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## Access as Pedagogy: A Case for Embracing Feminist Pedagogy in Open and Distance Learning

Suzan Koseoglu

**Abstract:** While the mainstream discourse around Open and Distance Learning (ODL) centers on standardization, scalability, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness, I return to a much more contextual and humane understanding of teaching and learning in ODL through feminist pedagogy. I begin my inquiry by discussing women students' experiences through the notion of *access as pedagogy*, which challenges disembodied views of online learners and learning, and a view of access to resources as an opportunity for equity. My primary focus in this discussion is gender issues; however, I view feminist pedagogy as an ethical position as well as a pedagogical position that calls attentive ways of looking into structuring educational services, methods, policies, and legislations that create an inclusive learning space not just for women, but for all students who are disadvantaged in their education. Within this context, student participation can be framed as a means for transformation, contributing to one's well-being, agency and sense of power. I highlight the need for an intersectional gender analysis in ODL, as well as openness and transparency in pedagogical processes in order to tackle human and non-human bias, misrecognition, misrepresentation and unequal participation. Education with an explicit goal for transformation leads to the use of technology for reflective, imaginative, and critical ends.

**Keywords:** empowerment, gender, open and distance learning, openness, feminist pedagogy

### Introduction

The recent Covid-19 crisis has transformed the delivery of many Higher Education institutions from solely on-campus to distance education virtually overnight. The pandemic taught us new vocabulary and new ways of doing things within weeks, with social distancing and the sudden 'pivot' to online teaching having the most impact on millions of students and staff around the world. It is essential that at the time of such a crisis, the ethical and humane dimensions of online education are our highest priority; that "it is not distant from people," and their living situations (FemdEdTech, 2020). The call for a more ethical, more just, more humane and caring education is, of course, not new. Feminist scholars time and again called for connectedness (see, for example, Kirkup & von Prümmer, 1990) and the need to "pay attention to the contexts of women's learning" in distance education, asking critical questions such as "when and where are they doing their studies? How do their daily routines, family responsibilities, and socio-economic status position them as distance learners?" (Patterson, 2009). Yet, addressing such critical questions can be a secondary concern in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) compared to students' access to educational content, which is partly fuelled by political and economic desires "to increase the provision of learning," and "cut the cost of education while increasing participation levels" (Dhanarajan, 2001, p. 62). Not surprisingly, concerns have been raised as to the promise of ODL as a democratizing force without effective support and good online pedagogy (Czerniewicz, 2018a; Weller, 2018). Furthermore, open resources and practices that do not consider issues with unequal participation, and the misrecognition and misrepresentation of historically disadvantaged groups have increasingly been criticized (Bali, Cronin, & Jhangiani, 2020; Lambert, 2018).



From a feminist perspective, the lens of *access as pedagogy* (Ahmed, 2017) is useful to explore what distance education offers, how and to whom, and to identify entry points for feminist interventions in ODL. The focal point of my analysis is women [Endnote 1] students, but I draw implications for all students who may struggle in the system of Higher Education, especially those who are in “isolated, marginalised, challenged and minority groups” (Dhanarajan, 2001, p. 62). I position feminist teaching as a form of support for students, where pedagogical resources and tools are aimed for transformative ends. Such support is needed for good mental health, academic progression and retention, but more so, it is crucial for working toward a broader ideal of existential equality: equalities in self-development, autonomy, freedom, dignity, and respect (Therborn, 2013). It is an essential element toward the path to *freedom of action, freedom of being and becoming*.

This opinion paper is not on teaching during Covid-19 and the unique challenges that define the current crisis in education; however, I do hope that the discussion will encourage readers to deeply reflect on how women students experience distance education. My inquiry begins with a university project in Turkey, as I explain next.

### Background

In 2018, Anadolu University—a giga university in Turkey with almost 3 million students (Bozkurt, 2019)—conducted a research project to explore the experiences of its distance learning students. The project began with a simple survey question posed to thousands of distance learning students enrolled in the university’s Open Education Faculty programs: *What is your story leading to Open and Distance Learning?* More than 2700 students from across Turkey and beyond responded to the question with their stories, some of which were curated in an open access book to inspire prospective students (see Bozkurt & Büyük, 2018). Despite the fact that the selected stories in the book were inspirational accounts of student experience, many narratives reflected deep structural issues in society (Bozkurt, Koseoglu, & Keefer, 2019). Women’s stories, in particular, revealed how socio-economic conditions were barriers for educational attainment. Many women had financial struggles, experienced oppression in their communities and families, and were burdened with childcare, housekeeping and other domestic duties throughout their educational journeys. These students clearly needed guidance prior to and during their studies; they needed social, academic and financial support to begin and successfully continue their education, which was evidenced in their self-narratives.

