Investigating High School Boys' Academic Underachievement in Second Language Classrooms

دراسة التحصيل الأكاديمي المنخفض للأولاد في المرحلة الثانوية في صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية

by

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Abstract:

This paper examines boys' low-achievement in comparison with girls in the high school section at a private school in Dubai. The researcher includes four questions to be answered. The first question seeks to explore the factors that contribute to boys' underachievement in an ESL setting. Furthermore, the second and third questions in this paper seek to conceive the teachers', students', and leaders' perspectives of the reasons that impact the boys' achievement in the ESL setting, while the fourth question seeks to explore if there is disparity in the quality of teaching between the boys' and girls' sections. This qualitative research adopts two main tools, which are observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers, leaders, and students. The findings of this case study explain why the boys' term marks are lower than those of the girls. Some of these factors have to do with the teachers' expectations in the boys' abilities, while other factors are related to the students' behaviours and the disruption they cause in the classrooms. Moreover, the findings show that the boys have low self-esteem, and they do not have high ambitions, as most of the interviewed boys plan to join the armed forces, which do not require high grades. In addition, the findings prove that there is no significant disparity in the quality of teaching between the boys' and girls' sections, but the disruptions of boys negatively affect the teaching and learning process. Another finding is that the assessment tools are not given sufficient attention by some teachers inside the classrooms. Moreover, there are some recommendations, which are based on the findings of this study, are listed in the "Conclusion Chapter," such as raising the expectation in the boys' abilities, maximizing the social workers' roles in dealing with the boys' behaviours and self-esteem, and increasing the professional development workshops for teachers. The significance of this case study comes from its connection to the UAE educational system, so it could help the educators to form or adapt policies to solve the problem of boys' academic underachievement.

Key Words: Underachievement - conversation analysis- gender gap - sociocultural theory- interpretive approach

نبذة مختصرة:

هذه الورقة البحثية تستقصي أسباب التحصيل الأكاديمي المتدني للأولاد مقارنة بالبنات في مدرسة خاصة توجد بدبي. ضم البحث أربعة أسئلة ليتم الإجابة عليها من خلال البحث. السؤال الأول : يبحث العوامل التي تساهم في مشكلة التحصيل الأكاديمي المتدني للأولاد في بيئة تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية، أماالسؤال الثاني والثالث: يتعلق بمحاولة فهم وجهات نظر الإداريين والمدرسين والتلاميذ في العوامل التي تؤدي لتدني درجات الطلاب في قسم الأولاد عن درجات الطالبات في قسم البنات في دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية. السؤال الرابع : كُتب لاكتشاف إذا كان هناك فرق في جودة التدريس بين قسم الأولاد والبنات أم لا. لقد تبنى هذا البحث الكيفي وسيلتين أساسيتين للوصول للنتائج ألا وهما، ملاحظة أداء الطلاب والمعلمين داخل الصفوف والمقابلات الشخصية مع الطلاب والمدرسين والإداريين، النتائج من هذا البحث وضّحت بعض العوال التي تؤثر في تدني درجات الطلاب حيث وُجد أن المدرسيين لديهم توقعات منخفضة فيما يتعلق بقدرات الطلاب الأكاديمية، كما وُجد أن الإزعاج الذي يقوم به بعض الطلاب يؤثر على العملية التعليمية. أيضاً وجدت الباحثة أن الطلاب أنفسهم ليس لديهم ثقة كافية في قدراتهم ولا يمتلكون طموحات عالية حيث وُجد أن أغلب الطلاب الذين تم عمل مقابلة شخصية معهم أن معظمهم يخططون للالتحاق بوظائف الجيش والتي لا تتطلب الحصول على درجات عالية. بالنسبة لإجابة السؤال الرابع فإنه لم يوجد فرق واضح في جودة التدريس بين قسمي الأولاد والبنات لقد وجدت الباحثة أيضاً عدم الاهتمام الكافي بالوسائل التقييمية التي تقيّم أداء الطلاب داخل الصفوف. وقد قامت الباحثة بتقديم بعض المقترحات بناءً على نتائج البحث مثل رفع سقف التوقعات في قدرات الطلاب وتفعيل دور الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين بشكل مكثف للتعامل مع سلوك الطلاب وتعزيز ثقتهم بأنفسهم. تكمن أهمية هذا البحث في علاقته الوثيقة بالنظام التعليمي داخل دولة الإمارات، ولذلك فإنه قد يساعد التربويين في حل مشكلة التحصيل الأكاديمي القليل عند الأولاد.

المصطلحات الهامة: التحصيل القليل – تحليل المحادثة – الفرق بين الإناث والذكور – النظرية الاجتماعية الثقافية ـ الطريقة التفسيرية

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

What takes place in the classroom largely determines the extent to which desired learning outcomes are attained. The systematic observation, analysis and understanding of classroom aims and events then become fundamental to any insightful educational research, one type of which is the research on such a prevalent issue as the male learners' academic underachievement in English as a second language. As detailed in literature, this phenomenon is inextricably intertwined with classroom practices and interaction between teachers and students as well as among students themselves. For a researcher to understand communication in a second language acquisition class, classroom processes and learning outcomes as a reliable and valid means of measuring classroom conversation and interaction are required. A commonly popular strategy is conversation analysis that can shed light on how a teacher actually talks reflects upon the teaching process, how both students and teachers structure their talk and to what effect, and what type of engagement brings about what kind of affordances for language learning. Employing such methods allows researchers to gain a profound understanding of the connection between relative 'dialogicality' of lessons and student achievement, and of the extent to which novel instructional policies have adapted or entirely altered classroom interactional patterns.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Males are rarely obviously introduced in gender policy documentation. They are mostly mentioned as hurdles to women progress (Bannon & Correira 2006). Men in the Middle East are seen to be dominating, while women are seen to be subjugated (Abu-Lughod 1998). That is why it is hard to believe that gender disparity is in favour of females. Literature reviews in the Arab region have usually concentrated on the problems that face girls in the masculine communities they live in. The latest Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) concentrates on the progress of women and discusses the difficulties the girls face in the educational field, such as the access to public and tertiary education, enrolment at university, the quality of education they get, and deprivation of completing their education in order to get married (UNDP 2006).

In a similar vein, the Regional Report on Arab States sheds light on the defects in females' education in the Arabic-speaking states. Moreover, the Gender and Development Report in

the Middle East and North Africa highlights a range of problems that girls face in education (World Bank 2012).

On the other hand, in 2008, the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO 2008) and *MENA Development Report: the Road Not Travelled* (World Bank 2012) admitted that girls perform better than boys all over the region, but there is no discussion of the reasons why boys underperform than girls. Furthermore, in all the previous reports that address the issue of education in the Middle East, nearly half claim that female students outperform male students at all school levels. Furthermore, countries like the United Arad Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Kuwait acknowledge that girls attend university more than boys, and that they outperform boys in the sciences and the arts (UNDP 2006; World Bank 2008). Despite all these findings and reports, it is shocking that governments and development organizations restrict the gender analysis and education topics to female students. Therefore, the researcher finds that it is important to address the issue of boys' underperformance.

1.3 Background of the Research

Historically, there has been prioritization of boys' education over girls'; a lot of encouragement and opportunities have been given to boys for the purpose of their academic success (Weaver-Hightover 2003). On the other hand, boys' education in the Middle East has received little attention regardless of the boys' low achievement and retentiveness rates. Generally, boys perform less compared to girls in the industrialized world schools (Legewie & DiPrete 2012). Moreover, the international large-scale assessment results claim that the performance of boys in math and science is higher than girls, while the girls' performance is higher in reading throughout most countries that took part in PISA surveys (OECD 2015).

The phenomenon of gender disparity in secondary education started appearing in many countries with high and high-medium income, such as East Asia, the Pacific, and the Caribbean in the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Jha & Kelleher 2006). Significantly, sociologists are concerned with male dropout rates because dropouts result in many social problems like drug addiction and crime. Furthermore, the economists are worried about the disappearance of males in the educational field as they assure the importance of having more males in the workplace to occupy the dominated male jobs, such as petroleum engineering and other jobs that require rigidity and irregular timings of work (Majzub & Rais 2010). Recently, many countries have shifted attention to boys' underperformance in comparison with girls as in the mid-1970s the problem was girls' underachievement, but in the 1990s,

boys' underperformance appeared to be the centric point (Epstein et al. 1998; Frosh et al. 2004). Apparently, girls have been noticed to outperform boys frequently (Jackson 2010).

In the UAE, there is a noticeable increase in the boys' dropout and repetition rates, and they are underperforming compared to girls. Most importantly, women constitute 60% of public sector workers, which indicates that there are more females than males in higher education. Regarding the UAE, the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) that evaluates the participation of females in educational, political, economic and health and survival areas ranks the UAE at 105 from a list of 130 countries in terms of gender equality, and it locates the UAE first in regard to secondary and tertiary education gender parity. However, this ranking is conceived as misleading as it does not take the obvious gender gap found in the UAE into consideration since the males remarkably perform lower than girls in academic achievement. Depending on these facts and studies, this case study concentrates on secondary education and explores qualitatively the factors that affect girls' and boys' teaching and learning to explain the disparity in achievement levels between them.

The case study is held in a private school in Dubai after taking the principal's consent. Furthermore, the consent of all participants, including teachers, leaders, and students are taken before doing the observations and interviews, and consent letters are sent to the students' parents to give the researcher the permission to conduct interviews with their kids. Observation of English classes is done to examine the quality of teaching and learning in the boys' and girls' sections. A sociocultural stance is seen to be more applicable in addressing the earlier mentioned phenomenon as classroom conversations are affected by social factors that extend beyond language classrooms including curriculum, educational policy, socioeconomic, ethnic backgrounds, and gender norms.

1.4 Significance of the Research

Although there are many researches that studied the issue of boys' underachievement in education, there are only few studies that address this problem in the UAE. Since the UAE is one of the countries that has made significant efforts in order to promote the education system and develop its policies, the researcher finds that it is important to conduct this study to explore the problem of boys' lower performance in order to overcome this problem.

Furthermore, this research is crucial to the chosen private school as it helps the education pillars to understand the factors that are affecting the boys' achievement in high school

education. Furthermore, the interviews that are done with the school's teachers and students are essential in conceiving the obstacles that hinder the teachers in doing their job inside the classrooms, and the factors that reduce the outcome of the boys' achievement in an ESL setting. Additionally, the recommendations that are stated in this case study can be adopted by the chosen school in order to improve boys' academic achievement.

Moreover, many schools can replicate this research in order to comprehend the issues that shape boys' achievement, so the schools can develop their policies and find solutions for this common problem.

The labour market, including unemployment and the vocational status and income, depends on the students' achievement (Murnane et al. 1995; Lamb 1997; Dearden et al. 2002). That is why the current educational research is important to the labour market since schools are the main source of knowledge, and if the students' educational outcomes are good, all the sectors of the labour market will flourish. Thus, since the labour market outcomes are highly impacted by education, it is crucial to prepare the boys to be successful members in society. Significantly, good education enables the individuals in getting stable jobs, high wages, and work productivity.

Furthermore, there are few studies done on this topic in the UAE, so researchers can replicate this case study to perceive the nature of male Emirati students and explore the factors that impact the boys' academic achievement. Researchers can use this case study to compare between boys' achievement in private and public schools in the UAE.

