

## **Determining the Relationship between the Gender-based Differences in the Leisure Time Activities of Boys and Girls and the Performance of English**

### **Philip Kiprotich Chebunet**

Lecturer, Dept of Linguistics, Literature Communication and Journalism,  
Narok University College  
P.O. BOX 861-20500  
NAROK, Kenya.

### **Joyce Cherono Laboso Abonyo, PhD**

Lecturer  
Department of Languages and Linguistics, Egerton University  
P.O. Box 536  
NJORO, Kenya.

### **Joshua G. Manduku, Phd Candidate**

Lecturer,  
School of Education and Social Sciences,  
Kabianga University College, Box 2030-20200 Kericho, Kenya  
&

Member, Kenya Association of Educational Managers and Educational Management Society of Kenya

This study assessed the relationship between the gender-based difference in the leisure time activities of boys and girls and performance of English language in secondary schools in Kenya. English is a medium of instruction in Kenyan Schools and is, indeed, a very important subject both in the curriculum and as a service subject more so in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. Despite the crucial role that the English language plays in Kenya, the performance of candidates in KCSE has been dismal. This poor performance is especially marked among the boys. It is a widely accepted fact that gender-based differences in leisure time activities that boys and girls engage in as part of their socialization process is one of the factors that plays a pivotal role in the educational attainment of students. This study therefore sought to establish within the Kenyan context, the relationship between students' gender-based leisure time activities and their performance in English language test. This study adopted the cross-sectional design and in order to get a further understanding of the variables under investigation, it was necessary to use a multi-method approach, where both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used simultaneously. An English test, a questionnaire and focused group interviews were used as data collection instruments.

The multi stage cluster sampling technique was used and schools were categorized into three categories urban/rural, single sex/mixed sex schools, then high, medium and low cost schools. Consequently six schools, 253 students, 122 girls and 131 boys representing 48% and 51% respectively were selected for the study. Some subject areas which have stereotypically been portrayed as being of interest to either boys or girls were identified and a total of twelve topics selected for the study. Study findings revealed that topics such as economy, money matters, or those related to crime and aggression, which have been claimed to be of more interest to boys, in fact in this study did not show any gender specificity. The p value for the cross tabulation between the gender and how often respondents discuss crime, aggression and related subjects was not significant. Equally insignificant was the p value of the relationship between gender and reading materials on the economy, money e.t.c. On the other hand, several topics did, indeed, display gender specificity and thus provide support for the notion that topic interest appears to be gendered. Sport, for example, was a topic that showed clear gender differences, so did technology, machines and science. Both these topics had an overwhelming number of boys and only a small number of girls indicating they read or discussed materials on these topics.

**Introduction**

**Background to the study**

English is a medium of instruction in Kenya schools and is, indeed, a very important subject both in the curriculum and as a service subject. In addition to being the medium of instruction, English is also the country’s official language and students require a good command of the language in order to interact in a large variety of professional, commercial and day to day transactions both locally and internationally.

More importantly, in Kenya, for one to be admitted into professional degree programmes in the public universities, a good grade in English or Kiswahili is mandatory. According to the Joint Admissions Board 1999-2000 circular on subject clusters, out of the 22 subject clusters offered in the public universities, 18 require a good grade in English or Kiswahili.

Additionally, good comprehension of language is necessary for the dissemination of knowledge and information in science and technology. It is, indeed, a common practice in Kenya for students to be encouraged to work hard in science and mathematics, for it is claimed, there are better career opportunities and improved lifestyles through these subjects. Although this cannot be denied, it is equally important to acknowledge the crucial role of the English language in disseminating this scientific knowledge to a wider audience. Indeed, Industry cannot make use of knowledge and information gained from research unless this information is communicated in clear and understandable language.

Despite the crucial role that the English language plays in Kenya, the performance of candidates in the Kenya certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) has been dismal. This poor performance is especially marked among the boys. KCSE English language and literature results between 1998 and 2000 will serve to illustrate this point more succinctly. As Table 1.1 shows, there are indeed clear gender disparities in performance with the girls’ performance being significantly higher than that of the boys. In all the three years, a higher number of girls obtained grades A – C+ compared to boys.