In a subsequent study on gender inequality in ODL, we observed that gender inequality is a shared problem on a global scale with serious consequences on women’s education (Koseoglu et al., 2020). This partial observation is confirmed by a recent UNESCO report which shows that there *is not* a single country in the world which achieved gender equality (Conceição et al., 2020). There are many reasons for inequality, which are complex and often related. In the ODL literature, patriarchy and androcentrism, the exploitation of land and people (modern colonialism), and poverty (as a result of unequal distribution of resources and opportunities) are noted as some major mechanisms that both cause and perpetuate gender inequality in education, as well as in the broader society (Koseoglu et al., 2020). One example of gender inequality would be the gendered division of domestic labor, which is a reality in many parts of the world, both in the Global South and Global North. Women may be socialized or even indoctrinated into childcare and housekeeping duties by a number of oppressive structures, such as social norms or traditions, employment regulations, policy and law. As a result, they may have little opportunities to access and benefit from educational resources (human and non-human), services and networks. Their educational gains may not be rewarding or freeing.

Especially in the so-called ‘developing countries,’ access to ODL is often posited as a strategic response to such barriers to education (Koseoglu et al., 2020), an opportunity to bring education to “where women live and work [which] enables them more easily to meet their work and family obligations as they study” (Cragg, Andrusyszyn, & Fraser, 2005, p. 22). However, as many critical scholars have noted time and again (e.g., Czerniewicz, 2018b; Demiray, 2014; Faith, 1988; von Prümmer, 2015), access to education

does not guarantee critical outcomes such as academic success, career progression, or economic freedom for women. It does not necessarily lead to social equity. Women may be significantly disadvantaged in their education by many structural factors such as ableism, racism, ethnic discrimination, poverty, or sexism. As Ahmed (2017) says, “[a]ccess can be the formal requirements you might need to meet to enter a world” (p. 109-110), but this does not translate to *accessibility*, which I use in a broad sense: the kind of education that gives learners the full capability to reach knowledge and skills, to understand what they are learning, why and how, and imagine other possibilities. Ahmed (2017) notes:

“Access is pedagogy. Adjustments have to be made to spaces and building because they assume certain bodies; streets might have to be adjusted to support the passing through of those in wheelchairs; podium might have to be adjusted to support those who are not the right height; a timetable might have to be adjusted to support those with childcare responsibilities, and so on” (p. 109).

In the context of ODL, there are many adjustments that have to be made to address barriers to women’s education. Some examples for barriers would be mandatory academic meetings and tutorials scheduled with little or no consideration of child care and domestic responsibilities or time or travel constraints (Jung 2012; von Prümmer, 2015). Other examples would be how the ODL curricula are delivered in a top-down manner with no room for women to bring their everyday experiences to their learning (Chung, 2016) or how the curricula assume certain digital literacies and capabilities for participation (Atan et al, 2002). All of these examples reveal assumptions made in the ODL provision in terms of human and non-human resources, family and work responsibilities, students’ identities, and their gender. Indeed, von Prümmer (1994) notes how ODL is often designed for the imaginary self-directed and independent learner, who is often a male. Much later, Houlden and Veletsianos (2019) note “flexibility [in online education] is neither universal nor neutral,” yet the mainstream discourse on online education assumes the presence of “autonomous learners that are self-reliant and individualistic” (p. 1006). Similarly, but without an explicit reference to gender, Knox (2019) argues how in open education learners are imagined as “straightforwardly utilising networks for personal enhancement” (p. 363).

