School Resources and the Gender Literacy Gap in South African Schools

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Introduction

- We estimate the relationship between resource inputs in South African primary schools and reading achievement of boys and girls.
- Literacy linked to educational opportunities, well-being and democratic participation.
- Literacy an indicator of economic development.

Introduction

- Analyse performance patterns for Grade 6 boys and girls in 2000 and 2007.
- Explanations for differences
  - Student individual background.
  - Schooling environment.

Gender, Education and Inequality in South Africa

- Transform the public education system to serve the poor.
- Quality of education varies greatly.
  - Under-resourced and poorly managed schools.
  - High quality schools for the elite.
- Focus on gender remains important.
  - May increase vulnerabilities of at-risk groups.
  - Major policy shifts in education.
  - Consequences of male underachievement far-reaching.

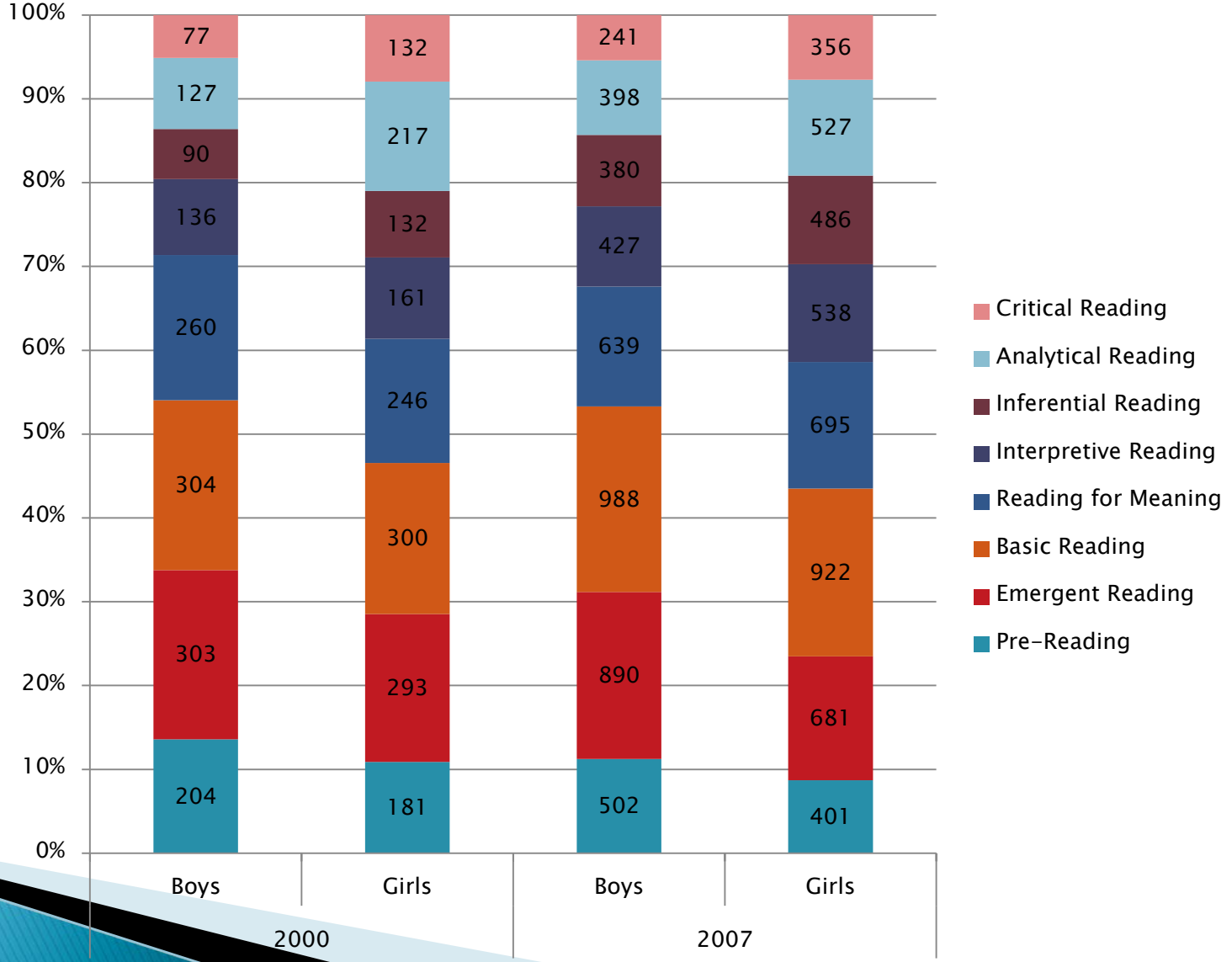
Key Issues from the Literature

- Internationally, gender-based differences in literacy tend to favour girls.
- Across economic and cultural spectrum.
- Explanations include biological, behavioural, societal and cultural.
- South African boys more likely to repeat a grade and to drop out of school.

