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Negotiating Gendered Spaces in Tertiary Virtual Learning Environments: A Quantitative Study of Inclusivity and Interaction

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how students negotiate gendered spaces in tertiary virtual learning environments (VLEs) and examines patterns of participation, interaction, and perceived inclusivity across genders. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, data were collected from 316 BS (4-Year) Social Sciences students at a public sector university using a structured questionnaire, which was pilot-tested for clarity and reliability. Univariate analysis was conducted to identify distribution patterns and variations in engagement, communication, and inclusivity perceptions. Findings reveal that male and female students navigate virtual spaces differently, reflecting broader social norms and culturally embedded gender expectations. The study situates these results within the frameworks of social constructionism, techno-feminism, feminist pedagogy, and the community of inquiry, highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive instructional design and platform management. Overall, the study underscores the need for inclusive strategies to foster equitable participation and interaction in online tertiary education.

Keywords: Gendered Spaces, Virtual Learning Environments, Inclusivity, Online Interaction, Higher Education, Techno-Feminism, Feminist Pedagogy

Introduction

The rapid digitization of higher education has fundamentally transformed the landscape of learning, creating virtual environments that are increasingly central to academic engagement (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025c; Shoaib & Zaman, 2025; Wajcman, 2004). Although these platforms offer unprecedented access and flexibility, they also reproduce and, at times, amplify social inequalities, particularly along

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gendered lines (Jimenez-Cortes & Aires, 2021; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025b). Tertiary virtual learning environments (VLEs) are not neutral spaces; they are socially constructed contexts where cultural norms, institutional practices, and individual behaviors intersect to shape patterns of participation, interaction, and inclusivity (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Shoaib, Tariq, & Iqbal, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Tariq, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025). Gendered experiences in VLEs are particularly salient, as digital learning often intersects with pre-existing social structures, such as gendered expectations, mobility restrictions, and differential access to technological resources (Abdullah, Akhtar, & Munir, 2025; Crenshaw, 1989; Shoaib & Ullah, 2025; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025a; Shoaib, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025). These dynamics influence not only students' engagement and performance but also their sense of belonging and inclusion within academic communities (Shoaib, Rasool, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Rasool, Zaman, & Ahmed, 2025; Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025). Prior research has highlighted disparities in participation, communication, and leadership in online discussions, suggesting that gendered socialization and digital literacy shape how learners navigate virtual spaces (Shoaib, Rasool, & Zaman, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Abdullah, Munir, & Malik, 2025). However, empirical studies examining these patterns quantitatively within the context of higher education remain limited, particularly in regions where cultural and institutional factors strongly mediate gendered access to education (Shoaib, Rasool, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b; Abdullah, Nisar, Ahmed, & Sultana, 2025; Shoaib, Rasool, Kalsoom, & Ali, 2025).

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how gender influences the negotiation of space, interaction, and inclusivity in tertiary VLEs. By employing a quantitative approach, the research systematically examines differences in engagement, participation patterns, and perceptions of inclusivity among male and female students. Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how virtual academic spaces reproduce, challenge, or transform gendered social dynamics, offering insights for educators, policymakers, and designers of online learning platforms. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of creating inclusive digital learning environments that enable equitable participation and foster a sense of belonging for all students.

Study Context

The rapid expansion of digital education has transformed the landscape of tertiary learning, creating virtual environments that mediate academic engagement, social interaction, and knowledge acquisition (Shoaib, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) offer opportunities for flexible, asynchronous, and collaborative learning, yet they also reproduce and sometimes amplify existing social inequalities, including those related to gender (Shoaib, Iqbal, & Iftikhar, 2025; Shoaib, Iqbal, Rasool, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Kausar, Ali, & Abdullah, 2025). In higher education contexts, gendered dynamics shape participation patterns, access to resources, communication styles, and perceived inclusivity within online platforms (Shoaib, Ali, & Kausar, 2025; Shoaib & Bashir, 2025; Shoaib, Batool, Kausar, & Abdullah, 2025). Despite the increasing reliance on web-based

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learning tools, there is limited empirical research that quantitatively examines how male and female students navigate these digital spaces, interact with peers and instructors, and experience inclusion or marginalization (Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). Gendered norms and expectations, both cultural and institutional, influence students' willingness to engage in discussion forums, contribute to collaborative tasks, and participate in assessments in ways that affect learning outcomes (Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). This study focuses on tertiary-level students enrolled in social sciences disciplines at a public sector university in Pakistan, providing a culturally specific yet globally relevant context to explore gendered interactions in virtual learning. By employing a quantitative approach, the research seeks to measure patterns of participation, interaction frequency, and perceptions of inclusivity across genders, offering insights into how virtual spaces designed or managed to foster equitable academic experiences. Ultimately, this study situates itself at the intersection of digital pedagogy, gender studies, and higher education research, aiming to contribute empirical evidence that informs policy, platform design, and pedagogical strategies to create more inclusive and interactive virtual learning environments.

