

Gender as a Mediator in the Acquisition of English as a Second Language

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the University of the North for the degree of Master of Arts in English Studies has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my own work in design and in execution, and that all the materials contained herein have been duly acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

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Abstract

This dissertation reports on an investigation into gender as a mediating factor in the acquisition of English as a second language. One hundred and twenty eight (64 female and 64 male) pupils in Grades 8 to 11 and 44 teachers, parents, and school administrators from four representative schools in the Polokwane Municipality of the Limpopo Province (South Africa) participated in the study. A quantitative ethnographic design (comprising questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis) was used to collect the data. A t-test was used to establish whether there might be significant differences between the mean scores of female and male pupils' mean scores of both the questionnaire data and test and examination results. A Multiple Regression Analysis was used to identify any factors (e.g., sex, attitudes, genre preferences and societal expectations) that might significantly contribute to differential performances between female and male pupils (e.g., pupil's scores on English tests/examinations) and the level at which (in percentage) each of the factors contributed to the performance. The results showed no significant difference in performance in English as a second language between female and male pupils or in their attitudes towards English language learning (although, when boys and girls are put together, high levels of negative attitudes predicted low performance). Their preferences for school-related materials in English and their perceptions of societal expectations differed significantly. As expected, girls preferred more "female" stereotypical reading materials, whereas boys preferred more "male" or "macho" reading materials. Societal expectations were confirmed on girls not on boys. It is suggested that inspiration can be drawn from the findings in policy formulation regarding unisex versus single-sex schools, language instruction, especially attention given and approaches used in dealing with both sexes in second language classrooms, and reading programmes in which a wide range of reading

genres would be provided to encourage pupils from both sexes to cross society's "stereotypes".

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Chapter One: General Introduction

1.1 Statement of the problem

Learning a second language (L2) is said to be a complex process (Ellis, 1995) because it involves several different mediating factors, and an “essentially idiosyncratic” (Allwright, 1987: 95) activity because of the variation in L2 performance and learning among learners. Second language acquisition (hereinafter SLA) is understood here as the acquisition of a language after at least one language has already become established (see Archibald 1997; Ritchie and Bhatia, 1996). Mediating factors in L2 learning may be grouped—to adopt Ellis’s (1987) widely used classification—into “individual” and “group” factors. These factors are so-called because they determine “individual” and “group” differences in L2 learning and performance. Among the individual differences, age, motivation, attitude, and length of residence in the second language-speaking country have been highlighted. On the other hand, group differences include, prominently: culture, first language (L1), and gender. The latter, a variable that has been under-researched, is the focus of this study.

The growing trend in establishing “unisex” or “mixed” schools is based on the principle that there should be no differentiation in the way girls and boys are taught. The underlying assumption is that girls and boys learn in the same way. Besides, different treatment of girls and boys might be perceived as discriminatory practice in an era of gender sensitivity. Yet, observation of social practices suggests that girls and boys grow and are raised differently and that these gender differences in growing may affect the way they perceive studying foreign languages, among others.

Illustrative of gender differentiation is the documented choice of reading materials by boys and girls. Boys usually read male-stereotypical genre, girls, female-stereotypical genre (Gambell and Hunter, 2000; Mena, 2000). Gender differentiation, through preferred genre reading, may affect performance and learning in English as a second language (ESL). Similarly, societal gender-stereotypical expectations can facilitate or hinder the learning of an L2 by males or females. Many societies (as represented mainly by parents, teachers, the media, or reflected in religious and cultural beliefs) hold that language learning in general is a female-stereotyped domain. It is, thus, expected that females would learn an L2 and perform in it better than males. Such a belief, by perpetuating societal prejudices (Abilock, 1997; Daly, 1999; Silva, 1997; Watt, 2000), may hinder L2 learning among learners from the other side of the gender divide.

The “myth” of female outshining males is not the full picture of beliefs on gender and language learning. In reality, opinions are divided about which side of the gender divide outperforms the other in second language learning. Three main views have emerged over time. The first holds that females outperform males (Baker and MacIntyre, 2000; Schueller, 2000). The sociolinguistic finding that women use a higher frequency of the incoming forms in linguistic changes than men seems to have been used as a starting theory for SLA research. The second view states that males outperform females in various SLA activities and/or skills (Brantmeier, 2000; D'Ailly, 2002; Hassan, 2001; Kasanga, 1996a). The third view can be said to be a middle-ground position: authors in this group suggest that no significant difference exists between the performance of males and females in SLA (e.g. Piske, MacKay and Flege, 2001). These views will be illustrated in the “Literature Review” chapter.

The differing views among researchers have to do with: whether boys and girls differ in the way they approach, learn, and perform in an L2; the nature and extent of gender differences, if any, in L2 learning and performance; the impact of these differences in instructed SLA; and practical or pedagogical measures to deal with them.

The state of knowledge on gender differentiation in SLA in South Africa is not much brighter than the insights available elsewhere in the world. On the contrary, there has been very little research on gender as a mediating factor in ESL learning in South Africa. A rare example is Gxilishe's (1994) study of the acquisition of Xhosa as a second language in which he found that female learners outperformed their male counterparts. A survey of the second-language literature in South Africa did not reveal a single empirical study of gender as a mediating factor in the acquisition of English as a second language.

The dearth of research in South Africa belies the massive increase in mixed English-medium schools and the concomitant efforts to promote gender equality as an entrenched constitutional principle. There is a lack of knowledge about: whether or not girls and boys would approach the learning of, learn, and perform differently in, ESL; what explanation would be offered for gender-based differences, if any; and what pedagogical implications, both for instruction and assessment, these differences would have on mixed-gender English-language classrooms. The lack of knowledge in this area was a spur to the present study, whose aim and objectives are outlined below.

1.2 Aim and objectives of the study

In the present study, I investigated the relationship between gender and performance in English as a second language among students in three high schools in Polokwane. The underlying assumption is that performance as measured by results of tests and assignments is an indication of the level of acquisition.

In pursuit of this aim, the following objectives were set:

- (i) To determine any (possible) significant differences in the performance of girls and boys in English language tests;
- (ii) To ascertain whether the attitudes of girls and boys towards English affect their performance in English language tests;
- (iii) To establish the reading preferences of girls and boys and the extent to which they may or may not affect the learners' performance in English language tests.
- (iv) To identify possible societal gender-stereotypical expectations on girls and boys with respect to English and the impact of these perceptions on the learners' performance.

1.3 Scope, rationale, and significance of the study

A study for a Master's dissertation is limited in time and scope, the latter including its breadth and depth. Consequently, the present study will cover a period of one school semester and will be carried out on a representative sample of English-second-language schoolgirls and schoolboys in Grades 8 to 11 in three selected secondary schools located in Polokwane. Further details of the sampling and profiles of the participants (including participants other than the learners) are provided later in the 'Methodology' section.

Real or perceived gender differences and inequalities in classroom talk need to be considered, not only in the light of unequal relations between girls and boys, but also in the light of the increasing attention paid in the OBE-inspired education system to the development of pupil's 'communication skills', the recognition of the role played by talk in pupils' learning, and the requirement for pupil's spoken language to be assessed. Swann (1992) joins the chorus of those who believe that classroom talk is discriminatory in the sense that boys dominate mixed-sex talk, and girls give away power in the classroom as in other contexts. This observed domination by boys is supported, often unconsciously, by teachers. There are good reasons to assume that the same may be happening in South African English classrooms. If this is the case, the present study may inform both theory and classroom practice, and may, thus, ultimately enlighten educators to consider not just how girls and boys interact, but also how teachers interact with girls and boys.

The present study is significant both for theory and (classroom) practice. It sought to contribute to filling the gap in knowledge on differentiation in the English classroom among girls and boys and the approaches used by boys and girls in learning English (including through choice of reading genres). An explanation was investigated for gender-based differences, if any; that may allow for pedagogical implications, both for instruction and assessment, these differences would have on mixed-gender English-language classrooms to be drawn. These implications relate to language pedagogy, curriculum, and policy.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

The broadening of the scope of SLA and the growth of a large body of literature on gender have resulted in a prolific terminology. More often than not, the same terms may mean different things to different authors. Consequently, it is useful to review key terminology that will be used in this dissertation and later and clarify its operational use.

