

Method and Characteristics of Gender Education Research in the Digital Age: Literature Review and Research Outlook

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Abstract

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the research on gender education has shown a positive trend. With the help of CNKI, this paper searched the main literature related to “gender education in the digital age” in recent years and has found that the academic circle had done a lot of research on the specific context of gender education, the concept analysis of gender education and the method of gender education, and has broadened the research horizon and practice path of gender education. However, there are methods in the research that ignore the methodology of system construction, or emphasize quantitative analysis over qualitative, which needs to focus more on the core concept of gender education, to construct gender education methodology system with Chinese characteristics, and to enhance the practical application of gender education in the process of social transformation and upgrading, in order to better achieve the free and comprehensive development of every individual.

Keywords: digital age, gender education, method characteristics, research outlook

1. The Special Context of Gender Education in Current Digital Age

As a new era after the industrial age and the information age, the digital age, is a new concept proposed by Professor Negroponte at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.¹ In the digital age, the development of new media has promoted the progress of social gender consciousness and shaken the long-standing

male-dominated social culture. The social gender culture in the digital age expresses the reasonable demands of modern gender in a more popular and accessible manner.

1.1 Technology Myth — New Technology and Forms of Gender Communication

Firstly, new technologies provide women with more freedom of expression. The development of Internet technology transcends the “male power” information monopoly of traditional society. Political transparency enables women to

¹ Nicholas Negroponte. (1996). *Being Digital*. New York: Random House (NY).

vote and vote; economic equity encourages women to pursue personal development without family attachment; cultural openness allows women to freely create and articulate their opinions. The complex interaction between virtual space and real space in the digital age has prompted many women's topics that are difficult to express in reality to be conveyed in virtual space. Secondly, new technologies increase the possibility for women to create their own value. The arrival of the digital age has gradually ended the patriarchal society represented by physical strength, and turned to a fair competition society dominated by intelligence and information exchange. The natural advantages of decentralization and equal rights of digital economy can empower more women in underdeveloped areas and enable them to achieve equal employment and entrepreneurship through the Internet platform. In addition, the development of the digital economy ensures the employment rights and self-worth realization of female college students, helping more vulnerable female groups to obtain the development opportunities they deserve. Third, new technologies expand the communication space for women's benign development. The evolution of the digital age itself is based on the reality of human life, and in turn has an impact on human evolution. The digital age has provided women with a new space and means of communication and has also narrowed the disparity gap between men and women. The exploitation of Internet technology makes the discussion of women's rights no longer limited to the perspective of cities. Women in villages, towns and rural areas also have the right and opportunity to interact with advanced women, so as to find and enjoy their rights.¹

In the process of development, media has brought great convenience to the spread of gender consciousness and the growth of feminism, but it must also be acknowledged that the media has corresponding drawbacks while developing. First, the consumer market intensifies the objectification of women. The convenience of media platforms allows people to freely express themselves in terms of beauty,

love, and sexuality, but the target of these expressions is the female body. "Under the control of the powerful logic of science and technology—production—consumption, the attribute, form and value orientation of postmodern literature and art have shifted from reproduction to production, subject to commercialization and market demand." ² Secondly, digital recommendations bring about gender polarization. In the environment of current media development in China, groups that master Internet technology and freely express their opinions are "younger". Young groups who have been exposed to the Internet earlier have not yet completed the process of personal socialization and gender.

Currently, the social gender in cyberspace has gradually shifted to sexual minorities, rather than the social gender itself. In addition, the influence of online public opinion makes the discussion of gender equality, social gender and female development easy to go to extremes. Moreover, digital recommendations and content analysis make the information obtained by the group from the Internet more biased towards "personal taste", making it difficult for diverse ideas to appear on the personal digital platform interface. This also leads to the group constantly reinforcing their own views and perspectives, indirectly promoting the solidification of gender awareness.

1.2 The Pluralistic Differentiation in Social Transition Period and the Diversification of Gender Education

Coexistence of old and new factors, interweaving of tradition and modernity, convergence of East and West, struggle between progress and backwardness, have commonly led to a diversified feature in the period of social transformation. The pluralism of modern society has also given people more choices. The traditional gender stereotype of "men leading the outside world and women leading the inside" is gradually being dismantled, and social diversity is gradually accepting and encouraging individuals to express their gender emotions and needs. Traditional gender framework is being broken, and gender diversity is becoming a new feature of gender

¹ Yang Keqing. (2015). Chinese mainland Exploring the specific context and methodology of media and social gender research. *Journal of Hubei University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Sciences edition)*, 33(03), 156-158, 173.