Conversely, as shown in the table, a significantly higher number of boys than girls are represented in the lower grades of C – E that suggests that more boys than girls performed poorly. This study attempts to provide possible explanations for these gender disparities in performance in English.

**Table 1.1 KCSE Grades for Boys and Girls 1998 – 2000**

							<b>1998</b>						
	ENTRY	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
Boys	90,541	9	70	413	1465	4567	6512	6720	12537	10243	38877	8672	456
Girls	76,012	21	81	442	1658	4399	5603	6211	10114	8262	32299	7163	349
<b>Total</b>	<b>166,553</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>3123</b>	<b>8966</b>	<b>12115</b>	<b>12341</b>	<b>22651</b>	<b>18505</b>	<b>71176</b>	<b>15835</b>	<b>805</b>
							<b>1999</b>						
Boys	92,977	172	422	1089	2501	5463	6289	6105	10317	8686	38138	12864	941
Girls	79,081	144	441	1085	2556	4668	5375	4987	8723	7224	32584	10664	630
<b>Total</b>	<b>172,058</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>8634</b>	<b>2174</b>	<b>5057</b>	<b>10131</b>	<b>11664</b>	<b>11092</b>	<b>19040</b>	<b>15910</b>	<b>70722</b>	<b>23518</b>	<b>1571</b>
							<b>2000</b>						
Boys	96,119	106	420	1451	4090	9224	10226	10617	13553	11064	27978	6898	492
Girls	82,494	127	487	1539	3916	7928	8603	8789	11114	9195	24161	6260	375
<b>Total</b>	<b>178,613</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>2990</b>	<b>8006</b>	<b>17152</b>	<b>18829</b>	<b>19406</b>	<b>24667</b>	<b>20259</b>	<b>52139</b>	<b>13158</b>	<b>867</b>

As already stated above, candidates’ performance in English is a critical factor considered in the selection process for most courses in the public universities. An important consequence of boys’ relative poor performance in English has indeed, been that many of them have missed to gain admission into courses like Medicine in the Kenyan universities despite the fact that they may have obtained very good grades in the science subjects; this is especially true for boys from the Rift Valley (Arap-Maritim, 2001). This is because for the subject cluster for Medicine, a candidate needs to get grade ‘A’ in Mathematics or Physics, Biology and Chemistry as well as an ‘A’ grade in English or Kiswahili.

Moreover, in the wider context as in Kenya, most research in gender and education in the past focused on factors influencing girls' underachievement in science, mathematics related subjects and their subsequent under representation in careers in these fields (Eshiwani, 1983, Costello 1991, Mondoh 1998). This campaign to increase women's participation in science and technology seems to have paid off especially in the developed countries. Evidence adduced from research in the UK, USA and Australia indicates that girls have outperformed boys at the 'O' level, not only in the traditional 'girl' subjects like languages and humanities but in all the other subjects including the 'hard' sciences which were traditionally the preserve of boys (Turner et al., 1995: Arnot et al, 1996).

In addition, past research has consistently shown that science and mathematics have come to be associated with masculinity while humanities and English in particular, with femininity (Whitehead, 1996; Francis, 2000). There is the assumption that somehow those who choose science subjects are 'right' and those who choose arts are 'wrong'. It has equally been claimed that choosing to study English or taking the subject seriously for some male students may be seen as 'unmasculine' (Norton, 2000, Sunderland, 2000) This apparent lack of interest or negative attitude towards languages and the whole question of gendered identities and language learning is one of the main concerns of this study.

Furthermore, evidence from past research indicates that language tests may be gender biased in that topics and tasks of test items may influence the outcome (Bugel and Buunk, 1996; Brantmeir, 2003). In other words, disparities in performance in language tests may result from factors inherent in the tests and not in candidates' abilities or attainments. Indeed, these important findings call for investigation in different contexts so that a more comprehensive picture can be created on the exact nature of biases in language tests. This was another area of focus in this study.