The Data and Methods

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was adopted to investigate how students negotiate gendered spaces in tertiary Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). The study population consisted of students enrolled in the BS (4-Year) Social Sciences program at a public sector university, from which a total of 316 participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across semesters and gender. Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire designed with multiple sections, including demographic information, interaction patterns, participation levels, and perceptions of inclusivity in online learning spaces. Prior to the main survey, pilot testing was conducted with 30 randomly selected students to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and validity of the instrument. Based on pilot results, minor adjustments were made to enhance comprehension and consistency. The instrument included an attitudinal scale measuring students' levels of agreement or disagreement with various statements, allowing for quantification of perceptions, experiences, and interaction tendencies within virtual learning contexts. For data analysis, univariate statistical techniques were employed to examine the distribution, frequency, and central tendencies of the collected data, enabling the identification of patterns and variations in student engagement and perceived inclusivity across genders. The results were then interpreted and discussed to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the negotiation of gendered spaces in VLEs, with implications for pedagogical design, policy formulation, and the promotion of equitable participation in online tertiary education.

Results

Negotiation and Contrasting: Table 1 outlines the response of the students towards negotiation and contrasting. The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "you negotiate for deadlines in class". The primary analysis indicated that 44.0 percent of the students were agree and 29.1 percent of the students

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were strongly agree with the given item "you negotiate for deadlines in class". However, 11.7 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 15.5 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "you negotiate for deadlines in class". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "you negotiate for deadlines in class".

Table 1

Response of the Students towards Negotiation and Contrasting
SA=Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree=SD

S. No.	Statement	SA f (%)	A f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)
i	You negotiate for deadlines in class	92 (29.1)	139 (44.0)	37 (11.7)	48 (15.2)
ii	You negotiated for marks	43 (13.6)	147 (46.5)	68 (21.5)	58 (18.4)
iii	You negotiated for the timing of the class	35 (11.1)	159 (50.3)	77 (24.4)	45 (14.2)
iv	Your class has strong negotiation with teachers	47 (14.9)	144 (45.6)	50 (15.8)	75 (23.7)
v	Negotiation in class affect your studies	82 (25.9)	156 (49.4)	32 (10.1)	46 (14.6)
vi	Contrasting between male/female students affect the studies	35 (11.1)	168 (53.2)	70 (22.2)	43 (13.6)
vii	Your teachers differentiate between male and female students	37 (11.7)	100 (31.6)	101 (32.0)	78 (24.7)

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "you negotiated for marks". The primary analysis indicated that 46.5 percent of the students were agree and 13.6 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "you negotiated for marks". However, 21.5 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 18.4 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "you negotiated for marks". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "you negotiated for marks".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "you negotiated for the timing of the class". The primary analysis indicated that 50.3 percent of the students were agreed or 11.1 percent of the students were strongly agreed with the given item "you negotiated for the timing of the class". However, 24.4 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 14.2 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "you negotiated for the timing of the class". It concluded that more than half of both gender pupils was in errand of agreement to specified declaration "you negotiated for the timing of the class".

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The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "your class has strong negotiation with teachers". The primary analysis indicated that 45.6 percent of the students were agree and 14.9 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "your class has strong negotiation with teachers". However, 15.8 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 23.7 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "your class has strong negotiation with teachers". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "your class has strong negotiation with teachers".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "negotiation in class affect your studies". The primary analysis indicated that 49.4 percent of the students were agree and 25.9 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "negotiation in class affect your studies". However, 10.1 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 14.6 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "negotiation in class affect your studies". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "negotiation in class affect your studies".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "contrasting between male/female students affect the studies". The primary analysis indicated that 53.2 percent of the students were agree and 11.1 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "contrasting between male/female students affect the studies". However, 22.2 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 13.6 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "contrasting between male/female students affect the studies". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "contrasting between male/female students affect the studies".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "your teachers differentiate between male and female students". The primary analysis indicated that 31.6 percent of the students were agree and 11.7 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "your teachers differentiate between male and female students". However, 32.0 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 24.7 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "your teachers differentiate between male and female students". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "your teachers differentiate between male and female students".