1.5 Rationale and Purpose of the Study

Being a high school teacher who has been in the field of teaching boys and girls English as a second/foreign language has given me numerous eyewitness accounts to wonder about the phenomenon of gender-based gaps in academic performance. Moreover, being an English teacher has also given the researcher stronger motivation to gain more comprehensive insights into the target educational phenomenon. This study aims to investigate the factors that contribute to the existent gap between high school female and male students' academic achievement in ESL classes based on their term marks and teachers' and leaders' perspectives about the reasons why boys have lower achievement in term marks than girls in the high school sector.

1.6 The Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the obstacles and factors which hinder the boys from achieving high scores in comparison with girls. Significantly, this underperformance results in social and economic consequences. The researcher identified four main questions:

1- What are the class-based factors that contribute to the current gender-based gap in achievement between high school boys and girls in ESL classes?

2- Is there a disparity in the quality of teaching and learning of second language acquisition between girls and boys in secondary education?

3- What are the teachers' and leaders' perspectives of factors that contribute to the girls' outperformance of boys?

4-What are the students' perspectives regarding the factors that resulted in their lower marks compared to girls' marks?

1.7 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter one includes the 'Introduction' wherein there is an overview of the research topic, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, organization of the paper, significance of the topic, and a general background about the problem of academic low-performance of boys in comparison with girls. At the end of the overview paragraph, there are definitions of some key terms mentioned in the study. The second chapter is dedicated to the 'Literature Review', and it starts with the theoretical framework sub-division that situates the present study. The 'Literature Review' is divided thematically and includes a sufficient number of studies that addressed the problem of boys' underachievement and the factors that contribute to the boys' academic performance.

The adopted 'Methodology' by the researcher which introduces the research framework and its key theories falls in the third chapter of the paper. The third chapter also includes information about the sampling techniques, instruments, context and participants, as well as ethical considerations, and data collection procedures. The 'Findings and Discussions' of this case study are explained in the fourth chapter as the discussion delivers a demonstration of the obtained results that are generated by various research tools, and it justifies connections among distinct data findings. The fifth and last chapter of this study draws conclusions based

on the study, illustrates its limitations and implications, and offers recommendations to future researches about boys' underachievement in secondary education.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the previous studies that are conducted regarding the issue of boys' underachievement. The first part of the literature review discusses the theoretical framework. The subsequent parts are divided thematically to present some explanations of the causes of gender gap in academic performance, to overview the problem of boys' underperformance in the UAE context, and to focus on the importance of conversation analysis in classroom observations.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

In light of the different lenses through which the issue of gender gap in academic performance is scrutinized, it is worth stressing that the study in hand is informed by the sociocultural theory as it is the theoretical framework or the intellectual structure that guides the study (Troudi 2010). According to this theory, human mental functioning is perceived as a procedure mediated by cultural activities and notions. Within this framework, humans are conceived to anticipate existent cultural factors and forge new ones in order to arrange their biological and behavioural activity where language is the leading means of mediation. Developmental procedures occur through contribution to linguistic, cultural, and historically established settings; for example, the interaction of peer groups, family social life, and institutional contexts, such as arranged sport activities, schools, and workplaces (Lantolf 2000).

Educational policy and mandated curriculum often impose limitations on what is accepted in the classroom and what is not. Gender, for example, is still perceived to have social implications within the classroom context; in classroom discourse, the implications of being male or female are established by discourses about such classifications and by everyday patterns of communication (Rymes 2015).

Language classroom discourse is not restricted to the linguistic and interactional implementation of specific tasks by students, but rather reflects a microcosm of participant orientations; through language classroom discourse, various identities are currently being debated by both teachers and students. In addition, it has become really obvious that classroom interaction is both the procedure and result of socialization and deliberation (Danesh, Aghagolzadeh & Maftoon 2017).

Hall and Verplaetse (2000) embrace a sociolinguistic perspective that regards language classrooms as 'discourse communities' in which interaction is meant to boost students' language acquisition. They interpret social interactions when both teachers and students participate in forging the academic activities that decide the form and the content of the target language, as well as the results of the learning process.

Gil (2002) suggests that second language classrooms have two interdependent styles, the pedagogical style and the natural one. She proceeds to claim that since classroom interactions occur in an institutional setting that allows teachers to have most of the talking rights, there is an urge for a more equal teacher-student relationship; hence, students should be granted more talking rights. Garton (2002) also highlights the significance of learner initiative as a means of steering the interaction in a way that accomplishes the learners' needs and interests. The effective progress of learners' initiatives in interaction dictates giving learners adequate chances for active participation in the learning process and tolerating more variance in interaction models.

From a sociocultural perspective, knowledge formulation and transition are conceived as a social activity that is negotiated by classroom talk; language learning is seen as a matter of the progressive socialization of students and teachers by using certain interactional patterns over time (Huth 2011). Consequently, the foundation of specific teacher-student interactional styles that are suitable to classroom environments has become the ultimate target; such patterns may develop some teaching methods that, if they are well applied, would cause many kinds of teacher-student or even student-student talk which may turn out to have various features and effects. From an anthropological perspective, a classroom is the micro-context where teachers come face-to-face with cultural implementations and social disparities. Therefore, teachers need to often question their taken-for-granted teaching practices and the reasons why they embrace such practices. Some long-standing practices do not need to be used anymore and teachers should move beyond stereotypical comprehensions of pre-existing stamps of learners or classroom practices.

2.3 Gender Gap in Academic Performance

Across a number of countries and disciplines, researchers have been attempting to demonstrate the pervasiveness of gender disparity in educational achievement and illustrate the reasons behind this phenomenon. Most literature can be assorted into two main blocs. The first group claims that gender differences in academic achievement are due to "nature," or the biological discrepancies between boys' and girls' maturation; the second group suggests that gender inequality in achievement is because of "nurture," or the external stimulants like the quality of teaching resources and approaches besides the factors that are related to the boys themselves, such as intelligence, potential, and motivation. Moreover, various scholars have acknowledged that environmental factors are crucial in expanding the gender differences regarding the beliefs, experiences, values, and achievements because they are affected by the region or the country where the target people live. Thus, it is conceived that there are major factors that demonstrate boys' underachievement, which are the biological disparities that create certain attitudes, structured gender-based partialities, teaching approaches, embraced curricula, and assessment proceedings, besides socioeconomic factors, such as the educational background of parents and the family income and structure (Cuttance & Thompson 2008). Moreover, Harland and McCready (2014) have pointed out some substantial contextual elements like race-related issues and ethnicity, social discrimination actions, quality of labour market, and religious association.

The biological explanation assures that girls have greater aptitude in reading while men's interest is in science and math by nature due to the hormonal, genetic, and neurological factors (Ceci, Williams & Bernet 2009; Penner & Paret 2008). Another important explanation is the cultural factor in which there is a widespread stereotype held by parents and teachers that literary activities are defined as a feminine feature, while math and science are perceived as masculine activities. Thus, gender stereotypes affect the students' behaviours regarding courses choices, college enrolment, career preferences through psychological processes like self-efficiency (Bandura 1986) or accomplishment motivation depending on expectation-value (Eccles 2011ab).

On the other hand, some psychologists claim that both males and females have the same cognitive and psychological variables due to the cultural shifts toward gender equity nowadays, which helped in closing the gap in students' performance in some subjects like science and math and in making the gender parity in course taking trivial in all the subjects,

excluding physics, during high school years (Hyde 2005; Hyde & Linn 2006; Hyde etal. 2008; Lindberg etal. 2010). Furthermore, another explanation for differential gender gap is the social and structural impacts, which are adopted by research in sociology. Sociologists claim that the gender parity is a consequence of social construction of gender differences in the life-long procedures of social stratification shaped by families, schools, and the labour market (DiPrete & Buchmann 2013; Xie & Shauman 2009). Sociologists perceive the gender ideologies as external obstructions not internalized. Furthermore, the studies of cultural effects mostly shed light on stereotypes that trifle the female's ability or overestimate male's, but focus less on how internalized gender ideals restrict females' ambitions and attainments (England 2016). Therefore, in sociological research, stereotypes and ideologies about status features and gender have the greatest influences on individual outcomes as the gender status and aspirations for rewards and costs impact on learners' performance on cognitive tests (Lovaglia etal. 1998) and self-perceptions of fulfilment(Ridgeway & Correll 2004).

An additional important factor that plays an important role in boys' performance is teachers' attitudes and anticipations as the major predominant masculine discourse in some contexts has had negative impacts on males' academic progress and the expectancy that boys behave and achieve less than girls partly result in the boys' lack of interest in school (Watson-Williams & Riddell 2011). In a similar vein, students' realization of teachers' divergent anticipations does influence their self-confidence; a bilateral construction of boys and girls is noticed to be reflected on teachers' discourse in the classrooms as teachers conceive girls as being more manageable, easier to teach, and less probable to defy authority; whereas boys need more disciplinarian control to be taught (Younger &Cobbett 2012).

In addition, the identity-based motivation theory (IBM), which states that individuals' feelings should be consistent with their gender standards, is used to explain the problem of boys' academic underachievement. Thus, if a certain subject, such as language arts, is considered as feminine, boys would discredit it; which results in affecting the classroom dynamics and preserving the widespread notion of boys' underperformance (Vantieghem, Vermeersch & Van Houtte 2014).

According to the body of literature addressing this issue, different elucidations have been presented throughout the years. Younger, Warrington and Williams (1999) debate factors that have to do with the level, quality, and tone interactions between teachers and students within the classroom; teacher-student interaction is conceived to be a main issue within the process

of teaching and learning. They state that the way teachers conceive gender-based disparities between boys and girls forges their preferences and performance as teachers; teachers perceive boys as quite chaotic, discouraged, and less inclined to prioritize school work in comparison with girls who are seen as better systematic, more communicative, more assertive, and self-reliant learners. On the other hand, boys are perceived as, more easily abstracted, more vocal, and more attentive to peer-group image.

Marks (2008) in his examination of the gender-gap issue in reading and mathematics across 31 countries emphasizes that gender gaps in educational attainment are profoundly established in students' achievement at secondary schools; these gaps can be attributed to either the school systems work or to the parents' appreciation of the educational careers of their kids. Counter to the situation in the past, the gender differences in the dispensation of boys and girls nowadays across school systems have given rise to a larger gap favouring girls, in reading for example, in most countries.

In another study, Maizub and Rais (2010) confirm that the educational field in Malaysia has reflected gender inequality in the academic performance where boys have emerged as low-performers in comparison girls. In secondary schools in Malaysia, girls tend to surmount boys in almost all subjects while boys are reported to be underperforming in contrast with their female counterparts. Consequently, males are perceived to be more susceptible to become dropouts of the society and to suffer some social diseases such as drug addiction and abuse.