Lastly, the Kenyan society seems to have socialized boys and girls into gender roles that appear to be dichotomous. The dichotomous socialization appears to be perpetuated and cemented in activities that take place in school and in the home environment. These activities include the type of materials they read, the programmes they watch on television, and even the chores they perform at home. This study investigates students' gendered activities with a view of highlighting how these activities may, in fact, be contributing to the continued gender difference in performance in English tests.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite the crucial role English language plays in Kenya, the performance of candidates in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education English and literature examination has been dismal. This poor performance is especially marked among the boys. However, factors contributing to this poor performance have not been clearly understood. Boys' attitude towards the subject, their interest and leisure time activities may be influencing their continued poor performance in the subject. Moreover, it seems that the Kenyan society socialize boys to view the humanities and liberal arts – languages in particular as 'feminine' and therefore, inconsistent with their masculine identity. On the other hand, girls appear to be socialized towards having a mental orientation towards the humanities and the liberal arts and during their free time at home and at school, girls engage in activities that continually enhance their competence in language. In addition, girls appear to have a better command of the skills tested in English language examinations better than boys do.

### **Purpose of the study**

To determine the relationship between the gender-based differences in the leisure time activities of boys and girls and the performance of English.

### **Objectives**

1. To establish whether there are gender differences in topic familiarity/interests and to establish the relationship between performance in English and topic familiarity interests
2. To identify gender-based differences in the leisure time activities of boys and girls and to determine the relationship between performance in English and these genders based activities.
3. Based on the findings to make recommendations on how to improve boys' performance in English language examinations in Kenya.

## **Research Questions**

- 1 Are there gender differences in topic familiarity/interest and is there a relationship between performance in English and topic familiarity/interest?
- 2 Do boys and girls have different interests and leisure time activities and is there a relationship between performance in English and the leisure time activities of boys and girls?
- 3 Based on the findings, what recommendations can be made on how to improve boys' performance in English language examinations in Kenya?

## **Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework**

In order to understand sex differences among students, several theories were used to underpin the study. Four theories were identified viz:-: *biological determinist factors theory, the social learning theory, cognitive development theory and gender schema theory.*

*Biological determinist* factors have been advanced by scholars such as Bryden (1979). In his theory of brain lateralization, he posits that there exists a dichotomy between linguistics and spatial skills in the hemispheres of the brain. He claims that the left hemisphere controls linguistic skills while the right, the spatial skills.

Bryden postulates therefore, that the linguistic superiority of girls can be explained by the fact that the left hemisphere has been shown to develop faster in girls. Boys, on the other hand are said to be late developers and retain right side cerebral dominance giving them competence in spatial related activities. Another theory that tries to explain sex differences by using *biological determinist factors* is that of Costello (1991) who suggests that women and men process information differently. The work of Scott — Hodgets (as quoted by Costello) hypothesizes that people inclined to adapt a serialist approach to learning. Women are thought to possess this trait, are better at tasks which require reflection. Boys are said to be more impulsive and mathematical ability is said to require risk takers and impulsive learners.

The *social learning theory* whose leading proponent is Bandura (1977) emphasizes the role of socio-cultural factors in the differential performance of boys and girls. This theory postulates that from early childhood boys and girls are accorded different experiences by society. That they are given different toys, that adults react differently to either sex and that characteristics thought to be appropriate for either sex are recognized and reinforced in the main socializing agents: the home, the school and the peer group. The suggestion is that all through their lives boys and girls tend to behave to match the attributions people make from social stereotypes because, to behave atypically, would set them apart. That in general, people behave unconsciously the way they are expected to behave to merge with and adapt to their environment. The present research borrows heavily from the suggestions advanced by the Social Learning Theorists.

A central figure in the *cognitive development theorists* is Piaget whose theory postulates that an individual's development consists of gradually learning a widening spatial and social environment. His schema theory' as reported by Patterson (1977) refers to both sensor motor and cognitive behaviour. Piaget claims that a schema is a pattern of behaviour through which an organism contacts and seeks contact with its environment and can include such reflex behaviors as suckling or grasping of an infant, lie further claims that a two or three year old child learns that there are two kinds of people and that he/she belongs to one of them.

