Sociology of Knowledge Perspectives on Gendered Curriculum and Educational Authority

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ABSTRACT
This study examines the intersection of gender, knowledge, and educational authority through the lens of the sociology of knowledge. It investigates how curricula, pedagogical practices, and institutional authority reproduce gendered hierarchies, privileging certain forms of knowledge whereas marginalizing others. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected from purposively sampled peer-reviewed articles, ethnographies, and theoretical analyses, and analyzed through thematic analysis to identify seven major themes: social construction of knowledge, gendered curriculum content, educational authority, pedagogical practices, intersectional epistemic access, student agency and resistance, and policy implications. The findings reveal that educational structures both reflect and reinforce societal power relations, shaping students' academic identities, participation, and opportunities. The study underscores the need for inclusive curricula, reflective pedagogy, and institutional reforms that democratize knowledge and foster equitable learning environments, highlighting pathways to challenge entrenched gender norms and expand epistemic access.

Keywords: Gendered Curriculum, Educational Authority, Epistemic Access, Pedagogy, Student Agency, Educational Inequality

Introduction
The sociology of knowledge provides a critical lens to understand how knowledge production, dissemination, and legitimization are socially constructed, shaped by broader power relations and cultural norms (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bourdieu, 1990). Inside educational contexts, this perspective illuminates how curricula are not neutral repositories of information but are embedded with ideological assumptions that reflect and reproduce societal hierarchies, including those based on gender (Connell, 1987; Bourdieu, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). Gendered curricula often privilege certain ways of knowing, disciplines, and historical narratives, subtly reinforcing traditional gender roles

and expectations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). By analyzing the social processes through which knowledge is structured, the sociology of knowledge framework reveals how educational authority is exercised and maintained (Shoaib, Shamraiz, Baneen, & Abdullah, 2026c, 2026d; Shoaib & Ullah, 2026), influencing what is taught, who is recognized as an authoritative voice, and whose experiences are validated within academic institutions (Shoaib, Shamraiz, Baneen, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026b). Applying a sociology of knowledge perspective to gendered curriculum and educational authority highlights the intersection between institutional power, teacher authority, and student subjectivity (Shoaib, Shamraiz, Abdullah, & Shahzadi, 2026a, 2026b). Teachers and policymakers play pivotal roles in selecting, framing, and legitimizing knowledge (Shoaib, Shahzadi, Shamraiz, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026b), often reproducing gendered norms unconsciously through pedagogical practices, assessment methods, and classroom interactions (Shoaib, Shahzadi, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib, Shahzadi, Shamraiz, & Abdullah, 2026c). Students internalize these knowledge hierarchies, shaping their academic self-concept, aspirations, and social identities (Shoaib, Iqbal, Baneen, & Abdullah, 2026c; Shoaib, Shahzadi, & Abdullah, 2026). Understanding these dynamics allows for a critical examination of how education both reflects and perpetuates gendered social structures, offering pathways to reimagine curricula and pedagogical practices that promote equity, inclusivity, and the diversification of epistemic authority within schools and higher education.

Study Context

Regardless of widespread recognition of gender equity as a fundamental principle in education (Shoaib, Iqbal, Baneen, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026b), curricula and classroom practices continue to reproduce gendered hierarchies (Shoaib, Iqbal, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026b), subtly privileging masculine-coded knowledge, disciplines, and pedagogical approaches (Shoaib, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026b, 2026c). This perpetuation of gendered knowledge not only shapes what is considered legitimate within educational institutions but also reinforces societal norms regarding gender roles, expectations, and authority (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Baneen, 2026b; Shoaib, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026a). Teachers, as mediators of curriculum, often unknowingly enact these biases, influencing students' academic self-concept, engagement, and access to opportunities (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Baneen, 2026a, 2026c). However, research has examined gender disparities in educational outcomes (Shamraiz, Shoaib, Baneen, & Shahzadi, 2026a, 2026b), there remains a gap in understanding how knowledge itself the content (Shahzadi, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026), structure, and authority embedded in curricula is socially constructed in gendered ways, and how these constructions influence both teacher authority and student experiences (Shahzadi, Shoaib, Baneen, & Abdullah, 2026). This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the sociology of knowledge underlying gendered curricula and educational authority. It aims to uncover the mechanisms through which knowledge is legitimized, the ways in which gender norms are embedded in curriculum design and classroom practices, and the resulting impact on students' learning, participation, and identity formation. By examining these dynamics, the research intends to provide insights for creating more equitable educational structures that challenge traditional gendered hierarchies in knowledge production and dissemination.

