TESOL and Feminist Pedagogy: The Application of Feminist Pedagogy in ESL versus EFL settings

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TESOL and Feminist Pedagogy:
The Application of Feminist Pedagogy in ESL versus EFL settings

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In
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ABSTRACT

TESOL and Feminist Pedagogy:
The Application of Feminist Pedagogy in ESL versus EFL settings

Emil Asanov

Feminist pedagogy, which emerged in the United States in the 1980s, is an anti-oppressive pedagogy that invites students to build community, fosters an inclusive learning environment for everyone to succeed and lead, and encourages power sharing among and between students and teachers. With feminism spreading and varying across the world, feminist pedagogy advertently or inadvertently manifests itself in the work of some English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers. Feminist pedagogy has received popularity in English classrooms all over the world, which is evidenced by increasing research on the topic (e.g., Vandrick, 1994, 1995, 2016; Yoshihara, 2013, 2014, 2017)

Despite interest in this topic, there is limited research on whether and how feminist pedagogy is understood and applied by ESL and EFL teachers, who may or may not identify as feminists or have any particular training in feminist theory. In this exploratory study, I pose two research questions such as “How do ESL and EFL instructors understand feminist pedagogy?” and “In what ways do ESL and EFL instructor apply feminist pedagogy?” to examine what ESL and EFL teachers in the United States and Russia think of feminist pedagogy, whether they apply feminist pedagogy practices consciously or unconsciously, and how feminist pedagogy can shape ESL and EFL curricula.

For my primary research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with four ESL and three EFL instructors from the United States and Russia, respectively, over Zoom. I then applied thematic coding and thematic analysis to analyze their responses and to discover overarching themes across all seven interviews.

The themes that arose show how instructors from both ESL and EFL settings and both countries understand and apply feminist pedagogy in their classroom. The instructors’ responses add and challenge the existing definitions of feminist pedagogy by expanding into the realm of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Further research into ESL and EFL teachers’ understandings and applications of feminist pedagogy is, however, needed to establish or question the connection between what the participants say during the interview, i.e. beliefs or teaching beliefs, and what they actually do in their classrooms, i.e., teaching practices.
To Neney, Dilara, and Zinera – three women that are long gone but that are always and forever in my heart

Посвящается Неней, Диларе и Зинере – трём женщинам, которых уже давно нет с нами, но которые навсегда в моём сердце
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Introduction

Sara Mitcho (2016) writes that feminist pedagogy “brings to bear feminist theory, feminist activism, and women’s experiences on educational content, the learning environment, the relationship between teacher and student, and the connection between the learning environment and the outside world” (p. 1). It is then fair to say that feminist pedagogy is “an overarching philosophy - a theory of teaching that integrates feminist values with related theories and research on learning and teaching (Vanderbilt Center for Teaching, n.d.). However you define it, feminist pedagogy is a critical, or anti-oppressive, approach to teaching because it rejects and contests traditional, repressive (Almanssori, 2020) pedagogical practices and strategies that contribute to the spread and development of hegemonic power structures and instead works toward reconceptualizing knowledge construction, voice, authority, and positionality (Tisdell, 1998).

Feminist pedagogy emerged as a result of the success of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the late 1960s, which “grew out of a struggle for civil rights, had a substantial influence on women and girls’ access to education and the beginning of women’s studies in the US… [and] brought public awareness to the nonexistence of women and the feminine in university curriculums” (Almanssori, 2020, p. 55). As a term in academic literature, “feminist pedagogy” was first used by Fisher (1981). According to Fisher (1981), feminist pedagogy is “teaching, which is anti-sexist, and anti-hierarchical, and which stresses women’s experiences, both the suffering our oppression has caused us and the strengths we have developed to resist it” (p. 20).

Feminist pedagogy was also a response to other anti-oppressive pedagogies that had come into being before. In particular, some strands of feminist pedagogy emerged in response to
or even against Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy (Vandrick, 1994). Freire’s critical pedagogy, which he first pioneered in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), is a pedagogy that focuses on the relationships between institutional structures such as policy, curriculum, and text and how these structures can be forms of oppression targeting those at the periphery (Almanssori, 2020). In particular, critical pedagogy challenges the power dynamic that exists between social classes by bringing to attention the inequalities that working and lower class people have to unjustly face in formal educational settings. While feminist pedagogy was definitely at least partially influenced by Freire’s ideas concerning how class differentials affect and undermine people’s learning and formal education, it also challenged them by addressing “the gendered nature of learning” (Tisdell, 1998; Crabtree et al., 2009). That is, feminist pedagogy critiqued Freire’s work because it does not address how gender affects learning and power differentials in the classroom or how one can use their personal experience and complexity of their identity, which would later in the study be referred as “positionality,” as valid knowledge in order to generate more knowledge about the connection between individual and social structures.

Additionally, hooks (1994) explains that Freire’s critical pedagogy lacks excitement. More specifically, she believes that critical pedagogy does not celebrate learning, the excitement that learning can bring, and students and teachers that do the learning. Instead, it is too focused on the marginalized status of select groups of oppressed students. hooks’ thoughts echo those of Almanssorri (2020) who writes that in critical pedagogy, individuals are not celebrated for their intersectional identities and what makes them individuals and instead have their voices equalized under the guise of democratic education as if every individual experienced oppression alike.
While gender and women’s issues lie at the core of feminist pedagogy as they were the founding principles, intersectionality, i.e., the overlappings of our identities (e.g., Black, trans, gay, first-generation student, refugee, etc.) and the effect those overlappings have on us (Crenshaw, 1989), has become one of the key premises of feminist pedagogy. “The concept of “woman” does not exist in isolation from other identities. Rather, identity is “intersectional,” a term that recognizes the interlocking and inextricable relationship between different aspects of identity and systems of oppression” (Vanderbilt Center for Teaching, n.d.).

Language teaching is no stranger to feminist pedagogy. In particular, different TESOL scholars (e.g. Vandrick, 1994, 1995, 2016; Yoshihara, 2013; 2014; 2017) have been exploring the impact of feminist pedagogy in the field. Despite the prolific work that has been done to investigate feminist pedagogy in TESOL, there is still a need for more research, especially in comparison with how much feminist pedagogy has been researched and applied in other fields, such as STEM or psychology. For example, there are numerous studies, like Schettion’s (2016) on adolescent student’s achievement in a Math classroom, where STEM teachers use feminist pedagogy to spark excitement, curiosity, and inquiry and to encourage collaboration and understanding of difference to counter traditional STEM teaching methods that tend to be “procedural, individualistic, competitive, distant, and objective” (Almanssori, 2020, p. 58). In this case, feminist pedagogy becomes what hooks (1994) terms “engaged pedagogy” because “the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should prevail, then pedagogical strategies were needed that would intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere” (p.7).

Feminist pedagogy is crucial for applied linguistics. Pennycook (2021) writes that different critical turns have entered the field of applied linguistics, which he himself calls
“critical applied linguistics.” Those include feminist, raciolinguistic, queer, translingual, decolonial, and other turns. This proliferation of “radical” turns and their significance have in turn called for new approaches to language pedagogy because “education, like language, is political” (Pennycook, 2021, p. 129). By engaging in radical pedagogies like feminist pedagogy, educators make the classroom contexts relatable to the wider social contexts by making clear the inequalities in society and creating enough room not just for thought but also for action and transformation (Banegas and de Castro, 2016). As a result, radical pedagogies’ foray into applied linguistics has enabled research and classroom conversations around TESOL and neoliberalism (Block, Gray, and Holborow, 2012), TESOL and colonialism and/or imperialism (Phillipson, 2009), teacher and student identity (Guerrero, 2010; Vandrick, 2016), the contents and use of published teaching materials (Gray, 2013), and the like. It has empowered many to reconsider and create teaching practices so they can be anti-oppressive, context-responsive, and transformative (McDeath, 2019; Crossman, 2019), and it has also empowered many to be mindful of different needs of different student populations, especially those that find themselves on the margins.

Feminist pedagogy is known for approaches to anti-oppressive education that many people do not realize have their roots in feminist pedagogy. Crabtree et al. (2009) consider practices such as discussion based-learning, collaborative work, and activities that tie classroom learning to activism in the outside community to have originated as feminist pedagogy practices. Additionally, Sara Mitcho (2016) argues that consciousness-raising activities originated in feminist circles in the 1970s. These practices are often an essential, but not an exclusive, part of different Women’s and Gender Studies courses because of their discussion-based nature.
As far as TESOL is concerned, Vandrick (2016) states that anti-oppressive education should also be an essential part of second or foreign language education, including TESOL, because “we need radical, open-minded thinking to address sexism and discrimination based on sex, gender, and sexual identity” (p. 227). Vandrick’s claim is similar to that of McDeath (2019) who believes that TESOL teachers should treat teaching as a radical act, bring into focus groups that have traditionally been left out, be open about how they feel about different issues such as racism, and empower students to learn on their own without relying on “some gatekeeper of knowledge” (p. 191).

Feminist pedagogy offers educators an approach that is student-centered, critical, and timely. First, in a feminist classroom, both students and professor contribute and their contributions are resources for generating knowledge. As hooks (1994) writes, “there must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes” (p. 8). Second, feminist pedagogy is critical because it challenges the model where teachers and students alike exploit the classroom for their opportunistic concerns. The criticality of feminist pedagogy, as hooks (1994) argues, is in that through centering learning around the personal and the different, feminist pedagogy emphasizes that “the pleasure of teaching is an act of resistance countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterest, and apathy that so often characterize the way professors and students feel about teaching and learning, about the classroom experience” (hooks, 1994, p. 10). Furthermore, it is critical in that it changes depending on the classroom, the students, and the professor, and it is critical in that it empowers us to transgress boundaries and think of the classroom as “the most radical space of possibility in the academy” (hooks, 1994, p. 12). Lastly, feminist pedagogy is relevant now as never before. Almanssori (2020) writes that feminist pedagogy and its treatment of emotion as a form of knowledge and truth are endangered
by the post-truth phenomenon. According to McIntyre (2018), the term “post-truth” describes a cultural phenomenon in which truth is being challenged “as a mechanism for asserting political dominance” (p. xiv). With the advent of the post-truth rhetoric, i.e., the rhetoric that anyone can claim their own truth regardless of their expertise, experience, or emotion, the appreciation of emotion as a knowledge-generating resource is receding (Almanssori, 2020). This has in turn contributed to the development of anti-feminist rhetoric, which, according to Almanssori (2020), under the disguise of financial cuts has resulted in the defunding of Women’s and Gender Studies courses and programs across North America.

Before we apply feminist pedagogy, it is important for us, educators, to understand what is behind such a label. Even more so, it is important for us to have our own understandings of what is behind the label. As hooks (1994) writes, any radical, or anti-oppressive, pedagogy, primarily including feminist pedagogy, is constantly reinvented and conceptualized “to address each new teaching experience” (p. 11). It is especially curious to compare how feminist pedagogy is understood and applied in different English language teaching settings by people that do not necessarily know what feminist pedagogy is but may consciously and/or unconsciously engage in anti-oppressive, feminist education. The need for more research into feminist pedagogy in TESOL becomes more apparent and critical as most of the literature that focuses on feminist pedagogy comes from fields other than TESOL, which is evidenced by the cited works throughout the study, and from North America because “the majority of the literature and surrounding contextual discussions are from the US and Canada” (Almanssori, 2020, p. 54).

With this in mind, I will now discuss what is critical about critical pedagogy, how critical pedagogy originated, and how it entered applied linguistics and TESOL. Following this, I will discuss the same of feminist pedagogy and how important it is to research feminist pedagogy in
TESOL, which will then lead to my primary research. In the sections on my primary research, I first discuss my participants and research design and then I go on to discuss the findings of my research and their implications.
Literature Review

Critical Approaches and TESOL

Critical pedagogy is a pedagogy for a reason. Crabtree et al. (2009) argue that pedagogy is “the art, craft, and science of teaching” (p.1). They argue it is different from teaching in that its origin is somewhat critical. In Ancient Greek, “pedo” means “boy, child” and “agogos” means “leader” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). So, a pedagogue is literally a “boy/child leader.” Interestingly, a pedagogue in Ancient Greece “was a slave who led boys to school and back, but also taught them manners and tutored them after school” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The fact that the oppressed had to take the role of mentor and educator can speak to the critical nature of the term “pedagogy.”