Key Issues from the Literature

- School facilities make more of a difference in developing countries.
- Schools with better resources attract better teachers.
- Lack of libraries and books in vernacular languages.
- Confusion about how resources should be used and the role of teachers.
  - Traditional vs. progressive approaches and boys' reading skills development.

Literacy Levels of South African Boys and Girls



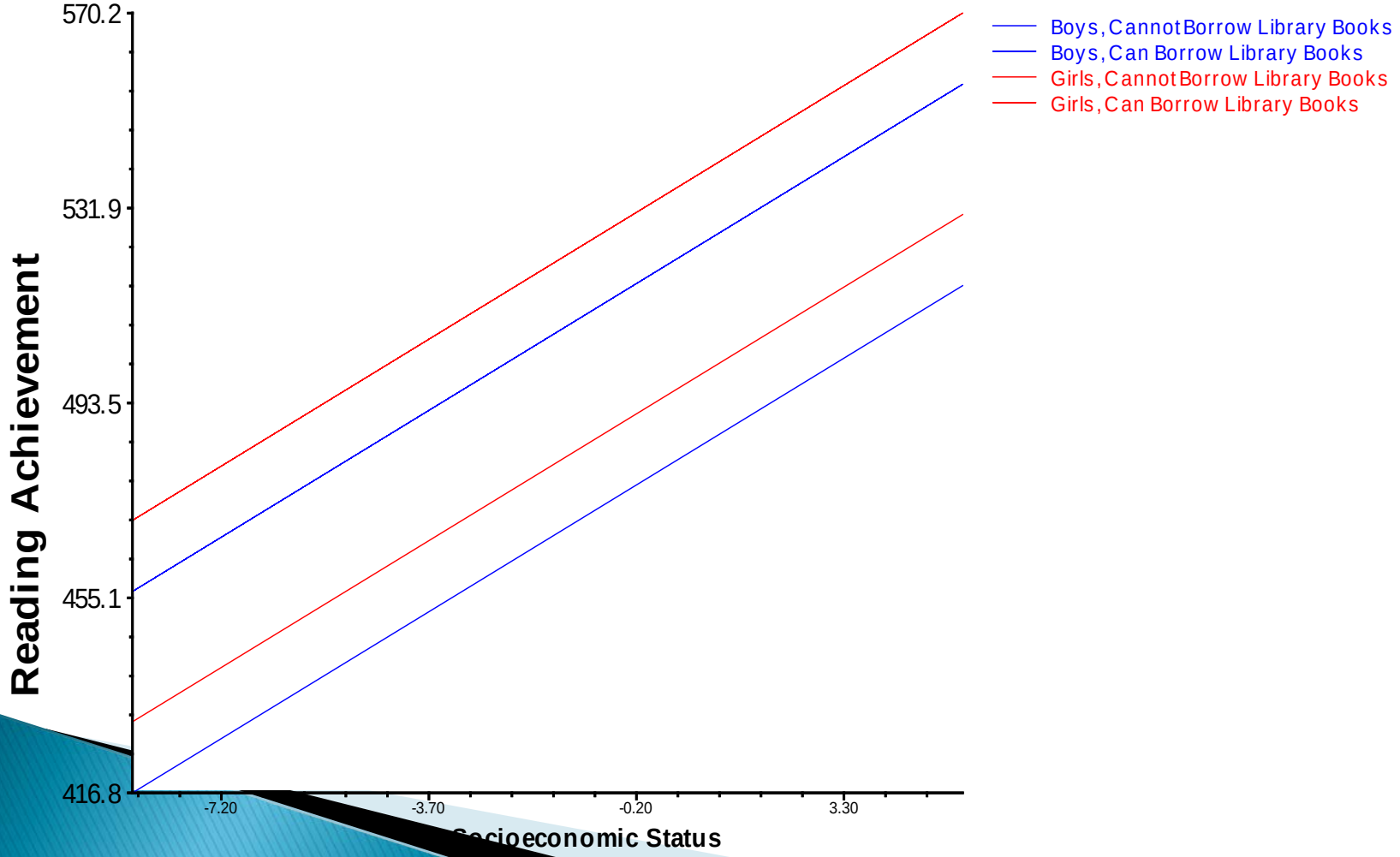
Results of Descriptive Analysis

- More boys at the lower end of the ability spectrum.
- Greater number of girls at the advanced levels.
- Higher proportion of boys had repeated a Grade
- Higher percentage of girls borrowing books from school library, owning a textbook and having homework corrected.