The Data and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore Sociology of Knowledge

perspectives on gendered curriculum and educational authority. Data were collected through purposive sampling of published research documents, including peer-reviewed articles, ethnographies, and theoretical analyses, selected for their direct relevance to the topic. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving iterative coding, identification of patterns, and refinement to derive seven major themes. Findings were interpreted to provide insights into the social construction of knowledge, gendered curricular practices, and the dynamics of educational authority, forming the basis for the study's conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Social Construction of Knowledge in Education

The social construction of knowledge in education underscores that what is taught in schools is not simply a collection of neutral facts, but a reflection of broader societal values, power relations, and cultural norms (Ali, Abdullah, & Shoaib, 2026; Larijani, Shoaib, & Abedi, 2026; Shahzadi, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2026). Curricula are often designed and sanctioned by institutional authorities, privileging certain disciplines, perspectives, and ways of knowing over others (Ahmed, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026b; Ali, Abdullah, & Shaoib, 2026). From a gendered perspective, this result in the systemic marginalization of knowledge associated with women, femininity, or non-dominant social groups, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies (Ahmed, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026; Waris, Shoaib, Sharif, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b). For instance, the selection of historical narratives, scientific examples, or literary texts often highlights male contributions and perspectives, whereas women's experiences and alternative epistemologies are underrepresented (Shoaib, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025; Waris, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025; Waris, Shoaib, Sharif, & Abdullah, 2025c). Such curricular structures shape students' perceptions of legitimacy, authority, and value in knowledge (Shoaib, Waris, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025b; Shoaib & Zaman, 2025), guiding not only what they learn but how they understand their own potential and roles within society (Shoaib, Waris, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Waris, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025a).

Teachers and educational authorities act as mediators in this process, consciously or unconsciously reinforcing these knowledge hierarchies through pedagogy (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025c), assessment practices, and classroom interactions (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025b). Their authority in legitimizing certain content and approaches further embeds gendered assumptions into the learning environment (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025b). Students, in turn, internalize these hierarchies, which influence their academic engagement, self-concept, and future aspirations (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025a; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025a). Recognizing the socially constructed nature of knowledge provides critical insights into how education reproduces societal inequalities (Shoaib, Tariq, & Iqbal, 2025b; Shoaib, Tariq, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025) and highlights the need for curricula that actively incorporate diverse perspectives, challenge dominant epistemologies, and democratize access to authoritative knowledge (Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Tariq, & Iqbal, 2025a).

Theme 2: Gendered Curriculum Content and Epistemic Bias

Gendered curriculum content reflects the ways in which educational materials and knowledge frameworks privilege certain perspectives (Shoaib, Rasool, Zaman, & Ahmed, 2025; Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025), often aligning with dominant masculine norms, whereas marginalizing or excluding feminine-coded knowledge

Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

(Shoaib, Rasool, & Zaman, 2025c; Shoaib, Rasool, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025). Textbooks, course readings, and learning resources frequently emphasize male achievements, leadership, and epistemic authority (Shoaib, Rasool, & Zaman, 2025a, 2025b), whereas contributions by women or non-binary individuals are underrepresented or framed in stereotypical roles (Shoaib, Rasool, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025b; Shoaib, Rasool, Kalsoom, & Ali, 2025). This epistemic bias is reinforced through subject hierarchies, with disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) often coded as masculine (Shoaib, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025b; Shoaib, Rasool, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a), whereas humanities and care-oriented fields are feminized, subtly shaping students' perceptions of intellectual value and societal roles (Shoaib, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025a, 2025c). Such biases not only shape what students learn but also how they conceptualize authority, expertise, and participation in academic and professional spheres (Shoaib & Kausar, 2025; Shoaib, Kausar, Ali, & Abdullah, 2025).