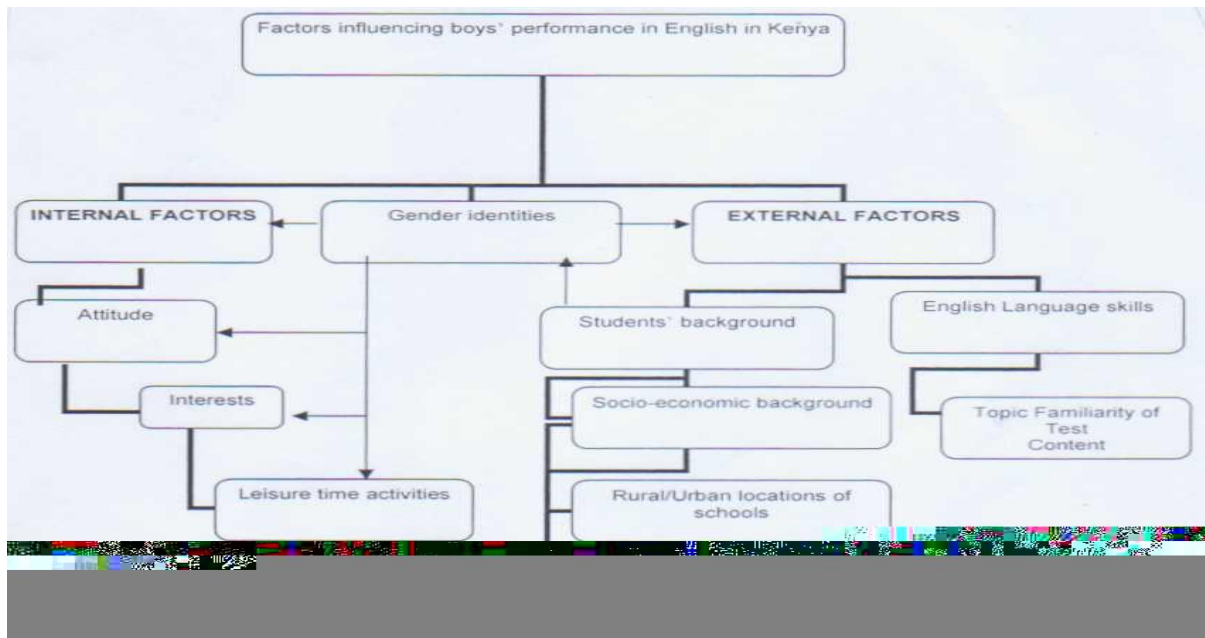
Although children are aware of this fact at this age they still believe that one can change one's gender through for example choice of games, clothes etc. He continues by stating that by age 6-7, referred to as the concrete operational period, the child finally' grasps the idea that gender stays the same with time and across situations. The *gender schema theory* stems from Piaget's schema theory was further developed by Sandra Bem (1983). This theory together with the social learning theory will form the basis of this study. The theory postulates that a child learns his/her society's definition of what it is to be a male and what it is to be a female and thereafter uses this fact as an organizing perspective for learning new information. She claims that children use schema or cognitive organization as a way to assimilate new information. Bem (1983) asserts that children learn that certain things are part of the definition of masculinity or femininity and that in most cases they want to do things that are appropriate for their sex.

They, therefore, choose “from among the many possible dimensions of human personality only that subset defined as applicable to his or her own sex and thereby eligible for organizing the diverse contents of the self concepts”. From the point of view of the gender schema theory, gender is the primary cognitive way to organize ne information because cultures hake allowed a dichotomy between male and female to influence every aspect of experience. In other words, gender is used as an organizing theme to classify’ and understand perceptions about the world as depicted in the diagram below.

It should be noted, however, that not all these theories are mutually exclusive. At some point, they intersect. Using the biological basis of sex differences in language ability, it would be interesting to establish how much of the ability is contributed by brain lateralisation and how much by the socialization process. Similarly, children have been said to construct gender schemas based on their socialization experiences, schemas that in turn influence how they process gender –related information and influence their behaviour. In addition, both the social learning theory and the gender schema theory involve environmental interactions.