Malaysian parents are more sensitive to the academic performance of their male children. One of the contributing factors to the inequality in academic performance of Malaysian students is the lack of male models which is seen to have resulted in the lack of proper discipline as listening to male teachers is preferred by male students over female teachers. Moreover, female teachers are said to favour girls and pay more attention to them. Another factor is the different personality and learning orientations of boys; boys seem to develop later and slower than girls. It is evident that girls reach puberty two to three years ahead of boys and thus demonstrate more mature attitudes towards learning. Moreover, boys tend to be tougher and more agile which make them more inclined to shine in sports while girls are identified as good readers which lead them to academic excellence. A third potential reason is the teaching methodologies adopted by Malaysian teachers who seem to have insufficient knowledge on how to meet male students' different learning needs and styles, a finding that is

consistent with what Hidalgo-Cabrillana and Loez-Mayan (2018) mention about the relationship between student performance and the teaching style. They have concluded that modern teaching is associated to higher achievement and the traditional teaching to lower achievement.

Stereotyping occurs when task performance undertaken by individual students is hinderedbecause of their recognition that there are low expectations of the whole performance of the social group the students belong to (Hartley & Sutton 2013). Individuals' self-esteem is thus menaced upon asserting a negative stereotype about one's group and being dealt with correspondingly. Lengthened exposition to stereotyping threats can influence an individual's achievement by causing apprehension and detachment with their surroundings.

Furthermore, Cvencek, Meltzoff, and Greenwald (2011) investigated children's gender stereotypes about math as they deduced that children in America link mathematics with boys more than girls, and such a stereotype threat has a negative effect on females' achievement in mathematic tests. Traditionally, gender stereotypes describe boys as eligible and predominant, but also more violent, less disciplined, and less meticulous than girls. These cultural perceptions of gender disparities, such as implying that they are very poorly disciplined and mostly distracted when trying to accomplish similar academic goals as girls, may obstruct boys in academic performance (Foster, Kimmel & Skelton 2001). In a similar study done by Hartley and Sutton's (2013) in England, there is strong evidence that gendered stereotype threats play a major role in the academic underperformance of boys to the point that it may become self-fulfilling as well. Their study proposes that gender stereotypes characterize boys as academically inferior in terms of self-regulation and behaviour, as well as ability and performance. They proceed to confirm that male academic inferiority stereotypes evolve in early childhood for girls and mid-childhood for boys, in spite of the fact that boys are members of non-denigrate, high-status group.

Matějů and Smith (2015) state that one of the focal questions of sociological study on gender gaps in education is whether or not teachers' evaluation of students' achievements can be prejudicial against boys or girls, as teachers' evaluations are perceived to be subjective and often receptive to stereotyping; the more attention teachers pay to students does not necessarily provoke a better attitude or performance on the part of the learner. Therefore, the research suggests that even if teachers give boys more attention in the classroom setting, much of this attention is negative and disciplinal because of poor behavioural patterns of boys and deficient attention span. Boys have always been seen as more frequently detached from

lessons, more disruptive, and in need of more learning support; on the other hand, girls have been seen as being more engaged in teacher-student interactions, which is conducive to learning. Moreover, the teacher's gender has had a strong influence on students' results. Teachers' impressions of the performance of students, such as behaviour congruent with girls, specifically cooperativeness and orderliness, is recognized and appraised while that typical of boys, primarily assertiveness and independence, is penalized; this situation that can result in a critical evaluation by the teacher (Heyder & Kessels 2013).

Xu and Li (2018) have focused on the demographic alignment as in student-teacher gender match as being critical to students' learning outcomes and academic performance. Student-teacher gender congruence impacts on how students interpret their experiences in the academic setting, creates a more inviting learning environment, minimizes the negative consequences arising as a result of stereotype threats by presenting learners with a positive role model, and mitigates teachers' bias where male and female students are treated differently. Xu and Li (2018) research findings show that student-teacher gender matches identify an appositive and persistent effect of having a female teacher on girls' test scores. These results suggest that the potential benefit of student-teacher gender congruence might be most noticeable in situations where a group of students are associated with persistent negative stereotype threats. In explaining the mechanisms through which student-teacher gender interaction impacts student academic outcomes, researchers have often alluded to the role model effect and the likelihood that students may change their behaviours and beliefs as a result of having a teacher who shares the same gender and thus serves as a positive role model.

Recent research on gender gaps in standardized achievement test scores among high school students has afforded inconsistent conclusions, with some evidence favouring boys and some favouring girls. A conspicuous type of explanation is cultural, gender ideologies and beliefs that have implications for math, science, and reading ability. According to this view, cultural influences steer boys toward non-literary activities and define reading as a feminine characteristic, whereas mathematical and scientific activities are defined as masculine. Psychologists suggest that gender stereotypes are widely held by parents and teachers, and these produce stereotype threats to students (Tsai, Smith & Hauser, 2018). Another strand of research sheds light on school factors and places the gender gap in student performance on the institutional arrangements of national educational systems; for example, gender gap in reading within-country has been ascribed to school practices, and local environment of high

schools are responsible for the gender-specific formation of study plans which might, intentionally or unintentionally, favour one gender over the other (Legewie & DiPrete 2014).

2.4 UAE Context

There has been a growing recognition of the phenomenon of boys' academic underachievement in UAE national and public schools where the student community consists mainly of Emirati students (Reynolds, 2010). Consequently, understanding the factors forming gender gaps in education is crucial to accomplish a wide range of policy goals. Gender inequalities in education can cause fundamental gender gaps within the labour-market and negatively affect economic growth by expanding employment gaps (Klasen & Lamanna 2009; Mechtenberg 2009; Buchmann & DiPrete 2013). While the Global Gender Gap Index classifies the UAE as 105 out of 130 countries in terms of gender parity, it ranks the UAE at the first place in regard to secondary and tertiary education gender equality due to the massive progress Emirati women have made in the educational enrolment. However, this first place fails to consider the substantial gender gap that exists with male Emirati students achieving noticeably lower than females in various key areas.

According to (Ridge 2009), although the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report emphasizes the huge advancement in the UAE educational attainment, it falls short of evidence to disprove the fact that men have not been making a similar improvement as women and that they are falling behind at times; Emirati males are proven to be performing poorly in school and university compared to females. He also states that the Ministry of Education in the UAE declared that girls had outperformed boys in all subjects in the final Grade 12 exams administered in the 2007 academic year.

Furthermore, Ridge (2009) claims that the gender gap in education in the UAE is said to have been the result of several factors based on family background, schooling, and the expected economic returns to education. Moreover, he adds that the role of schools in creating a motivational environment for boys to thrive should not be undermined. Boys' schools in the UAE are found to lack creativity and engagement where teachers' expectations of students are limited, and teachers give back less in return. On the other hand, girls' schools tend to be welcoming places of engagement, with high expectations of students.

From a sociocultural stance, Ridge (2009) states that family is believed to be the main building block of the Emirati society, and the perceived role of Emirati men is that of "breadwinners" who are expected to provide for their families. For young men from poorer regions in the UAE, this may compel them to drop out of school to get a job and support their family, or to go straight into paid employment as soon as they complete school rather than continuing their education. In addition, Ridge (2009) assures that some studies have shown negative effects of polygamy and/or divorce on wives and children, including poor performance at school, and he claims that perceptions of the potential returns to education, typically measured in terms of income, are shaped by the value of alternatives, and most importantly by the possibility of obtaining work without further education. Studies have shown that in countries where there is low quality of education and public sector employment is high, learners often make deformed educational choices, as they presume that there are no real advantages to further education (Ridge 2009).

2.5 Conversation Analysis (CA)

Leo van Lier (1996) state that the communication that occurs in the classroom does not necessarily follow the exemplary paradigms of a casual conversation; classroom interaction is a unique type of discourse structured collaboratively between the teacher and the students in which the concentration of interaction may spontaneously change from the pedagogical to natural way. In other words, conceivable classroom discourse is spontaneous and improvised, which shows the reciprocation between dependency and unpredictability when students act communicatively.

In order to define classroom communication, researchers have been trying to assort typical classroom talks and participation, indicate the results of adopting certain types of communicative paradigms on learning, and explore the effect of cultural elements on classroom communication. Consequently, classroom discourse is perceived as being quite problematic and complicated; with all its special characteristics that take into consideration the disparities between a pedagogic discourse and casual conversation, classroom interaction is conceived as a model of certain institutional discourse which occurs only within the regulated context of educational settings (Lee & Irving 2018).

Learner talk is believed to be important to classroom discourse because it reflects learners' perceptions of the subjects, enables them to express their thoughts, and supports teachers with

information about the prior knowledge of learners and how they synthesize ideas. Many teachers think that learners' participation is fulfilled if teachers ask questions and students give answers; however, research deduces that many question-answer interactions are not indicative of any progress in learners' cognition. Thus, classroom discussions should become more like conversations as the teacher should participate in conversations in similar fashions to the learners (Brodie 2007).

Varied practices in classroom discourse analysis arise from many theoretical directions, which might have a mutual principle on how learning to interact in a foreign language takes place through interactions, such as the interactions that occur between teachers and learners. The most relevant analytic frameworks are interaction analysis, conversational analysis and discourse analysis; the interaction analysis method, established in behavioural psychology, is conceived as an objective approach of scrutinizing classroom discourse that is capable of producing consistent classroom profiles through statistical, quantitative, and generalizable approaches (Lee 2011). However, it is usually censured for lack of offering a comprehensive view of classroom interaction and concentrating only on what is practically detectable (Aleksandrzak 2013).

Discourse analysis follows the constitutional methods and functional objectives of classroom interaction; the model that is followed in the discourse analysis method gives specific attention to the reciprocal level or the successions of questions and answers (IRF structure) when students respond to teachers' instructions.

The discourse analysis framework is criticized for not being sufficient in inspecting learner-centred classrooms where there is a room for unforeseeable quality and dynamics of classroom communication; it also fails to include contextual backgrounds of communication, the identities of students, and the sociocultural factors (Lee 2011). The previously mentioned gaps seem to be bridged through the conversation analysis (CA) approach which authentically focuses on employing natural communication in classroom discourse (Seedhouse 2004). This method depends on the presumption that communication in social contexts is dynamically formed through the consecutive organization of interactions when the speakers use language (Heritage 2004).

Classroom discourse features, such as openings and closures, turn-taking, successions of acts and adjacency pairs are the focal point of this framework. The strength of CA in comparison with interaction and discourse analysis methods lies in the lack of all preconceived concepts

about classroom interactional patterns and the claim that such patterns should be recognized and classified. CA seems to have promising implications for language teaching methodologies; for one, CA may report the design and interactional pattern of the tasks in the classroom. Second, a CA offers comprehension of the successive talking of teachers in classrooms and can guide teachers to use interactional practices. Furthermore, it also applies to teachers' beliefs of the types of tasks that the students mostly participate and engage in and how to formulate them. Third, CA helps in the construction and evaluation of instructional and assessment tools (Wong & Waring 2010).

The approach of CA is used to feature, analyse, and comprehend talk which is the main component of human social life. It does not only signify the origins of studying the daily normal conversation, but it is also used to investigate more specialized shapes of communication such as education, political, legal, mass media, and medical interactions (Sert& Seedhouse 2011).

According to literature, CA is the study of speech or the methodical analysis of speech that occurs in daily routines of human communication (Hutchby & Wooffitt 2008). The systemic structure of conversation does not necessarily mean that human and social interaction occurs spontaneously without considering the micro-level factors such as attitudes, thoughts and feelings, or the macro-level factors such as economic and socio-cultural elements. Obviously, in second and foreign language classrooms, language is the means and the target objective, and they are educational settings in which face-to-face talk is perceived as the major factor which determines its functions and outcomes. CA has widely been applied to the analysis of language classroom discourse in pursuit of studies that may lead to a more profound comprehension of what language educators and students really do (Huth 2011).

