort is required as an effective part of the teaching mission.

The school success or failure is associated with the clash between the school culture and the pupils' linguistic and cultural background. Farrington Camille claims that "the performance of lowest scores and high dropout rates among students are not reflective of what they are capable of achieving" (Farrington 2014, 6), i.e. students' marks do not mirror their real competencies and degree of intelligence. And "the basic of discontinuity between student and school often lay in a mismatch between the home culture and the school culture, the nature of the school is also a factor that contributes to school failure" (Farrington 2014, 6). Apparently, she believes that there is a clash between the students' cultural background and that of the school, and this leads to a blockage or a failure to comply with the school program.

Farrington, in the same vein, argues that both genders may fail at school not due to their cognitive inadequacies, but because secondary schools are shaped in a way that pushes genders towards low performance and dropout. If the system changes, learners will perform better and succeed at school. In fact, Farrington is openly blaming the whole system for this phenomenon; she steps by the side of learners against the schooling system. Pupils' background is not always adequate to be judged or blamed.

Curnock Cook (2016), the chief executive of UCAS, states that females' performance is better throughout primary, middle, secondary, and higher education than of males. Actually, boys' performance is not satisfactory, but there is no effort made by the policymakers or the government to solve this issue and take a positive action to offer equal education for their benefits. She believes

that there are more women than men who are successful in a number of domains including anatomy, biology, genetics, nursing, social work, and even the languages, like English. It is evident that there are more men than women in the population and, in order to achieve equality, more men are needed across the board because a gender gap is looming.

She supports males declaring that the teaching methods and techniques fit female pupils and might not appropriately prepare boys for academic challenges. Moreover, Cook claims that despite the fact that a myriad of studies has been carried out about the biological differences between males' and females' brain, hormones, behaviour, learning styles, etc., and how these differences have an impact on the educational achievement, there is a little focus on the gender gap in the educational context, especially when it comes to learners who belong to a low social class.

2.1. DETRADITIONALIZATION

The concept of femininity is “naturalized for women, so that whilst men can take on characteristics associated with femininity and be applauded and rewarded in the workplace for doing so, women’s performance of the same characteristics is not recognized for reward” (Leathwood 2009, 23). Leathwood and Read claim that gender is being detraditionalized or reversed in society. Detraditionalization is a concept used to describe the absence or modification of tradition in society. In other words, gender roles are being reconfigured in the sense that power relations are usurped and pupils in general, and males in particular, develop skills in accordance with the labour market demands. This is the source of detraditionalization, in which males are forced to adopt feminine features to be recognized and accepted in society.

On the contrary, Adkins (2002), cited by Leathwood (2009), says that there is no clear argument that gender is taking the status of being inappropriate. Moreover, there is no proof that gendered

power relations are being displaced or taken over. Likewise, in Mohanty's 2002 work, cited by Leathwood, he claims that the traditional gender order has not disappeared but rather modified and new foundations of masculinity and femininity are taking place on the ground. "In fundamental ways, it is girls and women around the world, especially in the third world, that bear the brunt of globalization. Poor women and girls are the hardest hit by the degradation of environmental conditions, wars, famines, privatization of services and deregulation of governments" (Leathwood 2009, 4)

Leathwood & Read (2009) state that the school environment and the educators' treatment reflect the way in which gender is constructed, i.e. the values of females are highly bound to the change of boys' behaviour via transforming them to be more feminine throughout disapproval and punishment of what is regarded as "natural" boyish behaviour. Biologically speaking, it is believed that "cultural feminization and reductions in male sperms counts are consequences of oestrogens in the environment" (Leathwood 2009, 11). In this context and from a medical point of view, the high rate of females in society entails high rates of their hormone in the atmosphere, and this might affect males both physiologically and psychologically.

It is noteworthy to mention that a dichotomy of gender might rise out of such feminization discourses, in which males are classified as being victimized by feminised cultures and hormones. Under this perspective, the feminine is enhanced whilst the masculine is worsened. In this prospect, males in crisis are categorized to be more at risk than females of committing suicide, underachieving at school and turning to violent behaviour.