2.1 Operational definitions of key concepts

The following key terms are defined operationally in this sub-section: Gender (2.1.1); Gender role or differentiation (2.1.2); Second language (2.1.3); and Second language (L2) performance (2.1.4). The operational use of other terms not defined here will be explained in due course in the relevant sections.

2.1.1 Gender

Scholars on gender often distinguish between “gender” and “sex” (although in some cases, they are used interchangeably). The former generally refers to the socio-cultural dimension of being male or female, whereas the latter refers to a biological distinction of being male or female. Some scholars, especially sociolinguists, when dealing with language differentiation between male and female, prefer the use of the term “gender” because it emphasizes the social construction of “male” and “female”, the biological distinction being thought of as not “appropriate to explain linguistic behaviour” (Labov, 1991: 206). In the SLA literature, either term, usually “sex” (e.g. Ellis, 1995), is used to refer to the way in which the variable that separate male from female is measured, i.e. in terms of bipolar opposites. Generally, both physiological and socio-cultural dimensions of being male or female are viewed as

being intertwined in determining social patterns of behaviour which, in turn, tend to condition approaches to language learning and use. In the same vein, “gender” in this study will designate the measurement of the social-cultural variable distinguishing male from female, It being is one of the social factors of second language acquisition.

2.1.2 Gender role or differentiations

“Gender role or differentiation” designates a set of expectations, and often, a set of prescriptions, of how females and males should think, act, and feel. In language performance, gender differentiations are generally manifested in expected domination by one sex and submission by the other, gender preferences of reading genres, or the slow pace by one sex versus fast pace by the other sex in learning a second language.

2.1.3 Second language

In the SLA literature, “second language” derives from terms such as: “first language” (and by extension, sometimes: “third”, “fourth”, “fifth” language), “native language”, “mother tongue”, or “home language” (the latter term being in wide use especially in South Africa) which are used to refer invariably to the first language (L1) which we acquire in our early years of life, generally in our home (and the surrounding environment). However, given the confusion surrounding the terminology relating to the language acquisition literature in general, the term “second language” also needs to be disambiguated. Second language will refer in this study to the language (English as a second language, for all the subjects in the study) learned after the first or primary language (L1) or languages (L1s) has (have) been acquired (see also Archibald, 1997). Indeed, given the multilingual environment in which some learners in the Polokwane area may have grown up, some will likely have learned more

than one L1 before learning English. It must also be borne in mind that some pupils (especially those from highly educated families) would have both English and an African language as their L1s. The sampling will, therefore, take into consideration this possibility.

2.1.4 Second language (L2) performance

The concept “performance” is generally used in SLA models and/or theories to measure, or at least estimate, the amount (or pace) of acquisition. In this study “L2 performance” refers to the English output of the learners (oral and written) as measured by their achievements on tests, assignments and/or examinations after being taught a certain amount of English. Performance or “output” (i.e. data a learner is able to reproduce) will be used to “estimate” the amount of “intake” (see Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992), or “uptake” (Slimani, 1989), that is the assumed L2 data a learner will have acquired as a result of formal instruction.

2.2. Literature review: gender and SLA

2.2.1 Biological and social factors of gender differentiation

The SLA literature has latched on to the L1 literature, especially in sociolinguistics, in using both biological and social variables to explain gender differences in the use (and by, the same token, the acquisition) of a variety or varieties of a given language. Some (e.g. Swann, 1992) base their theoretical statements on an assumed association between biology and linguistic destiny. The superior performance of girls (especially at pre-school, but also at the adolescence stage) over boys in “verbal ability”—measured by a variety of tests, including word fluency, grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and reading—has been attributed to the hormone system (Halpern, 1986) and brain lateralization (Swann, 1992).

In contrast, “Social influences” are influences from family members, especially parents, and the surrounding environment, including schools. One way in which the social environment influences the learning of languages differently along gender lines cultures is through adults’ discrimination between the sexes after the infant’s birth (Santrock, 1998) in terms of parents’ differential expectations for their adolescent sons and daughters in their academic pursuits. Teachers, too, as members of the same society, tend to share the views and beliefs about girls and boys, generally, unaware of the subtle ways in which gender infiltrates the school environment, often in the form of “gender stereotyping”. Even the identification of learning problems (see Sadker and Sadker, 1994) has been found to differ between girls and boys. Consequently, even if girls start school testing higher than boys in every academic subject, they often graduate from high school scoring lower than boys do in standard tests. Besides, certain activities may also come to be perceived as “feminine” or “masculine”. One clear implication of gender stereotyping is that it influences our attitudes, which in turn, affect the process of language learning. Positive attitudes are likely to facilitate learning, whereas negative ones may hinder it (Abu-Rhabia, 1993a; Gardner and Lysynchuk, 1990). Consequently, greater ESL ability found among girls than boys (Abu-Rhabia, 1993b; Daly, 1999; Winchock, 1995) has been attributed to the propensity among girls to develop a more positive attitude towards learning English than boys to meet social expectations.

2.2.3 Girls and boys in the classroom

The L2 classroom will tend to be a reflection of the pervasive beliefs about girls’ and boys’ differential language abilities. The behaviours of both the educators and the learners are likely to be influenced accordingly. In this sub-section, I will consider some empirical findings on the following: The structure of classroom talk (2.2.3.1); Assessment practices as

a reflection of social beliefs about gender differences (2.2.3.2); Unequal gender representativeness in reading materials (2.2.3.3); Girls' and boys' performance in the L2 (2.2.3.4).

2.2.3.1 The structure of classroom talk

The importance of how talk is structured cannot be overemphasized. Interactionist theories (Long, 1981; Pica, Kanagy and Faldoun, 1993) posit that the structure of interaction, interactional modifications, feedback, and comprehension are important ingredients for L2 acquisition in the classroom. The structure of interaction may take into account such variables as type of tasks and level of proficiency in interactional groups (e.g. Kasanga, 1996b).

The structure of classroom talk can be logically assumed to reflect the different social expectations about girls and boys. In his study of classroom interaction, Swann (1992) concluded that classroom talk is discriminatory. He found that boys dominated mixed-sex talk, and girls tended to give away power in the classroom (as they tended to do in other contexts). Teachers support this unequal structure of classroom talk, often unconsciously, in the way they expect how girls and boys interact, and they, the teachers, interact with girls and boys.

2.2.3.1 Assessment practices

Differences in the way we set values on talk by girls and boys influence the assessment of spoken language along gender lines. In the assessment of oral ability, teachers may be influenced in their assessment by the ways in which girls and boys differ in the choice of

accent or conversational technique, especially if the assessment is done on mixed-gender small groups or pairs. Some forms of contribution, while vital to the development of a discussion, may receive less attention from assessors simply because they come from members of one sex. The differences we perceive in the way girls' and boys' speak may, therefore, lead to injustices in assessment (Swann, 1992), in spite of findings, such as those by the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from 1979 through the 1980's (Swann, 1992), that show no significant differences between the performances of girls and boys in spoken language.

2.2.3.2 Unequal representation in reading materials

Just as verbal language is one way in which relations are negotiated, so are the words and images in children's books. They work alongside other ways of representing people. Research has shown that the words and images that confront girls and boys in schoolbooks and other print resources are often discriminatory, with an (unjustifiable) imbalance in the way women and men, girls and boys are represented (Swann, 1992). This form of sexism in printed resources, involving the predominance of male examples may indirectly affect the way one sex (girls) are attracted or not by the reading materials. Reading materials in this way help reinforce gender as a social division and perpetuate inequalities between girls and boys and women and men (Baker and Freebody, 1989).

2.2.3.3. Girls' and boys' performance

Several studies (e.g., Gorman, White and Brooks, 1987; Gorman, White, Brooks, Maclure and Kispal, 1988) have reported that girls tend to outperform boys in reading and writing presumably because girls tend to have more positive feelings about reading and writing than

boys. However, it seems that by the age of 15 years, girls lose confidence in their abilities as writers.

These gender differences in performance seem to correlate with preferences for different types of reading and writing. When surveyed, boys stated that they preferred factual writing, whereas girls expressed a more consistent preference for imaginative writing and reading fiction, and a love for stories. Even in the classroom, girls and boys make different reading and writing choices: among younger pupils, girls tended to choose reading and writing activities more often than boys; girls and boys also choose different types of books, and write about different topics.