But the reality for students, in the context of my discussion, for women students, can be quite different. Houlden and Veletsianos (2019) in their careful analysis of flexibility and gender note how women often have to “[work] through shared space and time” (p. 1013) to be able to pursue their education from a distance. Indeed, research shows that women students often experience “physical and emotional pushes and pulls when balancing demands on their time and energy” when taking distance education courses (Cragg, Andrusyszyn, & Fraser, 2005, p. 35). Kramarae (2001) in a seminal research report published by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, illustrates this tension using the metaphor of *Third Shift*:

[Women] serve a first shift at work outside the home and a second shift as primary caretakers of family members. The only way they can accomplish a third shift—their education—is to fit it in when and where they can. ... While DL allows women to squeeze in their studies around the seemingly immovable barriers of family and work life, this evades any general social discussion of how time and responsibilities, both in the workforce and the home, might be reconfigured to make fulfillment of educational goals a more humane and less taxing process. Instead, women make individual compromises and choices—as family members, workers, and students—to fit all of these activities into short days. While an insomniac lauds late-night studying as “the beauty of online education,” other women accustomed to more regular hours report that the third shift of education cuts into their already-scarce hours of leisure or sleep time (2001, p. 16-19).

Low-income students, students with caring responsibilities, minorities; in other words, students from any socially disadvantaged group, including women, are particularly vulnerable in online learning, just as

they would be in traditional learning. These are the students who need the most support and encouragement to fully benefit from formal education; who need to see themselves recognized and accurately represented in course content, activities and resources, who need good role models and effective mentoring in their education. For example, while black students in the US face racial bias in textbooks (Louie & Wilkes, 2018), Syrian refugees in Turkey face language and cultural barriers in their education (Taskin & Erdemli, 2018). All of these examples, including Kramarae's (2001) observation of the *Third Shift*, show that access to resources does not always lead to equal opportunity. How does a student create a productive study space after a busy day with work and/or childcare responsibilities? In what ways, and through which technologies, does she pursue her education? What makes her feel connected and motivated? Is she disadvantaged in her education because of her background, the way she looks, the way she uses her body, her political views? Does she know her capabilities; is she aware of both educational and social possibilities? What brought her to ODL? *What is her story?*

Addressing such critical questions calls for attentiveness to how students experience online learning and educational outcomes in the context of students' lives. It calls for a two-way relationship between the learner and educational provider to avoid assumptions and provide intentional support. Burge (1988) notes:

“In order to ascertain the sorts of education and support appropriate to women's needs it is necessary to understand and know more about their experiences. We need to know about their education and learning, self-image, personal changes and growth and relationships of importance to them. We also need to know their perceived catalysts for change and impediments to growth (Belenky et al 1986: 12). There needs to be a consistent approach so that it is not simply left to chance whether or not support is available” (p.vii).

Feminist pedagogy encourages the formation of such mutual relationships for personal development and social change. I would like to make it clear here that with feminist pedagogy, I refer to a broad orientation to teaching rather than the application of specific methods, such as group learning or role sharing, as depending on the subject matter and immediate context these methods may nor may not take place. I see feminist pedagogy as an ethical position as well as a pedagogical position that calls attentive ways of looking into and structuring educational services, teaching, policies, and legislations to create an inclusive and empowering learning space not just for women, but for all students who are disadvantaged in their education. The particular focus on gender is important, but feminist pedagogy is more meaningful and has more impact when multiple forms and manifestations of inequality are considered in relation to one another in learning and teaching. Feminist interventions can take place to encourage students to think deeply about inequality throughout a program or a course (e.g., in Women's and Gender Studies programs) or at certain points in their education. For example, an illustration in a textbook can lead to a discussion, challenging “stereotypes about who does and who doesn't do different subjects, like science and math” (Campbell & Storo, 1996, p. 287). I elaborate on feminist pedagogy next with implications for ODL practice.

### **Feminist Pedagogy and Implications for ODL**

Allen, Walker, and Webb (2002) note six core principles of teaching central to the feminist orientation to education: *reformation of the relationship between professor and student, empowerment, building community, privileging [student] voice, respecting the diversity of personal experience, and challenging traditional pedagogical notions*. I will critically discuss these principles with a particular emphasis on empowerment to illustrate the ethos of feminist education and highlight implications for ODL.