² Zhao Yifan. (2007). From Husserl to Derrida — Western Literary Theory speech. Beijing: Life · Reading, New Knowledge Sanlian Bookstore.

education.¹

The Education Bureau of Zhongshan City proposes in its gender equality education curriculum that through role analysis, students can eliminate their single, fixed, and rigid identification of gender roles, and understand that everyone has both masculine and feminine characteristics.

They also encourage the students to jump out of the stereotype of “girls speaking softly and boys speaking confidently” and interact with each other in a way that is free from gender bias and discrimination. Japan has gradually abolished gender restrictions on school uniforms, allowing students to choose school uniform based on personal preferences. Skirts, bows, ties, and pants are no longer stereotyped as clothing for boys and girls.

Besides, the digital age has exacerbated gender differences between urban and rural areas. Due to the limitation of traditional cultural norms as well as the need to spend more time completing housework, some rural female groups lack the time and space to learn information technology in the digital society, leading themselves to a serious gender digital divide.² However, the advancement of digital technology has still played an important role in eliminating gender differences in rural areas. Through the diffusion of technology, rural women have established connections with the world, strengthened their participation in rural work, and thus made them more willing to stay in rural areas, narrowing the gender rights gap between developed and underdeveloped areas, urban and rural areas, in which way becoming a key factor against the situation of rural population reduction and virilization.³ Therefore, rural gender education in the digital age is an important measure and means to strengthen the quality and to balance the development of education. In response to the heterogeneity of rural gender groups, more attention should be paid to individual life experiences and experience expression.

2. An Analysis of the Concept of Gender

Education

Academic circles have different definitions of gender education. Professor Liu Xiuli, standing from the perspective of the binary difference between men and women, pointed out that “gender education refers to the process in which educators, based on a correct understanding of the physiological differences between men and women, abandon traditional and incorrect social gender bias views, and cultivate learners with a diversified educational ideology”.⁴ Professor Hu Xiaohong emphasizes that gender education should address how to handle the social relationships between men and women, starting from the social roles they undertake. “Gender education refers to education based on gender equality, gender socialization, and gender harmony. Simply put, it teaches people how to be ‘men’ and ‘women’, how to treat the roles they play, and how to handle the relationship between ‘men’ and ‘women’.”⁵ This definition limits gender education research to two opposing genders, but in the digital age, people often exhibit different gender temperaments in different situations, and this binary distinction of gender education cannot meet the needs of the new era.

Therefore, some scholars have pointed out that social gender should be introduced as a methodological feature and used as a basis for social policy decision-making and an important consideration factor for coordinating educational management mechanisms. “Social gender refers to the differences in expectations, requirements, and evaluation criteria for the characteristics, roles, responsibilities, and relationships of both sexes in society. It is a gender in the social sense, determined by social systems and personalized processes, and can change with transformations in social gender concepts.”⁶ Some scholars have also proposed that “gender education is the education of social gender, which refers to the socialized education process based on gender concepts in a specific social background, permeating into various aspects of education through tangible and

¹ Li Huiying. (2021). The idea and practice of Gender Equality Education. *Journal of China Women's College*, 33(03), 90-97.

² Mathrani A, Umer R, Sarvesh T, et al. (2023). Rural-urban, gender, and digital divides during the COVID-19 lockdown: A multi-layered study. *Societies*, 13(5), 122.

³ Wang Rui, Feng Jian. (2024). Western Study on the Digital Divide in the 21st Century. *Advances in Geographic Sciences*, 43(06), 1247-1260.

⁴ Liu Xiuli. (2013). On gender education in science. *Educational Research*, (10), 127-133.

⁵ Hu Xiaohong. (2010). Gender education is the growth point of ideological and political education in colleges and universities. *Journal of Yunnan Minzu University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, (04).

⁶ Song Jian. (2009). Chinese social policy from the gender perspective: Conflict and Coordination. *Population and Family Planning*, (07), 1-2.

intangible means, influencing the development of gender cognition and the formation of gender concepts in learners, and producing corresponding gender behaviors.”¹ Such views over affirm the correctness of gender concepts in the current society. The current Internet is full of diverse gender perspectives, including some extreme views. Defining gender education based on gender concepts may continue gender stereotypes.

Based on this, the characteristics of gender education in the digital age should be targeted education for the physical and mental characteristics of individuals of different stages and genders under the premise of recognizing and respecting the differences between biological sex and gender. To help individuals fully, equally, freely and comprehensively realize their own gender development and the attitude of gender tolerance and recognition of others.

