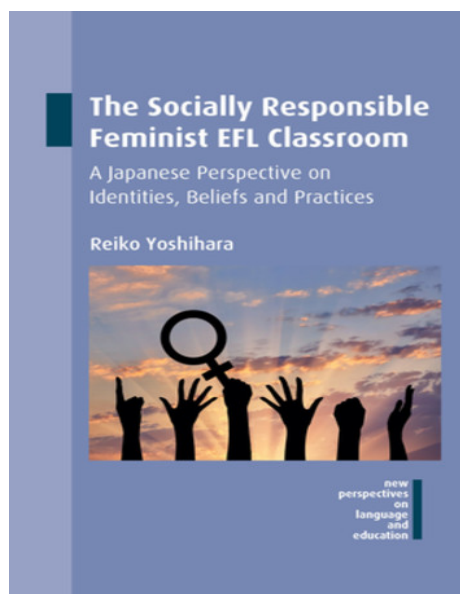


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The Socially Responsible Feminist EFL Classroom: A Japanese Perspective on Identities, Beliefs, and Practices **By Reiko Yoshihara**

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Yoshihara, R. (2017). *The socially responsible feminist EFL classroom: A Japanese perspective on identities, beliefs and practices*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Multilingual Matters.

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When I stumbled upon this book by Reiki Yoshihara (2017) for the first time, I sighed. A book titled *The Socially Responsible Feminist EFL Classroom* was bound to catch my interest in a time when I—as a Saudi-born woman—and others of my kin are both bending with and bending the looming waves of local social change in women’s rights. Our voices come from the most popular career for women in many traditional contexts—teaching, and this book speaks to the lingering desire of turning such a traditional platform into one that renovates feminist approaches to social justice, particularly in the EFL classroom.

Right from the beginning, Yoshihara adeptly connects with us as her readers through her personal narrative of how she grew into this area of research as an EFL teacher. Although Yoshihara examines the Japanese context, she claims that the implications of her study can be meaningful in other EFL contexts. This transferability, in my opinion, is another connection point between the writer and a diverse readership. It does add to the significance of this much-needed work, which bridges a palpable gap in the literature of critical EFL pedagogy. Indeed, Yoshihara’s contribution can be an invaluable read that inspires textbook writers to expand the TESOL vision beyond the linguistic surface and into critical sociocultural awareness. It can also inspire ESL teachers who are interested across contexts in transforming their classrooms into vessels of social justice. That is, the book can mitigate their worries about pertinent questions and tell them: “You’re not alone!”

The purpose of this book is to help us visualize the face of feminist TESOL pedagogy through the experiences and narratives of eight feminist EFL university teachers in Japan. In this qualitative interpretive study, the researcher uses interviews with the teachers, classroom observations, and

teaching journals to explore feminist teaching. Through these tools, the writer investigates the teachers’ feminist identities—their contours and evolutions. Then, the writer unpacks these teachers’ ideologies about teaching and their on-the-field practices in relation to these identities. Then, she analyzes the interplay among identities, beliefs, and practices as three salient elements in a feminist EFL classroom. A main question that this analysis answers is that of compatibility among these elements: whether feminist teachers’ practices stand to mirror their beliefs and identities and what contextual factors hamper the enactment of these identities and beliefs as pedagogical practices.

Beside tackling these overarching questions, this book can be a great stepping stone for graduate students and beginning researchers in this area of study. Before diving into her data, the author very succinctly arms us in her introduction (Chapter 1) with previous literature in feminist TESOL, key concepts, and relevant histories. This chronology includes the succeeding waves of feminism, structural feminist pedagogy, and post-structural feminist pedagogy (the last as a framework for this study). After that, the five remaining chapters explain the following: the researcher’s methodology and positionality (Chapter 2); the development and complex/multiple definitions of the participants’ identities as feminist teachers in the contexts of Japan (Chapter 3); the teachers’ beliefs as reflected in their feminist practices (e.g., giving equal attention to students regardless of gender, teaching gender-neutral language, and giving voice to women’s narratives in writing); and context-related obstacles that stood in the way of reifying feminist beliefs into practices (Chapter 5).

Finally, the writer concludes in Chapter 6 with recommendations for teachers, researchers, and textbook writers/publishers. She also provides a

personal reflection that beautifully ties back with her voice and narrative, which we started with in Chapter 1. Most importantly, she revisits the definition of feminism in TESOL in light of post-structural feminism. Since “The feminist teachers in [her] study often situate themselves in conflicts,” Yoshihara concludes that feminist pedagogy in TESOL should shift toward the deconstruction of oppositional binaries—including “voice/silence, egalitarian/authoritarian, safety/unsafety, empowerer/empowered, and rationality/affectivity” (p. 110).

After reading the book, I was left wondering how the gap in the feminist teachers’ genders (all are females except for one participant) might have affected the narratives, experiences, and definitions that the book puts forward. Also, while the teachers’ voices seemed to be resonant throughout the book, the students’ voices and responses took on a much more subdued tone. However, considering the dearth of literature that examines feminist pedagogy in sensitive and controversial contexts such as that of an Eastern EFL classroom, Yoshihara’s work is definitely a trailblazer and a timely reference in TESOL teacher identity research.