Critical pedagogy is a pedagogy that is grounded in critical theory, i.e., the aspiration “toward society in its actual and developing forms, informed by a strong ethical concern for the individual and a rejection of all possible excuses for hunger, domination, humiliation, or injustice, and a longing for a better world” (Blake & Masschelein, p. 39). As a theory, “it seeks human “emancipation from slavery,” acts as a “liberating … influence,” and works “to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of human beings (Horkheimer, 1992, p. 246). Any critical work would then be work aimed at transforming an unjust society into a more just one by addressing and deriving from the needs of the marginalized.

It is then fair to say that for critical pedagogy, it would be natural to tackle the social issues of the day and lead students toward developing a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), i.e., an analysis of the social issues and possible solutions to solving them. With its focus on the oppressed, critical pedagogy aspires to create “democratic dialogue” in the classroom that can serve as the basis of the liberatory, i.e., critical, classroom.
Although it seems that it is possible to define “critical pedagogy” and what it is grounded in, critical pedagogues argue (Kirylo et al., 2010) that any attempt to categorize or define critical pedagogy contradicts the fundamental beliefs underlying it: It would limit its changing status and even mission in the world. So, critical pedagogy is not only a pedagogical practice but also a response to the issues reflective of a certain epoch.

The origin and development of critical pedagogy is often credited to Paulo Freire, a renowned Brazilian educator. In his “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1970), Freire describes and criticizes what he refers to as “banking education”, the concept of learning in which the teacher takes on a somewhat authoritarian position and so makes themselves superior to the students and puts knowledge into their heads without ever asking them for their feedback and encouraging them to contribute to classroom procedures. Thus, critical pedagogy is an educational approach or strategy that encourages student-teacher interaction and cooperation with a view to addressing global, social issues, regardless of the subject. Furthermore, it empowers learners to be “critical actors who make meaning by posing problems of their lives in the world around them” (Simpson, 2009). In other words, critical pedagogy encourages learners to be active participants both in and out of the classroom.

Critical pedagogy is a response to any pedagogy where the teacher-student dichotomy is intensified and where teachers are positioned strictly as knowledge holders whereas students are positioned strictly as knowledge creators. What is, however, interesting is that critical pedagogy is also different from other, less repressive approaches to teaching. Constructivism is a case in point. According to Carr et al (1998), constructivism is a teaching model where students “take in information from the world and then construct their known view of that knowledge domain” (p. 8). Applying constructivism to teaching, teachers do actually support the active participation of
learners, value different perspectives, encourage and involve collaborative work, and emphasize the connection between classroom and real-life learning. Although these tenants show that constructivism has a lot in common with critical pedagogy, it does treat the classroom as different from real life. While it stresses the connection between both and teaches learners skills that they are invited to apply to real life, constructivism presents a classroom as an environment that is not part of real life, which is the opposite of critical pedagogy. Evidence for this is provided by how constructivism does not address the need for anti-oppressive change not only in the classroom but also in the whole education system that derives from the “banking model” of education where learners now even expect to be told what to learn and how to learn it (Carr et al, 1998).

Waters (2012) argues that since 1995, one of the key developments in ESL methodology has been the application of critical approaches to teaching ESL or EFL. These critical approaches are inspired by and founded on what is called critical pedagogy and other critical approaches to education, like feminist pedagogy, queer pedagogy, black feminist pedagogy, etc. At its core lies the idea that “structures of inequality are created and perpetuated by certain kinds of teaching policies and practices, and that more equitable ones should therefore be adopted in order to solve this problem” (Waters, 2012).

In 1999, TESOL Quarterly published a special issue on the implementation of critical pedagogy in ESL and EFL contexts. In the introduction to the special issue, Pennycook (1999) explains what critical approaches to TESOL are. He believes that critical approaches to TESOL need to “do with a political understanding of the location of pedagogy and the development of a way of teaching aimed at transformation” (p. 341). In other words, Pennycook is of the opinion that critical pedagogy should neither be merely reduced to nor confused with critical thinking,
which is an approach to developing a sort of questioning attitude in students, and that it should be political in the sense that it should encourage both teachers and students to analyze what issues affect both global and TESOL contexts at the same time. For instance, critical approaches to TESOL may raise issues that consider the relationship between the native speaker and the nonnative speakers or race or ethnicity issues that may be associated with language learning or even the connection between these two sets of issues: “The notion that native and nonnative speakers, furthermore, is interwoven with issues of race and ethnicity, as one’s nativeness as a speaker of English is often assumed to correlate with the paleness of one’s skin” (p. 333).

Anya and Randolph (2020) also write that it is important for language teachers to engage with critical pedagogy to get a greater understanding of issues of diversity facing teachers and students alike in language education. They believe that if language teachers explore anti-oppressive pedagogies, they may find ways to empower students that have been traditionally marginalized and underrepresented in language education, such as Black students, because critical pedagogy can offer the “inquiry on the day-to-day learning experiences of language learners.” Coupled with other factors, such as language policy and community engagement, critical pedagogy can help educators understand why certain groups of students choose to study second or foreign languages, whereas others do not.

Research into critical pedagogy has taken a special place not only in TESOL but also in second language acquisition (SLA), which is “the academic field of investigating how languages other than one’s first (native) language are learned” (Loewen and Reinders, 2011, p. 153). According to Crookes (2012), more and more TESOL and SLA researchers are engaging with critical pedagogy. Evidence for this growth is provided by the fact that there is an academic journal called *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* and a professional society called *The
International Society for Language Studies, which, as Crookes (2012) writes, “is notably hospitable to ideas of critical language pedagogy and associated positions” (p. 5).

Despite the interest that many applied linguistics and ESL and EFL teachers take in critical pedagogy and its correlation with TESOL, critical pedagogy is believed by some to have turned into an ideology that interferes with common, traditional pedagogical practices, especially in ESL/EFL contexts. For example, Waters (2009) claims that critical pedagogy in TESOL advocates constantly using authentic materials in class and connecting all the classroom practices to real-life situations and problems so that learners can familiarize themselves with more varieties of English than just standard English and so that they can be better prepared to deal with different situations in both their first language (L1) and their second language (L2). Additionally, he draws a connection between critical approaches to TESOL and other critical ideas like the anti-textbook stance, the learner-centered approach, task-based learning, the proscription of cultural generalizations, and the use of non-metropolitan language models.

Waters takes issue with the above practices and beliefs because he thinks that they promote an ideologically biased view of language teaching and undermine common pedagogical practices.

Waters’ views are, however, challenged by Simpson (2009) who emphasizes the interconnectedness of “language taught in class and language knowledge required for daily life” (p. 431). He believes that critical pedagogy helps ESL and EFL learners acquire the skill of critical thinking in both their L1 and L2, which, in turn, enables them to engage in problem-solving activities not only in class but also in real life. He gives an example of how critical pedagogy fosters an open learning environment in ESL classes for immigrants, who not only need to learn a new language but also find themselves in a new environment they are not familiar with yet. He argues that critical pedagogy benefits learners in such classes through the use of
real-life examples, like difficult job interviews for immigrants, and provides them with tools to deal with such situations outside class.

According to Crookes (2009), “there are different strands of critical pedagogy, and indeed there may be a growing diversity” (p. 7). For example, Crookes writes about how critical pedagogy can shift its focus on a more concrete construct depending on what lies at the core of the critical practice. One such construct is gender and it is closely tied with what is commonly known as feminist pedagogy.

**Feminist Pedagogy**

Feminist pedagogy “refers to a particular philosophy of and set of practices for classroom-based teaching that is informed by feminist theory and grounded in the principles of feminism” (Crabtree et al, 2009, p. 1). This is a straightforward yet inaccessible definition of feminist pedagogy because unless one is familiar with what “feminist theory” and “the principles of feminism” mean, they will probably have a very vague idea of what feminist pedagogy entails. Thus, Crabtree et al. (2009) offer a more accessible definition, which better explains what constitutes feminist pedagogy: “Feminist pedagogy, then, can be seen as a movement against hegemonic educational practices that tacitly accept or more forcefully reproduce an oppressively gendered, classed, racialized, and androcentric social order” (p.1).

Vandrick (1994) writes that feminist pedagogy is the result of the combination of the so-called “six strands”: psychological research, educational research based on classroom observation, critical pedagogy, linguistic research, composition research, and literary feminist thought. Critical pedagogy is believed by many to have had the most influence on the development of feminist pedagogy (Vandrick, 1994; Tisdell, 1998; Crabtree et al, 2009). Just as critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy acknowledges the existence of oppression in education as
well as the possibility of ending it and foregrounds the desire for and primary goal of social transformation (e.g., the banking model of education). However, feminist pedagogy is different from Freire’s critical pedagogy in that it defines identity and emotion as key to knowledge production. As Crabtree et al (2009) discuss, feminist pedagogy articulates “the multifaceted and shifting nature of identities and oppressions” (p. 3). That is, feminist pedagogues are critical of the fact that critical pedagogy does not take an intersecting approach to viewing learners and helping them deal with them outside class. “Intersecting approach” refers to the kind of approach that considers a person’s background as a combination of factors that have influenced them such as race, sexual orientation, gender identity, sex, religion, etc. Furthermore, Forrest and Rosenberg (1997) stress that feminist pedagogy is different from any other radical pedagogy because it “uniquely attends to women’s lives and oppressions and gender analyses of historical and sociocultural influences” (p. 180).

Because feminist pedagogy derives from many fields other than critical pedagogy, it is also thought to have variations across different feminist camps (Tisdell, 1998). However, it is true that researchers (Tisdell, 1998; Yoshihara, 2017) find poststructural feminist pedagogy to be a flexible variation that brings together different feminist pedagogies and addresses connection between individual and social structures. More specifically, poststructural feminist pedagogy emphasizes “connections between social constructions of identity (by race, gender, class), how knowledge is constructed on an individual level, and the politics of knowledge production. So, for the purposes of this study, I chose not to define other modes of feminist pedagogy and instead treated feminist pedagogy as one generic term that accommodates many variations that arise differently from different teachers’ and students’ needs because “feminist pedagogy is not
specific practices; each classroom, each teacher, each group of students, is different” (Vandrick, 1994, p. 84).

As a conflation of various fields, feminist pedagogy also has its own distinct tenants that Shrewsbury (1987) lays out in her article, which is considered to be one of the pioneering and theoretically fundamental works on feminist pedagogy (Almnassori, 2020). For Shrewsbury, feminist pedagogy presents the idea that teaching and learning can be liberatory in an environment where teachers and students act as subjects rather than as objects meaning that everyone is an active participant in the construction of knowledge. Students and teachers are invited to re-define their “teacher-student” and “student-teacher” identities and relationships and oppose the traditional, hierarchical power dynamic of the classroom through participatory and democratic processes like power-sharing. In a classroom like this, people care about each other’s learning and contribute to each other’s learning, learn to appreciate difference rather than fear it, and treat integrity as the norm.

Just as hooks (1994), Shrewsbury (1987) contests that “feminist pedagogy is engaged teaching/learning - engaged with self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change” (p. 6). For both authors, engagement drives learning and makes it exciting and purposeful: It gives students and teachers alike purpose as they learn and analyze how their learning increases their understandings of what the world is like and of what the world could and can be like.
Shrewsbury (1987) also writes that the part and parcel of feminist pedagogy is its emphasis on gender justice and overcoming oppressions in societal institutions and structures that are gendered. That is, the gendered nature of learning and teaching begets feminist pedagogy as a pedagogy that inspires growth, evolution, and the need to learn and critically look at what makes us whole as students, teachers, and individuals. That said, feminist pedagogy does not always focus on the oppression of one gender in particular and instead offers a new look at what teaching and learning can be like for all people and for all genders, including but not limiting to those that identify as female.

As a result, feminist pedagogy brings students and instructors together to explore diverse experiences and how those experiences make us similar and different. Shrewsbury (1987) suggests that to explore and celebrate these differences, students and instructors engage with three tenants of feminist pedagogy: empowerment, community, and leadership. These three tenants are critical to feminist pedagogy and they build upon each other.