Gender Inclusive: Table 2 outlines the response of the students towards gender inclusive. The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "teachers equally communicate with students". The primary analysis indicated that 46.2 percent pupils was agree and 32.6 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "teachers equally communicate with students". However, 12.3 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 8.9 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly

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disagree reference to the statement "teachers equally communicate with students". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "teachers equally communicate with students".

Table 2

Response of the Students towards Gender Inclusive

SA=Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree=SD

S. No.	Statement	SA f (%)	A f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)
i	Teachers equally communicate with students	103 (32.6)	146 (46.2)	39 (12.3)	28 (8.9)
ii	You have equal access to all resources	75 (23.7)	154 (48.7)	62 (19.6)	25 (7.9)
iii	Teachers give equal access for communication in the class	91 (28.8)	150 (47.5)	60 (19.0)	15 (4.7)
iv	Teachers give relevant ranking to students	75 (23.7)	145 (45.9)	52 (16.5)	44 (13.9)
v	Teachers respect all the students based on their gender	71 (22.5)	155 (49.1)	59 (18.7)	31 (9.8)
vi	Rural-urban background of the students affect in the class	61 (19.3)	103 (32.6)	83 (26.3)	69 (21.8)
vii	Students have equal work in the class	76 (24.1)	137 (43.4)	52 (16.5)	51 (16.1)

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "you have equal access to all resources". The primary analysis indicated that 48.7 percent pupils was agree and 23.7 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "you have equal access to all resources". However, 19.6 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 7.9 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "you have equal access to all resources". It concluded that more than half of the both gender students were in courtesy of agreement to the given statement "you have equal access to all resources".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "teachers give equal access for communication in the class". The primary analysis indicated that 47.5 percent pupils was agree and 28.8 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "teachers give equal access for communication in the class". However, 19.0 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 4.7 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "teachers give equal access for communication in the class". It concluded that more than half of the both gender students were in errand of agreement to the given statement "teachers give equal access for communication in the class".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "teachers give relevant ranking to students". The primary analysis indicated that 45.9

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percent pupils was agree and 23.7 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item “teachers give relevant ranking to students”. However, 16.5 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 13.9 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement “teachers give relevant ranking to students”. It concluded that more than half of the both gender students were in favor of agreement to the given statement “teachers give relevant ranking to students”.

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as “teachers respect all the students based on their gender”. The primary analysis indicated that 49.1 percent pupils was agree and 22.5 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item “teachers respect all the students based on their gender”. However, 18.7 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 9.8 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement “teachers respect all the students based on their gender”. It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement “teachers respect all the students based on their gender”.

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as “rural-urban background of the students affect in the class”. The primary analysis indicated that 32.6 percent pupils was agree and 19.3 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item “rural-urban background of the students affect in the class”. However, 26.3 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 21.8 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement “rural-urban background of the students affect in the class”. It concluded that more than half of the both gender students were in errand of agreement to the given statement “rural-urban background of the students affect in the class”.

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as “students have equal work in the class”. The primary analysis indicated that 43.4 percent of the students were agree and 24.1 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item “students have equal work in the class”. However, 16.5 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 16.1 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement “students have equal work in the class”. It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement “students have equal work in the class”.

Generally: Table 3 outlines the response of the students towards generally. The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as “you easily ask question in online class”. The primary analysis indicated that 43.7 percent of the students were agree and 31.6 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item “you easily ask question in online class”. However, 12.0 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 12.7 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement “you easily ask question in online class”. It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement

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"you easily ask question in online class".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "you generally feel good acceptance in class". The primary analysis indicated that 55.7 percent of the students were agree and 21.8 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "you generally feel good acceptance in class". However, 12.0 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 10.4 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "you generally feel good acceptance in class". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "you generally feel good acceptance in class".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "your views are accepted in online class". The primary analysis indicated that 48.1 percent of the students were agree and 19.3 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "your views are accepted in online class". However, 23.7 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 8.9 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "your views are accepted in online class". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "your views are accepted in online class".