Investigating classroom CA can shed light on how teacher talk reflects the act of teaching, how teachers and students organize their talk and to what effect, and what kind of interaction brings about what kind of affordances for language learning. As Hall and Walsh (2002) assure, these questions are central to the language teaching job. As schools are important sociocultural contexts, their instructional environments created through teacher-student interaction are important in forming efficient learning environment the formation of effective learning environments and eventually in shaping individual learners' language development.

Conversation analysts pay close attention to the sequential unfolding of discourse, to how each turn is connected to that which comes before it and to the probable responses it provokes for the following speaker (Lefstein Snell & Israeli 2015).

The central analytic notions of CA are progressively demonstrated in the language teaching and learning literature, for instance, turn-taking, adjacency pairs, preference structure, or repair. CA is mainly concerned with illuminating the methodical properties that organize the back and forth of naturally occurring talk. CA aims to illustrate how interlocutors make sense of each other's actions as conversation develops, and how speakers display their understanding of each other's talk. How speakers predict, interpret, and produce verbal and non-verbal responses based on their partners' conduct is seen as intrinsically systematic and social in nature as speakers use all the linguistic and extra-linguistic resources at their disposal while fulfilling their social and interactional needs. Language professionals' beliefs and presumptions of what may take place in a classroom and why, for example male students' behaviour or gender gap in academic achievement, would affect their teaching practices, classroom discourse, and analysis of classroom talk. In short, CA uses a dialog between a teacher and students as the constituent of episode and a pronouncement between them as the element of coding (Lee & Irving 2018).

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter demonstrates the methodology, research paradigm, samples and participants, data collection, data analysis, and the ethical issues relevant to this research.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is a view that elucidates presumptions about the knowledge, or 'epistemology', the nature of social actuality, or 'ontology', and about research methodology (Burrell & Morgan 1979). By deciding on a specific research paradigm, a researcher reveals his/her position regarding the chosen phenomenon (Troudi 2010). When a researcher tries to comprehend a certain phenomenon as the academic underachievement of high school boys in second language classes, the interpretive approach is the most applicable as it gives room for the researcher to ask open-ended questions, observe and live with the participants in their natural social context. In addition, CA is a methodology that concentrates on interpreting naturally occurring interaction which is not concerned with conversation alone. It mostly characterizes all styles of roles of talk in interaction and other characteristics of conduct such as body language, gestures, and facial expressions (Schegloff et al. 2002). Consequently, Interpretive-Qualitative research is seen to be the most applicable research strategy to the current study. Thus, the paradigmatic nature of this study is an interpretative one that focuses on human understanding and interpretations of a lived reality or certain phenomenon (Ernest 1994). An interpretivist position contributes to the viewpoint that the world does not stand independently of our recognition of it.

The key belief of the interpretive paradigm is that reality is socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen 1998). Therefore, the interpretive paradigm is sometimes called the constructivist paradigm. According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2018), the important feature of the interpretive paradigm is its concern for the individual, and the main intention in interpretive paradigm context is to comprehend human experience on the personal level, so in order to maintain the integrity of phenomena being scrutinized, researchers make effort to understand the inside of individuals and thus discarding the external format and construction because it would affect the observer's point of view.

Moreover, the interpretive methods concentrate on action or behaviour-with-meaning. In other words, actions are meaningful to the researcher because he/she is able to realize the intentions of participants. Since the interpretive research commence with individuals to comprehend the world they live in, this researcher concentrated on perceiving the students' and teachers' behaviours in an ESL setting as individuals make sense of the world in their specific ways. These interpretations occur in socio-spatial, socio-cultural, and socio-temporal contexts (Bailey, Marshall & Rossman 1996). Therefore, the researcher abandoned her own suppositions about people, culture, and context in order to inspect the situation and its context in its own features (Hammersley 2013).Furthermore, the nature of the research is explorative in order to scrutinize the participants' interpretations of the situation in order to conceive their attitudes, interactions, and behaviours. Thus, the generated data involved the purposes and meanings of the participants in the research. Moreover, the interpretive perspective presents variable images of people's behaviours since the situations and their contexts are diverse which matches this research as the participants have different viewpoints.

Guba &Lincoln (2003) debate that a research conducted within an interpretive paradigm include four trustworthy and authentic criteria which are conformability, transferability, dependability, and credibility. These criteria are approved by many scholars (Merriam & Merriam 1998; Erlandson et al. 1995; Silverman 2000; Bouma & Atkinson 1995), so this current research followed the four criteria of interpretive paradigm.

According to Grix (2004), knowledge is the consequence of an investigator's personal experience, subjective views and significance. Interpretivists hold the ideology that the world is structured through the social interaction between individuals. As a result, the ontological and epistemological stances of this study are based on subjective reality; research design or the overall constitutional design that would help structure the study effectively and answer the research questions is qualitative interpretive (Perry 2011).

To sum up, the paradigm that underpins this study is interpretive, and it is connected to the adopted qualitative methods as an interpretive paradigm is used in case studies because qualitative approaches provide intensive reports that are important for the interpretivists to deeply comprehend contexts (Willis 2007). The term "interpretive research" is usually used as a synonym for "qualitative research" although there is a difference between the two concepts (Giorgi2012). Moreover, the type of this research is a case study that adopts a

qualitative methodology, and case research is a unique design that can be utilized in an interpretive way in order to construct theories (Giorgi 2012).

Following the nature of the interpretive paradigm, the researcher conducted a study to investigate the factors that contribute to boys' underachievement in an ESL setting. These factors were identified by conducting observations of high school classes to gain an understanding of the students' and teachers' behaviours and the teaching and learning process inside the classrooms. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and leaders to understand each individual's viewpoint on the factors that affect the boys' achievements in classrooms.

3.3 Methodology:

Methodology is defined by Ernest (1994) as the theory in which techniques and methods are efficiently employed in order to produce and justify knowledge in light of the epistemology. The intended methodology for this study was perceived to be the most feasible procedure that reflected on the type of collected evidence and accordingly the kind of reality was represented in the form of attempting the four research questions.

The current research is qualitative because it is a case study that investigated the phenomenon of boys' underachievement in high school education, and the researcher collected all the available data that enabled her to understand the problem (Creswell 2002).

3.4 Participants and Sampling

Data gathering contributes to enhancing knowledge of the issue under scrutiny; thus, appropriate informant selection was crucial to the research. What these informants said or did was an important element that contributed to this qualitative research.

The type of sampling that the researcher used was non-probability sampling, which is suitable for qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Furthermore, this case study is purposive as it is the most common in a non-probabilistic sampling strategy which is adopted when the researcher aims to obtain and understand perceptions. In this case study, purposive sampling started with selecting the people and the site to be investigated, so it is a criterion-based selection (Schensul 2010). Based on the 'criterion-based selection', the researcher first

decided what feature of the sample was important to the study and then located people and sites that matched the selected criteria. Maximum variation sampling is a general style that emerges from large variations and has certain worth. The strategy of maximum variation sampling was adopted because it captures the core experiences and the focal aspects of a setting or a phenomenon (Patton 2015), and also it includes searching for the negative stances or drawbacks of a phenomenon (Miles, Huberman, &Saldana 2013). Moreover, the size of the sample was decided by the amount of sufficient information required and obtained by the researcher, therefore, the sampling was finished when there was no new information expected to be obtained from a new sampled unit.

The researcher selected the type of information to be revealed, then located people who can convey such knowledge (Tongco 2007). The key informants in this study were chosen for being observant, reflective teachers who were willing to share their knowledge and experience about high school boys' underachievement, attitudes, and learning outcomes. Based on the suggestion of Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), purposive sampling was adopted to approach people who have relevant knowledge, such as those individuals who have profound knowledge about a certain topic due to the merit of their professional position, access to networks, authority, specialty or experience. Participants in the current study include eight full-time, English Language teachers and three leaders who work for a private school in Dubai, UAE; all participants are veteran teachers with a minimum of five years of experience in the field. Most of the teachers teach high school male students only.

Table 1: The number of male students who participated in this research

Grade	Nine	Ten	Eleven	Twelve
Number of participants	71	65	61	58

Table 2: The number of female students who participated in this research

Grade	Nine	Ten	Eleven	Twelve
Number of participants	60	54	48	44

3.5 Data Collection Methods

A method refers to the specific technique or instrument utilized in the data collection procedure (Troudi 2010). Instrumentation or the pacing factor of research involves identifying, adopting and configuring analytical tools, in addition to contemplating the critical factors in deploying such tools. The researcher's productivity is determined by the tools he/she uses in observing, measuring and making sense of nature (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun 2012).Thus, qualitative data collection instruments, namely observations and semi-structured interviews, were conceived to be the most convenient tools to obtain information on the contributing factors to the academic gender gap, teachers' perception of boys' attitudes and the impact of such attitudes on their teaching practices.

3.5.1 Observations

Observation is the deliberate noting and accurate, methodical examination of people's actions in a realistic setting involving classrooms (Heigham & Croker 2012); observation usually detects individuals' features that may not have been discovered by any other method (Bell 2005).According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), observations are primary sources of data in qualitative researches, and observation is a major tool used in many kinds of qualitative research, such as case studies and ethnographies.

The researcher collected data through observations because an outside observer regards things that have become routine to the participants, which resulted in comprehending the context. Moreover, the researcher conducted observations in order to acquire some knowledge of the context and to notice some behaviours and events that could not be discussed in the subsequent interviews to enable the researcher to understand the phenomenon under scrutiny. One more important reason for doing observations is because some of the participants were not willing to express their opinions or discuss the issue of

boys' underachievement, so the observations helped the researcher notice things that were not revealed during the interviews. Observation usually detects individuals' features that may not have been discovered by any other method (Bell 2005).In addition, the observer was open to initial perceptions that helped her decide the following patterns of observations. It was decided beforehand to focus on observing particular events, behaviours, or people and to use a code sheet in order to record certain behaviours. Moreover, in this study, the researcher was an observer as a non-participant.

In educational contexts, discrepancies and incongruity are common as individuals' actions and knowledge are not always compatible; as a result, observing such behavioural styles is crucial to data collection in qualitative research (Johnson & Christensen 2014). The answers to the first and second research questions of this study were attained only through administering classroom observations. As suggested by Kumaravadivelu (1999), classroom conversation analysis included utilizing an observation design that composes of a number of prearranged categories for illustrating teachers' and students' verbal behaviours as they interact in the classroom (see Appendix 1).

3.5.2 Semi-structured Interviews

As two of the research questions were adopted to identify individual points of view about a certain issue, which in this case is the teachers', leaders', and students' perspectives of the factors that contributed to boys' underachievement in high school education, the most suitable tool that the researcher chose to utilize for collecting data was interviews. Apparently, the most common resource for gaining information as evidence is the interview method (Blumberg et al. 2008). The interviews were helpful in obtaining valuable information that could not be obtained from observation, and they were also crucial as they permitted the participants to deliver personal information that is comprehensive (Creswell 2012).