Empowerment, sometimes appearing in the literature as *agency* or *developing a sense of power*, is a central concept in feminist pedagogy. Stromquist (2015) defines empowerment as “a set of knowledge, skills, and conditions that women must possess in order to understand their world and act upon it” (p. 308). Furthermore, according to Stromquist, “[e]mpowerment is based upon individual self-discovery,

self-assertiveness, and critical learning about one's world, as well as upon collective organization" (2015, p. 308). On the other hand, Drydyk (2013) argues that empowerment and agency cannot be used interchangeably: "agency ... refers either to a given person's degree of involvement in a course of action or to the scope of actions that a person could be involved in bringing about ... while 'empowerment' refers to a process of change" (p. 251) that contributes to well-being. The concept of empowerment translates into feminist education in two ways. First, as Walker (2008), drawing from the human capabilities approach by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, argued, "[l]earning and learning achievements in higher education ought ... to contribute to well-being and quality of life in some way" (p. 479). Furthermore, there is a communal dimension to empowerment: "[t]he quality of what graduates learn and what they take to be valuable in and through learning ought to contribute substantially to improved lives during and after the period of higher education study, their own and that of others (Walker, 2008, p. 477). Perhaps because of the strong emphasis on individual and collective well-being and transformative change, some common principles of feminist pedagogy significantly overlap with the student capabilities identified by Walker (2007; 2008), in particular: *being able to form social relations, being able to practice and develop critical thinking, being able to "understand the lives and worlds of others," "being able to respond to human need and suffering," "have respect for oneself and for other"* (2008, p. 483-484), and *"to have one's opinions valued and to be heard"* (Loots & Walker, 2015). All of these capabilities, borrowing from the Open University UK's unique [mission statement](#), require an openness to people, ideas, and different ways of doing things. This takes me to my second point, that there needs to be "supportive institutional environments and cultures [and] appropriate curricula and learning and teaching strategies" (Czerniewicz, 2015) to create a space for positive change. Similarly, Lambert (2019) and Jung (2012) note support as a crucial dimension for widening participation, academic success and quality in ODL. This means access to ODL, as a mode of educational provision, is not necessarily a path for empowerment in and of itself, "equity of opportunity and outcomes" (Czerniewicz, 2015) requires hard work from pedagogical and organizational perspectives; it requires significant *human resources*.

Equally important, embracing empowerment as an educational aim requires a "nuanced analysis of power" (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2003) on many different levels, for example, in learning cohorts, in curricula, institutional services and policies, and societies in general. Ahmed (2017) says, "[i]ntersectionality is a starting point, the point from which we must proceed if we are to offer an account of how power works" (p. 5); however, it is important to note that many studies who advocate for the adoption of ODL to tackle gender inequality in education and the broader society fail to provide an in-depth analysis of how identity markers such as disability, color of skin, class, ethnicity, etc., may shape the lives of women in connection with their gender (Crenshaw, 1989). An intersectional gender analysis of educational content, activities and resources is crucial for feminist ODL educators to begin asking ethical questions about how to create a better educational experience. As a starting point, drawing from Nancy Fraser's works (see, for example, Fraser 1998) and Lambert (2018), a study of lack of representation and recognition of one's identity in the curricula (misrepresentation and misrecognition) can be a strong pedagogical tool for both students and teachers to reflect on how knowledge is constructed from a historical and socio-cultural perspective and challenge its form and nature, while exploring other/future possibilities to achieve participation parity.

An in-depth analysis of power within and beyond the educational context brings the recognition that feminist education takes place within many structural constraints (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2003). To what extent can educators realistically aim for transformation if they are limited by their life experiences, the resources they have, if they don't receive support from their institutions and colleagues, if they cannot exercise free will due to political powers, if their aims do not align well with student expectations or experiences? But as Manicom (1992) notes, such tensions should not paralyze teaching. Rather, they are useful starting points for reflection, to ask: "Is what I am doing as a teacher enhancing our capacity for transformative practice? In my particular circumstances, what kind of teaching and learning has the most potential to develop a collective capacity to engage in transformative feminist practice?" (1992, p. 383). This view aligns with Ahmed (2017) who said:

“Living a feminist life does not mean adopting a set of ideals or norms of conduct, although it might mean asking ethical questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world (in a not- feminist and antifeminist world); how to create relationships with others that are more equal; how to find ways to support those who are not supported or are less supported by social systems; how to keep coming up against histories that have become concrete, histories that have become as solid as walls” (2017, p. 1) [Endnote 2].