**Conceptual Framework for the Study**

This is a schematic representation of the relationships between the variables identified as influencing performance in English in Kenya. The main factors influencing boys’ performance in English in Kenya have been grouped into internal and external factors. The internal factors comprise boys’ attitude towards the subject, their interests and leisure time activities and how these factors impact on their performance in English while the external factors comprise factors related to English language tests as well as students’ socio-economic backgrounds below is a schematic diagram of the conceptual framework of the study and an explanation of the relationship between the variables.



Source: Eckert & McConnell - *Ginei* 1995 Figure 2.1 Gender Schema

**Methodology**

This study adopted a cross-sectional design and in order to get a further understanding of the variables under investigation, it was necessary to use a multi-method approach, where both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used simultaneously. An English test, a questionnaire and focused group interviews were used as data collection instruments.

The multi stage cluster sampling technique was used and schools were categorized into three categories urban/rural, single sex/mixed sex schools, then high, medium and low cost schools. Consequently six schools, 253 students, 122 girls and 131 boys representing 48% and 51% respectively were selected for the study.

Three of the six selected schools were from the capital city, Nairobi and three from the rural area Kericho District. Kericho town is a rural town situated in the Rift Valley province and is the home to the Kipsigis sub-tribe of the Kalenjin ethnic group. This area was purposefully selected because firstly, it has good catchments of different categories of schools found in other parts of the country and secondly, the district is representative of other rural areas in Kenya characterized by lack of basic facilities like running water and electricity, poor road networks and majority of the population are small scale subsistence farmers. There were three main features that needed to be captured by the study sample. The first one was gender, it had already been established that gender was an important variable in the research, also important was the urban/ rural dichotomy and as well as the different categories of schools found in the country.

Female and male students are said to differ in their backgrounds. They select different subjects in school, have different interests and generally engage in different leisure time activities. More importantly, it has been argued that these divergent interests and leisure time activities have a bearing on gender differentiated subject choices/preference as well as on subsequent performance in these subjects. Indeed, social and cultural explanation have been given focusing on the ways in which males and females are treated in society; the expectations about behavior that they pick up in the culture into which they are born, the way culture prescribes certain activities to men and women.

**Below is the list of twelve leisure time activities used in the questionnaire in the study:**

- Reading novels/ story books -engaging in sports
- Watching soap operas -engaging in talks with friends
- Repairing appliances -visiting friends
- Playing scrabble -singing in a choir
- Caring for pets -knitting and sewing
- Constructing & dismantling things -baby sitting

These activities were classified on the basis of the learning experience gained through involving in them. Certain activities were loosely classified as language – oriented in that they were to facilitate communication they were thought to facilitate communication while others were considered non- linguistic. In this regard, those classified as language – oriented include: reading novels/ stories; watching soap operas: playing scrabble; engaging in talks with friends; visiting; singing in the choir and even babysitting since it may involve teaching a child how to communicate. On the hand, those classified as non- linguistic included: repairing appliances; constructing and dismantling things; engaging in sports caring for pets and kitting and sewing. Of course, all are aware that the contribution to language learning of some of the activities classified as language – oriented may be contestable and may be challenged but as already stated, these are hunches that can only be validated through, hence the present study.

**Presentation of findings on Gender and leisure Time Activities**

In the following analysis, the findings will be as follows: first, results obtained for each pass time activity will be presented and then an attempt to show whether there is any relationship between gender and the language oriented activities. Additionally, results from across tabulation between these leisure time activities students’ performance on the English test used in the study will be presented. With respect to reading novels, the vast majority of students, both boys and girls, indicated that they often or always read novels.

According to the figures in Table 2 below, out of total of 106 girls 96% of the indicate that they ‘often’ or ‘always’ read novels. This figure represents 90.6% for the girls against that of the boys which was 83.1% in the same categories. Indeed, only a total of 17% of boys and 9.45 girls indicated that they’ ‘hardly’ or ‘never’ read novels. The ‘p’ value for gender and reading novels is at 0.06 which means that there is a significant relationship between the two variables.