Some of the factors suggested for the differences between girls and boys in their aptitude and liking/preferences for reading and writing are: (a) general perception of reading and writing as feminine (Kelly and Pidgeon, 1986); (b) low 'male interest' of some school reading materials (Zimet, 1976); and (c) girls' and boys' different 'achievement orientations', which may arise in part from the types of feedback girls and boys receive on their work (Licht and Dweck, 1983). The three factors do not constitute competing explanations; they may operate in combination with one another (Swann, 1992).

Some have, however, reported that boys performed better than girls in their studies (e.g. Hassan, 2001; Piske, 2001). Piske (2001), for example, in reviewing the relevant literature to identify factors that may affect the degree of foreign/second language attainment, reported that in most of these studies reviewed gender, length of residence in an L2-speaking country and self-estimated L1 ability were not found to have a significant, independent effect on

overall L2 pronunciation accuracy. Hassan (2001) also reported that male students who participated in his study in Egypt outperformed females on a pronunciation accuracy test. Maccoby and Jacklin (1979) and Tittle (1986) reported from a study conducted in the US that males outperformed females on special language tasks.

Contrary to the above findings, some authors found no significant difference of girls and that of boys (e.g. Jegede, 1994; Kincade and Kleine, 1990). For example, Jegede (1994) carried out a survey among high school students in Nigeria and reported that there was no significant gender difference in English language academic achievement and motivation among the participants; but that the students' English language performance could be reliably inferred from their level of achievement and motivation. The author therefore suggested that both boys and girls at the secondary school level were equally capable of mastering English. As the author commented, the equal levels of achievement and motivation in English is borne out by a changing trend in Nigeria in which women are moving out of so-called "domestic" professional jobs and compete favourably with men.

Kincade and Kleine (1990) also studied the effect of gender, age and cognitive task on three types of reading recall among school children in the US. They found no main effect due to gender differences. However, sharp differences between boys and girls were found depending on the information retrieval task they were assigned. Boys and girls reading recall performances differed dramatically, with boys demonstrating superior recalling the cued condition. The report suggests that boys need more structure in their recall task, while girls are better at imposing their own structure. The study illustrated the importance of continued attention to gender as it interacts with reading recall in complex ways

In conclusion, the above review of studies on the performance of girls and boys illustrates the lack of consensus on the possible effect of gender on SLA. It may be surmised that the culture, context, tasks, and other research variables may explain the variety of findings.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter on methodology will: describe the design (3.1), outline the working hypotheses (3.2), describe the profile of the participants (3.3), and the instruments and data sources used (3.4), explain the procedure followed (3.5), and the coding used for the analysis of the questionnaires (3.6), give a summary of the techniques for data analysis (3.7), and discuss ethical considerations (3.8) arising out of the use of human subjects.

3.1 Design

To meet the aims and needs of the study, a “quantitative ethnographic” design (Nunan, 1992) was used. The quantitative aspect of the design has to do with quantitative data from the questionnaire, such as: demographic information of the participants, quantified data on attitudes towards learning English, their reading preferences (genre), and their views on societal expectations of them as girls or boys. Further quantification was necessary after the collection of the most recent school results (school assignments, tests and examinations) in English. The study meets Nunan’s (1992) requirements of a true “quantitative ethnographic design” because:

- (i) It was carried out in the context in which the participants (subjects) normally work (classroom setting);
- (ii) It avoided manipulating the phenomena under investigation;
- (iii) It covered a relatively long-term period to be disqualified as a purely cross-sectional study;
- (iv) It involved the participation or co-operation of stakeholders (students and teachers) other than the researcher;

- (v) An interpretative analysis of the (quantitative) data was done; and
- (vi) An interaction was established between hypotheses and data collection.

3.2 Working hypotheses

Drawing from the literature, four main working hypotheses were formulated. For each of them, a brief explanation is offered of the background, i.e. the inspiration for the hypothesis, mostly findings from previous research, which tend to bear out personal observation or experience.

3.2. 1 Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis 1 was the overarching prediction which may be supported (or not) by the other three hypotheses: **Girls will perform better than boys on English tests and examinations.** Indeed, a sizeable body of research, mainly in survey formats, suggests that girls often outperform boys in English tests (e.g. Daly, 1999; Gambell and Hunter, 2000; Gorman, White, Brooks, Maclure and Kispfen, 1988; Hey, 1997; Leung, 1993; Schueller, 2000; Skarbrevik, 2002). In the UK, for example, a study by Gorman, White, Brooks, Maclure and Kispfen (1988) among secondary school pupils showed that girls outperformed boys in English reading and writing. A similar finding in favour of girls was reported by Jacobson (1979), Maccoby and Jacklin (1979), and Tittle (1986) on verbal tasks. Similarly, female's superiority over males in literary test results were reported from Canada by Gambell and Hunter (2000). Finally, a study carried out in Australia also showed that gender differences favoured girls in English (Watt, 2000).

3.2.2 Hypothesis #2

Girls and boys' expressed attitudes about school-related reading materials in English will differ. Research among school children in the UK in the eighties (Gorman, White, Brooks, Maclure and Kispal, 1988) found that female and male pupils reported differential levels of enjoyment in reading, with females being more positive than males about school activities associated with reading (novels, plays, and poetry). Girls overwhelmingly declared obtaining a great deal of pleasure from reading. In contrast, boys acknowledged boredom and reluctance to read (See also Daly, 1999; Hendley and Parkinson, 1995; Winchock, 1995).

3.2.3 Hypothesis #3

Girls and boys' reading preferences will differ significantly. Hypothesis 3 is also based Gorman, White, Brooks, Maclure and Kispal's (1988) study which documented the types of reading and writing preferred by girls and boys in the UK. With respect to reading, the majority of pupils indicated that they enjoyed reading fiction. But more boys than girls enjoyed reading non-fiction, such as books related to hobbies or books which involved finding out how things work. At the age 11, a higher proportion of boys than girls preferred to read comic books and annuals at home, rather than stories, the "Beano" being the comic preferred by most. Although questions were not designed to elicit information about different types of fiction, one distinction that emerged for 15 year olds was that six times as many girls and boys liked reading "love stories". More boys than girls had negative views about poetry (more pupils of both sexes expressed negative attitude to poetry at age 15 than at age 11), (Gorman, White, Brooks, Maclure and Kispal, 1988: 171-173).

3.2.4. Hypothesis #4

Societal expectations on girls and boys about learning English will differ. The hypothesis on societal expectations is corroborated by many studies which suggest that family, school, peer-group, religious authorities, culture, ethnicity, and the media believe and expect behaviours and characteristics appropriate for males and females to differ in the same way performance does (e.g. Abu-Ali, 1999; Brod, 1999; Freeland and Moran, 1987; Guidry and Boyd, 2000; Hartley and Maas, 1987; Kobayashi, 2002; Warrington and Younger, 1999; Williams, 1994).

3.3 Participants

10, and 11 pupils from four selected English-medium high schools in the Polokwane Municipality (in the Limpopo Province The main participants in the study were (i) 128 Grades 8, 9, of South Africa), whose L1 is not English. (Grade 12 students did not participate, since they were preparing for their matriculation examinations); (ii) their teachers or school administrators who were also parents, while, I, the researcher, endeavoured to remain a “non-participant observer” A stratified random sampling procedure was used to select the schools and the pupils who participated. Using a ballot system, two schools were selected from the schools in the City of Polokwane (henceforth “urban schools”) and two more at least 30 kilometres away from the city centre (henceforth “peri-urban schools”). In each of the schools, 4 boys and 4 girls for whom English was not an L1 were selected by ballot from each of the Grades 8, 9, 10 and 11. In each of these schools, 10 teachers or school administrators who were also parents were selected using the same ballot system. Finally, in each of the schools, one teacher or school administrator was selected for an interview by a ballot.

3.4 Instrumentation and data sources

In the collection of data, use was made of the following three instruments and sources of data: Two questionnaires (see 3.4.1); a semi-structured interview (see 3.4.2) and school records (see 3.4.3).