The concept of empowerment in feminist pedagogy challenges that of power in traditional schooling. Through its own idea of empowerment, feminist pedagogy moves away from power as domination to power as energy, capacity, and potential, which Shrewsbury (1987) refers to as “creative energy” (p. 9). Thus, being empowered does not mean seeking domination but rather engaging in meaningful, shared learning and recognizing and celebrating yours and others’ differences as facilitators of your shared learning.

As creative energy, power is shared between students and instructor. That is, power is not a luxury that only teachers can afford - instead, it is available to all actors so they can claim their learning, their own voice, and their own autonomy. Power sharing allows students and instructors to “connect in mutually productive ways … [to] enhance the stake that everyone has
in the success of a course and thereby make clear the responsibility of all members of the class for the learning of all” (pp. 8-9).

Among some empowering or power-sharing strategies, Shrewsbury includes enhancing “the students’ opportunities and ability to develop their thinking about the goals and objectives they wish and need to accomplish individually and collectively” and “developing the students’ independence (from formal instructors) as learners” (p. 9).

Speaking of individual and collective accomplishments, Shrewsbury (1987) writes that community-building in feminist pedagogy challenges the idea that community is “either the polar opposite of autonomy or as the rather weak conception of an aggregate of individuals together because of some shared formality like geographic boundaries” (p. 11). Feminist pedagogy then presents a re-imagining of the classroom as a community of learners where students participate both as individuals and as community members, where fairness, equity, and difference are considered building blocks of the learning experience, and where individual rights co-exist with compassion and care.

Community building is important because it allows for empowerment. In a feminist classroom, empowerment is possible only if there is a sense of mutuality. And mutuality is possible only if there is cooperation, especially cooperation between genders. Shrewsbury (1987) notes that while women aspire to build connections as they learn, men aspire to create rules that would govern their relationships with others and their roles in those relationships. Feminist pedagogy calls for a shift from relationships as instruments to relationships as integration and collective effort. Thus, collaborative work is both an essential element of feminist pedagogy and is a liberatory practice.
Lastly, leadership in feminist pedagogy entails taking responsibility for yours and others’ learning. More specifically, Shrewsbury finds important to feminist pedagogy a number of leadership practices, such as “developing goals and objectives for a course, “[learning] planning and negotiation skills,” and “finding connections between their needs and the needs of others” (p. 11). Furthermore, through collaborative work, students learn about how to work in groups, how to take on different leadership roles, and how to share work as they work toward meeting individual and collective goals. This vision of leadership serves as “a special form of empowerment that empowers others” (p. 12).

For a feminist teacher, it is important to be a role model of a leader because they instill in their students a sense of shared purpose and help members of the class develop a community in the first place. Then the teacher and students can collaborate and take responsibility for theirs and everyone else’s efforts.

Shrewsbury (1987) emphasizes that all feminist classrooms are different, which depends on a number of factors. One such factor, which can, however, interlock with other factors, is the field where feminist pedagogy is practiced. Now that we are turning to feminist pedagogy and its application in TESOL, it is important to remember the three key tenants but also to keep an open mind about what can be specific to TESOL as it concerns feminist pedagogy.

Feminist Pedagogy and TESOL

Feminist pedagogy first graced TESOL in the 1990s and has gathered considerable interest ever since. Vandrick (1994) outlines that feminist pedagogy plays an important role in TESOL because of a number of gender-related problems and topics that are germane to the field: sexism in ESL materials, the connection between linguistics studies of gender and L2
acquisition, treatment of female students in EFL and ESL programs, and the impact that sociolinguistic findings on gender and language have on TESOL.

Vandrick (1994) also states that TESOL is ideological just like any other field, which is why it should help to improve the world by making visible the marginalized in education, especially women. Thus, she discusses how important it is to pay attention to different speaking styles that people of different genders have, to ensure the inclusive nature of the materials that teachers use in class, and to avoid stereotyping and even to combat it whenever and wherever possible. She also mentions that feminist pedagogy is a kind of pedagogy that helps teachers create a safe zone for everyone to share their concerns without being afraid of being judged. Thus, feminist pedagogy classrooms are open learning environments where the issues of the marginalized are often at the heart of lessons.

Following this, Vandrick (1994) suggests a couple of ways to implement feminist pedagogy that are specific to second or foreign language teaching. One of the ways is to talk more about women and first teach words that have been traditionally used for women. For example, she cites one French teacher who teaches female family members to her students first. That is, they first teach words like “mother, aunt, and grandmother” and only then move on to words like “father, uncle, and grandfather.” This practice can definitely be applied to the teaching of English, too.

Apart from Vandrick, there exists more research on feminist pedagogy in ESL settings. For example, Johnson and Chang (2012) conducted a survey in Texas in order to find out how open ESL teachers are to discussing gender and sexuality issues with students in their classes.

Feminist pedagogy as a construct does not exclusively belong to ESL. According to Crookes (2009), critical, or anti-oppressive, pedagogies, such as feminist pedagogy, are
appropriate for various cultures because people can face discrimination on any basis worldwide. As such, feminist pedagogy has found its way into EFL settings, too. For example, Yoshihara (2013) surveyed Japanese EFL teachers about whether they like the idea of a feminist curriculum and, if so, whether they would use it to raise gender and sexuality issues in the classes that they teach.

Both of the above studies report that a good number of ESL and EFL teachers are interested in feminist pedagogy and are curious to implement it in their work. They also report that most teachers are willing to discuss gender and sexuality issues as part of the curriculum because these can serve as cultural codes and as keys to better understanding gender roles or even perhaps lack thereof in Anglophone countries nowadays.

Yoshihara (2014) feels that more research on feminist ESL/EFL teachers’ practices in different countries and institutions would help local ESL/EFL teachers practice feminist pedagogy. Surprisingly, there is not much research or literature on how feminist pedagogy is viewed in EFL classes, particularly in countries that may seem more conservative than others. Russia, for example, could be a good case in point because despite its conservatism, there is a big feminist movement that is gaining momentum there (Rossman, 2021; Surman & Rossman, 2021). As Yoshihara’s study (2013) shows, EFL classes present students with a different experience than any other class because they are engaged in learning a foreign language so they can engage with new cultures and new ideas. As a result, EFL classes should be a friendly learning environment for everyone, but given how conservative most post-Soviet societies are (Surman & Rossman, 2021), critical approaches to teaching may not work as effectively there as somewhere else.
Interestingly, there is also no research on how EFL and ESL instructors come to understand feminist pedagogy and feminist pedagogy practices, regardless of where they are from. While there are studies that address the understandings of feminist pedagogy that ESL or EFL instructors that identify as feminists and/or feminist pedagogues (Yoshihara, 2014) have, there are no studies that show how lay ESL and EFL instructors who may not be versed in feminist theory or keep up with the feminist movement can add to and challenge the definition of feminist pedagogy and its tenants articulated by scholars like Shrewsbury (1987). Through their own understandings of the term, through their work as language instructors, and through their classroom practices that they themselves may not consider feminist or anti-oppressive, both ESL and EFL instructors may test how accessible “feminist pedagogy” is to them and how it could be applied in their settings.

Lastly, there is no research on how the setting, such ESL or EFL classrooms in different countries, can affect instructors’ understandings of and applications of feminist pedagogy. Nor is there any research that compares these different settings. While there are many variables to consider when discussing someone’s understanding of feminist pedagogy being contrasted with someone else’s, the ESL and EFL dichotomy may impact how one understands and applies feminist pedagogy.

Thus, the following questions were posed: “How do ESL and EFL instructors understand feminist pedagogy?” and “In what ways do ESL and EFL instructors apply feminist pedagogy?”

In the next chapter, I discuss my participants, what research design I used, and how I analyzed the data.
Methodology

Study participants

The current study is a qualitative study that explores interview data from four participants in the United States and three participants in Russia (see Table 1). To participate in the study, participants had to match the following criteria:

- They had to be at least 18 years of age; and
- They had to be an ESL instructor from the United States or an EFL instructor from Russia.

While all participants in Russia identified as female, three participants in the United States identified as female and one identified as male at the time of the interview. All four ESL instructors – Alexandria, Jackie, Alan, and Mel (pseudonyms) – worked at the same post-secondary institution. While Alexandria and Jackie worked as full-time instructors, Alan and Mel worked as graduate teaching assistants. In contrast, the EFL instructors – Anna, Lidia, and Helen (pseudonyms) – all taught in different settings: Anna worked in a secondary school, Lidia worked in a university, and Helen worked in a private EFL school. Furthermore, Anna, Lidia, and Helen were from different cities in Russia.

All three EFL instructors spoke Russian as their first language (L1) and English as their additional language (L2) and were originally from Russophone countries: Lidia and Anna were originally from Russia, whereas Helen was originally from Kazakhstan but lived and worked in Russia at the time of the interview. As for ESL instructors, two of them – Jackie and Mel – spoke English as their L1 and were originally from the United States, whereas Alexandria and Alan spoke English as their L2, were both originally from Brazil, and spoke Portuguese as their L1.
Table 1

*Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Alexandria</th>
<th>Jackie</th>
<th>Mel</th>
<th>Alan</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Lidia</th>
<th>Helen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of birth</td>
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<td>United States</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of residence and work</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>English</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL or EFL</td>
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<td>ESL</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>EFL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Post-secondary institution</td>
<td>Post-secondary institution</td>
<td>Post-secondary institution</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>Post-secondary institution</td>
<td>Private school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
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<td>Full-time instructor</td>
<td>Graduate teaching assistant</td>
<td>Graduate teaching assistant</td>
<td>Full-time teacher</td>
<td>Part-time instructor</td>
<td>Freelancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
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<td>No contact prior to the interview</td>
<td>Classmate</td>
<td>Classmate</td>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The table presents some geographic, linguistic, and professional information about each study participant.
Data Collection

Before starting data collection, I completed the required research training and submitted a protocol application to the WVU IRB. My protocol qualified as exempt (number: 2109419802). When I interviewed my participants, I did so according to the norms and with the permission of the WVU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Subjects.

To recruit participants for this study, I sent an email to ten ESL instructors at one postsecondary institution in the United States and to five EFL instructors in Russia that I personally knew. Each candidate I contacted received a cover letter outlining the details of the study. I contacted each instructor personally and there was no snowball sampling involved. Out of all the people that I contacted, four ESL instructors in the United States and three EFL instructors in Russia volunteered to participate.

Interviews

To solicit data from the participants, I held one-on-one thirty-minute interviews with every participant on Zoom. All interviews took place in October and November 2021. All seven interviews were recorded. Before an interview, I asked every participant’s permission to record.

I decided to use semi-structured, or loosely structured (Perry, 2017), interviews because through interviews, “an interpersonal connection is formed between the interviewer and the interviewee. This connection allows for direct monitoring for comprehension of the questions and modification in the case of misunderstandings” (Perry, 2017, p. 125). With semi-structured interviews, “you have a set of predetermined questions, but the interviewer is free to follow up a question with additional questions that probe further… to capture participants’ experiences, views, and feelings” (Perry, 2017, p. 126). The personal plays a key role in feminist pedagogy (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007; Sprague, 2016), which is why it was important for me to use a
“personal” collection procedure. The fact that I knew most participants personally also made it easier to establish rapport right at the beginning of the interview. I also believe that the personal element made interviews relaxing and comfortable for the participants to speak freely. I had never discussed feminist pedagogy or critical pedagogy with any of the seven participants before the interviews.

Talmy (2010) writes that the interview as a data-collection procedure has significantly increased in applied linguistics “particularly in qualitative studies that aim to investigate participants’ identities, experiences, beliefs, and orientations toward a range of phenomena” (p. 128). Given the construct, which is feminist pedagogy, and the variables, which are my participants’ understandings of feminist pedagogy, I was certain that the interview was one of the most effective instruments available to me.

