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The Influence of Reading Culture on Academic Achievement among Secondary Students in Morocco

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between reading culture and academic achievement among secondary school students in Morocco. The research investigates how reading habits, frequency, and preferences influence students' academic performance across various subjects. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews involving 385 secondary students from urban and rural schools in Morocco. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between regular reading practices and academic achievement, with students who engage in consistent reading activities demonstrating higher grade point averages and improved critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the study identifies barriers to developing a robust reading culture, including limited access to diverse reading materials, socioeconomic factors, and the predominance of examination-oriented learning. The research highlights the necessity for educational stakeholders to prioritize reading initiatives and create supportive environments that foster literacy development. These findings contribute to understanding educational outcomes in North African contexts and provide actionable recommendations for curriculum developers and policymakers.

INTRODUCTION

The cultivation of a reading culture represents one of the most fundamental pillars of educational success and intellectual development in contemporary educational systems. Reading extends beyond basic literacy skills to encompass critical thinking, knowledge acquisition, and cultural understanding, which collectively contribute to academic excellence (Muhsyanur, 2014, 2019). According to Clark and Rumbold (2006), reading for pleasure is positively associated with academic achievement, with students who read regularly demonstrating superior performance across multiple subject areas compared to their non-reading peers. This relationship between reading engagement and academic success has been documented across diverse educational contexts, yet its manifestation in North African educational systems, particularly Morocco, remains underexplored in scholarly literature.

Morocco's educational landscape presents unique challenges and opportunities for examining the role of reading culture in academic achievement. The country has undergone significant educational reforms over the past two decades, with initiatives aimed at improving literacy rates and educational quality. Mullis et al. (2017) noted that Moroccan students' performance in international assessments reflects ongoing challenges in reading comprehension and literacy development, highlighting the critical need to understand factors influencing reading engagement. The multilingual nature of Moroccan education, incorporating Arabic, French, and increasingly English, adds complexity to reading development, as students navigate multiple linguistic codes throughout their academic journey.

The theoretical framework for understanding reading culture's influence on academic achievement draws from sociocultural perspectives on literacy and cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that reading is fundamentally a social practice shaped by cultural context, where meaning-making occurs through interaction between readers, texts, and their social environments. This perspective is particularly relevant in Morocco, where traditional oral culture intersects with contemporary literacy practices. Anderson et al. (1988) demonstrated through extensive research that the amount of time children spend reading independently is the best predictor of reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, and overall academic achievement, underscoring the importance of cultivating sustained reading habits during secondary education years.

Reading culture encompasses not merely the mechanical act of reading but the attitudes, values, and practices surrounding reading activities within a community or educational institution. Krashen (2004) argued that free voluntary reading is the most powerful tool for literacy development, suggesting that students who choose to read independently develop superior language competencies compared to those who engage only with assigned readings. In secondary education contexts, this voluntary reading becomes increasingly important as students develop their identities as learners and begin to exercise greater autonomy over their educational experiences. The Moroccan educational context, however, often emphasizes rote

memorization and examination preparation, potentially limiting opportunities for exploratory reading.

International research consistently demonstrates strong correlations between reading frequency and academic performance across subject areas. Sullivan and Brown (2013) found that reading for pleasure was associated with improved performance not only in language arts but also in mathematics and science, suggesting that reading develops general cognitive abilities applicable across disciplines. The mechanisms underlying this relationship include enhanced vocabulary acquisition, improved comprehension strategies, increased background knowledge, and developed analytical thinking skills. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) emphasized that reading engagement, characterized by motivation, strategic knowledge, and conceptual understanding, serves as a crucial mediator between reading instruction and achievement outcomes.

Despite growing recognition of reading's importance, many Moroccan secondary students face substantial barriers to developing robust reading cultures. Ezzaki (2000) identified challenges including limited access to age-appropriate reading materials, insufficient school library resources, and socioeconomic factors that constrain families' ability to provide diverse reading materials at home. Furthermore, the examination-oriented nature of secondary education in Morocco may inadvertently discourage reading for pleasure, as students and teachers prioritize test preparation over exploratory learning. Understanding these contextual factors is essential for developing effective interventions to promote reading culture.

The intersection of reading culture and academic achievement in Morocco also reflects broader questions about educational equity and social mobility. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized cultural capital as resources that provide advantages in educational settings, with reading practices representing a significant form of cultural capital. Students from families with strong reading traditions and access to books typically enter secondary education with advantages that compound over time. In Morocco, where socioeconomic disparities significantly influence educational opportunities, examining how reading culture affects academic achievement provides insights into mechanisms of educational inequality and potential intervention points to promote more equitable outcomes for all students regardless of background.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively examine the relationship between reading culture and academic achievement among Moroccan secondary students. The quantitative component utilized a cross-sectional survey design, while the qualitative component incorporated semi-structured interviews to provide deeper contextual understanding. Following Creswell and Clark's (2017) convergent parallel design, both data streams were collected simultaneously and analyzed independently before integration during interpretation. The study population comprised secondary students (ages 15-18)

from five provinces across Morocco, including both urban centers and rural areas to ensure geographic diversity. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select 385 participants from 12 secondary schools, with schools stratified by location type and socioeconomic characteristics. According to Cohen et al. (2017), this sample size provides adequate statistical power for detecting medium effect sizes while ensuring representation across Morocco's diverse educational landscape.