3.4.1 Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were used, one for pupils, the other for parents, teachers, and school administrators. The Questionnaire for Pupils comprised Sections A to G (see Appendix A). Section A serves to collect demographic information about the respondents. The items in Sections B to F were adapted from the Attitude Questionnaire used by Watt (2000). The original questionnaire used by Watt (2000) contained items about the attitude of students towards English language and Mathematics. The version of the questionnaire used for the present study restricted itself only to attitudes towards English language. The original 7-point Lickert-type response format used by Watt was reduced to 5-points (except for item 31). The rest of the items were derived from the study by Higginbotham (1999) now widely used in this type of studies.

The Teacher/parent Questionnaire comprised Sections A to E (see Appendix B). Section A serves to collect demographic information about the respondents. The items in Sections B to D were also adapted from the Attitude Questionnaire used by Watt (2000) and modified as in the case of students, except that it inquires about their attitudes towards their sons' and daughters' performance in English language. The items in section E were also derived from Higginbotham's (1999) study.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sampling of four teachers and school administrators who were also parents of pupils for whom English is not an L1 as an additional data-gathering tool, for respondent validation (i.e. to verify some of their responses in the questionnaire), and for limited data triangulation (e.g. Rossman and Wilson, 1991). The use of open-ended questions was chosen because of the many advantages, viz.: (i) allow and encourage respondents to give their opinions fully and with as many nuances as they can; (ii) allow respondents to make distinctions that are not usually possible with other types of questions; (iii) allow respondents to express themselves in a style that is comfortable for them and congenial to their views (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982: 150), and (iv) avoid the effect of “demand characteristics” in which cues might influence the interviewees in behaving according to perceived research aims. Most of all, open-ended questions provide a valuable source of qualitative information in the forms of quotable material.

3.4.3 School records

School records consisted of registers/records of the pupils’ performance in English, viz. their results on assignments, tests, and examinations in the current school year (2003). The data were anonymised before the analysis for ethical considerations (see 3.8).

3.5 Procedure

Permission was obtained from the principals of the schools and Education District authorities to carry out the research in the schools. Parents of participants were also requested to sign a consent form for their children to participate in the research and for the records of their children’s performance in English to be used anonymously for the study.

A small-scale pilot study was carried out in which a questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of 20 pupils (10 boys and 10 girls) was carried out. The same type of pilot study was also conducted among 10 teachers/school administrators who are parents, with their own questionnaires. The aim of the pilot study is to test the participants' level of comprehension of the questionnaires. Any problems encountered were addressed before conducting the main study. The participants in the pilot study did not take part in the main study.

The subsequent administration of the Questionnaire for Pupils was monitored in a classroom setting by myself, with the help of the English teachers (where they made themselves available). My presence (as the researcher) served to reassure the respondents and answer any questions they may have about any questionnaire item and, to avoid biasing the data, was as unobtrusive as possible. As a symbol of appreciation, a small token reward was given to the respondents if the school authorities so allowed. Copies of the Teacher/parent Questionnaire were distributed to the respondents to be completed in the staff-room or office and were collected within the hour to minimise attrition. On the basis of the time-table and particular logistics of each school, interviews were conducted, according to a time-table mutually agreed upon, with a teacher and/or a school administrator (a principal, deputy-principal, or subject head of department) who, preferably, was also a parent of a pupil for whom English was not an L1. A precaution was taken to prepare sheets on which school results of the respondents were written from the school official records.

3.6 Coding

The Questionnaire for Pupils was coded as follows: the responses to the items in Section B were coded using a five-point scale in which at one extreme 0 stood for “don’t know” and at the other extremes 4 stood for “not good at all” and 1 for “very good”. The responses to the items in Sections C through E were coded using a five-point scale in which at one extreme 1 stood for “very well”, “not [hard] at all”, “very easy”, “[like English] much more [than]”, “far more interesting”, “far more enjoyable”, “very useful”, all of these being considered “very favourable dispositions towards the learning of English”; and at the other extreme 5 stood for “not well at all”, “very hard”, “very difficult”, “not easy at all”, “much less”, “much less interesting”, “much less enjoyable”, “not useful at all”, which are all considered as “very unfavourable dispositions towards the learning of English”. Responses to the items in Section F (items 20 to 25) were also coded using a five-point scale in which at one extreme 1 stood for “typically male-stereotypical genre preferences”, and at the other extreme 5 stood for “typically female-stereotypical genre preferences”. Responses to the items 26 through 30 in Section G were also coded using a five-point scale in which at one extreme 1 stood for “not well at all”—considered as “very low societal expectations”—and at the other extreme, 5 stood for “very well”—considered as “very high societal expectations”. Responses to item 31 were coded as 0 (“don’t know”), 1 (“boys do better than girls in English”), 2 (“girls do better than boys in English”), and 3 (“boys do as well as girls in English”).

The Teacher/parent Questionnaire was coded as follows: the responses to the items in Sections B through D were coded using a five-point scale in which at one extreme 1 stood for “very well”, “not [hard] at all”, “[like reading/watching] a lot”, “very useful”, and “very well”, all being considered as “very positive expectations about offsprings’ performance,

enjoyment, or use of English”; and at the other extreme 5 stood for “not well at all”, “very hard”, “not [like reading/watching] at all”, “not useful at all”, and “not well at all, which are all considered as “very negative expectations about offsprings’ performance, enjoyment, or use of English”. Responses to the items 25 to 27 in the same Section E regarding societal expectations were coded as follows, using a five-point scale: for item 25, 1 represented “[boys] not [to do] well at all”, and 5, “[boys to do] very well”; for item 26, 1 represented “[girls] not [to do] well at all”, and 5, “[girls to do] very well”. For item 27, 0 represented “don't know”, 1 “boys do better than girls in English”, 2 “girls do better than boys in English”, and 3 “boys do as well as girls in English”.

3.7 Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS - Version 11) computer programme was used to analyse the data. The statistical techniques used are the t-test and the Multiple Regression Analysis. The t-test was appropriate for the study since it served to establish whether there were significant differences between the mean scores of two groups of respondents (e.g., boys and girls). For Hypothesis 1, the mean of the total scores of boys in English tests/examinations was compared with that of girls using the independent t-tests. For Hypothesis 2, the total scores of each pupil on Sections B through E were added up to form his/her score on attitude towards English language. The independent t-test was then used to compare the mean scores of boys and girls on Attitude with those of girls. For Hypothesis 3, the mean of the total scores of boys on Section F was compared with that of girls. For Hypothesis 4, the mean of the total scores of boys in Section G (items 26 through 30) was compared with that of girls also using the independent t-test. The Multiple Regression Analysis is used to find out the factors (e.g., sex, attitudes, genre preferences and societal

expectations) that significantly contribute to performance of participants (e.g., pupil's scores on English tests/examinations) and how much (in percentage) each of the factors contribute to the performance.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

In line with ethical requirements, anonymity was guaranteed to the participants. One of the guarantees offered to the school authorities was that all the records would be requested in an anonymised format, i.e. without identifying individual students and *en bloc* (total scores only were needed for each of the male and female samples). All the pupils who participated were requested to complete a consent form to be also signed by their parents or guardians (see Appendix D). In addition, it was envisaged that if the process of data collection aroused any participant's emotions negatively (e.g. by reminding her/his of parent-child career conflicts), the participant would be referred to the school counsellor or a psychologist for professional attention. Fortunately, no such incident occurred during the administration of the questionnaires.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter on results is presented under the following headings: Frequencies (5.1 of demographic data for both the pupils and the teachers/parents, Testing of Hypotheses (5.2), Teacher questionnaire data (5.3), and Interview data (5.4).

4.1 Frequencies

Frequencies were used to analyse the demographic data of both the pupils and the parents/teachers. Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the demographic variables of the pupils.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of the demographic variables of the pupils.