According to Creswell (2002), qualitative interviews are significant for providing precise and efficient data, as well as comprehensive context, especially when adopting semi-structured interviews. The interviews are classified into three categories; structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Gill et al. 2008). In structured and semi-structured interviews, the interviewer does not attempt to ask or originate any extended questions, and he plays a neutral role during the interviews; in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer conforms to the pattern, but he/she can depart from the subject with the interviewee when he/she senses that this is

suitable (Creswell 2002). Consequently, it is seen that semi-structured interviews are more convenient in conducting this research due to their accuracy and effectiveness, rather than the other two types. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are more dynamic as they give the interviewee as well as the interviewer the opportunity to modify questions, such as editing, deleting, or rephrasing them, in case they are inconvenient or inappropriate (Creswell 2002). These modifications that took place during the interview did not affect the purpose of the assigned questions nor the conducted interview. Thus, in this case study, the participants were free to express their thoughts and were able to reject answering any question that is related to political factors or that can cause any future threat to the respondents. Although the researcher had the authority to modify or edit some questions, the participants were asked the same main questions regardless of the order of the questions or the way the questions were asked (Shank 2006).

Depending on the qualitative research design, open-ended questions were outlined and asked in order to allow the participants to feel free to elicit their experiences with no limitations or constraints. Moreover, the open-ended questions helped the interviewer to obtain additional data through comprehensive questioning, asking for elaboration, remarking on various answers to make sure that she understood the responses, which does not happen in close-ended questions because they have many constraints that results in getting fewer data points that have similar results to the old ones (Creswell 2002). In contrast, McMurray, Scott & Pace (2004) state that open-ended questions do not include beforehand experience regarding the content of the responses, so it allows the researcher to explore the issue profoundly. In other words, the investigator is allowed the opportunity to explore the topic from different angles as a result of open-ended questions, which may result in further questions to be triggered and debated.

Kvale (2008) defines a semi-structured interview as a purposive everyday conversation that employs a specific technicality. Creswell (2014) features interviews as a methodology to examine the meaning designated to a social problem. A semi-structured interview involves some previously composed questions that are formulated in order to be suitably open that subordinate questions are to be improvised (Wengraf 2006), which was referred to by Drever (2003)as 'adaptability.'

The benefit of using semi-structured interviews here was to tap into teachers' experiences as well as their insights into boys' academic underachievement, attitudes towards learning and

the impact of this phenomenon on teaching practices and classroom discourse. An interview protocol and interview guide were carefully planned and developed beforehand; the outline sets up harmony of the collected data, consolidates systematic data collection, and helps expect data gaps, and therefore contributes to the tool's dependability (Mertens 2010).This tool was conceived to be the most suitable to answer the third and the fourth research questions.

3.6 Procedures

The classroom is the primary and most obvious context for the discourse to be examined. Collecting spoken and written, audio and video data from many sources, interviews and discussions with participants, and observations are the main data collection approaches in CA (Seedhouse 2004). The interpretive nature of classroom CA required an analysis of multiple viewpoints, mainly the teacher's and the learners', on classroom discourse. Accordingly, 20structured observations, in which observation purposes were set beforehand, were conducted in ten different classrooms by the researcher as a complete observer who sat in a corner of the classroom and inspected the teacher and his students (Fraenkel & Wallen 2012); taking the role of a non-participant observer was beneficial because in this approach, the observer rarely manipulated the behaviour of the students and teachers.

A qualitative observation is consolidated when the investigator takes thorough field notes on the activities of the observed people at the research spot (Creswell 2014); thus, field notes were taken about classroom practices, interactions, and teaching and learning activities. Although field notes delivered first-hand information, an observer needed to depend on supplementary aids, such as recorders, to effectively track all the activities that occur in the classroom (Hopkyns 2014). A recording device was used to keep records of the observations for continued study and analysis.

Furthermore, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were carried out with all the purposefully chosen participants in order to help detect the problem and examine participants' attitudes (Creswell 2014). Each interview lasted for about 30-40 minutes. Interviews were individually administered to enable the researcher to steer the conversations towards a specific direction while maintaining discretion, which helped participants to openly express their personal views. Thus, face-to-face interviews were more suitable for monitoring the teachers' non-verbal reactions such as tone, body language, hesitance and facial

expressions. Semi-structured interviews are advantageous for the detailed data they offer and for their flexibility (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle 2010).

To help respondents better communicate their experiences and reflect on the questions, a non-threatening environment was arranged. Qualitative audio recordings of the interviews were gathered to guarantee credible analyses of transcribed data (Creswell 2014). As advised for interviews, the researcher started with building affinity with the respondents by introducing herself and the aim of the research interview, drawing out the essential demographic information, declaring an adherence to confidentiality of the revealed data, and commending them about their liabilities to respond honestly and of their right to reject answering questions (Bell 2005).

All observed classes and interviews were recorded, transcribed, colour-coded and categorized into main themes that emerged from both the observations and interviews, and they were based on grouping the questions developed to answer the research questions. CA transcripts were planned to stimulate the moment-by-moment succession of special actions while coding, including features such as intonation, inference of talk, hindrances, and hesitations (Huth 2011).

3.7 Data Analysis

A Creswell (2012) notes that analysing data obtained via qualitative research methods requires conceiving the approach of making sense of images and text in order to answer the planned research questions. He assures that coding is the method of dividing and labelling text in order to create explanations and trends within data. Therefore, the data generated through this qualitative research underwent two stages, which are coding and thematic data analysis. Thus, the researcher analysed the generated data to connect the concepts obtained through the interviews. Data coding was perceived to be the first step in analysing data by which the investigator tried to make connections between the empirical data and the theory. Thus, coding data was the process of dividing the data into chunks and summarizing segments to create a story to tell (Huberman& Miles 2006).

Moreover, the second stage in collecting data in this case study was analysing the thematic data. Creswell (2012) illustrates that themes are alike codes that are put together in order to create a main idea in the database, so it is considered a central factor in data analysis for a qualitative research. In addition, this approach involved sorting the data and describing it.

Following the procedure of data coding, the researcher used the decoding process in order to make interpretations and show relations between disperse themes. Thus, the thematic analysis was a crucial approach since it captured elaborated and meaningful ideas contained in the given data set (Guest et al. 2012).

Finally, the researcher analysed the data manually as the collected data were firstly read and then marked by hand in order to divide the collection into chunks and categories. This type of analysis was chosen to analyse the short database (Creswell 2012).

Data Analysis in Qualitative Research
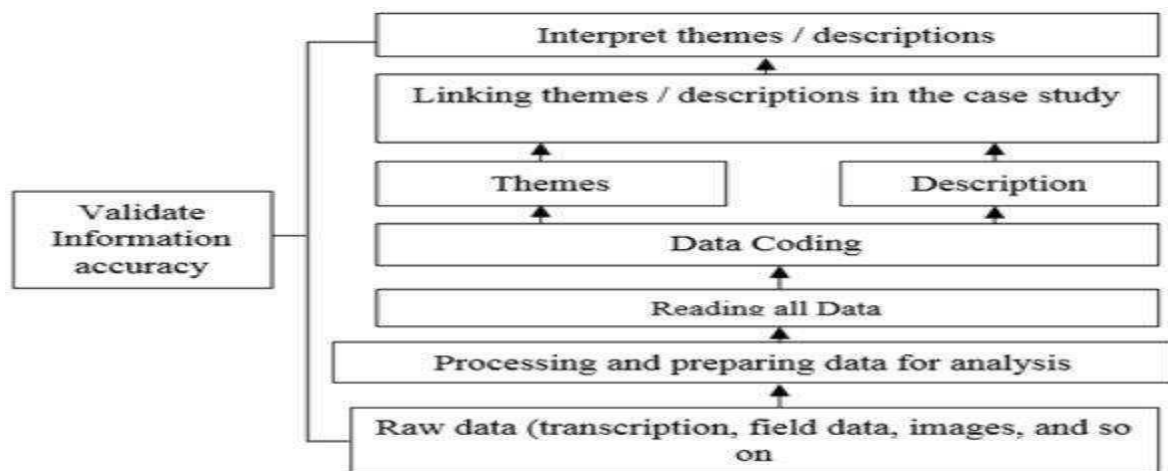
3.8 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics is a compulsory consideration for a researcher, one type of which is establishing safeguards to protect participants' rights; hence, classroom observation ethics were followed. First, permission from site gatekeepers, namely the school principal, was obtained prior to data collection; secondly, teachers were approached and made aware of the research purpose and procedures. Then, consent for classroom entry was obtained beforehand. As high school students are considered minors, a process of communicating with their parents to get their consent and also seeking students' consent were obtained. Field notes were taken in an inconspicuous and safe way to minimize the observer's impact and reduce the students' responsiveness level (Heigham & Croker 2009).

Moreover, interviewees were advised of the interview purpose and were assured that data confidentiality will be maintained using various means, one of which is using pseudonyms to conceal their identities. To ensure participants' understanding of the non-compulsory purpose

of the research, guaranteed withdrawal was offered to all participants beforehand to monitor and minimize the researcher's potential intrusiveness (Briggs, Burgess & Wilson 2005).

3.9 Credibility and Transferability

In qualitative methodologies, reliability involves sincerity to real life, context-and situation-particularity, originality, breadth, details, trustworthiness, profundity of answers and usefulness to the respondents (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007).Qualitative validity, or the accuracy in which the findings precisely reflect the data, and reliability, or the solidarity in analytical proceedings and findings, are substantial in the fidelity of the collected data; triangulation of different data sources is an authentic strategy a researcher utilizes to add credibility to his/her findings. For this study, conducting observations, profound interviews and taking field notes are to be adhered to as data triangulation action plans (Creswell 2014). Credibility refers to the truth-value of the research findings and whether they offer rational information and valid interpretations drawn from the contributors (Korstjens &Moser 2017).

In this study, credibility was guaranteed by the engagement strategy through which the researcher built up trust by introducing herself, discussing the research purposes, and ensuring confidentiality of information. The constant observation of key elements through recording and labelling codes was another strategy that guaranteed credibility. Furthermore, transferability or using intensive descriptions of context, behaviour, and experience to allow the readers to determine if findings are conveyable to their own site was also deliberated in this study.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

This research was conducted to explore the factors which caused the low-performance of boys compared to girls in the ESL context. Also, the researcher tried to identify the perspectives of teachers, leaders, and students regarding the reasons of boys' underachievement and explored if there was a disparity in the quality of teaching in boys' and girls' classes. The data collected through observations and semi-structured interviews were discussed with reference to literature. The first two questions of this case study are:

1- What are the class-based factors that contribute to the current gender-based gap in achievement between high school boys and girls in (ESL) classes?

2- Is there a disparity in the quality of teaching and learning of second language acquisition between girls and boys in secondary education?

To answer these two questions, the researcher observed boys' and girls' classes. Different names have been assigned the teachers in order to maintain anonymity and avoid any problems that could face the teachers as a consequence of the study.

One of the observations was conducted in grade 10 boys. Their teacher is Mr. Haitham, who is newly employed in this school, but has six years of experience in teaching the American curriculum. There were some strength points in Mr. Haitham's class as he showed good knowledge of the concepts he introduced. Also, the teacher adjusted the pace of learning as a result of the students' responses, and the teacher's fluency in spoken English was excellent. The interaction between the teacher and students was good. The teacher applied the students-centred classroom in answering the literary questions.