Talmy (2010) argues that the interview can be both a research instrument and social practice. In my study, I employ the interview as both because I am interested in both the product and the process. According to Talmy (2010), interviews as research instrument and interviews as social practice are both used to generate data that can be analyzed and used to answer research questions. I treat my interviews as an instrument because I used the interviews as starting points of my data analysis. As a result, interviews become collections of information that I can use to understand how ESL and EFL professional define feminist pedagogy and how they apply it to their teaching (e.g., consciously or unconsciously). By analyzing the collections, I can discover different themes that can be found in my participants’ responses. They are patterns or recurring motifs. So, I used thematic analysis, which, according to Talmy (2010), is typical of the interview-as-instrument perspective because it groups and summarizes participants’ responses by content themes or content categories. Although I discuss how I employed thematic analysis for
the analysis of my data later in this section, it is also important to discuss it here because thematic analysis, as part of the interview-as-instrument perspective, is oriented toward the product. In contrast, interview as social practice treats interviews as sites or topics for investigation rather than tools or resources for collecting data. By applying the interview-as-social-practice perspective, the interviewee moves from being “a passive vessel of answers” to someone that “not only holds facts and details of experience, but in the very process of offering them up for response, constructively adds to, takes away from, and transforms facts and details.” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, p. 131). Thus, it was also crucial for me as a researcher to observe how my participants generated and shared their knowledge in the course of the interviews. In other words, I was not only interested in their responses but was also interested in their reactions to my questions, how they used hesitation markers to generate ideas, how they would invite me to clarify certain questions, and so on. Furthermore, since my participants did not have to be familiar with the term “feminist pedagogy,” I was curious to know how they interpreted the terms and so generated knowledge during the interviews: They shared their ideas with me and they also explained why they thought those ideas could be valid. Thus, our interviews became collaborative, which is, in turn, recognized as a common feature of feminist research (Sprague, 2016).

My interviews also served as social practice because my participants’ responses were definitely influenced by their position and their positionality, i.e., how they were viewed and treated in society (position) and how they viewed and presented, or positioned, themselves in society (positioning). My perspective as a researcher was influenced by my position and positioning, as well. Talmy (2010) writes that for the interview-as-social-practice perspective, researchers should consider theirs and their participants’ positions and positionings. According to
Green et al. (2020), positions “are dynamic and evolving clusters of norms and expectations that people … perform (or reject) in varied and unique ways” (p. 121). Positions can, for example, be institutionally defined (e.g., “student” vs. “teacher”) or situationally constructed and enacted, in which case every person’s background, experiences, and goals are important and have an impact. Green et al. (2020) write that positions are “fluid, dynamic, and always in the process of being constructed in particular contexts” (p. 121). Thus, for me, it was important to also take into account the fact that my participants’ responses are at least partially dependent on and affected by different factors such as whether they were full-time instructors, graduate teaching assistants, or freelancers, where they worked, whether they spoke English as their L1 or L2, where they were from, and what gender they identified with.

As far as positioning is concerned, it is “the corresponding act by which a person claims certain rights and opts for certain duties, or has them thrust on a certain social actor” (Harre, 2011, p. ix). That is, while positions are usually conditions, circumstances, and environments that make us behave a certain way, positioning is how we play into those conditions, circumstances, and environments, assume our prescribed roles, and then modify them in accordance with our worldviews. So, to better understand my participants and their perspectives, I ensured to take account of both their positions and positionings.

**Data Analysis**

To begin analysis, I transcribed the interviews through an application called *Otter*. Although I relied on the app to transcribe the Zoom recordings, I would still go through each transcript and compare it against the recording to correct words and phrases that *Otter* did not
understand. I wanted to make sure that all hesitations and repetitions that the participants had in their recordings were included so as to make the data more credible.

To analyze the interviews, I chose thematic analysis (TA). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), TA is a method of data analysis that is flexible and can be used within any methodology, i.e. with any data collection procedures and study designs. By analyzing data through TA, I looked for different themes - or patterns - that occurred across all seven interviews. To identify my themes, I used the bottom-up approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013), meaning that I relied on the data themselves to discover themes. This, in turn, contributed to the exploratory nature of my study, (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

I took a number to steps to analyze the data. After I collected the data and transcribed it, I analyzed all seven transcripts for different themes that illustrated the participants’ understandings and applications of feminist pedagogy. As I read transcripts both on a computer and on paper, I identified different pieces of information my participants gave in their responses that could then serve as “codes.” Braun and Clarke (2017) write that “codes are the building blocks for themes, (larger) patterns of meaning, underpinned by a central organizing concept - a shared core idea” (p. 297). As I was looking for codes, I color coded the data that I could then potentially use to create codes. I created a spreadsheet where I pasted the names of the codes. I utilized the codes that emerged in the data and then grouped them based on what they had in common (see Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4). I began by utilizing codes that emerged in the data. By grouping the codes, I identified broader, more general themes. For example, I had codes “textbook” and “videos,” which arose out of my participants’ responses, and then I grouped into one general theme “Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion in media.”
Since I interviewed participants from the United States and Russia, I also compared their responses. While I discovered the same themes across all interviews, there were different codes for each theme because of the participant’s country and whether they were an ESL or EFL instructor. However, it is also true that there were different codes for each theme from participants from the same countries and even from the same workplaces. Thus, all participants, regardless of their position and positionality, responded to questions in a way that helped to establish common themes but also to find differences within the themes.

Through data analysis, I had different but related themes arise in response to both of my research questions. While only one theme arose in response to my first research question, which is “How do ESL and EFL instructors understand feminist pedagogy?”, four themes were found in response to my second question.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

My position and positioning definitely played a significant role in my research. Since I identify as a feminist and I study Women’s and Gender Studies, I was particularly interested in exploring feminist pedagogy. I always try to be a feminist teacher, which, I have to admit, does not always work out at least according to what literature says a feminist teacher should be. Furthermore, as someone who is studying to be a TESOL professional, has taught EFL in the past, is from Russia, and now works in the United States, I was interested to learn from other ESL and EFL instructors particularly from Russia and the United States because the settings and contexts that arise in these countries are familiar to me to a greater or lesser extent. Lastly, I wanted to learn from my colleagues how they understood and applied the pedagogy that I think I understand and apply but that I also believe I should investigate even more because, as Vandrick
(2016) writes, feminist pedagogy is not specific practices; each classroom, each teacher, each group of students, is different.

Speaking of feminist research, my choice of semi-structured interviews as my data-collection instrument and as social practice was also influenced by my positioning as a feminist. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) write that “interviewing is a particularly valuable research method feminist researchers can use to gain insights into the world of their respondents” (p.4). While she argues that it is not the method but the questions that make the study feminist (e.g., questions that concern women’s lives and those of other oppressed groups, social justice and social change, etc.), she still considers that the interview as a research method acts as a facilitator. In particular, she emphasizes that semi-structured interviews can be especially useful because although you do have a specific interview guide full of questions that target a specific topic, you still leave room for spontaneity for both yourself and your interviewee. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews usually have an informal structure (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007), meaning that they are used to “build a relationship with your respondent, to explore what might be the relevant topics of interest to them, and to uncover topics that might otherwise be overlooked by the researcher. She also mentions that such a structure can be helpful when you have no prior contact with your interviewee. As it can be seen from Appendix A, I had an interview guide that enabled me to keep my interview semi-structured and informal by first establishing rapport with my participants, then asking them questions on feminist pedagogy and language pedagogy, and also asking them follow-up questions or changing the order of my questions in accordance with what they were saying.

Last but not least, as a feminist applied linguistics researcher, it was also important for me to approach the study from the perspective of standpoint theory rather than positivism or
neopositivism. For any research that can be classified as feminist, the focus on epistemologies, i.e., “theories of knowing,” is crucial because feminists study how the knower, the known, and the process of knowing are connected (Longino, 2010). People that turn to positivism, one of the most common epistemologies in research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007; Sprague, 2016), argue that “the world of experience is an objective world governed by underlying regularities, even natural laws” (Sprague, 2016, p. 35). Therefore, objectivity lies at the core of positivism. As a researcher, I found that positivism as an epistemology did not fit my research objectives. In fact, I was not interested in the epistemology of objectivity because I aimed to conduct a qualitative, exploratory study on teachers’ understandings and applications of feminist pedagogy in ESL vs. EFL classrooms. The fact that understandings and applications are plural noun forms should speak for itself - I was interested in a plurality of different voices, views, beliefs, and practices that my participants had. For that reason, I structured my primary research according to standpoint epistemology that argues that “all knowledge is constructed from a specific position and that what a knower can see is shaped by the location from which that knower’s inquiry begins” (Sprague, 2016, p. 47).

Despite the fact that I intended to make my study exploratory, i.e., have no hypothesis in mind, I was aware I could still have potential biases. In particular, before the interviews started, I always had in the back of my head this expectation that I would get more perspectives and also more positive perspectives on feminist pedagogy from the ESL instructors in the United States than the EFL instructors in Russia. As a Russian citizen, I know very well what views are considered mainstream in society and what views (and people) find themselves at the periphery. Additionally, although I think of feminism as being a broad, multidimensional, and multinational force owing to what I have learned as part of my Graduate Certificate in Women’s and Gender
Studies, I have also been largely exposed to mainstream kinds of feminism coming out of North America, which, I am sure, has had an impact on my understanding of feminism at least in the past.

Additionally, I considered mine and my participants’ positions and our relationships with power where we have those positions. For feminist pedagogy, it is important to address not only power-sharing but also power imbalances because even feminism itself as a collective movement emerged as a result of power imbalances in society (e.g. Creasy, 2012). As a graduate student and as a graduate teaching assistant, I had a different amount of power during all interviews because all my participants had positions of their own. While it was one thing for me to interview fellow graduate teaching assistants in the United States and instructors in Russia all of whom I knew personally and informally, it was another when I had to interview participants that I had never met before and that had a higher position than me in the university hierarchy. While it was certainly not an intimidating experience, I still approached my interviews with them differently: I may have spent more time getting ready or I may have asked them slightly different questions that would not be as informal as the ones that I had for people that I knew and/or that I worked at the same level as. It was clear to me that my participants’ positions were reflected in their responses when they were discussing their teaching beliefs, their teaching practices, or their overall teaching experience.

My participants and I brought different experiences to this project. Researching and gaining expertise in feminist pedagogy in language teaching, I ensured that I was open to the diverse voices of my participants because every one of them comes from different backgrounds such as linguistic, cultural, regional, or professional ones.
Findings

I posed two research questions for my study: “How do ESL and EFL instructors understand feminist pedagogy? and “In what ways do ESL and EFL instructors apply feminist pedagogy in their classrooms?”. To answer these questions, I used an interview guide full of relevant questions (Appendix A). By asking my participants different questions, I had the following themes arise.

Question One: How do ESL and EFL instructors understand feminist pedagogy?

*Feminist pedagogy as an anti-oppressive pedagogy*

One pattern that emerged across all seven interviews was the idea that feminist pedagogy is an anti-oppressive pedagogy. Some participants held that feminist pedagogy primarily addressed women’s issues, whereas others believed that feminist pedagogy addressd the needs and challenges of both women and other marginalized, underrepresented groups. Figure 1 demonstrates different themes that arose in my participants’ responses when they were discussing what they understood feminist pedagogy to be.

**Figure 1**

How do ESL and EFL teachers understand feminist pedagogy?
Note. The mind map shows different themes comprised of codes that arose in response to the first research question.

Anna, a middle school EFL teacher, believes that feminist pedagogy is geared toward creating an equitable society where women’s achievements are celebrated:

We are trying to make men and women equal. I personally think that feminist pedagogy includes studying accomplishments that women had in different areas and teaching that to your students and just giving real-life examples that feminism exists.

For Anna, it is crucial to celebrate and honor women and their achievements if we want to engage with feminist pedagogy. She also stresses the importance of sharing real-life examples with students in the classroom so they can realize that there still exist practices, like the pay gap, that interfere with women’s careers.

For Alan, feminist pedagogy is also first and foremost centered around issues that are relevant to “the feminist cause”:

[You] will be attentive to feminist issues, right, like, like, but like issues that are pertaining to the feminist cause. And so, you know, that means that maybe feminist pedagogy is related to pedagogy that is inclusive [and] that is fighting to demolish those stereotypes. Yeah, like change their views base that through teaching and in the classroom (Alan, ESL graduate teaching assistant).

As it can be seen from Alan’s response, he also thinks that feminist pedagogy is a pedagogy that de-constructs different stereotypes that we have about different groups, namely
gender stereotypes. However, to de-construct those stereotypes, you need to adopt appropriate practices. As a result, Alan is “challenging myself to rethink what we should do.”