Variable		Males N(%)	Females N(%)	Total N(%)
Types of School	Peri-urban 1	16 (50.0)	16 (50.0)	32 (100.0)
	Peri-urban 2	16 (50.0)	16 (50.0)	32 (100.0)
	Urban 1	16 (50.0)	16 (50.0)	32 (100.0)
	Urban 2	16 (50.0)	16 (50.0)	32 (100.0)
Grades	Grade 8	16 (50.0)	16 (50.0)	32 (100.0)
	Grade 9	16 (50.0)	16 (50.0)	32 (100.0)
	Grade 10	16 (50.0)	16 (50.0)	32 (100.0)
	Grade 11	16 (50.0)	16 (50.0)	32 (100.0)
L1	Afrikaans	17 (53.1)	15 (46.9)	32 (100.0)
	Northern Sotho	44 (49.4)	45 (50.6)	89 (100.0)
	Venda	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)	1 (100.0)
	Shangaan	2 (66.7)	1 (33.3)	3 (100.0)
	Southern Sotho	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)	2 (100.0)
	Tswana	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)	1 (100.0)

As can be seen from Table 1, the pupils who participated in the study were equally distributed in terms of gender, types of school, and their grades, in line with the study design. In terms of L1, the great majority have Northern Sotho/Sesotho sa leboa as their L1, followed by Afrikaans. This distribution of L1s is in agreement with the actual language distribution in the Polokwane Municipality, which is predominantly Northern Sotho/Sesotho sa leboa-speaking.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of the demographic variables of the teachers, parents and school administrators.

Variables		N (%)
Types of School	Peri-urban 1	10 (25)
	Peri-urban 2	10 (25)
	Urban 1	10 (25)
	Urban 2	10 (25)
Job Title/Rank	Teacher	35 (87.5)
	Head of Department	2 (5)
	Principal	2 (5)
	Agent	1 (2.5)
Name of Employer	Department of Education	39 (97.5)
	Private Company	1 (2.5)
Sex	Males	15 (37.5)
	Females	25 (62.5)
Present income bracket per annum (in Rands)	50,000-100,000	31 (77.5)
	101,000-200,000	8 (20)
	201,000-300,000	0 (0)
	301,000-400,000	1 (2.5)
L1	Afrikaans	18 (45)
	Northern Sotho/Sesotho sa Leboa	19 (47.5)
	Venda	1 (2.5)
	Shangaan	0 (0)
	Southern Sotho	0 (0)
	Tswana	0 (0)
	Other	2 (5)
Level of education	Grade 12/Std 10/Matric	4 (10)
	Diploma	17 (42.5)
	First degree (BA/BSc)	8 (20)
	Honours degree	10 (25)
	Master's degree	1 (2.5)

In Table 2 the frequency distribution displays the demographic variables of the teachers, parents, and school administrators who participated in the study. Most of the participants in the teacher/parent category had the rank of “teacher” at the time of the study and, as expected, most of them were employed by the Department of Education. Because females outnumber male teachers in the Province, this unequal distribution is also reflected in the sample. The majority of the respondents earned between R50,000 and R100,000 per annum. Afrikaans and Northern Sotho/Sesotho sa leboa were almost equally reported (respectively 45% and 47.5%) as L1. One out of ten only had a Grade 12 certificate, almost half (42.5%) held a Diploma, the remainder a first degree (20%) or a higher degree (25% for Honours, only 2.5% a Master’s degree).

4.2 Testing of hypotheses

The first step in the testing of hypotheses is the presentation (Table 3) of both computed raw data (“group statistics”) of the variables (English grades, attitudes towards English, reading/genre preferences, societal expectations) grouped according to gender and the results of the statistical test proper (independent sample t-test) and an explanation of the statistical results is given for each hypothesis. The second stage consists of identifying the possible effect of any of the four independent variables (gender, attitudes towards school-related reading materials in English, reading material/genre preferences, and societal expectations) on the dependent variable (performance in English).

4.2.1 Results of the t-test

Table 3: Independent t-test for Hypotheses 1 to 4.

Group Statistics					
Variables	Gender	N	Mean scores	Std. deviations	Std. error means
English examinations and test grades in 2003	Male	64	48.45	17.45	2.18
	Female	64	51.14	16.97	2.12
Attitudes towards English	Male	64	32.13	6.50	0.81
	Female	64	30.65	5.63	0.70
Reading/genre preferences	Male	64	16.77	2.72	0.34
	Female	64	18.53	2.62	0.33
Societal expectations	Male	64	20.92	3.48	0.44
	Female	64	22.02	2.54	0.32

Independent-sample t-test										
		Levene's test for eq. of variance		t-test for equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tail.)	Mean Diff.	Std. error diff.	95% conf. inter. of the diff.	
									Lower	Upper
English grades	Equal var. assumed	0.33	0.57	-0.88	126	0.38	-2.69	3.04	-8.71	3.33
Attitudes	Equal var. assumed	0.83	0.36	1.37	126	0.17	1.47	1.08	-0.66	3.60
Reading preferences	Equal var. assumed	0.01	0.95	-3.74	126	0.00	-1.77	0.47	-2.70	-0.83
Societal expectations.	Equal var. assumed	1.52	0.22	-2.03	126	0.04	-1.09	0.53	-2.16	-0.03

(i) Hypothesis # 1

Girls will perform better than boys on English tests. Table 3 shows that although girls tended to score higher than boys in English language examinations/tests (Mean Score for girls = 51.14, Mean Score for boys = 48.45), there is no statistically significant difference between the two scores ($t = -0.88$, $df = 126$, $p > 0.05$). It is not significant because the p-value is greater than 0.05. Therefore, **Hypothesis 1 was rejected.** [Even when village

schools are considered separately and the city schools are considered also separately, there is still no significant difference between the performance of the boys and that of the girls. (Among village schools, Mean Score for boys = 37.16, Mean Score for girls = 40.72, $t = -0.10$, $df = 62$, $p > 0.05$. Among city schools, Mean Score for boys = 59.75, Mean Score for girls = 61.56, $df = 62$, $t = -0.58$, $p > 0.05$).

(ii) Hypothesis #2

Girls and boys' expressed attitudes about school-related reading materials in English will differ. Table 3 also shows that although males tended to have a higher level of negative attitudes towards school-related reading materials in English (Mean Scores of boys = 32.13, Mean Scores for girls = 30.65), there is no statistically significant difference between the two scores ($t = 1.37$, $df = 126$, $p > 0.05$). The p-value is greater than 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was rejected

(iii) Hypothesis 3

Girls and boys' reading preferences will differ significantly. Table 3 also shows that girls and boys' reading preferences differed significantly ($t = -3.74$, $df = 126$, $p < 0.05$). The p-value is less than 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was borne out by the data. Girls preferred more female stereotypical reading materials than boys did (Mean Score for girls = 18.53, Mean Score for boys = 16.77).

(iv) Hypothesis #4

Societal expectations on girls and boys about learning English will differ. Table 3 also shows that boys and girls' perception of societal expectations on them with respect to performance in English Language significantly differed ($t = -2.03$, $df = 126$, $p < 0.05$). The p-value is less than 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was confirmed. Girls perceived more positive societal expectations on them than boys did (Mean Score for girls = 22.02; Mean Score for boys = 20.92).

4.2.2 Multiple regression analysis

In an attempt to find out which of the four factors (gender, attitudes towards school-related reading materials in English, reading material/genre preferences, and societal expectations) may have affected the pupils' (boys and girls put together) performance (grades) in English, Multiple Regression Analysis (with simultaneous entry method of variables) was used as shown below in Table 4.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis for the effect of 4 independent variables on pupils' performance in English

Model summary					
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	
1	0.43	0.18	0.16	15.81	
ANOVA					
Model 1	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	6814.29	4	1703.57	6.81	0.00
Residual	30750.43	123	250.00		
Total	37564.72	127			
Coefficients					
Model 1	Unstandardized coefficients		Std. coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. error	Beta		
(Constant)	114.87	18.46		6.22	0.00
Sex	2.78	3.04	0.08	0.91	0.36
Attitudes towards school-related reading materials in English	-0.99	0.25	-0.35	-3.95	0.00
Reading material preferences	0.46	0.54	0.08	0.85	0.40
Societal expectations	-2.16	0.51	-0.39	-4.24	0.00

Predictors: (Constant) Gender, expressed attitudes towards reading materials, preferences of school-related reading materials in English, societal expectations.

Dependent variable: average grades in English in 2003.