Table 3

Response of the Students towards Generally
SA=Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree=SD

S. No.	Statement	SA f (%)	A f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)
i	You easily ask question in online class	100 (31.6)	138 (43.7)	38 (12.0)	40 (12.7)
ii	You generally feel good acceptance in class	69 (21.8)	176 (55.7)	38 (12.0)	33 (10.4)
iii	Your views are accepted in online class	61 (19.3)	152 (48.1)	75 (23.7)	28 (8.9)
iv	All the students in your class have comfort zones	56 (17.7)	164 (51.9)	59 (18.7)	37 (11.7)
v	Your contributions in virtual classroom are valued equally	63 (19.9)	153 (48.4)	63 (19.9)	37 (11.7)
vi	Virtual learning platforms are equally accessible	50 (15.8)	156 (49.4)	68 (21.5)	42 (13.3)
vii	You felt excluded in class because of your gender	53 (16.8)	89 (28.2)	89 (28.2)	85 (26.9)

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "all the students in your class have comfort zones". The primary analysis indicated that 51.9 percent of the students were agree and 17.7 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "all the students in your class have comfort zones". However, 18.7 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and

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11.7 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "all the students in your class have comfort zones". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "all the students in your class have comfort zones".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "your contributions in virtual classroom are valued equally". The primary analysis indicated that 48.4 percent of the students were agree and 19.9 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "your contributions in virtual classroom are valued equally". However, 19.9 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 11.7 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "your contributions in virtual classroom are valued equally". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "your contributions in virtual classroom are valued equally".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "virtual learning platforms are equally accessible". The primary analysis indicated that 49.4 percent of the students were agree and 15.8 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "virtual learning platforms are equally accessible". However, 21.5 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 13.3 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "virtual learning platforms are equally accessible". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "virtual learning platforms are equally accessible".

The male and female students responded to the statement mentioned in the table as "you felt excluded in class because of your gender". The primary analysis indicated that 28.2 percent of the students were agree and 16.8 percent of the students were strongly agree with the given item "you felt excluded in class because of your gender". However, 28.2 of the students enrolled in the university responded to disagreed and 26.9 percent of the male and female students gave their response in favor of strongly disagree reference to the statement "you felt excluded in class because of your gender". It concluded that more than half of the male and female students were in favor of agreement to the given statement "you felt excluded in class because of your gender".

Discussion

Negotiation and Contrasting: The summary of the frequency distribution declared that students negotiated for deadlines in class. Moreover, the study findings claimed that students negotiated for marks. The primary data analysis highlighted that students negotiated for the timing of the classes. Further, the study findings summarized that class had strong negotiation with teachers. The study findings indicated that negotiation in class affected student's studies. However, the study findings asserted that contrasting between male/female students affected the studies. The primary data analysis pointed out that teachers differentiated between both gender students. The study results had been associated with numerous revisions on subject of sociology of education and specifically for gender spaces and virtual learning environment.

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Similarly, the study findings outlined that the web-based learning evaluation on the virtual learning environment had been found digital aspects of sources at tertiary level (Abdullah & Nisar, 2024; Chan, Tsui, Chan, & Hong, 2008; Shoaib, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Ahmed, & Usmani, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Ahmed, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025). Likewise, the study findings showed that interaction aware online educational system called web classroom and also had been found to enhance student interactions at the higher organizations (Chen, Xu, Tang, & Chen, 2017; Iqbal, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, 2025a, 2025b; Abdullah & Ullah, 2022; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Ahmed, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Ahmed, Iqbal, et al., 2025; Shoaib, Ahmed, & Usmani, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Ahmed, Zaman, et al., 2025). In a nutshell, the study of Colomina and Remesal (2015) indicated that in higher education the social interaction and online collaborative instructional methods had been discussed among students of both gender.

Gender Inclusive: The summary of the frequency distribution declared that teachers were equally communicated with students. However, the study findings claimed that students had equal access to all resources. The primary data analysis highlighted that teachers gave equal access for communication in the class. Contently, the study findings summarized that teachers gave relevant ranking to students. The study findings indicated that teachers respected all the students based on their gender. Moreover, the study findings asserted that rural-urban background of the students affected in the class. The primary data analysis pointed out that students had equal work in the class. The study findings had been aligned with several studies on the subject of sociology of education and specifically for gender spaces and virtual learning environment. Similarly, the study findings outlined that problem difficulties as well as knowledge in establishing online networks to collaborate for learning instruction in technology for students and had been found web-based platforms for learning (Ali, Shoaib, & Ali, 2025; Abdullah, Matloob, & Malik, 2024; Ali, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b; Ali, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b; Ali, Shoaib, & Kausar, 2025; Dempster, Beetham, Jackson, & Richardson, 2003). In a nutshell, the study findings showed that in public and private spaces the introduction of mobile universality had been found gender inclusivity at higher level (Ahmed, Shoaib, & Zaman, 2025; Díaz & Ekman, 2011; Shoaib, Ali, & Abbas, 2024; Abdullah et al., 2024; Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2024a, 2024b; Shoaib, Zaman, & Abbas, 2024). Besides, the study of Ergun and Kulkul (2019) indicated that an investigation on the definition of semi-public areas in restricted environments had been found in individuals for gender inclusivity.