_Sometimes my students will say, ‘Oh, boys against girls,’ and I always stop and I say, ‘Hey, why do we have to do that?’ You know, and I try to elicit those ideas from them as well. Why do we have to always be boys versus girls? Like, why can’t boys go along with the girls and, you know, just do a different type of dynamics?_ 

Speaking more of stereotyping, Helen, an EFL instructor in a private school in Russia, believes that feminist pedagogy challenges stereotypes and biases in teaching and finds it important because we are prone to believing stereotypes:

_[Feminist pedagogy] is about avoiding putting labels, trying to convey feminist ideas through teaching, and trying to avoid any stereotypical ideas in the lessons in the way teachers approach students. We rely on them [stereotypes] all the time in our thinking in general and in teaching languages, as well._

Jackie, an ESL instructor, also says that the representation of different groups is important as she discusses feminist pedagogy:

_It's extremely important in language classes that we as teachers are aware of how things are being presented. So, I think that it's more about the manner in which we're doing it because of cultural differences, language proficiency, religious differences. I think that it's extremely important to be aware of how it's, it's done._
Feminist pedagogy as a welcoming, inclusive pedagogy

Not only did the participants view feminist pedagogy as a pedagogy designed to support and celebrate women and other marginalized groups, but they also viewed it as a pedagogy designed to create an inclusive, welcoming environment for learning and developing.

*It is a way of inclusive teaching, in which, you know, the power and the balance is equally shared across the group. It's important that everybody has an equal leg and whatever the race is, and so that everybody is set up to succeed and to get along with one another, and to be able to interact with people who are different than them.* (Jackie, ESL full-time instructor)

According to Jackie, the implementation of feminist pedagogy helps to include different learners and to facilitate power sharing in the classroom. As it can be seen from her response, Jackie also believes that teaching like a feminist pedagogue would ensure that equity and integrity play a significant role in their classroom management (e.g., “everyone has an equal leg”)

Alexandria, another university ESL teacher, shares Jackie’s view on feminist pedagogy as a way of helping everyone to succeed in and out of the classroom:

*It's giving everybody a chance to shine on their own pace. Like as much as they're comfortable with. And you know, the way that it works for them like not everybody wants to do the same things the same way. But everybody should have the chance, you know, to try new things and to get out of their comfort zone or to stay in their comfort zone if that's what they want, so I guess it's like treating everybody fairly and giving people a chance to.*
As it can be seen from Alexandria’s understanding of feminist pedagogy, feminist pedagogy is a pedagogy that empowers students to express themselves and use their experience as a person and as a learner to participate in classwork. Alexandria also notes that the application of feminist pedagogy encourages people to “try new things and to get out of their comfort zone.” However, she realizes that some people may want to stay in their comfort zone, so for Alexandria, using feminist pedagogy would not necessarily mean pushing students too hard out of their comfort zone.

For Lidia, who has taught EFL in secondary school and university settings, feminist pedagogy means creating a classroom where everyone is welcomed:

[It] is the way you treat your students and approach our students. This is something you can do, regardless of what you're studying at the moment. So not discriminating, being respectful, respecting boundaries, pronouns, just, you know, creating this atmosphere for learning the atmosphere of you know, acceptance, and also kind of creating this not safe space, but brave space

According to Lidia, applying feminist pedagogy is the same as fostering an environment where everyone is comfortable enough learning, being themselves, and being “brave.” Lidia also adds that feminist pedagogy can serve as an instrument to implement a good change both in and out of the classroom:

[Feminist pedagogy] is this tool in learning spaces that supports and facilitates the transition from the society we live in right to the other society that we are working to get towards where respecting human rights, respecting human dignity in whatever form isn’t lost.
Feminist pedagogy as a collaborative pedagogy

Finally, for some participants, feminist pedagogy means not only creating inclusive, safe (or brave) spaces but also working together. For example, for Mel, another ESL instructor, feminist pedagogy, too, involves applying “[a] teaching methodology being inclusive to all genders and just trying to like have an active role in making people equal.” But she also adds that feminist pedagogy is about collaboration, on top of inclusivity and power sharing. She also compared it with her own experience as a graduate teaching assistant.

I think collaboration is a big part of it [feminist pedagogy]. You know, like being supportive of each other. In that sense of like when you first come in to be a TA and you hear from everybody and you start to learn about everyone and just having that like support from your peers and also your superiors who can be like “No, you're doing a good job.”

Mel thinks that practicing feminist pedagogy would mean creating a workspace where everyone supports each other. For her, the model would be similar to that of her own program where she says she receives support from peers, professors, and supervisors.

Research Question Two: “In what ways do ESL and EFL instructors apply feminist pedagogy in their classrooms?”

When interviewing my participants, I was interested not only in what they thought feminist pedagogy was but also how they thought it could be applied to TESOL. Above all, I was curious as to whether they applied feminist pedagogy to their teaching, consciously or unconsciously.
So, when it came to the discussion around the application of feminist pedagogy, the following themes arose:

- Feminism as a topic in the classroom
- The role of target language resources
- Language classroom as a safe or contested space

I will now discuss each theme in more detail.

**Theme: Feminism as a topic in the classroom**

During the interview, most of the participants discussed how feminism as a topic is raised in their classrooms. While some of them discussed feminism with their students on a regular basis, others did not for different reasons. Figure 2 describes how ESL and EFL instructors address feminism and feminist topics in their classrooms, under which circumstances they do or do not do so, and what concerns some of they have as it comes to feminist topics in the classroom.

**Figure 2.**

*Feminism as a topic in the classroom*
Note. The mind map shows the theme “Feminism as a topic in the classroom” and different codes that comprise the theme.

Jackie, an ESL university instructor, is one of the instructors that usually brings up feminism in her classes:

*Oh, yeah, I would say so. I teach American culture on occasion. And so that's a really, really great class to be able to kind of, you know, get some of that in there. And to expose some of the students that maybe come from more, I don't want to say conservative cultures, but different cultures that maybe don't have as much of that playing into it. So yeah, I would say I try to bring it in, sneak it in when I can without making anyone uncomfortable.

One of the other instructors that likes to “push the buttons” is Alexandria, an ESL instructor. She said that in her classroom, feminism as a topic is raised often:

*It's something that comes up in my classroom a lot. In class discussions, there are, you know, some topics that sometimes, you know, the issue of gender roles and things like that come up. And I do like to, you know, push the buttons a little bit like, I know, what kind of answers these students are going to give me, but I still bring up those issues anyway just to see what they're gonna say. And I always try, like, I and I, and I tell them, “Hey, guys, I'm just playing devil's advocate here a little bit.” Like, you know, I tell them, “I just want you to think about things from many different perspectives.” Like we do have some discussions sometimes that some teachers might avoid maybe to be on the safer side, maybe, you know, novice teachers.

Furthermore, Alexandria believes that raising feminism and women’s issues is not problematic anymore. However, she also says that it was not always like that:
I guess nowadays, it's not as tricky as it used to be. But considering that most of my students are Middle Eastern students. Um, when I first started, like many years ago I think the students we used to receive here, they, we had some more conservative students, I think that's not the case anymore. But we used to have some students who were pretty conservative. And you know, even doing group working class, you know, pairing a female student with a male student, that could become an issue. Sometimes, or even just addressing female students or, because like, something that used to happen a lot is that we used to have sometimes couples taking class together, and then the husbands wanted me to act a certain way towards the wife or, you know, do things a certain way. And then I would just explain, “Hey, this is how things work in my classroom, everybody's the same. And this is how it's gonna be.” And I just, you know, took my stand. And luckily, it turned out okay. Like, there was never any trouble. But I like, I did have to face some situations where, you know, because of cultural differences, or things like that, I did have to kind of like, defend my position, like, I know, this is a female student, and you may think that this means something else to you, but in this classroom, everybody's going to do the same, regardless of, you know, their gender, or their culture whatever.

Based on what Alexandria says, students from all over the world have become generally more open-minded. She reflects on her teaching experience and concludes that in the past, she had to explain to her students that some things in her classroom, as well as the United States, may not be the same as in their home country. Still, she says she has always stood her ground and never abandoned her views. She even goes on to say that she always has students ask her what she thinks:
Like I said, when we have certain discussions, I don’t shy away from certain topics. Like I let them know share their points of view, I let them, you know, do all of the discussions. And then they sometimes ask me, they want to know what, what my position is. And I tell them what my position is. I don’t like I don’t hide my perspectives.

In her interview, Alexandria mentions that some novice teachers prefer not to “push the buttons.” Alan, who works as a graduate teaching assistant at the same university as Alexandria, is a case in point because hesitates discussing feminism with his students:

Here, right now, it's way more difficult to talk about these things, just because one, it's my first semester, a lot of my students right now come from a very specific context culturally, religiously speaking. So honestly, to be really honest, I don't think my students very open to, to talk about that. And I'm actually scared because especially because I don't know their culture so much. And also, I don't know, like how the department works, you know, how much freedom we have to talk about these things in the classroom. So I don't I don't really do it that often here or I haven’t done it that often.

Just as Alan, Anna, a high school EFL teacher, thinks that it may be problematic for her to discuss feminism in her classes or to even openly position herself as a feminist in society even if she is one:

I would say I'm a feminist all the time. But, um, if you mean, do I do anything as a feminist? Do I advocate? Do I go into the streets and, I like, participate in any marches? No, I don’t. I don't know if it's fortunate or unfortunate. But, you know, in Russia, I'm very, I'm very careful about that. Like, I can definitely support feminism on social media. But when it comes to
being active about it, in Russia, that I guess that's where you have to be careful, because it's not. I think Russia is a bit too conservative for openly supporting feminism. It's not like I am ashamed or afraid of doing that. Not at all. But, um, I think I just think that I can do in my own way.

Unlike Alan or Anna, Lidia, who relatively recently started working as a part-time EFL instructor at a university, says that she brings up feminism and other gender-related topics in her classroom:

And it's kind of like, there are certain days when I'm like doing this, I guess, on purpose and like, more consciously, in a sense of like, what topics I'm choosing for discussions. But I've also noticed lately that I kind of do it unconsciously as well, like with how I use different pronouns when just talking about something with my students, and when we're talking about imaginary situations.

However, Lidia also adds that she needs to be careful in her particular workplace even though she identifies as a feminist and discusses feminism-related topics with her students:

I feel like I have to be careful. With like, how much of that I'm discussing how I guess how radical I am, when we're talking about things like that. And just how much time in general, I can dedicate to that. Especially considering there's just not a very welcoming environment for feminism. Why in the well, I wouldn't say in the Russian in the Russian academia in general, that's a guess a bit of an overstatement. But at least at our university, for sure.

Just as Lidia, Mel discusses the importance of using inclusive language in her classroom. She, however, admits that it has been a little challenging for her:
You know I haven't not as in like teaching that as a specific subject [feminism], but I do try to when I'm addressing the class try to use like non-gendered language. But it's been it's been really hard for me to like I always say “you guys,” like you guys is my go to and I've been trying to say more, like “everyone” or hey “y'all” or something like that which is kind of a small thing, but I feel like when I think about what's behind it I'm like I'm trying to include everybody. That's about as far as I've gone in my classroom.

When Mel mentions that “I haven’t not as in like teaching that as a specific subject,” she is talking about feminism. Mel then clarifies that she does not bring up feminist topics in her classroom because she’s afraid there may not be enough room for much feminist content in her classroom because there are certain course goals that she and her students’ needs to meet:

There has to be someone to kind of like guide the group, you know, or someone that’s held responsible to, you know, the next higher up person, because I think sometimes if like the whole group, if nobody really was in charge, we might not get as much done. And there has to like that end goal. And I have to be the one to keep in mind. Yes, we can have fun in class, we can learn a lot, but we still need to, like, make sure that they’re ready for the next step, or that they’re ready to go to the university at the end of this.

**Theme: The role of target language resources**

Some of my participants also stressed the role of target language resources in inclusive classrooms. Figure 3 describes what materials participants use in their classroom, lack thereof in EFL settings, and how different target language materials can undermine efforts to make ESL and EFL classrooms more inclusive.
The role of target language resources

Note. The mind map shows the theme “The role of target language resources” and different codes that comprise the theme.