The gendered nature of curriculum extends beyond content to the hidden curriculum, encompassing the implicit lessons (Shoaib, Iqbal, & Iftikhar, 2025; Shoaib, Iqbal, Rasool, & Abdullah, 2025), values, and norms transmitted in classroom interactions and institutional practices (Shoaib & Bashir, 2025; Shoaib, Batool, Kausar, & Abdullah, 2025). Teachers' expectations, assessment methods, and classroom discussions often reflect these biases, influencing which voices are validated and which are marginalized (Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025b; Shoaib, Ali, & Kausar, 2025). Consequently, students internalize socially constructed hierarchies of knowledge, affecting their confidence, engagement, and aspirations (Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025c). Examining these epistemic biases through a sociology of knowledge lens reveals how educational authority is intertwined with gendered power structures (Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025b, 2025c) and underscores the importance of creating curricula that are inclusive, representative, and critically reflective of diverse ways of knowing (Shoaib, Ahmed, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a).

Theme 3: Educational Authority and Knowledge Legitimization

Educational authority plays a central role in determining which knowledge is deemed legitimate and which perspectives are marginalized within school and higher education settings (Shoaib, Ahmed, & Usmani, 2025a, 2025b). Teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers act as gatekeepers of knowledge, shaping students' understanding of what counts as credible, important, and socially valuable (Shoaib, Ahmed, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025). This authority is inherently influenced by societal norms and power structures, including gender, which result in the privileging of masculine-coded knowledge (Shoaib, 2025a; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2025), disciplinary hierarchies, and epistemic traditions (Shoaib, 2025b). Through the selection of content, the framing of discussions, and the enforcement of assessment standards (Iqbal, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025), educators reinforce established norms regarding who has the right to know, who speak authoritatively, and whose contributions are recognized as meaningful (Ali, Shoaib, & Kausar, 2025).

The process of knowledge legitimization has significant implications for students' learning experiences and identity formation (Ali, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a). Once authority is exercised in gendered ways, students internalize notions of intellectual hierarchy and social expectation, shaping their academic self-concept, participation, and aspirations (Ali, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025b; Ali, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025b). Female and non-dominant students experience marginalization, diminished confidence, or limited access to authoritative discourse, whereas male students often

benefit from alignment with dominant epistemic norms (Ali, Shoaib, & Ali, 2025; Ali, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a). Recognizing the gendered dynamics of educational authority through the lens of sociology of knowledge highlights the need for reflective pedagogical practices (Ahmed, Shoaib, & Zaman, 2025; Shoaib, Zaman, & Abbas, 2024), inclusive curricula, and institutional reforms that democratize epistemic power and foster equitable access to legitimate knowledge for all learners (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2024a, 2024b).

Theme 4: Pedagogical Practices and Gendered Classroom Dynamics
Pedagogical practices and classroom dynamics are key sites where gendered assumptions in education are enacted and reinforced (Shoaib, Abdullah, Naqvi, & Ditta, 2024; Shoaib, Ali, & Abbas, 2024). Teachers' instructional strategies, communication styles, and expectations often reflect broader societal norms, resulting in differential treatment of students based on gender (Shoaib, 2024d, 2024e). For instance, male students have been encouraged to participate more actively in debates (Shoaib, 2024b), problem-solving tasks, or leadership roles (Shoaib, 2024c), whereas female students are often guided toward compliance, collaboration, or supportive roles (RAli, Zaman, & Shoaib, 2024; Shoaib, 2024a). These subtle forms of reinforcement shape students' engagement, confidence, and perception of their own intellectual abilities (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2023; Shoaib, Usmani, & Abdullah, 2023). The structure and delivery of classroom interactions, including who speaks, whose ideas are recognized (Shoaib, Naseer, & Naseer, 2023; Shoaib, Rasool, Anwar, & Ali, 2023), and how feedback is provided, therefore reproduce gender hierarchies and influence learning outcomes (Shoaib, 2023c; Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2023).

The hidden curriculum embedded in pedagogical practices further amplifies these effects by transmitting implicit messages about gendered roles and authority (Shoaib, 2023a, 2023b). Assessment methods, participation grading, and teacher expectations often align with dominant epistemic norms, privileging students who conform to masculine-coded behaviors and learning styles (Shoaib, Usmani, & Ali, 2022; Ullah, Shoaib, Ali, & Ullah, 2022). As a result, female or marginalized students internalize limitations on their academic potential or feel less entitled to occupy positions of knowledge authority (Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2022; Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022). Analyzing these dynamics through the lens of the sociology of knowledge emphasizes that pedagogy is not neutral; it both reflects and reproduces social power relations (Shoaib, Anwar, & Rasool, 2022; Shoaib, Mehmood, & Butt, 2022). This highlights the need for reflective teaching practices that consciously address gendered biases (Ali, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2022; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Abdullah, 2022; Shoaib, Anwar, & Mustafa, 2022), promote equitable participation, and support diverse modes of learning and expression within the classroom (Shoaib & Ullah, 2021a, 2021b; Ullah & Shoaib, 2021).