Table 2

Sex	How often do you read novels?				Total
	Never	Hardly	Often	always	
F % within sex		10 9.4%	44 41.5%	52 49.1%	106 100.0%
M % within sex	4 3.6%	15 13.4%	61 54.5%	32 28.6%	112 100.0%
Total	4 1.8%	25 11.5%	105 48.2%	84 38.5%	218 100.0%

### Gender, Leisure Time Activities and Performance in English

Already stated, in the past, researchers have attributed boy's superior performance in Mathematics to *inter alia* their preference for 'tinkering' activities and for constructing and dismantling things. These activities have been shown to somehow afford them learning opportunities relevant in the study of mathematical concepts. In same vein, the next section of this chapter is an analysis of results of the language – oriented leisure time vis a vis the non- linguistic ones and their relationship with the respondent's performance in the English test, TELP. The purpose is to establish whether there is any difference in performance between respondents who selected the language – oriented leisure time activities vis a vis the non- linguistic ones and their relationship with the respondent's performance in the English test, TELP. The purpose is to establish whether there are any difference in performance between respondents who selected the language – oriented pass time activities and those selecting the non- linguistics activities.

With regard to reading novels/ story books as a leisure time activity and its relationship with gender and performance in English, Table 2 summarizes the findings.

According to the figures in the table, there were more girls than boys who indicated that they 'always' read novels ( 52 out of 106 girls compared with 32 out of 112 boys ) . Additionally, it is also important to note that 37 girls out of the 52 who indicated that they 'always' read novels score 40% and above (those in categories 5.00-8.00) in the test. On the other hand, there were only 15 boys out of 32 in the same category that scored over 40% in the test. These figures would, therefore, suggest that 'reading novels' seem to have a positive effect on performance in English. This finding is very much in line with other researches in the developed countries which have established girls' interest in reading novels or fiction ( Gorman et al . 1988; Murphy & Elwood, 1998 Kitchen ham, 2002) while, they claim, boys are more interested in reading comics books and reading for factual information. Most of the studies have attributes girls' better performance in English to this pass time activity.

In the study, further evidence in support of reading novels as a preferred leisure time activity for girls attributed the better performance of girls in English to the fact girls enjoy reading novels.

**Table 3 Relationship between Gender, Reading story books and Performance in English**

Sex	Grouped marks obtained	How often do you read novels/ story books?				Total
		Never	Hardly	often	Always	
F	1.00		0	1	1	2
	2.00		1	2	7	10
	3.00		0	3	4	7
	4.00		1	5	3	9
	5.00		1	8	9	18
	6.00		4	14	14	32
	7.00		1	11	11	23
	8.00		2	0	3	5
	Total		10	44	52	106
M	1.00	0	0	1	1	2
	2.00	1	3	9	9	22
	3.00	0	1	7	2	10
	4.00	0	5	7	5	17
	5.00	2	2	17	8	29
	6.00	0	1	15	5	18
	7.00	0	3	5	5	13
	8.00	1	0	0	0	1
	Total	4	15	61	32	112

Watching soap operas as was noted earlier in this chapter is a highly gendered activity in favour of girls. However, when this activity was cross tabulated with gender and performance in English, no significant relationship was established ( $p= 0.581$  for girls and  $0.110$  for boys). Table 4 below summarizes this information. Of the 69 girls (35 + 34 who indicate that they often or always engage in this activity, 56 of them scored between 40% and 70% and above ( 5.00- 8.00 categories) whilst the boys in the same categories numbered 43( 28+15) with only 28 of them scoring between 40% to above 70%)

**Table 4**

Sex	Grouped Marks Obtained	How often do you engage in sports?				Total
		Never	Hardly	often	Always	
F	1.00	0	0	1	1	2
	2.00	0	4	4	2	10
	3.00	0	2	2	3	7
	4.00	0	2	6	1	9
	5.00	2	7	6	3	18
	6.00	3	12	11	6	32
	7.00	0	16	7	1	24
	8.00	0	2	1	2	5
	Total		5	45	38	19
M	1.00	0	1	0	1	2
	2.00	0	3	4	15	22
	3.00	1	1	5	3	10
	4.00	0	2	8	7	17
	5.00	3	2	15	9	29
	6.00	0	6	9	3	18
	7.00	2	4	6	1	13
	8.00	0	0	1	0	1
	Total		6	19	48	39



Another highly gendered leisure time activity in favour of boys that showed no relationship with performance in English is ‘repairing appliances’. According to the figures in Table 5 the majority of the girls ( 85 out of 103) indicate that they ‘hardly’ or never engage in this activity, however, 50 of these girls scored over 50% in the test (6.00-8.00 categories ). With respect to the boys despite the fact that a large number indicated that they ‘often’ or ‘always engage in the repair of appliances, most of them fall in categories 4.00-6.00 meaning that they scored between 30% and 50% This can generally be interpreted to mean that their marks were below average Moreover, the figures in the table clearly suggest that repairing appliances appears to have no relationship with performance in English.