Interestingly, it was mostly participants from Russia that raised this point. It may be because, as Anna says, there may not be as wide a variety of EFL materials to begin with:

*I think there's always a shortage, like, any topic you take. It's not it's not enough. Especially considering the fact that as I mentioned, I have to stick to the syllabus. And, um, you know, I'd say not, like, not all of the resources that I can find online, are, like would work in a Russian classroom, if you know what I mean, like just some topics that are out there, and they would work for ESL students in the US, they don't really work for Russian students.*

Lidia, who is also an EFL instructor but in a university, shares Anna’s concern but also notes that different textbooks do not even accurately represent people in Anglophone countries
and instead contributes to linguistic imperialism, which Pennycook (1999; 2021) links with the idea that one’s nativeness as a speaker of English is determined by their Whiteness:

> When a Russian kid or teenager opens an English textbook, they tend to get this perspective that all English-speaking countries are predominantly white, middle-class people.

For Jackie, an ESL instructor, representation in course materials is also an important issue and she tries to address it in her classroom. For example, one way that Jackie does it is through introducing her students to the authors of their textbooks:

> One of the big things we can do and it’s it’s kind of simple, but I think anytime we have a material like a textbook or something, I kind of like to start by showing a little bit about the author. Who is this person that’s writing this book about it? Is this a person that has a background similar or different than you? Is this something that inspires my students to be like, Oh, well, this person looks like me, or this person is similar to me in some way. So I think we can start just right down with something as basic as who is the author of the textbook, and playing that into the book and saying, see, okay, we’re using this resource, this textbook, and it was written by this person who is, you know, their native language is similar to yours.

She, however, notes that many textbooks are not diverse or inclusive enough to help to raise justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) in the classroom:

> I wish that some of the textbooks were a little bit more modernised, I guess, um, some of them, you know, they do a really good job. I think especially like grammar textbooks, if using different names from different cultures and like photos that are very, very diverse, but where they are just kind of like this is a grammar textbook. It’s very, to the point A lot of times and
sometimes I think like, for like reading textbooks or something, I wish that some of the articles were maybe a little bit more inclusive.

Nevertheless, she manages to find ways to make her classes inclusive and to address JEDI issues. For example, she always goes beyond textbooks and looks for other media that can address diverse, anti-oppressive content and that she can use in her classes:

*If I'm ever going to play a video, I try and make sure the video is inclusive, inclusive.*

When I teach pronouns, if I do like grammar, or writing, I teach the, like the third gender, they them singular pronoun, I include that and explain how that works as well. So it's not so much a set like, this textbook is great. It's more like how can I get other things in here that showing it that we can talk about.

Just like Jackie, Helen also integrates inclusive videos or pictures that show different kinds of people in her EFL class:

*There is actually one video of like, it was an interview with different people in New York. And there is so one gay couple, which, who were asked by the interviewer, and I really liked that video. And I really like the fact that they introduced like, there are different people in the video and different accents, different opinions. So I use it in my program for students, but actually, I was a bit afraid of using it because I, I don't know, in Russia, it is a there are different opinions and and, and, and I'm not sure if as a teacher, even in such an informal school, I was able to use it. So I first asked my boss and stuff, but she was okay with it.*
Theme: Language classroom as a safe space

The last theme that emerged out of all the interviews was the idea that the English language classroom was a safe space. Figure 4 shows how some participants define a “safe classroom” and what goes into a safe classroom to make it “safe.” When talking about feminist pedagogy as a pedagogy that is “creating this atmosphere for learning the atmosphere of you know, acceptance,” Lidia described this atmosphere as a “brave” space. Although some participants did not explicitly use the term “safe space” or “brave space,” they still emphasized that for them, it was important to create a classroom where power-sharing, community-building, and leadership - the tenants of feminist pedagogy according to Shrewsbury (1987) - were considered and promoted.

Figure 4

Language classroom as a safe space

Note. The mind map shows the theme “Language classroom as a safe space” and different codes that comprise the theme.

ESL instructor Mel, however, does think of an international classroom as a “safe space”:

I think when you have people, especially that are living abroad, sometimes for the very first time, the classroom becomes kind of their safe place because it's the people that they see
every day. They encourage each other, like we clap for each other when we have a presentation things like that. And so I think it becomes this like small community of people that they didn't know they would be friends with, but that they feel comfortable interacting with. They're in a safe place that they can you know make mistakes, but they're learning, but that it's all okay, and try to just kind of like make it a place where they feel like, like outside life might be a little crazy, but when I'm in this room, I can focus so that's that's been my goal.

In her interview, Lidia, an EFL university instructor, uses an alternative term “brave space” when she discusses the collaborative nature of her classroom. In this “brave” classroom, students have agency over what they do and they collaborate to achieve results, some of which are palpable (e.g., PowerPoints that students create and then share at what Lidia calls “PowerPoint” parties):

My first class is always like after introducing myself for a brief period of time and then learning about my students is that we collectively kind of write down a blueprint for a trend for our, basically for our whole program for each semester. So I try not to stick to whatever I thought I was going to teach this semester. And I kind of actually stopped being very detailed about it, because every single group of students is different. And the way I try to share power with them is that I always make sure that whatever we're studying at the moment is something that they want and need. And also I asked them about the ways that they feel like, give them the most benefit. So I kind of tried to learn about what is efficient for my students and what is not. So we're working with that as well. And also some some classes. They, they kind of organize everything. So we would have PowerPoint parties, or we have some sort of activities where I am
barely present. And incidents of that I'm just observing and letting them explore things. So this is what I try to do.

For many other interviewed instructors, like Helen, an EFL instructor, and Jackie, an ESL, instructor, collaboration also plays an important role in the classroom dynamics:

... And we also have like chats in social media. And people exchange different questions, different ideas, different emotions. Sometimes they exchange memes. (Helen)

I always have people usually work in the same groups so that they get to know their classmates and they hold one another a little bit more accountable about it. Okay, here's a piece of paper in this group, everybody in the group is going to work on it, all of your names are on it. You guys are a group, you're your own little community here... Whenever we would have these groups, a different person would be kind of like, the head person for it, and it would rotate. So if we did, everyone worked in their groups on Monday, then Student A would be the leader that day, and if they were in their groups, the next weekend Student B, so that everybody's kind of getting that chance and that opportunity to practice. (Jackie, an ESL instructor)

In his interview, Alan, an ESL instructor, addresses another issues when it comes to creating a safe, or brave, classroom, which is challenging students to think critically about different issues. Alan says that he tends to address behaviors in the classroom that can be problematic in a way that invites students to reflect on what exactly is problematic about something someone has said.
I definitely try to bring a more critical view on certain things and definitely question some [things]. Even sometimes when my students come up with a dialogue or, you know, just like speech that is not necessarily, that is a little problematic, we can always, you know, reflect on and try to, you know, try to look at it from a different perspective.

Among other things, Alan also empowers his students, especially if they have historically been underrepresented and discriminated against. In particular, Alan says he empowers his female students:

I empower my female students. Right. I also like to remind them that they, you know, they can do whatever they want, they either are strong, you know, they are just as capable as anybody else. Right. Like, it's not a matter of gender, it's just a matter of capacity. And like, we all have that capacity.

Jackie, an ESL instructor, also says that empowerment, as well as power sharing, is an important part of what she does as a teacher. She believes that she can empower her students in two different ways: by being honest and vulnerable and by asking for her students’ input:

One thing that I like to do with my students, because I don't want them to think that I'm this domineering force in the classroom, and that they do have a say in it, I will be the first person to admit if I do something wrong. To my students, if I mess something up, I'll be like, “So sorry, guys, you know, or everyone, you know, that's on me.” Like, this was my mistake, you know, and we'll laugh about it. And I think it's important for them to see me as human. And I think that that, in turn makes them feel like they have some say in things and that they have, you know, power over certain things in the class. I also always ask their input on things. You know,
what did you think about this assignment? Did you like it? Did you not like this project? Or if I did this again later? What would you want to see done differently? I’d like to have them give that feedback, because maybe it doesn’t help them right then but it would help a different group of students in the future. And I think that that is kind of rewarding for them and gives them that opportunity to kind of share in the structure of things with me.

Lidia, who teaches ESL, also mentions that she always strives to be open about her emotions and feelings with her students:

I know that a lot our professors especially tend to well, they don't really share much about themselves. And I feel like that can influence some things a lot. So when I am tired before teaching a class and it’s an 8am class, everyone knows I'm tired and I know that my students are tired, and we can even talk about that for a bit and maybe talk about how next class we should bring each other coffee and that would be another activity. Or you know, I would say I mostly related to develop an emotional interest. Originally, actually, but maybe it has a bit more sites than I thought initially. But I’m trying to be more transparent about my emotions, and also experience while teaching. And I feel like that could maybe change something as well. Because we just get more honest and honest with each other over time. And this leads me to very often been in a situation where students would tell me something that I am basically the first person to learn about.

Alexandria’s view of power sharing is similar to that of her ESL colleague Jackie. She also believes that one way to share power and to build community is to invite students to contribute and to share their voices.
We do have a lot of discussions about lots of things, and then they start, you know, telling me about the way that it is in their families or in their hometown and then someone else from the same country is going to say ‘Well, actually, that's not exactly like this.’ Like, I think, and also even for people from the same country, you are going to have you know different experiences and different points of view and they're all and they all should be included, and you know appreciated.

Just as Alexandria, Anna thinks that her students should feel comfortable speaking up and sharing their views, and she says that is something that she thinks her students are more comfortable doing than she is:

It's always been important for me to, to make them, you know, comfortable around each other, and to be able to, to talk about anything... In our class, it became a time for like, self-reflection, and for, for just sharing their emotions and experiences and even worries, I'd say, so, um, every time I come to their room after class, and I asked them what they want to do today, they always reply to they want to talk and they talk in front of each other, they can share anything, like what happened to them at home, like if their parents were in a bad mood, and it affected them and they, you know, they just, yeah, I'm really proud of making this achievement. I'd say, Yeah, I say it's an achievement for me, that they are not afraid of speaking up in front of each other, even though they're like, you know, I I, if I were them, at their age, I would definitely be shy of saying some of the things that they do in front of boys as a girl. But they're not shy to settle. They can say anything and they want to listen to each other. They want to share their stories. and it's great. I mean, if only I had this when I was their age, it would be awesome. But yeah, it is, is.
Discussion

Given that my first research question was “How do ESL and EFL instructors understand feminist pedagogy?”, I was interested to learn how my participants reacted to and interpreted “feminist pedagogy.” Because my second research question was “In what ways do ESL and EFL instructors apply feminist pedagogy?”, I wondered what my participants could tell me about their classrooms, their teaching practices, and their teaching beliefs, and how close those were to the tenants of feminist pedagogy proposed by Shrewsbury (1987).

How Do ESL and EFL Instructors Understand Feminist Pedagogy?

When I was asking participants questions about how they would define feminist pedagogy and what it meant to them (Appendix A), it was clear that they had the same idea of what it could be. However, they still had different perspective on what the main focus of feminist pedagogy is.

For example, some instructors (e.g., Alan, an ESL instructor, or Helen, an EFL instructor) wanted to create an environment where their students, regardless of their gender, can question their traditionally assigned positioning and learn about the negative impact of stereotyping. For example, Alan’s comment about boys being against girls implies that oftentimes dichotomies prevail in our thinking and in our classrooms. For feminist pedagogy, dichotomies are destructive, especially if they are “men versus women” in nature. It is destructive because in education, “rationality and intellect have been preempted as masculine” (Forest & Rosenberg, 1997, p. 184). Forest and Rosenberg (1997) also add that as a result, feminist teachers “refuse to assign gender or to privilege one half of these dualities, preferring to claim both halves instead … [in order to] name and challenge the sexist and oppressive tensions inherent in these false
dichotomies” (p. 184). Tisdell (1998) also argues that feminist pedagogy works toward destroying binary opposites but from slightly different perspective. She writes that feminist pedagogues challenge the idea that dichotomies, like voice versus silence, present only one interpretation and that feminist pedagogues insist on looking into constituents of these binaries because there is more to them. For example, she says that in some cultures silence is considered a sign of weakness or a lack of power, whereas in others silence is “resistance, power, and the active construction of knowledge” (Tisdell, 1998, p. 151). That also shows that feminist pedagogy does not welcome stereotyping, nor do the instructors I interviewed, such as Alan, Anna, Jackie, and Helen.