Table 4 shows that when boys and girls are considered together, only “Attitudes towards school-related reading materials in English” and “Societal expectations” (respectively -0.99 and -2.16; at $p < 0.05$) significantly influence the performance of the pupils in English. Indeed, the negative values of Regression Coefficient (B) indicate that the two factors have an inverse relationship with performance in English language. In other words, pupils who do not like the school-related reading materials in English are likely to perform worse in English than those who have low levels of negative attitudes. Also, pupils who hold positive societal expectations more strongly (i.e. those who feel more as being under societal pressure to perform well) will perform worse in English than those who perceive societal expectations

less strongly (i.e. those who feel less as being under societal pressure to perform well). The value for R-square shows that the two factors account for only 18% of the variability in the pupils' performance in English.

4.3 Teacher questionnaire data

Table 5 below shows whether there is a significant difference between the expectations of teachers/school administrators (who are also parents) of their children (boys and girls) in English language, as well as those of the society on boys' and girls' performances.

Table 5: One-Sample t-test on the expectations of teachers/school administrators on their children (boys and girls) in English language, as well as those of the society on boys' and girls' performances.

One-Sample (Mean) Statistics						
Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean		
Parental attitudes towards their sons	34	18.71	3.50	0.60		
Parental attitudes towards their daughters	31	17.19	2.88	0.52		
Societal attitudes towards boys	38	1.92	0.91	0.15		
Societal attitudes towards girls	37	1.60	0.80	0.13		
One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Parental attitudes towards their sons	31.21	33	0.00	18.71	17.49	19.93
Parental attitudes towards their daughters	33.24	30	0.00	17.19	16.14	18.25
Societal attitudes towards boys	12.99	37	0.00	1.92	1.62	2.22
Societal attitudes towards girls	12.16	36	0.00	1.60	1.33	1.86

Table 5 shows that teachers/school administrators have significantly higher levels of negative perceptions towards their sons with respect to performance in English language (mean = 18.71, $t = 31.21$, $df = 33$, $p < 0.05$) than towards their daughters (mean = 17.19, $t = 33.24$, $df = 30$, $p < 0.05$). The table also shows that teachers/school administrators perceive the society to have significantly higher levels of negative attitudes towards boys with respect to performance in English language (mean = 1.92, $t = 12.99$, $df = 37$, $p < 0.05$) than towards girls (mean = 1.60, $t = 12.17$, $df = 36$, $p < 0.05$). The above data supports the result of Hypothesis 4, which significant differences in boys and girls' perceptions of societal expectations on them with respect to performance in English; with girls perceiving more strongly parental/societal expectations on them than boys.

4.4 Interview data

Below are the questions the four-selected teachers/school administrators for interview were asked and a summary of their responses.

1. Can you speak about yourself and your family very briefly? [OPTIONAL]

Two School Principals and two Heads of Departments, one from each of the participating schools, were interviewed. Two of them were males and two were females. They were all parents and each of them had two children. Two were Whites, one was a Black African and one Indian.

2. *How many languages do you speak reasonably well, well, very well, perfectly? What is your level of education/academic qualifications?*

All the informants speak English language very well, three of them speak also Afrikaans very well. One speaks Northern Sotho and Zulu very well and one speaks three other Indian languages very well. Three of them have B. A. degrees and one has a B. A. Honours degree.

3. *What grade is your son/daughter in?*

Two of them have school-age children (Grades R, 1, or 2), while the other two have children who are either working or are studying in a university.

4. *What is your opinion about boys' and girls' ability to learn languages in early childhood?*

The informants have a divided opinion on this. Two said that at early childhood, girls learn languages faster than boys do, while the other two said that at that stage there is no difference in boys' and girls' language ability. The following two quotations represent the two views:

“Girls learn languages faster in the early childhood, but on a later stage, it is vice versa”.

“There is no difference at that stage. Boys start to struggle later on at school, because boys are not all that interested in it.”

5. *What is your opinion about boys' and girls' ability to learn languages at school?*

All the informants said that at school, girls learn languages better than boys do. However, the reasons they gave for the difference are different. For example, one said:

“Boys want to do boys' things and are under pressure from peer group. Girls prefer to sit at home, watch movies and read books. Girls read and study more than boys”.

Another said:

“Boys tend to mature later, at about 17 to 18 years, while girls mature at 15-16 years.”

6. Is language learning a masculine or feminine activity?

The informants also had a divided opinion on this. Two said it is a feminine activity and two said it is neither a feminine nor masculine activity. For example, one of the informants teaching in one of the village schools said:

“It is a feminine activity, because girls find it pleasurable to learn languages than boys”.

Another informant from a city school said:

“My two sons speak English and Afrikaans very well. Thus, it is not only a feminine activity. It depends on the family”.

7. Do you think boys and girls are given the same opportunities for learning English?

All the informants said that boys and girls are given equal opportunity for learning English. However, the reasons for any difference in performance between boys and girls are expressed differently. For example, one said:

“Yes! Parents and teachers try to convince boys to read more often. But boys don't make use of those opportunities”.

Another said:

“Girls spend more time sitting down and learning. Boys are not so keen in sitting down and learning for a longer time. Girls are more patient to sit down and read or learn. Girls spend more time at home than boys. Girls watch more TVs, listen to radio programmes, read more books. Boys prefer playing outside and staying out with friend”.

8. Should boys and girls be encouraged to read different types of books in English?

All the respondents said that boys and girls should be encouraged to read different types of books in English. Also, the reasons they gave for the response are different. For example, one said:

“Girls can learn more about boys if they read books about adventure, and boys can learn more about girls if they read more about sentimental books”.

Another said:

“Yes! Interests are different. Boys have interest in sport's activities, girls might be romantically inclined”.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion:

This study shows that among pupils who participated in the study, there was no significant difference between the performance of girls and that of boys in English (see Table 3). This finding disagrees with many reported studies that hold that there is a significant difference between the performance of boys and girls in English language (e.g. Daly, 1999; Gambell and Hunter, 2000; Gorman, White, Brooks, Maclure and Kispfen, 1988; Hey, 1997; Leung, 1993; Schueller, 2000; Skarbrevik, 2002; Watt, 2000). It contrast with the view of those who suggest that that girls often outperform boys in English tests (e.g. Daly, 1999; Gambell and Hunter, 2000; Gorman, White, Brooks, Maclure and Kispfen, 1988; Hey, 1997; Leung, 1993; Schueller, 2000; Skarbrevik, 2002). Also, when teachers/parents were interviewed on their opinion about boys' and girls' ability to learn languages at school, all of them said that girls learn languages better than boys do.

Some of the interviewees said that language learning is a feminine activity. The finding also disagrees with another view which says that males perform better in SLA than females (Brantmeir, 2000; D'Ailly, 2002; Hassan, 2001; Kasanga, 1996a). It however, concurs with a previous finding of no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls (Jegade, 1994; Kincade and Kleine, 1990). The Multiple Regression Analysis conducted in this study (see Table 4) also suggested that sex did not contribute significantly to the performance of the pupils in English language. The differences in the reports may be due to methodological (e.g. the instrument used) and cultural differences (the site for this study is

different from the sites of previous studies). One example is a study conducted by Kasanga (1996a) with Zairean university students majoring in English language and literature at four different levels of proficiency paired in same- and mixed-ability dyads before they were allowed to perform the tasks. In the present study, secondary school students in the Polokwane Municipality (South Africa) participated in it, and their marks in examinations and tests were used to measure their performance in English language.

Table 3 also shows that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of boys towards English language and those of girls. This result on the attitude of boys and girls disagrees with many studies, which hold that girls have better attitudes toward English language than boys (Daly, 1999; D'Ailly, 2002; Gorman, White and Brooks, 1987; Gorman, et al., 1988; Hendley and Parkinson, 1995; Kobayashi, 2002; Watt, 2002; Wigfield, et al., 1991; Winchock, 1995; Zammit, 1993). That there is no significant difference between the attitudes of boys towards English language and those of girls, however agrees with one study which, reported no significant difference in the attitude of males and females towards learning English as an L2 (Brungardt, 1994). The same methodological and cultural factors (as mentioned above) may account for the variation in the different findings.

The results of the above-tested hypotheses support the growing trend in establishing “unisex” or “mixed” schools based on the principle that there should be no differentiation in the way girls and boys are taught. The underlying assumption is that girls and boys learn in the same way. Besides, different treatment of girls and boys might be perceived as discriminatory practice in an era of gender sensitivity. Yet, observation of social practices suggests that girls and boys grow and are raised differently and that these gender differences in growing may

affect the way they perceive studying foreign languages, among others. In deed, Table 4 suggests that pupils who have high levels of negative attitudes towards school-related reading materials in English are likely to perform poorer in English language than those who have low levels of negative attitudes.