3. DATA COLLECTION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Changing masculinities or debating masculinity is one of the factors that have been suggested to be a serious reason behind boys' failure

at school. According to Smith (2013), boys' weak performance is linked to the fear that they will not have a chance to obtain a job with a satisfactory salary in front of females, in other words, the change in the gender regime. In this respect, male pupils might construct an idea that there is no chance to compete a female at the workplace, and this may be stored in their brain and activated from time to time, as a negative reminder.

To conduct this empirical inquiry, a questionnaire, an interview and the observation were used. We selected a sample of 80 pupils from the secondary school of Mohamed Boudhiaf, Tissesmilt, Algeria.

Table 1.1 shows the number of females over males in the secondary school, final classes. As a matter of fact, females' number is higher.

Distribution by Gender %	
Males	41, 25
Females	58, 75
Total	100

Table 1.1. Pupils' gender at Mohamed Boudhiaf Secondary School

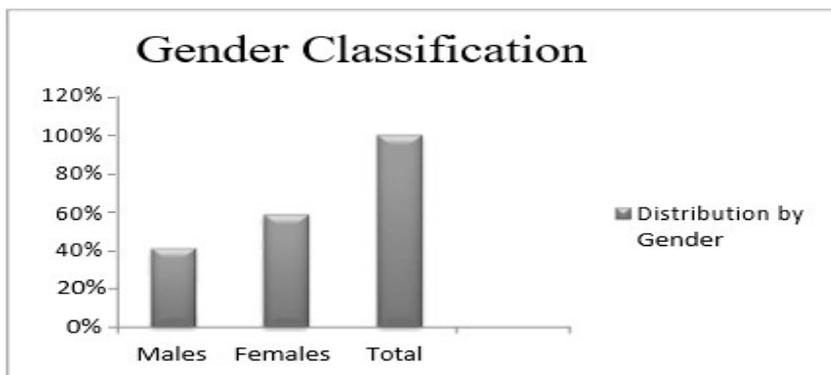


Figure 1.2. Distribution of pupils by gender in Mohamed Boudhiaf Secondary School

As can be easily observed in Figure 1.2, male learners of third-year secondary school represent 41%, whereas female learners 59% of the whole. Females outnumber males in the classroom, their existence is notably predominant.

School dropout is what grabs our attention throughout the reaction of pupils towards this enquiry. Although some pupils responded that they were not afraid of school dropout, their justifications revealed the opposite.

	Yes	No
Males	21%	20%
Females	46%	14%

Table 2.1. The Genders' attitude on dropping out at Mohamed Boudhiaf Secondary School

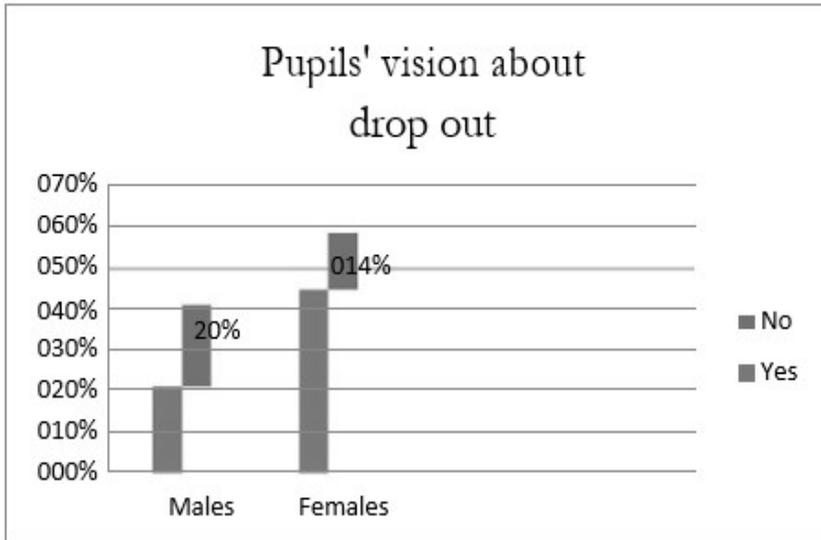


Figure 2.2. Pupils' reaction to school drop out in the Secondary School of Mohamed Boudhiaf