3. The Methodology Characteristics of Current Gender Education Research in China

The core purpose of feminism is to criticize social relations in order to achieve gender equality. At present, most of the research on feminism focuses on sociology, communication and other disciplines, and these fields have made great achievements in the methodology of feminist research. As a joint force of pedagogy and feminism, the research method still has a tendency to simplify, and it is relatively simple in the analysis dimension.

3.1 The Study of “Feminist” Vision Covers the Construction of Methodological System

With the deepening of education reform, people’s demand for higher levels, higher quality, and more diverse education keeps growing, which makes contradiction to unbalanced and insufficient development of education. In the process of analyzing such contradictions, feminism is mostly taken as a research horizon, such as “how to improve the education quality of female college students” or “how to do college students develop in an all-round way”. But feminism is not just a research perspective. American scholar Gayle Rubin pointed out in the article *The Traffic in*

Women: notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex (1975) that “the social gender system is a patriarchal system based on male domination of women and is a male centered system that constrains gender relations and controls human social and cultural life.”

In the pursuit of gender equality, it is necessary to abandon structured knowledge model from traditional society based on “male dominance” and its discourse, to break through power oppression, and to actively build a methodological framework based on female experience as the foundation of discourse system. In contemporary gender education research, the unique role and universal value of feminist methodology have not yet been recognized.

The essence of feminism is a methodological principle to view and analyze problems from the perspective of gender. Traditional gender education often focuses on the needs of men, attempting to replace the needs of all humanity with these needs, while ignoring the needs of women. The substance of the research on the evaluation, innovation and creation of gender education based on feminist thinking is to expose and criticize the gender bias in traditional China and pursue the true gender equality and human liberation in gender education. However, in recent gender education research, feminism is widely used as a research perspective, and there are relatively few achievements in exploring and constructing it as a methodology.

3.2 Emphasis on Methods and Techniques over Methodology Discussion

Modern feminists believe that education “has the potential to play an important role in eliminating gender inequality.”² In order to promote the effectiveness of gender education, there have been fruitful research results on gender education, and the research methods used are not singular. For example, qualitative and quantitative methods such as content analysis, quantitative survey, and questionnaire survey are widely used. Whereas it should also be acknowledged that in previous research on gender education, there has been a focus on exploring the methods and techniques used, with little methodological analysis. Current

¹ Wang Wen et al. (2009). Research progress of gender development abroad and enlightenment for Gender education in China. *Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences edition)*, (5), 122-128.

² Wang Xiaomei. (2007). Review and Prospect of female education research in China. *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences edition)*, (3), 106.

research on gender education mainly focuses on specific practical issues such as gender inequality in education and employment of female college students. When discussing specific problems, researchers only use feminism as a research perspective, focusing on whether specific methods and techniques such as survey questionnaires and data organization are scientific and accurate. They only discuss theoretical perspectives or analyze and dogmatically introduce existing methods based on a certain situation, lacking “personal experiences and feelings”, as well as locality and reflection. The disconnect between methodology and methodological techniques has resulted in methodology lacking the support of specific investigation methods and becoming a castle in the air. Specific methods also lack guidance from methodology and only have statements without discussion.

The emphasis on the construction and use of methodology is because studies on women are not purely exclusive to a single discipline. Taking gender education research in colleges and universities as an example, it is unlikely to simply and unilaterally take female in colleges and universities as a research perspective or entry point, and to discontinuously analyze the effects of four-year gender education on women. Instead, we should put women’s studies in the interdisciplinary field, focus on women’s life experience, and regard their experience as a culture that attaches equal importance to the empirical culture centered on male power.

On the one hand, the exploration of this methodology is to stand from the perspective of women, make the true voices, and resist the methodological constraints centered on “male dominance”; On the other hand, it emphasizes qualitative research and explores the universality and generality of feminist methodology.

3.3 The Local Traditional Theory Has Insufficient Support to Establish a Scientific Methodology System

As a special field with both academic and action orientation, the research method of gender education is influenced by the western gender education research and feminism in one respect, and in another respect, it needs to be rooted in the specific reality of China. With the introduction of western learning, localization is prominent as a companion problem. The current

research methods of gender education mostly draw on the theories and viewpoints of western feminist schools, communication, sociology and other fields, using discourse analysis such as “the other” and “male gaze”, and theoretical frameworks such as “social gender” and “gender atmosphere construction” to explain.

The lack of a scientific localization theoretical framework is reflected both in the difficulty of constructing a localization theoretical framework, and in the difficulty of applying a Westernized theoretical framework. The difficulty in constructing a localized theoretical framework is due to the long-standing influence of traditional beliefs, which have made the discourse system dominated by “male dominance” the mainstream of society.