Similarly, Lawrence (2016) notes three tenets of feminist pedagogy: *resisting hierarchy, using experience as a resource, transformative learning,*” but warns that as feminist pedagogy “originat[es] from and belong[s] to different people and places,” it is a continually developing, evolving approach with no dogmatic or pre-defined set of methods.

In feminist pedagogy, it is these kinds of reflections and subsequent pedagogical actions that challenge traditional or top-down pedagogical notions, which typically are not very open or welcoming to critical questioning. Note in Ahmed’s definition, the emphasis on ethics, equality in relationships and support for those who have been disadvantaged by structural issues in the society (such as racism or patriarchy). Feminist pedagogy is also a *pedagogy of care* (hooks, 2003), characterized by mutual empathy, affection, and emotional/psychological support in the learning ecology (Bali, 2020; Robinson, Al-Freih, & Kilgore, 2020). Feminist pedagogy is also a *pedagogy of hope* (hooks, 2003), as it is hopeful for personal and social transformation. These issues are critical for a feminist analysis of ODL teaching, some of which I discuss next through the lens of access as pedagogy (a critical look into what education offers, how and to whom).

**A view of feminist teaching as student support:** Feminist education is more likely succeed in formal education if students are recognized and supported in their learning as a *whole person*, with all the experiences, emotions, relationships, knowledge and skills that shape them as a human being. As many critical theorists across different fields have argued, learning is not just a cognitive process; any formal learning experience is situated in a socio-cultural and political system, and how learners develop their knowledge, skills, and attitudes is tightly connected to the way they position themselves in their learning; in other words, how they see themselves in relation to other people, tools and resources. This view challenges the traditional separation of academic and non-academic support in Higher Education (see, for example, Sánchez-Elvira Paniagua, & Simpson, 2018). Rather feminist pedagogy views education from a holistic perspective, taking affective, social, cognitive, reflective, systemic and gender-specific dimensions of learning and the support coinciding with those (for the noted dimensions of support see Jung & Hong, 2014).

The framing of feminist teaching as support does not mean that feminist educators should work like counsellors or undertake the roles of professional services. Rather, a holistic view of teaching and support means how students learn is not only a psychological or motivational matter, learning is situated in societal expectations, upbringings, cultural norms and traditions, hidden or explicit biases, or privileges. To understand that such barriers exist, and to overcome such barriers individually and/or collectively, it is important that students are guided well throughout their education with ample support built *both around and within* content, activities and resources. For example, without modeling and coaching, or working alongside students as a co-learner or facilitator, key pedagogical concepts underlying feminist teaching such as critical thinking, building connections with personal and local experiences, student voice or dialogue often stay in the abstract. If, for example, the goal is critical thinking, students need to learn how to think critically through issues or problems that are relevant to them and need to understand why it is important to work towards recognizing their and others’ misconceptions and biases (Bali, 2019). If the goal is student voice, students need to be able to listen and contribute in ways that elevate others’ presence. It might take a village to achieve these—by which I mean the educational institution as a whole—because many students need time and a lot of support to switch from a top-down traditional model of education to horizontal or variable structures. If access is

pedagogy, if adjustments should be made to improve the student experience as a whole, then all programs of education and all services supporting disciplinary teaching and activities, such as Library, Careers, Mental Health, Academic Skills, IT services need to have a shared vision of an egalitarian society.

**Affinity spaces and networked learning:** Traditionally, feminist educators, akin to the popular rhizomatic slogan “community is curriculum” (Cormier, 2008), have seen community building as a central concept in teaching, but research shows community is a problematic concept in networked learning (Bell, Mackness, & Funes, 2016)—who decides what a community is, its rules, its members? In response to widely recognized theories of community-building, Gee (2005) said, “If we start with the notion of a “community” we cannot go any further until we have defined who is in and who is not, since otherwise we cannot identify the community. Yet it is often issues of participation, membership and boundaries that are problematic in the first place” (p. 215). If community is a problematic notion, then the student voice in a community is a problematic notion as well: whose voice is heard in a group of students and how? Instead, Gee (2005) proposes *affinity spaces* to describe learning spaces or networks “where people relate to each other primarily in terms of common interests, endeavours, goals or practices, not primarily in terms of race, gender, age, disability or social class” (p. 225). This is a theory that originated from the study of computer games but has important implications for formal education. Gee notes:

“Classrooms tend to encourage and reward individual knowledge stored in the head, not distributed knowledge. They do not often allow students to network with each other and with various tools and technologies and be rewarded for doing so, rather than to be rewarded for individual achievement. Further, classrooms tend to narrowly constrain where students can gain knowledge, rather than utilise widely dispersed knowledge.” (2005, p. 230-231)

Affinity spaces and networked learning are helpful for learners to (i) bridge formal and informal learning, (ii) have connections with others across different cohorts, programs, departments, (iii) utilize learning networks outside of formal education, (iv) build relationships with supportive mentors and peers in and outside of the formal institution. A good example for the latter would be the Open University UK’s [Global OER Graduate Network](#) (GO-GN) network, “which is a global network supporting PhD researchers in the area of OER” (Weller, Farrow, & Pitt, 2019). A central inquiry in ODL feminist education is then, to what extent does the curriculum support social networking and mentoring with or without digital technology, and to what extent are students supported in the formation of safe and meaningful relationships within and beyond institutional learning?

**Student participation as a means for transformation:** Bali, Cronin, and Jhangiani (2020) note that open educational practices can be considered along three broad dimensions: from content-centric to process-centric; from teacher-centric to learner-centric; and from primarily pedagogical to primarily social justice focused. In terms of social justice, they note that open practices “can support social justice from economic, cultural and political dimensions;” however, caution is needed as they can “do so in transformative, ameliorative, neutral or even negative ways.” Transformative action “refers to addressing systemic/structural roots of injustice, affirmative/ameliorative refers to addressing surface injustice, neutral refers to not having a social justice impact, and negative means reproducing or even exacerbating injustice” (2020). In the context of my discussion, transformative action could be understood in terms of learner empowerment, which can be defined as a process of change that contributes to one’s well-being and sense of power through agency, critical reflection and shared learning in a climate of dignity and mutual respect.

In feminist pedagogy, the dimensions of empowerment, student participation and process-oriented education are interdependent. As student participation increases and as the focus of education shifts from product (e.g., resources and outputs) to educational processes (e.g., skills, attitudes, and activities

that shape resources and outputs) (Bali, 2019), it is more likely that teaching will draw from students' life experiences and "shift their thinking in new directions" (Lawrence, 2016). It is also likely that resources, activities and assessment, even the tone of voice in educational content, will be adjusted with student participation, increasing the likelihood of positive change. But ODL as a mode of education, just like traditional Higher Education, is increasingly becoming distributed, for example with the use of MOOCs, OERs, and for-profit educational technology tools and services (Czerniewicz, 2018a). This means the nature and rhythm of student participation may not be uniform across different ODL provisions. In this sense, participation can mean different things in different ODL contexts, such as regular student contributions in online classes, the design of curricula with student representatives, or working with a group of current or prospective students as partners in research and evaluation.

**Openness and transparency in educational structures and processes:** Transparency and openness in pedagogy together form a significant mechanism to foster student agency and motivate students in their education. Students should be able to understand the processes of education, with a recognition that they too can have a voice in the pedagogical design (hooks, 1994). With the rise of for-profit educational technology and the rapid advance of systems like artificial intelligence and data surveillance and analytics, there is a pressing need for both teachers and students to understand and to be able to critique the pedagogical processes in ODL. As an emerging field of inquiry, *data feminism*, for example, critiques issues with power and binary thinking in big data collection and analysis (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2019). A feminist orientation to data analysis is important because many institutions use learning analytics to understand where students are in their learning and design interventions for underprivileged or at-risk groups (Sclater, Peasgood, & Mullan, 2016). Learning analytics is also increasingly used on a smaller scale by educators to track students' progress and the extent to which they engage in certain activities (e.g., watching a video, participating in a forum on the VLE/LMS). First, there is an urgency for educators to critique the ethics of data surveillance and implications on disadvantaged groups (Gilliard, 2017). Second, student data must be shared with those who own the data—students themselves—both for transparency and as a pedagogical tool for students to understand how systems work and how they can have more agency in those systems. One example would be teaching students how to analyze their data traces or how to make sense of their learning analytics to help them reflect on their education and educational systems and tools, both as a learner and as a citizen.