Theme 5: Intersection of Gender, Social Power, and Epistemic Access
The intersection of gender and social power profoundly shapes students' access to knowledge and participation in educational settings (Shoaib, Fatima, & Jamil, 2021; Shoaib, Iqbal, & Tahira, 2021; Shoaib, Rasool, & Anwar, 2021). Educational structures often reproduce societal hierarchies (Shoaib, Ali, & Akbar, 2021), whereby students' opportunities to engage with authoritative knowledge are influenced not only by gender but also by class (Shoaib, Ali, & Naseer, 2021), ethnicity, and other social identities (Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Shaukat, 2021). Male students frequently benefit from alignment with dominant epistemic norms, whereas female and marginalized students encounter

Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

structural barriers, limited recognition, or reduced encouragement to engage fully in knowledge production and classroom discourse (Shoaib, Ahmad, Ali, & Abdullah, 2021; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, Rasool, et al., 2021). This intersectional perspective highlights that inequalities in epistemic access are multifaceted (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2021), reflecting broader patterns of social stratification and power relations that extend beyond individual classrooms (Shoaib & Abdullah, 2021b).

Moreover, the unequal distribution of epistemic authority reinforces gendered expectations and influences students' academic self-concept, participation, and long-term educational trajectories (Shoaib, 2021). Students who are consistently positioned as less authoritative or competent internalize these hierarchies, impacting their confidence (Ali, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2021), aspirations, and engagement with learning (Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021). Conversely, students who navigate or resist these barriers develop strategies of negotiation (Ahmad, Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021), adaptation, or agency, which reshape their relationship with knowledge and authority (Abdullah & Shoaib, 2021a). Applying a sociology of knowledge lens to these dynamics underscores that equitable access to knowledge is not solely a matter of content inclusion (Abdullah & Shoaib, 2021b) but also involves addressing the power structures that determine whose voices are heard, valued, and legitimized in educational institutions (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2020; Shoaib & Ullah, 2019).

Theme 6: Student Agency and Resistance

Whereas educational structures often reproduce gendered hierarchies and epistemic inequalities, students are not passive recipients of these norms (Ahmad, Ahmad, & Shoaib, 2016; Shoaib & Rafique, 2015). They actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist the gendered constraints embedded in curricula, pedagogical practices, and classroom dynamics (Rafique & Shoaib, 2015; Shoaib, Shaukat, Khan, & Saeed, 2013). Resistance take multiple forms, ranging from questioning teacher authority and challenging biased content to seeking alternative knowledge sources or asserting intellectual presence in class discussions (Anwar, Shoaib, & Javed, 2013; Shoaib, Latif, & Usmani, 2013). Such acts of agency reflect students' critical engagement with the social construction of knowledge and their awareness of the unequal distribution of epistemic authority (Shoaib, Saeed, & Cheema, 2012).

Student agency also interacts with identity formation, as individuals navigate and redefine their roles within the educational field (Abdullah, Usmani, & Shoaib, 2023a; Anwar, Shoaib, & Shahid, 2024; Anwar, Shoaib, Zaman, & Arshad, 2024). Female and marginalized students, in particular, develop strategies to counteract limited participation, such as forming peer support networks, excelling in domains traditionally coded as masculine, or engaging in self-directed learning (Abdullah, Usmani, & Shoaib, 2023b; Anwar, Shoaib, & Mustafa, 2022; Naseer, Shoaib, Ali, & Bilal, 2021; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2021a). These efforts not only enhance personal academic trajectories but also challenge the institutionalized norms that perpetuate gendered knowledge hierarchies (Ali, Shoaib, & Asad, 2021; Ali, Shoaib, & Syed, 2021; Anwar, Shoaib, & Zahra, 2021; Mariam, Anwar, Shoaib, & Rasool, 2021; Naseer, Shoaib, Ali, & Ahmad, 2021). A sociology of knowledge perspective emphasizes that student resistance is both a response to and a potential disruptor of entrenched power relations (Abdullah & Shoaib, 2021a; A. Ahmad, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2021; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2020), highlighting the dynamic interplay between structural constraints and individual action in shaping equitable educational experiences (Shoaib, 2025a, 2025b).

Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

Theme 7: Policy Implications and Pathways Toward Inclusive Knowledge

Addressing the gendered construction of knowledge and disparities in educational authority requires deliberate policy interventions and structural reforms (Shoaib, 2024a, 2024e). Curriculum design must be critically examined and revised to incorporate diverse perspectives, represent historically marginalized voices, and challenge traditional gendered hierarchies of knowledge (Shoaib, 2024b, 2024d). Policies that promote inclusive pedagogical practices, equitable assessment methods, and teacher training on gender sensitivity are essential to ensure that all students have access to authoritative knowledge and meaningful participation in learning (Ali et al., 2022; Ullah & Shoaib, 2021). Institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion facilitate a shift from reproduction of inequality toward the cultivation of an equitable epistemic environment (Shoaib, 2021; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2021b).

Pathways toward inclusive knowledge also involve empowering students as active participants in shaping curricula and classroom practices (Shoaib, 2025a, 2025b). Encouraging critical thinking, collaborative decision-making, and student-led initiatives democratize the distribution of epistemic authority and foster a more participatory learning culture (Shoaib et al., 2020; Shoaib & Ullah, 2019). Moreover, integrating a sociology of knowledge perspective into educational policy highlights the importance of reflexivity among educators and policymakers, ensuring that knowledge is not only transmitted but critically examined in relation to social power structures (Shoaib, Ahmed, & Usmani, 2025b; Shoaib, Batool, et al., 2025). By aligning curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional practices with principles of equity and inclusivity, educational systems challenge gendered norms, expand epistemic access, and create transformative learning environments that value multiple ways of knowing (Shoaib, Ahmed, & Usmani, 2025a, 2025b).

Theoretical Insights

The sociology of knowledge provides a foundational framework for understanding how educational content, pedagogical practices, and institutional authority are socially constructed and imbued with power relations. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that knowledge is a product of social processes, maintained and legitimized through institutional practices. Applied to education, this perspective emphasizes that curricula are not neutral; they reflect dominant ideologies, shaping students' perceptions of what knowledge is legitimate and who holds epistemic authority. Gendered curricula, therefore, it understood as a mechanism through which societal norms regarding masculinity and femininity are reproduced within schools, subtly reinforcing hierarchies of power and authority (Connell, 1987; Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field further illuminate the interplay between social structures and individual agency in education. Habitus refers to the internalized dispositions shaped by socialization, which influence how students engage with knowledge and perceive their own academic capabilities (Bourdieu, 1990). Cultural and symbolic capital determine access to valued knowledge, with gendered norms often privileging male-coded forms of expertise and authority (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Teachers, as agents within the educational field, exercise epistemic authority that reflects these power structures, legitimizing certain forms of knowledge whereas marginalizing others. Additionally, feminist theorists emphasize the importance of intersectionality in understanding how gender interacts with class, ethnicity, and other social categories to shape access to knowledge and participation in educational institutions (Crenshaw, 1989). Collectively, these theoretical insights highlight that addressing gendered curricula and educational

authority requires a critical examination of both structural inequalities and the processes through which knowledge is constructed and legitimized.

Conclusion

This study highlights that curricula and educational authority are not neutral but socially constructed, reflecting and reproducing gendered power relations within educational institutions. By applying a sociology of knowledge perspective, it demonstrates how gendered content, pedagogical practices, and institutional authority shape students' access to knowledge, academic self-concept, and participation in learning. The findings reveal that whereas structural hierarchies and epistemic biases persist, students exercise agency and resistance, negotiating these constraints in diverse ways. Addressing these inequalities requires inclusive curricula, reflective pedagogy, and policy interventions that democratize knowledge, recognize diverse epistemologies, and foster equitable participation. Ultimately, transforming educational structures through these measures challenge entrenched gender norms, expand epistemic access, and promote social justice within learning environments.

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Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

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