Firstly, the division of labor in society limits the diversification of educational goals for women; Secondly, gender perspectives influence the diversification of female education content; Thirdly, social consciousness hinders the diversification of women’s education evaluation. Furthermore, there are two factors that make it hard to construct the theoretical framework of localization. Firstly, the Confucian ideology has made sex a taboo topic, making it an urgent issue to be addressed in the process of gender education on how to convey gender awareness to women in a healthy and scientific manner. The second reason is that the process of globalization and the development of network technology have led to the emergence of diverse ideas. The incomplete synchronization and imbalance of both gender education concepts and methodology, and the progress of science as well as technology have also become the reason for the difficult development of localization concepts.

The Western theoretical framework is difficult to apply, firstly because there are significant cultural differences and ideological differences between China and the West. Knowledge loses its validity across contexts, and the effectiveness of Western social theories and knowledge when used locally in China is greatly reduced. For example, Western culture emphasizes individualism, while Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism. In Chinese culture, the individual, family, and state are unified. Therefore, gender consciousness, national and ethnic consciousness, and social consciousness are often inseparable. The prevailing gender education research framework in the West is

difficult to apply to China's educational environment. Secondly, excessive introduction of Western frameworks and knowledge will gradually lead to the dominance of academic autonomy and national discourse power in China. It needs to be recognized that while globalization intensifies cultural collisions, it also exacerbates cultural infiltration and colonization. In a sense, the Western framework carries "universal values" and "Western centrism", and in the process of full acceptance, it is easy to erode China's cultural confidence.

3.4 The Concept of Social Gender Became the Main Analysis Method

The concept of gender was formed during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. As the main concept of feminist theory, social gender plays a crucial part in exploring the oppression of women, unequal relationship formation, and women's ideological liberation. As an analysis method, social gender points out that gender is a kind of cultural component. In the process of social cultivation, masculine temperament marks power and authority, and both political rights and moral authority are monopolized by men. Women are constructed by the society as ancillary products. Social gender means that both the differences and interests of men and women should be considered, so the promotion of gender equality should not be unilaterally understood as merely enhancing women's rights.

After decades of development, gender has become an important analytical category, and the methods of gender analysis have gradually developed in academic research and social practice. Gender analysis is a systematic process that runs through specific activities, involving development, implementation, detection, and evaluation. Social gender analysis mainly refers to comparing the different gender roles played by both sexes in society, understanding their different gender needs, and analyzing the gender inequality in resource, responsibility, and power distribution. The core of gender analysis methods is to analyze the impact of various social policies and laws on both men and women. When formulating laws and policies, it is necessary to specifically analyze the different effects that the provisions of laws and policies will have on men and women. It is not based on the formal equality stipulated in legal provisions, but on the substantive equality they bring.

With the introduction of social gender theory, gender education in China mainly starts from gender differences, popularizing gender roles, gender consciousness and sex education to achieve gender equality. However, due to the influence of traditional ideas such as "male superiority and female inferiority" and "sexual aversion", we need to draw on the gender education ideas and research theories of foreign scholars. By now, China is still in the preliminary stage of gender education research, and many domestic scholars' studies are still in the theoretical exploration stage. The lack of quantitative research makes it difficult for us to analyze the current social situation from a macro perspective. With the rise of feminism, social gender as a product has rapidly become the main analytical method in current gender education research in China.

4. Literature Review and Outlook

From the above literature review, it can be seen that the academic circle has made a series of explorations on the research methods, theoretical basis and practical difficulties of gender education in the digital age, and achieved rich results, which puts forward important materials and ideas for further putting forward more scientific and localized gender education. However, there are still some problems in the methodology of gender education in the digital age, such as the methodology and the system construction of "feminist" research methodology, which will become the key direction of future research. In the future, the research methods of gender education in the digital age should concentrate on four issues: first, the concept of gender education. The research object of scientific discrimination of "gender education" is the educational methodology that takes physiological sex (sex) and social sex (gender) as the focus to realize the free and comprehensive development of each individual. Second, to construct a gender education methodology with Chinese characteristics. Taking Marxist theory as the main support, integrating the methodology of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, and recognizing the diversity and difference of the two sexes in the process of historical development and in the social reality from the concrete and realistic gender education. Third, the regional differences of gender education. On the basis of the quality and balanced development of education, different

genders between different regions are further considered. The real situation and regional characteristics, break down the digital divide between the genders, and learn from the advanced educational experience of other regions. Fourth, pay attention to the overall development of history, analyze the social structural oppression faced by gender education, and integrate the individual life experience and quality table into the social production and lifestyle.

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