Table 5

Sex	Grouped Marks Obtained	How often do you engage in sports?				Total
		Never	Hardly	often	Always	
F	1.00	0	0	1	1	2
	2.00	2	4	4	2	10
	3.00	0	2	2	3	4
	4.00	1	2	6	1	9
	5.00	7	7	6	3	17
	6.00	6	12	11	6	32
	7.00	7	16	7	1	24
	8.00	0	2	1	2	5
	Total		5	45	38	19
M	1.00	0	1	0	1	2
	2.00	0	3	4	15	21
	3.00	1	1	5	3	9
	4.00	0	2	8	7	17
	5.00	3	2	15	9	29
	6.00	0	6	9	3	18
	7.00	2	4	6	1	12
	8.00	0	0	1	0	1
Total		10	38	42	15	109

### Questionnaire on leisure time activities

With respect to the questionnaire on leisure time activities, respondents were asked to indicate on a four point likert scale (1-never 2- hardly 3-often 4- always) how often they engage in the twelve activities listed below. This list of activities was adapted from an earlier research carried out in Kenya in relation to achievements in mathematics (Mondoh, 1999) in which she was unable to establish any clear relationship between performance in mathematics and the leisure time activities of boys and girls. In that research, she reiterated the need for more systematic research to be carried out in this area in order to establish whether, indeed, there is any relationship between the pass time activities of students and their achievement in school. It should be noted that this is an adaptation and not a replica of the leisure time activities enumerated in that study. This is because the focus of the present study is different. The main purpose in this study was to look at common gendered leisure time activities and try to establish whether there is any relationship between these activities and performance in TELP. Below is a list of twelve leisure activities used in the questionnaire:

- Reading novels/ story book
- Watching soap operas
- Repairing appliances
- Playing scrabble
- Caring for pets
- Construction & dismantling things baby sitting
- Engaging in sports
- Engaging in talks with friends
- Visiting friends
- Singing in a choir

- Knitting and sewing

These activities were classified on the basis of the learning experience gained through involving in them. Certain activities were loosely classified as language –oriented in that they were thought to facilitate communication while others were considered non-linguistic.

In this respect, those classified as language oriented included: reading novel/stories; watching soap operas; playing scrabble; engaging in talks with friends; visiting friends; singing in the choir and even babysitting since it may involve teaching a child how to communicate. On the other hand, those classified as non-linguistic included: repairing appliances; constructing and dismantling things; engaging in sports

**The following are discussion questions used during interviews;**

- Name and place of residence
- What is your attitude towards English as a subject?
- Which area of curriculum do you prefer – composition writing, literature reading comprehension
- What do you do in your free time, your leisure time activities?
- What language do you speak at home, in school and with friends?
- What do you read? How often do you read/ number of books in a week, month etc?
- What are your views on why girls perform better than boys in languages while boys do better in science and mathematics?
- What role do your parents play in your subject choices, subject preferences?
- Where do you see yourself five to ten years from now?
- What does the school do to encourage or enhance your English learning or to help you perform better in English? What facilities are provided? Are they prohibited from speaking any language in schools

**Findings**

One leisure time activity that showed no significant relationship between gender and engaging in the activity was easy/ causal talk with friends. The evidence adduced from the analysis earlier in the chapter indicated that both boys and girls often engage in this activity. Moreover, when the variable of ‘performance’ in English’ was added to the cross tabulations again no significant relationship was established. The P value for the girls was 0.122 while that for the boys was 0.875

The finding is quite surprising as one would have expected that those who often or always engage in the activity would have the advantages of gaining of gaining relevant experience in communication. This however, appears not to be the case in this study.