Helen also thinks of feminist pedagogy as a pedagogy that is bias-free. According to Yoshihara (2014) bias-free approaches to teaching lie at the core of feminist pedagogy as she writes that feminist pedagogy allows for “gender bias-free teaching such as avoiding stereotyping” (p. 12). For a feminist educator, it is important to teach with an open mind because “we have an opportunity, even an obligation, to teach not only information and skills but also consciousness and issues of justice” (Vandrick, 1995, p. 6).

The instructors’ responses and views are affected by a number of variables, such as where they are, where they are from, where they work, what position they have at work, what language they speak as their L1, and so on. Despite these variables, it can be seen from the responses that some instructors had a shared understanding of feminist pedagogy being an inclusive pedagogy. According to Pennycook (1999), inclusivity is “the struggle for diverse representations in classrooms and materials” (p. 339). He adds that inclusivity in a language classroom addresses the connections between language and identity and centers the classroom around issues of gender, race, socioeconomic status, and sexuality in curricular design as they
pertain to students’ needs. While this section does not directly address target language materials, it does address student populations and, as Jackie says, how they should all have “an equal leg” and have all the support than they need from the instructors to succeed. Despite the fact that Jackie and Alexandria teach in an ESL setting and are full-time university instructors in the United States and Lidia teaches in an EFL setting and is a part-time university instructor, all three instructors view feminist pedagogy as a way to help students achieve success inside and outside the classroom. They think of feminist pedagogy as a way to encourage students to succeed and take the lead, regardless of their position in society.

All three instructors, i.e., Jackie, Alexandria, and Lidia, also talk about respecting and celebrating different students in their classrooms. According to Tisdell (1998), many scholars write that while feminist pedagogues prioritize issues of gender, feminist pedagogy also accounts for race, class, and sexual orientation differences. In fact, Tisdell (1998) writes that for feminist pedagogy, it is important to consider “the intersections of gender with other systems of oppression and privilege” (p. 146). Such intersections are important because they are “the connections between the individual and the intersecting structural systems of privilege and oppression that affect how participants construct knowledge, discuss their own experience, and interact in the classroom” (Tisdell, 1998, p. 146). Further, Tisdell argues that “feminist educators deal with both similarities among the participants (including themselves) in the learning environment and the differences based on factors of gender, race or ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and so on.” (p. 149) This point ties well into what Jackie, Alexandria, and Lidia said when they were talking about providing students with fair opportunities and respecting their differences.
Lastly, Mel’s view of feminist pedagogy as being a pedagogy that fosters collaboration echoes that of Vandrick (2016) who writes that working on projects collaboratively is working “in true feminist fashion” (p. 229.). Furthermore, Vandrick (2016) supports the idea that collaboration is a big part of feminist thinking, as does Shrewsbury (1987) who believes that in feminist thinking and feminist pedagogy, collaboration builds community and fosters leadership.

Not only did I want my participants to share with me their definitions of feminist pedagogy, but I also wanted to know what they did in their classrooms and whether their practices were any similar to those that grow out of empowerment, community, and leadership in feminist pedagogy.

**In What Ways Do ESL and EFL Instructors Apply Feminist Pedagogy?**

As mentioned in the Results chapter, there were three overarching themes that my participants’ responses constituted:

- Feminism as a topic in the classroom;
- The role of target language resources; and
- Language classroom as a safe space

**Feminism as a topic in the classroom**

Many of my participants discussed how they feel toward the inclusion of feminism as a topic in their curriculum. More specifically, some of them discuss how they include feminism as a topic on a regular basis whereas others say that they do not feel comfortable enough discussing feminism with their students for different reasons.
Jackie, an ESL instructor, says in her interview is one of the instructors that brings up feminism in her class. For example, in her course on American culture, Jackie sometimes raises issues that have to do with feminism. It is common to raise cultural issues in content-based instruction (CBI) courses. According to Davison & Williams (2001), CBI is a “heuristic label for diverse group of curriculum approaches which share a concern for facilitating language learning broadly defined, through varied but systematic linking of subject matter and language in the context of learning activities” (p. 57). As such, this approach helps Jackie address the target language and the target culture and raise issues that are important to both the language and the culture, including feminism.

Alexandria, who is also an EFL instructor in a university, also incorporates feminism into her classes. She believes that it is important to discuss topics like feminism in ESL classrooms because they make students step outside their comfort zone and look at things critically, i.e., from different perspectives. Alexandria’s views are similar to those of Vandrick (1995) and Yoshihara (2014) who believe that it is important to teach issues such as “violence against women, sexual harassment, the influence of religion on the roles of women, the role of business and the media in reinforcing negative stereotypes about women, and the current backlash against, or negative reaction to, the gains women have made in the past 15 years” (Vandrick, 1995, p. 4). Although Alexandria did not specify whether she and her students discussed the issues that Vandrick mentions, she finds it important to challenge her students’ perspectives and introduce them to new ones.

Alexandria also holds that from students all over the world have become generally more open-minded. In her responses, she reflects on her teaching experience and concludes that in the past, she had to explain to her students that some things in her classroom, as well as the United
States, may not be the same as in their home country. Still, she says she has always stood her ground and never abandoned her views.

Unlike his colleagues Jackie and Alexandria, Alan, who teaches ESL as a graduate teaching assistant, is cautious when it comes to bringing feminism into the classroom for two reasons. First, he is not sure how his students would respond to that. Second, he does not know if he can actually do it because he is new to the department where he teaches and has not had enough time to learn everything yet.

Just as Alan, Anna, an EFL instructor in a secondary school, is also cautious but for a different reason. Anna believes that feminism is still a taboo topic of some kind in Russia because she views Russian society as “a bit too conservative for openly supporting feminism.” Anna’s concern is definitely legitimate because different research (Chebakova, 2016; Surman & Rossman, 2021) shows that some people in Russia still frown upon feminism and feminist ideas and find them foreign to Russian culture and society. As a result, some people feel concerned and act careful when they discuss and engage in any feminist activity.

Another reason that Anna is careful around feminist topics in her classroom is the fact that topics concerning feminism are often raised along with topics concerning sexuality or gender identity. Vandrick (1994; 1995) writes that a feminist teacher should address issues of both women and other marginalized groups because feminist teaching is geared toward not only student empowerment but also social justice and equity. Yoshihara (2013; 2014) write that teachers and students in Japan often like to discuss women’s issues, such as violence against women or pay gap, together with other issues like different genders or different sexualities because for many of them, there is no other place than their EFL class where they can openly talk about these topics. In Russia, there are laws that would prevent you from raising gender or
sexuality issues in the classroom because of the so-called “anti-LGBTQ propaganda law” that prohibits anything LGBTQ+ related in the presence of minors (Goodyear, 2021). According to the law, minors (in Russia, anyone that is younger than 18 years old) should be protected from any information, both visual or oral, that is about the LGBTQ+ community. That includes discussions of LGBTQ+ people, as well. So, Anna’s case is different from Vandrick’s or Yoshihara’s in that not only would she have to deal with Russian conservatism, but she might also be breaking the law because she teaches secondary school children.

In contrast to Anna, Lidia does incorporate feminism into classwork probably because she teachers at a university and her students are legally old enough to be exposed to the issues that Anna cannot expose her middle-school students to at the risk of facing consequences. In her interview, Lidia mentions that she brings feminism and other gender related topics into her classroom both consciously and unconsciously. Thus, for EFL instructor Lidia, depending on what she is doing, some things are purposeful and other things are automatic. For example, according to her response, she takes time to select classroom topics, but she uses inclusive language in her classroom without thinking much about it.

Nevertheless, Lidia implies that some of her colleagues at her Russian institution may not necessarily appreciate her interest in feminism, especially as a topic in her classroom. Just as Alan, she does not want to go overboard because she is concerned about the potential consequences. But while Alan simply does not know what the ESL department’s policies are concerning the discussion of sensitive topics or what his colleagues would think of his discussing feminism with his student, Lidia is aware that some people in her university would disapprove her often engaging with feminism in the classes that she teaches.
As mentioned above, Lidia talks about how she unconsciously uses inclusive language, e.g., gender-inclusive pronouns, when she teaches. Mel, a ESL graduate teaching assistant, discusses the role that inclusive language plays in her classroom, too, and she believes that it is important to use inclusive language. For example, she says that she likes to use the address “you guys” a lot and that she finds “you guys” gendered because of the gendered nature of the word “guys” (Maynor, 2000). Instead, she is using other words like “everyone” and “y’all” that have been considered more inclusive of and welcoming to different groups of people, including women and non-binary people (Maynor, 2000). While Mel says that she does not discuss feminism with her students, it is clear that for Mel, the application of feminist pedagogy in the classroom would involve not only some specific content but also different practices of working with students.

Mel is, however, concerned that going too much beyond the planned coursework can go against the course goals. Mel’s concern is very similar to that of Akiko, one of the participants in Yoshihara’s study on EFL teachers’ application of feminist pedagogy in Japan (2014). Mel and Akiko are both concerned about meeting the university expectations and so stick to the syllabus so students can meet their university-related goals. This phenomenon is referred to as “institutionalized pedagogy as regulation,” which is a term that was coined by Gore (1993) to describe an institutional constraint that is imposed on teachers when they want to extend their course goals beyond “institutionalized” goals.

How my participants would address or incorporate feminist content reflects contexts in which they teach and occupy their positions and positionings. Mercer (2016) writes that context is not monolithic and Ushioda (2011) remarks that the notion of learning context specifically in language education can vary depending on the environment and how we choose to look at that
environment: Do we choose to look at it within physical, social, and cultural boundaries of the classroom settings or beyond them? While Ushioda (2011) addresses the power and role of learning context in language learners’ lives and how they contribute to learner motivation, the responses that my participants gave can support these claims and even expand them to include the power and role of learning or teaching context in instructors’ lives.

As it can be seen from the instructors’ responses, some of them teach in the same institutional and/or cultural contexts, but they still feel differently about the integration of feminist content into their classes. For example, because of her cultural and institutional contexts, Anna is wary of raising feminist issues and topics in her classroom. Despite coming from the same cultural context, Lidia, another EFL instructor in Russia, feels more confident about discussing feminism with her students mainly because she teaches in a post-secondary institution, not a secondary school like Anna.

By the same token, Jackie and Alexandria, full-time ESL instructors, find it possible and even necessary to incorporate feminist content or raise relevant issues, whereas Mel and Alan, ESL graduate teaching assistants in the same post-secondary institution, have reservations that have to do with how they are positioned in the exact same context as Jackie and Alexandria. This, in turn, indicates that the reservations that Mel and Alan may originate from the power imbalances that usually exist in university settings. Jackie and Alexandria can afford to be more daring and experimental because of their positions as full-time instructors and their teaching experiences both in general and in the institution where they worked at the time of the interview. In contrast, Mel and Alan who do not have as much teaching experience, especially in the same post-secondary institution as Jackie and Alexandria, may feel more pressured into sticking to the syllabus and a list of traditional textbook topics.
The role of target language resources

Another theme that arose across the interviews was the role that target language materials played in my participants’ classrooms. Interestingly, it was mostly EFL teachers in Russia that brought up target language materials. According to the interviewees, one reason can be that current target language materials may not work for EFL students and settings. For instance, Anna, an EFL instructor in a secondary school, is concerned that most materials that are readily available online may not necessarily work for EFL students because they may present ideas that are not relevant to students in other cultures. So, these materials do not take account of cultural differences.

Lidia, a university EFL teacher, shares the same perspective as Anna and adds that English textbooks may sometimes present native speakers of English, which has also been contested as a term (Pennycook, 2021), as monolithic: White, middle-class, college educated, etc. Her observation is not new. Pennycook (1999) writes that “the notion of native and nonnative speakers, furthermore, is interwoven with issues of race and ethnicity, as one’s nativeness as a speaker of English is often assumed to correlate with the paleness of one’s skin” (p. 333). He also mentions that the issues of race and ethnicity are oftentimes interwoven with issues of class, which is clearly the case in Lidia’s comment, and creates a false, generalized understanding of and representation of people in Anglophone countries.