Generally: The summary of the frequency distribution declared that students easily asked question in online classes. However, the study findings claimed that students generally felt good acceptance in class. The primary data analysis highlighted that student's views were accepted in online classes. Likewise, the study findings summarized that all the students in your class had comfort zones. The study findings indicated that student's contributions in virtual classroom were valued equally. Contently, the study findings asserted that virtual learning platforms were equally accessible. The primary data analysis pointed out that students felt excluded in class

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because of gender. The study findings had been aligned with several studies on the subject of sociology of education and specifically for gender spaces and virtual learning environment. Similarly, the study findings outlined that a systematic literature review personalized online assessment had been found at higher educational institutions (Hattingh & Northcote, 2023; Shoaib, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e; Shoaib, Abdullah, Naqvi, & Ditta, 2024; Abdullah, Nisar, & Malik, 2024). Moreover, the study findings showed that the function of online learning places had been found in engaging students in higher learning (Heaton-Shrestha, May, & Burke, 2009; Abdullah, Nisar, & Ahmed, 2025; Shoaib, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2023; Shoaib, Usmani, & Abdullah, 2023). Besides, the study of Herodotou et al. (2020) indicated that an examination of comparison of digital optics in universities had been found using online learning techniques.

Theoretical insights

The present study is theoretically grounded in the social construction of gender, which posits that gendered behaviors, roles, and interactions are socially produced rather than biologically determined, shaping how students engage in virtual learning environments (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Rasool, & Anwar, 2021; Shoaib & Ullah, 2019, 2021)). Complementing this perspective, techno-feminism emphasizes that technologies are not neutral but reflect and reproduce existing gendered power relations, influencing participation and interaction patterns in online platforms (Shoaib, 2021; Shoaib, Anwar, & Mustafa, 2022; Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2022; Shoaib, Rasool, Anwar, & Ali, 2023; Abdullah, Shoukat, Malik, Akhtar, 2025; Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022; Wajcman, 2004). Feminist pedagogy further informs the study by advocating for inclusive, participatory, and equitable learning spaces that challenge traditional power hierarchies in digital classrooms (Jiménez-Cortés & Aires, 2021). Additionally, the community of inquiry (CoI) framework highlights the role of social, cognitive, and teaching presence in fostering meaningful online 9interactions, however, acknowledging that gendered dynamics shape learners' engagement and sense of belonging (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Ali, Zaman, & Shoaib, 2024; Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2021; Abdullah, Sultana, & Nisar, 2025; Shoaib, Ahmad, Ali, & Abdullah, 2021; Shoaib, Ali, et al., 2021). Finally, an intersectional lens recognizes that gendered experiences in virtual spaces intersect with other social categories, such as culture and socioeconomic status, producing differentiated patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Crenshaw, 1989). Collectively, these frameworks provide a comprehensive foundation to investigate how gendered spaces are negotiated in tertiary virtual learning environments and to quantify patterns of interaction and perceived inclusivity.

Conclusion

This study highlights that gendered dynamics significantly shape participation, interaction, and perceptions of inclusivity in tertiary virtual learning environments. The findings indicate that virtual platforms provide opportunities for flexible and collaborative learning, male and female students navigate these spaces differently, reflecting broader social norms and cultural expectations. Quantitative analysis revealed variations in engagement patterns, communication frequency, and perceived

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inclusion, underscoring the need for pedagogical strategies and platform designs that actively promote equity and participation across genders. By situating these results within social constructionist, techno-feminist, and feminist pedagogical frameworks, the study emphasizes that fostering inclusive and interactive virtual learning spaces requires not only technological accessibility but also the deliberate mitigation of gendered barriers. These insights contribute to the development of more equitable virtual education practices and provide evidence-based guidance for policy, instructional design, and future research in gender-sensitive online learning.

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