One of the weakness points is that the teacher did not write the objectives of his lesson, which is an important element that enables the students to know what they must accomplish by the end of the lesson. Another weakness point is that the teacher introduced more than one concept in one period, which seemed like chops, so the students seemed to be perplexed and were not engaged in some parts of the lesson. Also, another flaw in the teacher's class is that the teacher did not have any worksheet on the skills in order to make his students practice the skill, nor did he apply the skill on the selection to be studied, so he did not make sure that the students understood what he taught. Also, he did not relate the big idea of the selection to the students' real life nor to the global world as the big idea is 'Recalling Childhood Memories'.

Also, there were many disruptions caused by the boys in the classroom. Moreover, the teacher did not ask challenging and critical thinking questions to the distinguished students.

To investigate if there is a disparity in the quality of teaching between the boys' and girls' sections, the researcher conducted an observation of the same grade and lesson that was introduced in grade 10. The teacher of grade 10 in the girls' section, Miss Salam, introduced a unified lesson on one concept only, which is the skill that underpins the selection of "Any Other Name". This is considered a positive point as the girls' outcomes were better than the boys' who were taught more than one concept in one class. Another positive point in this class is that the title and objectives were clearly written on the board, and the teacher discussed with the students that by the end of the lesson, they should be able to identify the author's purpose and analyse the historical context. A good aspect that was seen at Miss Salam's class is that she started her lesson by discussing the title and asked the students to apply their inference skills to interpret what the story could be about. Moreover, the discussion of the big idea of the selection 'Recalling Childhood Memories' resulted in a productive interaction between the teacher and her students as they were totally engaged to recall their childhood memories. Another good point that was seen in this class is the application of student-centred classroom as the teacher asked the students to scan the text to find out the important elements that are mentioned in the given historical context. Also, the usage of a PowerPoint to illustrate how to analyse the historical context and identify the author's purpose was used effectively to simplify the lesson for the students.

On the other hand, there were some weaknesses that were observed in this class, such as the absence of any assessment tool, whether oral or written, to make sure that the girls understood the skill that was taught. One more negative point that was seen in Miss Salam's class was that she did not ask challenging questions for the high-achievers; she did not differentiate her instructions, nor offer a simplified worksheet for the low-achievers and the students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

After observing these two classes, the researcher found that the lesson that was introduced in the grade 10 girls' section was more organized than the lesson in the boys' section, but this cannot indicate a factor in the low-performance of boys in contrast to girls in academic achievement because Mr. Haitham was newly employed in the school, so he cannot be responsible for the accumulative low-achievement of the boys in the high school section.

Another observation was conducted in grade 9 boys who were taught also by a male teacher, Mr. Majid. He is an experienced teacher who has worked in the selected school for three years, and he has more than five years of experience in teaching the American curriculum. His lesson was also about a literary skill "Plot Stages", and the overall evaluation of his lesson is very good. The teacher depended mostly on a Power-Point, which was employed effectively, to display the objectives and demonstrate the lesson. A significant positive point in Mr. Majid's class was that he clearly stated and discussed the objectives of the lesson. Another positive point is that he used visuals to explain the *plot stages* as started explaining that any short story is composed of a series of events called *plot*, and then he showed the students a diagram explaining the *plot stages*. Another positive point was that the Lesson opening and engagement helped students figure out the text main idea. Another strong point was the division of the students into groups, who worked very effectively and collaboratively, to apply the skill on a long text; however, not all the students were engaged in the activity and a couple of the students fought over being the leader of the group.

On the other hand, some weak points that were noticed were that there were some disruptions by the disengaged students that affected the working groups. Also, due to the length of the text, the students were not able to finish the task in the allotted time, so when the teacher started discussing the students' answers, not every student was able to participate; especially in the last set of questions. Thus, a weakness point that was seen in this class was the assessment tool, as the teacher could have used a shorter text to analyse the plot stages, and thus he could have ample time to make sure that all the students understood the concept and he could have given constructive feedback on the students' answers and mistakes. Also, there was limited attention drawn to the distinguished students, as the questions that were asked suited the average and low-achievers only.

Comparatively, while attending the same lesson in the same grade in the girls' section, there was no big difference in the quality of teaching, but the good-manners of girls enabled the teacher to give them more time to accomplish the given tasks. Thus, the class of the girls was more organized and more productive, and the girls were far less disruptive, which enabled the teacher to achieve the objectives more efficiently. A significant positive point that was seen in this class is that the teacher used encouraging and positive language with the girls which motivated the rest of the class to participate in order to obtain appreciative words.

The researcher also attended classes of grade 11 boys, and one of which was taught by Mr. Omar who has 9 years of experience in teaching the American curriculum. The most significant observation about his class was that the teacher was strict with the students regarding their behaviours, so the students were cautious not to talk or make any disruptions. Thus, the teacher's management skills were evident, which was a positive point. Also, the teacher showed some other strength points as he has excellent subject knowledge and was able to put it in a meaningful context for the learners. Also, the teacher showed an understanding of the difficulty of certain concepts and presented a good repertoire of examples of *rhetorical devices* to reinforce their relevance to students. Another positive point was that he asked some students to read some parts of the selection, which isuseful to improve the students' reading skills. Also, the assessment sheet that was used to assess the students on parallelism was beneficial to check the students' understanding, and the teacher gave his students constructive feedback on their answers. Moreover, Teacher applied a very good strategy through guessing answers before reading, sharing and correcting answers after reading.

On the other hand, a weakness point of this class was the monotony during some parts of the lesson, especially when the teacher spoke for a long time, as some students seemed disengaged. It was recommended by the researcher that the teacher should have shown the students the video of Martin Luther King saying his speech "I Have a Dream" since it is a very famous speech and would have helped the students understand the importance of using repetition and parallelism to evoke the emotions of the readers and listeners and to emphasize the meanings.

In contrast, the parallel teacher in the girls' section, Miss Wafaa, was less strict with the girls as they were not disruptive, and warm rapport connected the teacher to her students, which was considered a positive area. Thus, the conversation between the teacher and her students was positive and productive, and the classroom management was strongly and smoothly maintained. Another positive point was that she depended on a video of the speech "I Have a Dream" to explain the *rhetorical devices* that Martin Luther King used in his speech as the video was an effective tool that made the students profoundly understand the usage of *rhetorical devices.* Moreover, the teacher engaged the students to use their inference skills in order to explain why a speaker or writer tends to use repetition and parallelism to convey his ideas.

On the other hand, there were some weaknesses in Miss Wafaa's class, one of which was the lack of an assessment tool in order to make sure that her students understood the concepts she taught. Thus, Lesson closure was an explicit weakness. Also, the teacher did not give the students enough examples of parallelism, so some of the students kept asking her on how to write a parallel structure. Moreover, the teacher's questions were focused and usually individualized for particular students, the active ones, while she neglected those who did not raise their hands for participation. Teacher needs to ask questions, elicit answers, and then show model answers afterwards

In the grade 12 boys' classroom, Mr. Ahmed who has more than 10 years of experience in the school was very close to his students, and he planned his lesson very well, which impacted the efficacy of teaching and learning process in the classroom. Some of the positive areas of this class were that the objectives were stated clearly, and the class was almost student-centred as the students were involved in acting *Shakespearian* drama, which resulted in students' comprehension of all the drama events. Thus, the students were engaged and participated in analysing the characters' motives and commenting about the events of the drama. Another positive point was that the conversation between the teacher and his students was very positive, and there was mutual respect between Mr. Ahmed and his students as he calls all of his students with their names preceded by Mr., so the researcher took a note to ask him about the reason why he shows all this respect to his students.

One area that needs to be improved in the future classes is that the teacher must assess each objective after it is covered to assess and to measure students' understanding. Another weakness point was that the teacher's instructional pace left some students confused.

The same lesson in the girls' section was observed; it was found that the teaching and learning process in the boys' section was more successful and interesting although the lesson in the girls' section was considered good as well. Most students were interested and engaged, which was seen a positive point in this lesson. Miss Mai introduced the lesson in an interesting way, and she employed the technology effectively as she showed them a sketch of the *Shakespearian* drama on YouTube, which enabled the students to understand the events. One more positive point is that the students were quiet and did not cause disruptions, and most of them participated in answering the teachers' questions.

One weakness area that was noticed in this class was that the teacher spent a lot of time translating the difficult old English words, which could have been avoided by defining the

key words that could hinder the students' comprehension of the text. Another weakness point was that the teacher did not discuss the objectives of the lesson with her students. Also, the teacher needed to ask more questions, elicit answers, and then show model answers afterwards.

After conducting all the exploratory observations in both boys' and girls' sections, the researcher perceived that there was no big difference in the quality of teaching between boys' and girls' classes as most of the teachers did their best to make sure that their students understood the lessons; however, the researcher found that there are some factors that impact boys' underachievement in this private school. First, an important factor that impacted the boys' achievement is the reality that some of them were more disruptive and disengaged that would surely affect both their term marks and their classmates' term marks. A second important factor that affected the boys' outcome in ESL classes was the lack of positive conversation and participation between the boys and their teachers in some of the observed classes. Also, the researcher noticed that the teachers did not have high expectations of their students, which was proven by the type of questions that did not challenge the distinguished students as the questions were directed to be answered by the average students. Moreover, the researcher found that there was limited attention given to the weak students in both boys' and girls' classes. Lastly, the assessment tools should have been given more attention and time to make sure that the students' accomplished the objectives of the lessons.

Thus, in order to develop a profound understanding of the factors that affect boys' academic underachievement, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the observed teachers and the leaders who evaluate their work. Furthermore, the researcher chose a focus group of students who were disruptive and disengaged and also some distinguished students in order to ask them about their perspectives about the factors affecting boys' achievement.

The second phase of this research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with teachers, leaders, and students in order to answer the following questions:

3- What are the teachers' and leaders' perspectives of factors that contribute to the girls' outperformance of boys?

4-What are the students' perspectives regarding the factors that resulted in their lower marks compared to girls' marks?

The interview was mainly composed of ten questions, and some additional questions were presented to the previously observed teachers in order to explore the reasons why they adopted some kinds of teaching practices.

In the teachers' interviews, the first three questions were basic questions that were dedicated to introduce themselves, their positions, their grade they are teaching and whether they teach boys or girls. See (Appendix 2). Then, the rest of the questions followed this sequence:

4- Why do you think boys' marks and academic achievements are lower than girls'?

All participants stated that the boys' disruptions inside the classroom are the major factor impacting on their results. As for Mr. Ahmed, a teacher and coordinator, he mentioned that two important reasons behind the boys' underachievement are the distractions that the boys experience in their daily lives and also the lack of competition between boys in contrast with what happens between girls as they are more jealous and compete to achieve better than their classmates.

> 'I believe that there are many reasons behind this. The most significant reason is the distractions that boys have in their daily lives which, for me, are real barriers for their academic achievement. These distractions might include going out with friends, computer games, and the level of freedom they have in general. Another reason why boys achieve lower than girls is the fact that they usually lack jealousy which is a great motivation for girls; especially in the high school. This acceptance of the boys' achievement levels kills competition and eliminates their desire to achieve better.'