Finally, Helen, an EFL instructor in a private school, and Jackie, an ESL university teacher, use videos that show different kinds of people. For example, Helen says that she has in the past used videos that show same-sex couples. Helen’s and Jackie’s use of videos that show different people is shared by other feminist educators and researchers. For example, Vandrick (1995) believes that it is important to try different media to engage in feminist pedagogy.
Although she writes mostly about materials that include women’s issues and feminism, like different readings, textbooks, or videos, she says that it is crucial to address other issues through those materials (e.g., patriotism and racial issues).

It is also important to note that this practice is risky. While Jackie does not reflect on that, Helen, by virtue of being a Russian citizen, understands that diverse materials, e.g., materials that even acknowledge the presence of same-sex relationships, may cause a bit of a controversy among some students in Russia. While homophobia and other isms are not exclusive to Russia, it is definitely more dangerous when it is state-sponsored (Goodyear, 2021).

Yet, as risky as this practice can be, it is a step toward diversifying teaching and learning and making them more just and equitable for teachers and students alike. Anya and Randolph (2020) write that “we should question our assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs that contribute to the inequitable status quo and adopt perspectives of equity-mindedness and inclusivity, which are key to making positive change” (p.2). As educators select materials and resources for teaching, they should think of students that can often find themselves at the periphery: students with disabilities, BIPOC students, LGBTQ+ students, first-generation students, etc. If educators do not acknowledge the existence of these marginalized students both in their materials and in their classrooms, it may lead to their even further alienation, which is evidenced by Anya and Randolph (2020) who write how the presence of Black students in K-12 and postsecondary language education is insignificant compared with the presence of White students and other students of color.
Language classroom as a safe space

Last but not least, interview participants discussed their classrooms as a safe space. The participant that actually used the term “safe space” was Mel, who works at a postsecondary institution in the US. Mel believes that it is important for an ESL classroom to be a place where students can be comfortable and safe, especially because they, as international students, are new to everything in and out of the classroom. That is why Mel says classes like hers are more like small communities where everyone is supportive and understanding of each other.

Interestingly, some people, like Mel, argue that feminist educators should strive to create a safe classroom because it is “an ideal space free from physical threat in which participants might explore issues of social justice, free from judgement or verbal intimidation, and confident in the group members’ honesty and shared values” (Ludlow, 2004, p. 43). However, others claim that we should abandon the idea of a classroom’s being safe and instead focus on the classroom as being “contested” (hooks, 1989; Ludlow, 2004; Rich, 1986). According to Ludlow (2004), the term “safe” in relationship to words like “space” or “classroom” can be ambiguous because it has two connotations. On the one hand, “safe” means “a place in which we can draw breath, rest from prosecution or harassment” (Rich, 1986, p. 206, as cited in Ludlow). On the other hand, it is “the safety of the ‘armored and concluded mind,’ the safety of the barricaded door which will not open for the beleaguered” (Rich, 1986, p. 206, as cited in Ludlow). Because of the ambiguous nature of the term, one may think of a safe classroom as a place where they are encouraged to be too comfortable to step outside their comfort zone and to accept others’ points of view. Thus, Ludlow advocates the use of the term “contested space.” She writes that out of all meanings “contested” has, she believes that the idea behind “contested space” has to do with
“contested” meaning “to affirm another’s witnessing, to testify together” (p. 47). By entering a contested space, you enter a space where identity politics and personal experience co-exist and where the spirit of coalition-building or collaboration is present. So, Mel’s idea of a “safe classroom” is similar to Ludlow’s idea of a “contested classroom” in that Mel defines collaboration and support as key features of the safe classroom.

Thus, the term “contested space” is somewhat better fitting for the current theme because my participants touched upon most, if not all, of the characteristics of the contested classroom, outlined by Ludlow (2004):

- simultaneous collaboration and contention;
- situated knowledges;
- unresolved contradictions and simultaneous truths;
- intersectional understanding of identity;
- accountability; and
- interrogation of systems of power and privilege.

Evidence for how these features can come to live is Lidia’s “brave space” classroom. Lidia’s “brave space” is somewhat similar to Ludlow’s contested space. In Lidia’s “brave” or “contested” classroom, students have agency over what they do and they collaborate to achieve results, some of which are palpable (e.g., PowerPoints that students create and then share at what Lidia calls “PowerPoint” parties).

Other instructors, like Helen (EFL) and Jackie (ESL), stress the importance of cooperation in their classes. In particular, Jackie believes that it is important for students to create smaller communities in the classroom so they can work together and hold each other accountable for everything that they do as a group. Furthermore, Jackie encourages her students
to develop leadership skills by having them lead their groups and also by letting everyone in each group step into the shoes of the leader. These strategies lead to creating a more equitable environment (Shrewsbury, 1987).

In his interview, Alan, an ESL instructor, dwells on the other aspect of the contested classroom which is challenging students to think critically about different issues. Alan says that he tends to address behaviors in the classroom that can be problematic in a way that invites students to reflect on what exactly is problematic about something someone has said. He wants his students to understand why some things can cause a controversy or make someone feel uncomfortable. He does not want to reprimand his students - instead, he wants them to be part of the conversation.

Empowerment is an integral part of both the contested part and feminist pedagogy and many of my participants recognize it as such. For example, Alan thinks that any individual, regardless of their gender, can do anything that they want to. He does not think of it as being something that is gender dependent. He thinks of it as a matter of how much authority one has and, as Bauer (1991) writes, empowers his students to claim his authority as an “emancipatory strategy.”

Anna, an EFL instructor, has an interesting experience with her own empowerment when she was a middle-school student. She mentions that when she was her students’ age, she did not feel comfortable talking about anything in front of boys. However, she can now see that that has changed and that everyone in her classroom, regardless of their gender, feels comfortable expressing themselves in front of her classmates. For Ludlow (2004), that would be the true nature of the contested classroom because everyone’s opinion is heard and considered, irrespective of their position or positioning.
However, empowerment is not as easy as it may seem. According to Gore (1993b), “in attempts to empower others we need to acknowledge that our agency has limits, that we might “get it wrong” in assuming we know what would be empowering for others, and that no matter what our aims or how we go about “empowering,” our efforts will be partial and inconsistent” (p. 63). So, it is important for educators to acknowledge that they do not have an infinite amount of agency or authority in the classroom and so should facilitate power-sharing.

In her interview, Jackie, an ESL instructor, says that students “have some say in things.” This suggests that Jackie finds what Shrewsbury calls “power-sharing” (1987) to be paramount to her classroom. Jackie responsibility for things that go wrong because of her, which instantly makes her different from the authoritative teacher that engages in the “banking” concept of learning and so deposits knowledge into students’ heads (Vandrick, 1994). And then Jackie welcomes and encourages her students’ input so they can together organize their classroom. Ropes-Huliman (1999) says that this power-sharing essentially disrupts the teacher-student dichotomy and welcomes a plurality of experiences and perspectives.

Alexandria, an ESL instructor, also supports and practices power sharing and feels that different voices should be invited and heard even if those voices are geographically from the same place. In fact, Alexandria argues that everyone has their own experiences and points of view and those should not be discarded and should instead be welcomed. Alexandria’s position echoes that of Ropes-Huilman (1999) that writes that feminist teachers recognize different opinions and voices of their students and never think of someone’s perspective as the perspective because there is always more than one perspective. In the same vein, Tisdell (1998) notes that multiple voices, when recognized and appreciated, become powerful tools of knowledge construction.
Limitations

Although I had a deep conversation with every interviewee on Zoom about their opinions, their teaching beliefs, and their teaching practices, I did not observe their classes so they could demonstrate that they apply some strategies that could be considered feminist pedagogy strategies. This could, however, be one way to expand and inform my research in the future as I investigate the role of feminist pedagogy, as well as other anti-oppressive pedagogies, in TESOL.

Another limitation that I have to acknowledge is that I cannot know for sure whether my participants knew little or nothing about feminist pedagogy before our interviews. While I could tell from how thoughtful and even confused they all sometimes looked as I was asking them questions, I still cannot guarantee that they came into the interviews having zero idea of feminist pedagogy. I did have a couple of participants, such as Alexandria (ESL) and Lidia (EFL), who were familiar with critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy, but other participants said they were not. One way I could change it in my research is by applying Conversation Analysis (CA). I believe that through CA, I can look at their speech in more detail and examine their pauses, hesitations, fillers, and repetitions. While I understand that CA will not help me establish for certain whether they knew anything about feminist pedagogy before the interviews, that could still help me make my research more credible.
Conclusions

The present study looked at how different ESL instructors in the United States and EFL instructors in Russia understand and apply (e.g., consciously or unconsciously) feminist pedagogy. As it has been argued throughout this thesis, feminist pedagogy is not a concrete definition but practices that are always evolving and are always changing depending on the settings, the instructor, and the students. A feminist classroom is responsive to the issues and needs of students in and out of the classroom. As it can be seen from the responses of my participants, their views and practices sometimes reflected different practices that are considered part of feminist pedagogy. For example, my interviewees discuss the importance of diversifying target language materials and making them more inclusive, i.e., making them more meaningfully representative of different kinds of people and inviting students to discuss their differences (e.g., Jackie’s practice with discussing the authors of the textbooks) versus just using a picture of a Black person. They also discuss the role that empowerment, community, and leadership play in their classrooms and emphasize that a language classroom should be safe, brave, or, as Ludrow (2004) writes, contested so students can be empowered, invited to build community, and be ready to take the lead by celebrating different voices and different ways to build knowledge.

There are some things that people ascribe to feminist pedagogy that some of my participants do not do or do not realize that they do. For example, some of my participants do not usually include feminist content or any content that would be anti-oppressive for fear that they may face prejudice, hostility, or even legal action. However, they do not need feminist content to empower their students, to build community in and out of their classroom, and make them leaders. While it is important to address injustices and inequalities not only for feminist teachers but also for any teacher, it is easier said than done when you go against an oppressive system or the unknown.
I would then argue that there is no right way to do feminist pedagogy. When you practice anti-oppressive education, you do not get a checklist and try to check off all your boxes, in which case you may again get too carried away engaging in those institutionalized practices that stand in the way of anti-oppressive education (e.g. “institutionalized pedagogy as regulation” (Gore, 1993)) and not actually creating a contested, empowering classroom for your students. Instead, you invite your students to engage in meaningful, critical work that celebrates them and that celebrates you.

Moving forward, I think that it would be interesting to look at some particular issues that are touched upon in this study but not in as much detail as they deserve. In particular, the issue of power imbalances between different types of instructors is worth exploring because my study suggests that depending on what position you have in an educational institution, you present your positionality and identity differently and you make decisions accordingly. For example, the fact that graduate teaching assistants and full-time instructors felt differently about the incorporation of feminist content into their ESL classrooms speaks of how institutional constrains imposed on instructors can affect and dictate both class content and teacher development in the early stages of a teaching career and reinforce a hierarchy and underrepresentation that already exist.
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Appendix A

Interview guide

Before the interview begins, ask your participant for their permission to record.

Different segments.

. Getting to know your participants and getting them to trust

A. Defining terms (e.g., feminist teacher) – what they understand these things to be

B. Classroom practices – getting them to describe what they do in their classrooms

C. Relationship between language teaching and feminism

Segment A and segment B.

1. Could you tell me about your teaching and research areas?

2. What does feminism mean to you?

3. Do you identify as a feminist?

4. Do you bring feminism into your classroom?

Follow-up questions:

Do you have target language resources about feminism to use in your classroom?

(follow-up – What things do you wish you could use?)

5. Were you first exposed to feminism through your native or second/foreign language?

6. Would you consider yourself a feminist teacher?

7. What does it mean to be a feminist teacher?
Follow-up questions:

IF YES, if you identify as a feminist outside class, is it easy for you to identify as one in class?

Follow-up questions:

Ask them more about their first contact with feminism and how they gained an appreciation for it.

Segment C and Segment D.

1. Do you teach feminist concepts in your native language? Why or why not?
2. Do you teach feminist concepts in your second language? Why or why not?
3. How can/should language teaching accommodate feminist thinking?
4. What is feminist pedagogy? Do you think it is important?
5. How do you share power with your students?
6. How do you build community with your students?
7. How do you foster leadership skills in your students?
8. How can/should language teaching accommodate feminist pedagogy?