Results of Regression Analysis

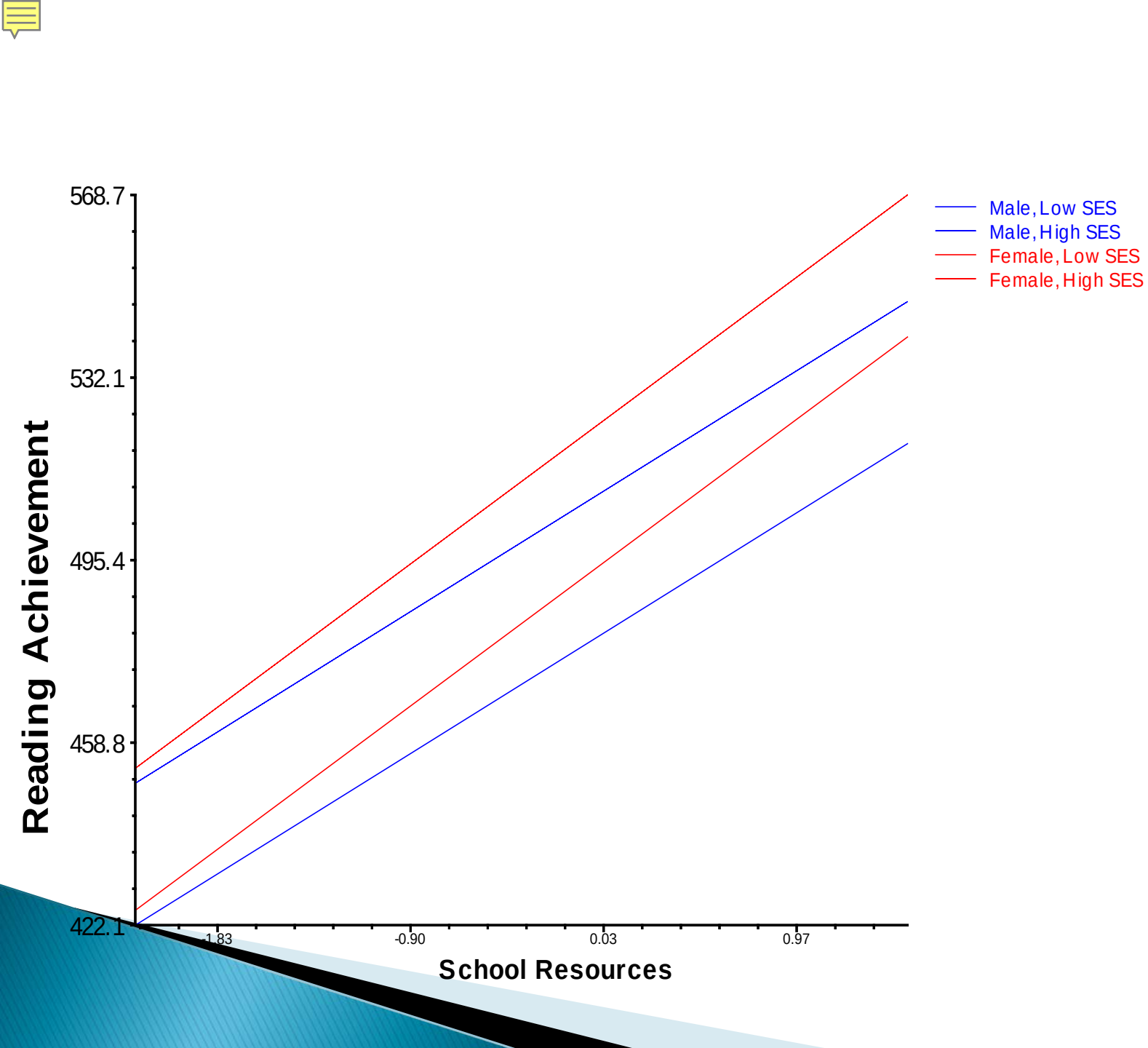
- On average, test scores of girls 13 and 23 points higher (2000 and 2007).
- Higher socioeconomic status, speaking English at home, access to library facilities and support with homework related to higher reading scores for both boys and girls.
- Grade repetition associated with a lower mean outcome for all students.

Results of Regression Analysis



Results of Multilevel Model

- Teacher experience, teacher tertiary education, school size little or no effect.
- School resources and in-service teacher training related to higher reading scores.
- Gender gap wider in resource-rich schools.
- Consistent for the two periods.
- Either type of resources better suited for girls or girls using resource more effectively to improve their literacy skills.


568.7
532.1
495.4
458.8
422.1
Reading Achievement
-1.83
-0.90
0.03
0.97
School Resources
Male, Low SES
Male, High SES
Female, Low SES
Female, High SES

Conclusion

- Gender gap favouring girls in reading significant and increasing with time.
- Strong links between student reading skills, material resources and teacher training.
- Reading scores higher among boys and girls who could borrow school library books (2007).

Conclusion

- Physical resources especially important to girls – good news.
- Better school facilities – better teachers – stronger academic culture
- Girls more comfortable in learning-oriented environments.
- Challenge – how to ensure resources invested so that benefits extend to boys' literacy education.

THANK YOU