**Use of educational technology for reflective, imaginative, and critical ends:** This theme perhaps is the heart of this opinion paper, the final theme that encapsulates all the other themes I noted up to this point. In what ways could technology be used so that the ODL curricula and teaching are ethical, support the whole person, and speak to learners' interests, aspirations, goals, and needs? In what ways could it contribute to people's well-being and quality of life? I would like leave these as open-ended questions for the readers, for finding ways, new ways, to "reconcile distance education with feminist pedagogy" (Aneja, 2017, p. 850) and help learners transcend cultural, technical, and social distances in ODL platforms, spaces, services and tools (Aneja, 2017; Bozkurt, Koutropoulos, Singh, & Honeychurch, 2020).

### Conclusion

hooks (1994) says, "Our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (p. 13). If we embrace hook's vision in ODL (and why shouldn't we), then it is clear that ODL curricula, teaching and services should be orientated toward learners (not just the delivery of content and resources), to their everyday experiences, feelings, aspirations, and needs. Such an orientation moves us away from a blind focus on issues like standardization, scalability, efficiency, or cost-effectiveness to a much more contextual and humane understanding of teaching and learning in ODL. In the current climate of ODL, I argued for a need to:



- place an explicit emphasis on intersectional gender analysis in the curricula and tools with a recognition that educational resources and activities may lead to transformative, ameliorative or even negative experiences (Bali et al., 2020);
- reframe student participation as a means for transformation;
- design for networked learning experiences, by which I mean the meaningful connections students build with others through formal and informal networks;
- embrace a holistic understanding of student learning, combining affective and cognitive dimensions of teaching and learning;
- embrace open and transparent educational structures and processes;
- use technology for reflective, imaginative, and critical ends.

Going back to the current situation with Covid-19, there have been numerous calls to shift the focus of teaching during this crisis from teaching educational content to how to share, collaborate and support others (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). A distinction between remote teaching (content-driven, focused on technology) and online distance education—defined as a learning process that provides learners agency, responsibility, flexibility and choice (2020, p. ii)—is made to avoid a limited understanding of online education, especially for those who are new to online teaching. These are very fitting calls in the current crisis we are facing; however, as I argued here, we need to recognize that not all ODL provisions lead to learner agency and enhanced responsibility, and flexibility and choice are debatable concepts depending on who offers them, how and why they offer, and how they are perceived by the learner. In addition, trauma, stress and psychological pressure are not new for many learners; they are part of everyday life. Caution is needed to avoid the “unsettling disconnection” that often occurs between “symbolic commitment of institutions and a lived reality” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 90). One way to connect ideals with reality is through contextualized learning and contextualized support, which can only be possible with a system of education that puts not just the student, but the *whole person* in its center. Feminist pedagogy is one method that brings us closer to that ideal. It is also promising that the *pedagogies of care* have surfaced as a strong response to remote teaching with the current crisis (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

Going forward, I call for a need to examine feminist teaching in ODL from a multidirectional perspective, in particular on issues around support: How can institutions better support their staff so that they can better support their students, especially those who are not in a position to fully exercise their capability? This is a pressing issue in the current climate of Higher Education where employing precarious staff (post-doctoral researchers, PhD students, adjunct lecturers, zero-hour contract workers) is increasingly becoming common practice. Furthermore, how can students better support their peers or have access to support networks outside of formal education, and how could those networks further feed into education? These are important questions to consider, so that little bumps on the way won't become walls for our vulnerable students [Endnote 3].

### Notes

1. I refer to “woman” or “women” as a gender identity, not as a biological category.
2. An example for “a history that has become as solid as walls” (Ahmed, 2017, p.1) would be racial discrimination in modern day US, which is rooted in the histories of colonialism, slavery and white privilege.
3. In reference to Ahmed (2017) who wrote, “I learned how disability is worldly because I came up against the world; the different ways you are treated, the opening of doors, concerned faces, the closing of doors, rigid indifference. But most of all, I came to feel the little bumps on the street, little bumps I had not even noticed before. Those little bumps became walls that took a huge amount of energy just to get over or to get around” (2017, p. 180-181).

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### About the Author

Suzan Koseoglu; s.koseoglu@gold.ac.uk; Goldsmiths, University of London, United Kingdom;  
<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8918-2714>

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