Similarly, Mr. Majid delivered almost the same answer as Mr. Ahmed as he assured that the main reasons of the boys' underachievement are the boys' distractions and their shorter concentration span; so he said that the boys' need variation and quick shifts in tasks and activities to keep the boys fully engaged in the lesson.

> 'Usually both boys and girls absorb the same skills, but boys' reflections are less than the girls', simply because boys can be easily distracted, their concentration span is shorter, and they need quick shift or change every now and then to keep them fully engaged in class.'

Mr. Haitham assured that the reason behind boys' lower achievement is the lack of commitment and interest; especially in literary themes.

> 'I guess boys show lower levels of commitment; in addition to their lack of interest in literary themes. Boys prefer to have it easier in our male-dominant community'

In the same vein, Mr. Mohammed, assured on the same points his colleagues elaborated, and he added that the boys spend less time doing their homework and completing tasks than girls, and that they do not believe that performing well at school is a cool thing to do.

> 'The most important reason is that boys usually have more distractions than girls. Also, boys are usually less motivated than girls, they do not believe that doing well at school is a cool thing, and they spend less time doing their homework and assignments than girls.'

Moreover, Mr. Anas emphasized that boys do not have multitasking abilities, and that they depend on being spoon-fed the information by their teachers and do not make effort at home because they believe that the information they obtain at school is enough for them to pass the tests. He also added an important factor, which is that boys prefer playing sports than studying, and they conceive it as more significant than education. Mr. Anas also, agreed with his colleagues that the boys are less motivated than girls.

> 'Unlike girls, boys are not multi-taskers; as they cannot do two things at the same time. Also, boys in general do not like studying as they depend on the information that they grab from their teachers thinking that this is sufficient for them to get the required score to pass the different subjects. Furthermore, boys are less motivated than girls and have negative attitudes towards the school, and they consider the sports that they enjoy practicing more important than education.'

The Head of Department, Miss Nisreen, stated that boys have a totally different attitude and mindset when it comes to learning than girls. In terms of attitude, boys generally possess different learning skills and approaches than those adopted by girls; boys are mostly kinesthetic, active learners who tend to learn by doing and interaction. For inexperienced teachers, this might be considered as violation of the typical classroom behaviour. She also added that rarely has she seen a male student who is willing to spend hours studying English grammar or practicing spelling; on the other hand, girls show more commitment and devotion to learning in general.

Similarly, the boys were asked the same questions, and their answers were varied. Jassim who is a tenth grader believes that the boys' disruption in classroom causes him to concentrate less on the lesson, and thus he cannot perform well in the given assignments and tests. Moreover, another participant in grade 11, Mohammed, said that education is not important for boys because they can join the armed forces and get high salaries once they graduate from school, and the marks will not affect joining the military forces or not,

so he prefers doing other activities like sports rather than studying. Another student called Abdulla said that he does not prefer to study English as it needs lots of memorization, and he prefers subjects like Math because it only depends on understanding during classrooms. Also, Mohammad who is a twelfth-grader stated that he does not study English because it is boring, and he does not like to read long passages.

5- What are some obstacles that face you as a teacher in teaching boys?

Most of the participants agreed that the lack of motivation is one of the most challenging obstacles in teaching boys. Another teacher claimed that another obstacle is the boys' indifference to their achievement; some of them only want to pass while others want marks without even any effort from their side. Furthermore, Mr. Mohammed added that he always struggles in adapting lessons to match boys' interests. Moreover, Mr. Anas emphasized that some obstacles that face him in teaching boys are that boys have low self-esteem, and they do not believe in their abilities to achieve well because of the lack of support from teachers and parents. Also, he sometimes suffers because of some boys' rudeness and impolite behaviour.

> 'Teachers who are teaching boys are suffering from many obstacles that can block the boys from scoring high grades. Some of these obstacles are: firstly, their mindsets; the way they think about themselves and about others. Secondly, their behaviour; as some students are so impolite and rude with their teachers and with their peers as well. Thirdly, many boys have low self-esteem as they do not believe in their abilities and capabilities to excel in the school subjects, and this happens due to the lack of support from both parents and teachers.'

6- What do you think facilitates teaching and thus achievement in girls' sections?

The participants agreed on similar points, such as that the girls are internally motivated, they are not easily distracted, they are quiet by nature, and they are less hyperactive than boys. Mr. Ahmed assured again on the competitive skills of the girls as he said:

> 'Generally speaking, the quiet nature and the competitive skills of the girls are the most essential domains that empower their accomplishments.'

Mr. Omar's answer was more comprehensive and convincing as he said:

> 'I think the facilities do not differ at all between both sections, but since the girls are internally motivated and that is due to their psychological entity and the adequate support that they receive from peers, parents, and teachers, they perform better than boys.'

7- Which English skill the boys hate to study or to interact with the teacher in class?

Most participants stated that boys dislike literary selections and reading long passages as they find it boring and less interesting than other skills. Mr. Majid said:

> 'Boys despise reading long passages in the reading comprehension period. To be more specific, they hate reading informational texts. In addition, they hate writing essays.'

One of the answers, posed by Mr. Yasser, was different than the other participants as he mentioned that speaking and verbal interaction is the skill the boys hated most. This answer is deeply related to the conversational analysis that is adopted in this research.

> 'Speaking skill is the most crucial obstacle the boys face in class. The language barrier relegates students' speaking and consequently their verbal interaction become very limited as well as their written outcomes.'

By asking the participants from the male students the same question, most of them said that they hate the literature classes as they find it hard and not interesting at all. Some of the participants stated that they hated to study grammar because it is hard.

8- What are some strategies that you use to grab the boys' attention in class?

The interviewed teachers and leaders listed many useful strategies that help them in engaging the students in their lessons. Mr. Ali stated that he usually displays videos in his classes as boys enjoy watching videos about the selections that they are studying, and they like using technology in teaching and learning such as Prezi or Google class. Moreover, they enjoy working in pairs. Mr. Ahmed claimed that teaching the new concepts through competitive games will stimulate their minds to work and will allow them to enhance their performance and correspondingly their grades in any subject; while Mr. Mohammed assured that he always adapts lessons and links them to their interest, and he also strikes up competitions works wonders. Moreover, Mr. Yasser also said that boys in general are not quite interested in traditional learning strategies. Thus, using digital resources and focusing on updated issues, case studies, and real-life application grab their attention and help the teacher in getting amazing outcomes from his students. Mr. Haitham claimed that one of the successful strategies that can be implemented is praising their great work, as boys like to be praised in front of their classmates, which will create a competitive atmosphere in the class.

9- What are the possible solutions to overcome the difficulties in teaching boys and thus improve their academic achievement?

In order to overcome the problem of boys' underachievement, the researcher found that it is important to ask the teachers about their perceptions of the possible solutions for this problem. Mr. Ahmed suggested that the boys should be given a space to express their opinions regarding their learning preferences, so being an effective part of the educational process will build a solid trust between both learners and educators. He also emphasized varying the teaching methodologies as boys hate conventional methods of teaching, and they love the teacher who keeps coming up with innovative ways and techniques that would benefit their ability to comprehend new and difficult concepts in different subjects. Moreover, he stressed the importance of simplifying instructions and concepts for boys as they hate complicated definitions and instructions, so as a boy's teacher you need to make everything so simple and explicit for them. Mr. Ahmed also added that whenever boys do not comprehend some parts of the lesson, they start misbehaving immediately. As for Mr. Anas, he claimed that it is important to re-enhance the boys' learning skills from early stages, and that introducing differentiated instructions and assessment tools are the most essential requirements to overcome such a difficulty in the boys' performance. Furthermore, Mr. Omar highlighted the importance of understanding the psychological aspects of boys because boys' attitudes towards learning are highly affected by their psychology.

10 – How often does the administration organize professional development workshops?

This question was presented to both teachers and leaders, and most of the interviewees agreed that these kinds of workshops happen once per term as the teachers themselves prepare and introduce different topics related to teaching and learning methodologies and classroom management strategies. The other meetings that occur during the year are mostly follow-ups of the administrative orders and conveying the leaders' voice.

The researcher believes that one professional development workshop is not enough at all, especially for the newly-hired teachers as there must be frequent and consistent workshops in order to improve the teachers' practices inside the classrooms and help the teachers learn effective classroom management strategies.

Some additional questions were presented to certain teachers such as Mr. Haitham who introduced more than one skill in the same class. When the researcher asked Mr. Haitham

about the reason why he introduced all these skills in one classroom, he answered that he had to complete the vocabulary list that he started introducing the previous day, and he claimed that the other skills are related to the same lesson, so he believed that they can be taught in one class.

Moreover, Mr. Ahmed was asked about the reason why he adds the title, Mr., before calling his students' names. He noted that this creates mutual respect between them, and when boys are dealt with as adults, they make great effort in order to impress their teacher. Consequently, the disruptions will be less and there will be positive communication between the boys and their teacher. This is perceived a positive factor that may contribute to the boys' performance in academic settings and can result in improving the engagement level inside the classroom, which will lead to a better academic performance in term tests.

Also, some students were asked about the reasons that make them participate less in the classrooms. Some of the participants mentioned that there are some complicated tasks and instructions that make them unable to answer the questions. Moreover, some of the students mentioned that they cannot read very well, so they do not raise their hands to read as they feel shy and are afraid to be criticised. Some students mentioned that they cannot express their answers in English very well, so they prefer not to share their answers.

Moreover, some students assured that teachers always shout at them, even for minor misbehaviours, which affects the relationship between the students and their teachers.

As mentioned earlier, the interviews phase occurred after conducting the class observations. Thus, after interviewing teachers, leaders, and students, the researcher concluded some points. First of all, most of the teachers' responses were ideal, which indicates that the teachers are aware of the effective teaching strategies. Secondly, all the interviewees hold negative perceptions about the boys that they are teaching, which surely affect the quality of teaching and interaction between teachers and students. Thirdly, most of the students guarantee that they will have high positions in the future whether in the military forces or other governmental jobs that do not require college qualifications, and this surely results in their lower effort they do both at school and at home. Moreover, it was observed that not all teachers use technology in their teaching which resulted in the students' boredom and being disengaged in the classroom. Also, the teachers do not have high expectations of their male students, so this may affect the students' self-esteem and confidence, and thus they will not make significant effort to perform well in quizzes, assignments, and tests. Although it is

complex to analyse the classroom interactions, evidence through observations of teacher-student interaction and behaviour proved that boys and girls were treated somehow differently in most of the observed classrooms, and this differential treatment of boys and girls in the classrooms was noted by the boys who were interviewed. They mentioned that they usually get more negative attention than the girls. There is evidence that claims that the tolerance level of teachers is higher towards girls' misbehaviour than that to boys' (Pickering & Lodge 1998), and this attitude results in boys' negative reaction to learning. Also, the more aggressive the teacher is inside the classroom, the more conflicts occur between the teachers and the boys due to the clash between the teachers' authority and the boys' growing masculinity. This notion of masculinity is a main factor in making the boys less likely to ask for help or support or to work co-operatively with their peers. Moreover, after observing the boys' classrooms, it was easily inferred that there is no sufficient training for the boys' teachers; especially the newly employed ones as the administrative members, head of departments, and coordinators should make sure that their teachers use effective teaching methodologies inside their classrooms.