Evidence adduced from Table. 6.18 indicate that, in spite of the fact that the majority of the respondents, both boys and girls, indicated that they often or always engage in the activity, most of the girls, scores are clustered around 5.00 to 7.00 (40% to 70%), (20% to 60% ) categories, What can, therefore, be deduced from this findings is that there appears to be no relationship between engaging in easy talk with friends and performance in English

In fact, it should be noted that evidence gathered from the focus group interviews indicated that most boys talk in *Sheng*, (a lingua franca used by urban youth) among themselves as way of constructing their masculinity and cultural identity.

This may explain why, there appears to be no relationship between performance in English and causal talk with friends: they are not ‘speaking in English.’ Indeed, engaging in causal talk can be said to improve one’s oral communication skills but in the case of these respondents, they may be improving their oral communication in *sheng* not in English.

**Concluding comments**

The main aim of this study was to examine the extent of sex – typing in the leisure time activities of boys and girls in the study as well as examine any relationship between these leisure time activities and the respondent’s performance in English.

With respect to the sex- typing in leisure time activities the analysis revealed significant stereotypical gender differences in the choices of these activities.

In essence the findings suggest that girls more than boys are more likely to choose pursuits such as reading novels/ story books, watching soap operas playing scrabble knitting and sewing, baby sitting and singing. Conversely, according to the findings, boys more than girls are more likely to engage in sports, repair appliances and construct and dismantle things. Moreover, the activities which were found to be gender neutral, in that, almost equal numbers of boys and girls indicated that they often engage in the activity included engaging in easy talk with friends and visiting friends

With respect to gender schema and leisure time on the one hand it can be argued that the results from this study to a large extent indicate that this group of respondents' displayed gender appropriate behavior in their choices of leisure time activities, girls chose activities that are stereotypically associated with them and boys did the same. On the other hand, it is important to note that several respondents behaved in gender atypical ways. For instance, several girls especially those from the high cost schools indicated that 'hardly' or 'never' knit sew or baby sit. As stated earlier. The gender schema theory though useful in explaining gender identity and behavior cannot always be used as it lacks a reflective on diversity – based realities reflected in individual's positioning i.e. whether in rural or urban area, socio – economic status etc. All these factors are crucial in determining even the leisure time activities of boys and girls.

With respect to the relationship between the leisure time activities and the respondents performance in English the findings were rather inconclusive. Reading novels/ stories seems to be the only leisure time activity which appeared to have some relationship with performance in English. It had been established earlier that reading novels seems to be a gendered activity in favour of girls. Therefore one needs to be cautious in making any claims concerning the relationship with performance in English. It may well be that performance is being determined more by the respondents gender rather than by their participation in the leisure time activity, Is it a chicken and egg situation: do girls like reading stories because they are girls or is it that since they are girls they read stories? Regarding the other leisure time activities, the study was unable to establish any relationship with performance in English. This inability to establish any relationship however may in fact have more to do with weaknesses in the research instrument: the questionnaire rather than in the findings that there is no relationship between these variables.

### ***Recommendations***

1. There is an urgent need to deconstruct the notion that English and language learning in general is 'female business'. The dichotomy that exists that polarizes the subjects into arts, there feminine, and sciences, therefore masculine, should be changed in order to have a more neutral image of the subjects to be created and thus encourage children to work equally hard in all subjects. The whole guidance service in schools should be examined critically in terms of its philosophy, procedures and expectations.
2. While respecting boys' preferred language of communication, teachers need to encourage them to speak English purely on the understanding that by increasing their use of language, it's likely to improve their performance in the subject. It is important to counter the current view that constructs the speaking of English as 'unmasculine' through appropriate classroom activities.
3. Since teachers and parents also influence students' perception of subjects, teachers, parents and policy makers need to be sensitized on the importance of English so that they too can advise the youth, especially the boys on the benefits to be gained by having a good command of the English language
4. English language Examiners need to be aware of the significant role of topic familiarity in determining performance in language tests so that they avoid giving undue advantage to one gender as a result of factors inherent in the test
5. There should be an enhanced and extended provision of books and other texts in schools and public libraries which include boys' preferences.

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