In this study (Table 3), girls and boys' reading preferences differed significantly. Girls preferred more female stereotypical reading materials than boys. This is so in spite of the view of the interviewed teachers/parents who said that boys and girls are given equal opportunities for learning English. This finding supports many other recent studies in Europe and America which reported similar gender-specific (stereo-typical) genre preference (e.g. Collins-Standing and Gan, 1996; Donovan, Smolkin, and Lomax, 2000; Fink, 1997; Gambell and Huneter, 2000; Guzzati, Young, Gritsavage, Fyfe, and Hardenbrook, 2002; Mena, 2000), thereby lending credence to the belief that there are gender differences with respect to preferences in genre. They all observed a difference between the sexes in their favourite topics and genres, which followed traditional gender patterns. All the teachers/parents who were interviewed in this study also said that boys and girls should be encouraged to read different types of books in English, since as one of them said, the "interests are different...". Surprisingly, however, the reading preferences did not contribute significantly to the variation in performance among the participants (as shown in Table 4). In any case, the above result calls for the provision of a variety of genre in schools so that each pupil should find reading materials that are of his or her interest.

Boys and girls' perception of societal expectations on them with respect to performance in English significantly differed. Girls perceived more positive societal expectations on them

than boys did (Table 3). Furthermore, teachers/parents also indicated more positive (less negative) parental as well as societal attitudes towards girls than boys with respect to English (see Table 5). This result on societal expectations is corroborated by many other studies which suggest that family, school, peer-group, religious authorities, culture, ethnicity, and the media believe and expect behaviours and characteristics appropriate for males and females to differ (e.g. Abu-Ali, 1999; Brod, 1999; Freeland and Moran, 1987; Guidry and Boyd, 2000; Hartley and Maas, 1987; Kobayashi, 2002; Warrington and Younger, 1999; Willams, 1994). The implication of this is that societal gender-stereotypical expectations can facilitate or hinder the learning of an L2 by males or females. Many societies (parents, teachers, the media, religion and culture) believe that language learning in general is a female-stereotyped domain. Thus, the society expects that females would learn an L2 and perform in it better than males. Such a belief, by perpetuating societal prejudices (Abilock, 1997; Daly, 1999; Silva, 1997; Watt, 2000), may hinder L2 learning among male learners. Even, a further analysis in this study showed that pupils who perceive high levels of positive societal expectations (in other words, those who feel being under societal pressure to perform well) will perform poorer in English than those who perceive low levels of societal pressure (see Table 4).

The present study, however, is limited to gender and SL2. There are many other factors that can affect SLA (e.g., age and L1) which were not considered in this study. Interviews were limited to only teachers/parents/administrators. A focus group discussion with the pupils may have given more insight into the effect of gender on SLA. The participants for this study were drawn from the schools in the Polokwane Municipality. Thus, the results of this study

cannot be generalised to other parts of South Africa without some caution. Further studies in the topic should consider the above limitations.

5.2 Conclusion

With due caution, given the limitations of this study, I conclude that there is no significant difference between the performance and attitudes of boys and girls with respect to English SLA. However, reading preferences in school-related materials in English and societal expectations on them differ between boys and girls.

Therefore, the results of this study support the growing trend in establishing “unisex” or “mixed” schools, which is based on the principle that there should be no differentiation in the way girls and boys are taught. One therefore assumes that boys and girls learn languages in the same way. Different treatments of girls and boys may therefore be perceived as discriminatory practice, especially in this era of gender sensitivity. The societal expectations and practices which treat and raise boys and girls differently presumably affect the way pupils perceive studying foreign languages, among others.

The result of this study confirming the fact that on reading preferences in school-related materials in English differ among boys and girls has some implications both for instruction and assessment.

The present study has contributed to filling the gap in knowledge on differentiation in the English classroom among girls and boys, and on their choice of reading genre.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the above findings, I recommend the following:

1. Teachers and school administrators should design programmes aimed at improving the attitudes of boys and girls towards learning English language, since negative attitudes affect the learning of English adversely.
2. A wide range of school-reading materials in English, which appeals to both boys and girls, should be provided in schools. Teachers, in their choice of reading materials for pupils' instruction and assessment should select materials that are interesting to both boys and girls.
3. There should be no differentiation in the way girls and boys are taught.
4. Awareness campaigns against differential societal expectations on boys and girls should be considered and supported
5. Equal treatment of boys and girls should also be factored in language pedagogy, curriculum development and school policy formulation.
6. Enlightenment programmes should also be embarked upon to reduce societal pressure on pupils (especially boys), so that they can learn English with ease and with pleasure.
7. More studies should be conducted in the area of gender and SLA. Future studies, however, should take into consideration the limitations of this study regarding sample size, design (by increasing the possibility of triangulation), and even selection of dependent variables.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire For Pupils

This is not a test or assignment. It is a questionnaire which seeks information about your learning of English as a second language. Please complete it thoroughly as honestly as possible. Your responses will be treated confidentially and anonymously. (Please note: If your mother tongue is English, you should not complete the questionnaire.)

Section A (Demographic Information):

1. Your students number in the school: _____
2. Sex: Male Female
3. Your present Grade: _____
4. Your first language (that is, your mother tongue or the language you speak most often with your parents at home):

Afrikaans Northern Sotho/Sesotho sa Leboa Venda Shangaan Zulu

Southern Sotho Xhosa Tswana Ndebele

Other (Specify) _____

Section B (Self-evaluation):

5. If you compare yourself with other students in your class, how good do you consider yourself to be at oral English?

Not good at all Fairly good Don't know Good Very good

6. If you compare yourself with other students in your class, how good do you consider yourself to be at written English?

Not good at all Fairly good Don't know Good Very good

7. If you compare yourself with your best friends in class, how good do you consider yourself at English?

Not good at all Fairly good Don't know Good Very good

Section C (Expectations):

8. How well do you expect to do in English next semester?

Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

9. How well do you expect to do in English this school year (2003)?

Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

10. How well do you expect to do in English next year (2004)?

Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

Section D (Self-evaluation of required effort):

11. How hard do you need to try to get good marks in English?

Not at all a little somewhat hard hard very hard

12. To what extent do you consider English to be a difficult subject?

Not at all just a bit difficult quite difficult very difficult

13. Compared with all other subjects, how easy/difficult do you think English is?

Very easy easy fairly easy not easy not easy at all

Section E (Enjoyment, interest and usefulness):

14. How much do you like English compared with your other subjects?

Much less less the same more much more

15. How interesting do you find English compared with your other subjects?

Much less interesting less interesting as interesting more interesting

far more interesting

16. How enjoyable do you find English, compared with your other school subjects?

Much less enjoyable less enjoyable as enjoyable more enjoyable

Far more enjoyable

17. How useful do you believe English is for your studies?

Not useful at all not useful fairly useful useful very useful

18. How useful do you think English is in the everyday world?
Not useful at all not useful fairly useful useful very useful

19. How useful do you think English will be in your future career?
Not useful at all not useful fairly useful useful very useful

Section F (Reading/Genre preferences):

How much do you like to read books or magazines containing the following information?

20. Romantic (male-female friendship) stories.
Not at all a bit average a lot very much

21. Violent or horror/scary stories.
Not at all a bit average a lot very much

22. Real stories.
Not at all a bit average a lot very much

23. Sports stories.
Not at all a bit average a lot very much

24. Adventure stories.
Not at all a bit average a lot very much

25. Science discoveries.
Not at all a bit average a lot very much

Section G (Societal expectations):

26. How well do both your parents/guardians expect you to do in English?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

27. How well does your father/male guardian expect you to do in English?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

28. How well does your mother/female guardian expect you to do in English?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

29. How well do you think people in your community expect girls to do in English?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

30. How well do you think people in your community expect boys to do in English?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

31. How well do you think people in your community expect boys and girls to do in English?
boys to do better than girls in English boys do as well as girls in English

girls to do better than boys in English don't know

THANK YOU.