Comparing this case study to other studies done on the same topic, some findings are similar, such as in Majzub & Rais (2010) as they claim that one of the important factors that impacts boys' academic levels is that the boys do not have a high need for achievement or future ambition. Another case study was conducted in secondary schools in Britain by Younger, Warrington, & Williams (1999) in which they state that there are generalizations made regarding girls and boys as teachers perceive girls to be more organized and good self-learners, meanwhile, teachers perceive boys as more vocal, less advanced for their academic year, and easily distracted. Also, their study proves that boys receive more negative attention as boys are mostly shouted at or sent out of the class for being talkative, so there is less tolerance for the boys' misdeeds.

Moreover, the researcher concluded that teachers' expectations and attitudes played a major role in the boys' performance. A similar study was done in Jamaica, and it was observed that teacher-student interaction, including participation and level of feedback, relies on the expectations of the teachers (Clark 2005). Furthermore, Watson, Williams & Riddell (2011) stated that there is evidence that proves that boys react correspondingly to the teachers' expectations about their low-achievement, and the boys who desire to study are not assisted by the school system as the masculine discourse negatively impacts the academic behaviour of the boys. Another study that was conducted in the Seychelles, inferred that the reason

behind the boys' lack of interest in school is the expectation that boys behave and achieve lower than girls (Ministry of Education and Youth 2002). Also, it was assured that the teachers' differential expectations affect the students' own expectations for themselves (Cobbett & Younger 2012; Hartley & Sutton 2013). Thus, words such as 'clever', 'hardworking', and 'have potential' can influence the students' approval and comprehension of their identities and can boost the students' respect to their school (Maher & Martino 1996).

Apparently, the findings from observations and interviews are significant to this research paper as they helped the researcher answer the four research questions that were introduced in the "Introduction Chapter". Also, the study can be replicated to understand the factors that impact boys' academic underachievement in other schools; especially that there are not enough studies done on the same issue in the UAE context. Most of the findings were expected to be found in classrooms and during interviews. Also, it is evident that the academic leaders should offer more training workshops to the teachers; especially the new ones. Moreover, the researcher expected to find the disruptive behaviours of boys in classrooms and the disengagement of some of the male students in the introduced lessons.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper offered an exploration of boys' academic underachievement in a private school in Dubai. The objectives of this study were to find out the factors that contribute to the boys' underachievement in an ESL setting, to identify the teachers', leaders', and students' perceptions of the reasons of boys' low-performance in high school, and to explore if there was a disparity in the quality of teaching between boys' and girls' sections.

The literature review explored the main pillars of the issue under study. Firstly, it addressed the factors that researchers believe affect the performance of boys in comparison with girls. Secondly, the paper presented the current problem in the UAE context, and then it discussed the importance of conversation analysis inside classrooms, which can impact the teaching and learning process within the boys' section. Most importantly, the four research questions that were presented in the 'Introduction Chapter,' were elaborately answered in the 'Finding and Discussion Chapter'.

The findings of the first question were obtained by observing ESL classrooms to explore the factors that affected boys' performance in term marks. The researcher concluded that the factors that affect boys' academic achievement are the disruptions that the boys cause during the lessons, the lack of positive interaction between the teacher and his students in some of the attended classes, the teachers' low expectations in the boys' performance, which was evident from the level of the questions that were asked by the teachers inside the classrooms, and the insufficient attention that the teachers give to the low-achievers inside the classrooms. The most expected finding was the behaviour of the boys as most of the boys were disruptive and did not show interest in the lesson that the teachers presented.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews, which were done to answer the second and third questions of this study, showed that the teachers have low expectations of the performance of their male students, and also the students have low self-esteem and do not have confidence that they can perform better. Another important finding is that the boys themselves do not have high ambitions to achieve well as they said that they are guaranteed good jobs whether in the public sector or in the armed forces, so they do not need to achieve high marks to have a secure future.

The finding of the fourth question of this study, which is related to the disparity in the teaching quality, is that there is no evident difference in the quality of teaching between the boys' and girls' sections. However, there must be more attention given to the assessment tools during and after teaching the lessons.

This case study is significant as it can be replicated in similar private schools to understand the factors of boys' low-performance in the UAE setting. Also, the same study could be replicated in different contexts, such as public and vocational schools to explore if the same factors that affect boys' achievement in different settings and compare the results of the findings of this study to findings of other studies. Thus, the educators can find effective solutions based on the findings.

The male gender gap in education should be profoundly explored to identify effective solutions to this problem and to improve the competitiveness of the students. Moreover, solving this problem may result in many social and economic benefits. It is crucial to find ways to boost boys' academic achievement in high school education. Thus, if researchers and educators do not give this problem the attention it requires, there will definitely be severe long-term consequences for all the citizens who live in the UAE.

5.2 Recommendations:

The researcher offers some recommendations to be followed in order to overcome the problem of boys' underachievement in the high school section in the selected private school. Firstly, to overcome the existing problems of the students' disruptions inside the classroom and the students' low self-esteem, the social worker's role must be effective in the boys' section as they must motivate the boys to boost their self-confidence, and they must advise the students to be disciplined in their classes. Also, depending on the finding that the school organizes only one day per term for professional development, it is recommended to increase the number of these workshops in order to make sure that the teachers, especially the newly-hired ones, use effective teaching methodologies and that they use positive language with their students. Also, it is very important to ask the girls' and boys' teachers, especially the newly-employed, to make peer and cross visits in order to learn different methodologies in teaching and increase the teachers' experiences.

Furthermore, depending on the finding that most of the teachers do not have high expectations in the boys' abilities to achieve better, all the teachers, leaders, and social

workers must raise their expectations of boys' abilities as the boys will continue to perform poorly if they are treated with low expectations. Also, the teachers must ask the students more critical and challenging questions in order to address the distinguished students and make the boys believe that they are able to answer these types of questions, and there must be special support and simplified instructions for the low-achievers in order to help them perform better and improve their academic level as most of the teachers did not show differentiation neither in the instructions , nor the worksheets, so the week students seemed somehow neglected.

Moreover, depending on the finding that not all of the teachers linked the big ideas of the literary selections to the students real life contexts, the teachers should make more effort to link the knowledge of the students to the context in order to engage the students in dialogues with their classmates and with their teachers to validate comprehension (Tunstall & Gsipps 1996).

Also, teachers must adapt their lessons to the boys' preferences and keep coming up with innovative ways and techniques that will increase their ability to comprehend new and complex concepts in the ESL setting. This will eliminate the boredom that was noticed in some of the boys' classes. Moreover, it is crucial to simplify concepts and instructions, especially for the weak students, as some students stated that complicated definitions and instructions hindered their understanding of some English lessons, so boys' teachers need to make everything clear and explicit for all students.

Moreover, depending on the finding that some students were not fluent in reading or speaking inside the classroom and also on what the boys' said during the interview about being too shy to participate in class because their reading or speaking skills are not that perfect, there must be some curricular activities, such as drama clubs, to increase the cooperative learning and engage the students into the reading and speaking tasks.

5.3 Limitations

There were some limitations that faced the researcher while conducting this research. First, not all the selected students wanted to be interviewed, and some of the students were shy to express their opinions. The feasibility of research is often bound to accessibility to data and time constraints which contributed to hindering the researcher in obtaining the required data earlier. Also, since a group of the target participants are high school students, their parents'

consent was had to be obtained; consequently, reaching out to all parents was challenging. Moreover, it was difficult to meet all the administrative staff due to their busy schedules. Also, this case study investigated the boys' performance based on term marks, but the researcher did not examine the students' performance in international tests, such as MAP and PISA tests, due to the confidentiality of these reports.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 (Observation Form)

Revised

Note to evaluator: Prior to observation, underline performance areas identified by teacher as target for growth.

Dubai National School
Classroom Observation Form

S = Strength Area
P = Proficient
T = Target for Growth
U = Unsatisfactory

Teacher: _____ Subject: _____

Grade/Subject: _____ Date of Observation: _____

Directions: Place an "X" in the appropriate column if the indicator has been observed. No "X" denotes Not Observed.

Instructional Skills	S	P	T	U	Comments
Check if observed: 1. Objectives are clear and consistent with SOLs and/or defined curricula. (I-1) 2. Lesson is opened with overview and relevance established (anticipatory set). (I-2) 3. A prototype or example is provided to guide student's work. (I-2) 4. Teacher has appropriate closure to lesson. (I-2) 5. Teacher refocuses instruction every 15-20 minutes (age plus 2 minutes). (I-2) 6. Teacher checks for prior learning of students. (I-2, I-4) 7. Instruction is differentiated for diverse learners. (I-2, I-3, I-8) 8. Teacher actively listens and responds to students in a constructive manner. (I-5) 9. Variety of resources/materials are used. ((I-6) 10. Technology is integrated. (I-3, I-6)					
11. Teacher emphasizes major points through repetition and use of visual image-links. (I-6) 12. Students are engaged in hands-on, interactive learning activities. (I-6, I-7) 13. Teacher frequently asks questions that reflect high-level thinking. (I-7)					
Communication	S	P	T	U	Comments
Check if observed: 1. Teacher maintains professional dress and demeanor. (P-1) 2. Teacher communicates using precise language and acceptable oral expression. (I-5, M-4, P-4) 3. Teacher communicates clearly in writing. (I-5, P-4)					

Assessment Skills	S	P	T	U	Comments
Check if observed: 1. Students self-assess work and progress. (A-1) 2. Teacher conducts on-going assessment via walking around and checking for learning. (A-1) 3. Student progress is monitored before, during, and after instruction. (A-2) 4. Teacher provides appropriate feedback to students. (A-2, I-5) 5. Instruction is paced appropriately for learners. (A-3) 6. Authentic assessment applied to real-life experiences is evidenced in instruction. (A-3, I-4) 7. Assessment measures are consistent with content being taught. (A-3) 8. Teacher adjusts instruction based on assessments. (A-3) 9. Tests provide SOL practice, where applicable. (A-3)					
Management Skills	S	P	T	U	**Comments**
Check if observed: 1. All students are engaged in appropriate learning tasks. (M-1) 2. The teacher constructively redirects students who are off task. (M-1) 3. Teacher models caring, fairness, humor, respect and courtesy. (M-2) 4. Environment is welcoming. (M-3) 5. Procedures and routines are posted and adhered to by students and teacher. (M-3, M-4) 6. Teacher minimizes effects of disruptive behavior. (M-4)					

Observer's Signature: _____Date: _____

Teacher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 2 (Interview Questions)

Boys' Underachievement

1- Introduce yourself and your position.

2- Which grade are you teaching?

3- Do you teach boys or girls?

4- Why do you think boys' marks and academic achievements are lower than girls'?

5- What are some obstacles that face you as a teacher in teaching boys?

6- What do you think facilitates teaching and thus achievement in girls' sections?

7- Which English skill the boys hate to study or to interact with the teacher in class?

8- What are some strategies that you use to grab the boys' attention in class?

9- What are the possible solutions to overcome the difficulties in teaching boys and thus improve their academic achievement?

10 – How often does the administration organize professional development workshops?