20% of males answered our query negatively, claiming that school dropout is not a big deal, and 21% of them argue that they fear it. As for females, the majority showed their fear of school failure and dropout: 46% of them show a negative standpoint towards the latter. However, 14% of females displayed no fear but exhibit indifference. For male pupils, the category that showed no fear of school dropout argued that studying would not offer them a good future, and military service is a decisive target. Whether they succeed at school or not, it is the only domain of activity in which money is easily earned. Some of them think that females are taking a recognized position everywhere; thus, they are pre-programmed to believe that their future is guaranteed neither at school nor in the workplace in comparison to a female. Regarding The group of males that showed fear, their explanation was that the school represents the future and they fear the reaction of their parents. Others claim that they have to avoid failing at school in order to realize their parents' dreams. Accordingly, none of their answers revealed an intrinsic motivation; hence, parents' reaction was what they fear the most. On the contrary, female pupils, the ones who fear of dropout, justified their answers by their motivation to learn, obtaining a good degree, getting a decent job and realizing their dreams. They expressed their love to learning and for their school. The only thing that they fear, as a consequence of failure, is teen marriage. That is to say, the young females who drop out of school early are forced to get married by their parents. The category that answered negatively claimed that school is not everything, so failing is not the end of the world for them. Others justified their attitudes by their confidence, claiming that failure will never come across their path because they are serious and hard workers.

The interview showed that the teachers of English do not treat males the way they treat females. Their argument is that the female pupils are more interactive and hard workers in their studies. Besides, their children are females. By contrast, they fear approaching male pupils because of their violent behaviour in the classroom.

Likewise, from the observation, we discovered that gender bias strongly exists in EFL classes. Teachers do not behave the same way with both genders. Besides, there is some sort of tension between teachers and male pupils, especially because these teachers are women, and the pupils belong to the generation that studied only 5 years in primary school. Accordingly, a gap of age co-exists between them.

4. CONCLUSION

The feminisation of schooling has been the interest of many scholars throughout time because it is an intriguing phenomenon. In addition to the detraditionalization that is taking place in our society, school is another context that could shape the displacement or modification of gender roles. Teachers in the classroom deal with pupils but not with genders with distinct identities. The number of females and their performances could negatively affect males, but teachers' bias and their lack of awareness and equity might make things worse. Though a myriad of pedagogical parameters warrants consideration, instructors should know that gender awareness and equity among both genders in the classroom is one step towards pupils' academic achievement. The recruitment of male teachers is proposed as a solution to improve performance among male pupils in the classroom for it might have a positive impact on pupils' identity, by making them believe that chances are not offered to females only, but the workplace is open for both genders undoubtedly.

References

- BBC News. "Schools 'Too Feminine for Boys'." June 13, 2006, accessed January 2016. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/5074794.stm>
- Cook, Curnock. "Our Education System Must Stop Ignoring its Bias Against Boys". *The Telegraph*. January 5, 2016, accessed October 9, 2017. www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/our-education-system-must-stop-ignoring-its-bias-against-boys/

- Farrington, Camille. *Failing at School: Lessons for Redesigning Urban High Schools*. Columbia University: Teachers College Press, 2014.
- Leathwood, Carole and Barbara Read. *Gender and the Changing Face of Higher Education: a Feminized Future?* UK: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 2009.
- Smith, Emma. "Failing Boys and Moral Panics: Perspectives on the Underachievement Debate". *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (2013): 282-295.

Notes

1. Feminized, statistically, stands for the number of females over males; culturally, it refers to the teaching environment that is biased towards females.