Appendix B: Teacher/Parent Questionnaire

Section A (Demographic Information):

5. Your job title or rank: _____
6. Sex: Male Female
7. Your present income bracket per annum: R50,000-100,000 R101,000-200,000
R201,000-300,000 R301,000-400,000 R4001,000 and above
8. Your first language (that is the language you speak most often with your family at home):
Afrikaans Northern Sotho/Sesotho sa Leboa Venda Shangaan Zulu
Southern Sotho Xhosa Tswana Ndebele
Other (Specify) _____
9. Your level of education/academic qualifications
Grade 12/Standard 10/Matric Diploma First degree (BA/BSc)
Honours Degree Master's degree PhD

Section B (Expectations):

6. How well do you expect your son to do in English next semester?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well
7. How well do you expect your daughter to do in English next semester?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well
8. How well do you expect your son to do in English this school year (2003)?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well
9. How well do you expect your daughter to do in English this school year (2003)?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well
10. How well do you expect your son to do in English next year (2004)?

Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

11. How well do you expect your daughter to do in English next year (2004)?

Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

Section C (Self-evaluation of required effort):

11. How hard does your son need to try to get good marks in English?

Not at all a little somewhat hard hard very hard

12. How hard does your daughter need to try to get good marks in English?

Not at all a little somewhat hard hard very hard

13. To what extent do you consider English to be a difficult subject for your son?

Not at all just a bit difficult quite difficult very difficult

14. To what extent do you consider English to be a difficult subject for your daughter?

Not at all just a bit difficult quite difficult very difficult

Section D (Enjoyment and usefulness):

15. How much does your son seem to like reading English materials?

Not at all just a bit somehow quite a lot very much

16. How much does your daughter seem to like reading English materials?

Not at all just a bit somehow quite a lot very much

17. How much does your son seem to like movies in English?

Not at all just a bit somehow quite a lot very much

18. How much does your daughter seem to like movies in English?

Not at all just a bit somehow quite a lot very much

19. How useful do you believe English is for your son's studies?

Not useful at all not useful fairly useful useful very useful

20. How useful do you believe English is for your daughter's studies?

Not useful at all not useful fairly useful useful very useful

21. How useful do you think English will be in your son's future career?

Not useful at all not useful fairly useful useful very useful

22. How useful do you think English will be in your daughter's future career?
Not useful at all not useful fairly useful useful very useful

Section E (Societal/parental expectations):

23. As a Parent/guardian, how well did you expect your son to do in English when you enrolled him in the school where he is now?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

24. As a Parent/guardian, how well did you expect your daughter to do in English when you enrolled her in the school where she is now?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

25. How well do you think people in your community expect girls to do in English?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

26. How well do you think people in your community expect boys to do in English?
Not well at all not well fairly well well very well

27. How well do you think people in your community expect boys and girls to do in English?
boys to do better than girls in English boys do as well as girls in English
girls to do better than boys in English don't know

THANK YOU.

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

1. Can you speak about yourself and your family very briefly? [OPTIONAL]
2. How many languages do you speak reasonably well, well, very well, perfectly?
Your level of education/academic qualifications
3. What grade is your son/daughter in?
4. What is your opinion about boys' and girls' ability to learn languages in early childhood?
5. What is your opinion about boys' and girls' ability to learn languages at school?
6. Is language learning a masculine or feminine activity?
7. Do you think boys and girls are given the same opportunities for learning English?
8. Should boys and girls be encouraged to read different types of books in English?

Appendix D: Application Form to Ethics Committee

**UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH
ETHICS COMMITTEE**

APPLICATION FOR HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION

(Completed forms, preferably typed, should reach the Chairperson of the Ethics Committee at least one month before the experimentation is due to start. Projects where the researcher only receives human material for analysis without actually being involved with collection from the experimental group must still register in the normal way. Researchers who are involved with projects which have been approved by Ethical Committees of other Institutions should provide this Committee with the necessary information and provide it with a shortened protocol for approval)

PROJECT TITLE: Gender as a mediator in the acquisition of English as a second language.

PROJECT LEADER: Bridget N. Madu

DECLARATION

I, the signatory, hereby apply for approval to execute the experiments described in the attached protocol and declare that:

1. I am fully aware of the contents of the Guidelines on Ethics for Medical Research, Revised Edition (1993) and that I will abide by the guidelines as set out in that document (available from the Chairperson of the Ethics Committee); and
2. I undertake to provide every person who participates in any of the stipulated experiments with the information in Part II. Every participant will be requested to sign Part III.

Name of Researcher: Bridget N. Madu

Signature:

Date:

For Official use by the Ethics Committee:

Approved/Not approved
Remarks:

Signature of Chairperson:
Date:

PROJECT TITLE: Gender as a mediator in the acquisition of English as a second language.

PROJECT LEADER: Bridget N. Madu

APPLICATION FOR HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION: PART II

Protocol for the execution of experiments involving humans

1. *Department:* English Studies
2. *Title of project:* Gender as a mediator in the acquisition of English as a second language.
3. *Full name, surname and qualifications of project leader:* Bridget N. Madu, B.A. Hons.
4. List the name(s) of all persons (Researchers and Technical Staff) involved with the project and identify their role(s) in the conduct of the experiment:

Name: Bridget N. Madu
Qualifications: B. A. Honours (English Studies)
Responsible for: the Research
5. *Name and address of supervising physician:* None
6. *Procedures to be followed:* Questionnaire.
7. *Nature of discomfort:* None
8. *Description of the advantages that may be expected from the results of the experiment:*
Master's dissertation.

Signature of Project Leader:

Date:

PROJECT TITLE: Gender as a mediator in the acquisition of English as a second language.

PROJECT LEADER: Bridget N. Madu

APPLICATION FOR HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION: PART II

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. You are invited to participate in the following research project/experiment:

Questionnaire on the learning of English as a second language.
2. Participation in the project is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project/experiment (without providing any reasons) at any time. You are, however, requested not to withdraw without careful consideration since such action might negatively affect the project/experiment.
3. It is possible that you might not personally experience any advantages during the experiment/project, although the knowledge that may be accumulated through the project/experiment might prove advantageous to others.
4. You are encouraged to ask any questions that you might have in connection with this project/experiment at any stage. The project leader and her/his staff will gladly answer your question. They will also discuss the project/experiment in detail with you.
5. Your involvement in the project.

Completing a questionnaire.

This section is to be drawn up by the researcher and must be submitted together with the application form.

(It is compulsory for the researcher to complete this field before submission to the ethics committee)

**UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH
ETHICS COMMITTEE**

PROJECT TITLE: Gender as a mediator in the acquisition of English as a second language.

PROJECT LEADER: Bridget N. Madu

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the following project: *(it is compulsory for the researcher to complete this field before submission to the ethics committee)*

I realise that:

1. The study deals with gender as a mediator in the acquisition of English as a second language.
2. The procedure or treatment envisaged may hold some risk for me that cannot be foreseen at this stage;
3. The Ethics Committee has approved that individuals may be approached to participate in the study.
4. The experimental protocol, ie. the extent, aims and methods of the research, has been explained to me;
5. The protocol sets out the risks that can be reasonably expected as well as possible discomfort for persons participating in the research, an explanation of the anticipated advantages for myself or others that are reasonably expected from the research and alternative procedures that may be to my advantage;
6. I will be informed of any new information that may become available during the research that may influence my willingness to continue my participation;
7. Access to the records that pertain to my participation in the study will be restricted to persons directly involved in the research;
8. Any questions that I may have regarding the research, or related matters, will be answered by the researchers;
9. If I have any questions about, or problems regarding the study, or experience any undesirable effects, I may contact a member of the research team;

10. Participation in this research is voluntary and I can withdraw my participation at any stage;
11. If any medical problem is identified at any stage during the research, or when I am vetted for participation, such condition will be discussed with me in confidence by a qualified person and/or I will be referred to my doctor;
12. I indemnify the University of the North and all persons involved with the above project from any liability that may arise from my participation in the above project or that may be related to it, for whatever reasons, including negligence on the part of the mentioned persons.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHED PERSON	SIGNATURE OF WITNESS
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SIGNATURE OF PERSON WHO INFORMED RESEARCHED PERSON	SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN
--	------------------------------

Signed at _____ this ____ day of _____ 200