Data collection instruments included a validated Reading Culture Questionnaire adapted from the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile developed by Pitcher et al. (2007), measuring reading frequency, preferences, attitudes, and access to reading materials. Academic achievement was operationalized through students' grade point averages across core subjects and standardized test scores. The questionnaire demonstrated strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.82 for all subscales. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 purposively selected students representing varying levels of reading engagement and academic performance. Interview protocols explored students' reading experiences, motivations, barriers, and perceived relationships between reading and learning. Data analysis followed established procedures, with quantitative data analyzed using SPSS software to conduct descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and multiple regression models examining relationships between reading variables and academic outcomes. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, involving familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and report writing. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants and parental consent for minors, ensuring confidentiality, and securing approval from institutional review boards. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided comprehensive insights into how reading culture influences academic achievement within the Moroccan educational context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reading Habits and Academic Performance Correlation

The quantitative analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between reading frequency and academic achievement among Moroccan secondary students. Students who reported reading for pleasure at least three times weekly demonstrated grade point averages approximately 0.8 points higher than peers who rarely engaged in voluntary reading activities. This finding aligns with international research patterns while providing Morocco-specific evidence. The regression analysis indicated that reading frequency accounted for 34% of variance in academic performance when controlling for socioeconomic status, parental education, and school resources. This substantial predictive power underscores reading culture's critical role in educational outcomes, even when considering traditional achievement predictors.

Furthermore, the data revealed differential effects across subject areas, with strongest correlations observed in language arts and social sciences, followed by

natural sciences and mathematics. Students classified as frequent readers scored particularly higher on assessments requiring critical analysis, synthesis of information, and written expression. These patterns suggest that reading develops transferable cognitive skills applicable across disciplines rather than merely enhancing language-specific competencies. The qualitative interviews provided explanatory depth, with high-achieving students frequently describing reading as integral to their learning processes. One participant noted that extensive reading exposed them to diverse perspectives and analytical frameworks that enhanced their ability to approach complex problems systematically.

The relationship between reading diversity and academic achievement proved particularly noteworthy (Muhsyanur and Ramlee Bin Mustapha, 2023). Students who engaged with varied genres including fiction, non-fiction, newspapers, and digital texts demonstrated more robust academic performance than those limiting themselves to single genres or primarily academic texts. This finding suggests that broad reading experiences cultivate flexible thinking and adaptability, characteristics increasingly valued in contemporary educational contexts. Additionally, students who discussed books with peers or family members showed enhanced comprehension and retention compared to those who read in isolation, highlighting reading's social dimensions in knowledge construction.

However, the research also identified a concerning achievement gap related to reading access. Students from well-resourced urban schools with comprehensive libraries and home book collections significantly outperformed peers from under-resourced rural schools, even when individual motivation levels were comparable. This disparity emphasizes that reading culture cannot be separated from material conditions and resource availability. Qualitative data revealed that many rural students possessed strong reading motivation but lacked access to age-appropriate, culturally relevant materials in their preferred languages. These findings underscore the necessity for systemic interventions addressing resource inequities alongside individual motivation enhancement.

Barriers to Reading Culture Development

Table 1. Major Barriers to Reading Culture Among Moroccan Secondary Students

Barrier Category	Percentage of Students Affected	Primary Contributing Factors
Limited Access to Books	68%	Insufficient libraries, economic constraints
Time Constraints	72%	Heavy academic workload, examination pressure
Language Challenges	45%	Multilingual environment, limited materials in preferred languages
Lack of Reading	53%	Limited parental reading, teacher

Barrier Category	Percentage of Students Affected	Primary Contributing Factors
Models		emphasis on textbooks
Digital Distractions	61%	Social media competition, preference for video content

The identification of barriers to reading culture development revealed systemic challenges requiring multifaceted interventions. The most frequently cited obstacle was time constraints resulting from demanding academic schedules and examination pressure. Moroccan secondary education's competitive nature, particularly regarding the Baccalaureate examination, creates environments where students and teachers prioritize test preparation over exploratory reading. Interview participants consistently expressed desires to read more extensively but felt compelled to focus exclusively on examination-related materials. This tension between intrinsic learning motivations and extrinsic performance pressures reflects broader educational system contradictions that inadvertently undermine the very skills examinations purport to measure.

Access to appropriate reading materials emerged as another critical barrier, particularly affecting students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and rural areas. While urban schools in major cities like Casablanca and Rabat often maintained reasonably equipped libraries, rural schools frequently lacked basic book collections beyond required textbooks. Economic constraints prevented many families from purchasing books, and public library infrastructure remains underdeveloped in many regions. The multilingual nature of Moroccan education compounds these challenges, as students require access to materials in multiple languages to develop comprehensive literacy across their linguistic repertoire. Many participants expressed frustration at finding age-appropriate, engaging materials in Arabic, noting that available options often felt either too juvenile or excessively formal.

Language complexity itself represented a significant barrier for many students navigating Morocco's multilingual educational landscape. Students described challenges transitioning between Arabic, French, and increasingly English across subjects and contexts. Some participants reported avoiding voluntary reading because uncertainty about which language to prioritize created cognitive burden rather than enjoyment. This finding highlights unique challenges in contexts where educational language policies create linguistic fragmentation rather than additive multilingualism. Additionally, students from Amazigh-speaking backgrounds faced particular challenges, as materials in Tamazight remain scarce despite this language's official status and increasing educational inclusion.

Digital technologies presented paradoxical influences on reading culture development. While digital platforms potentially democratize access to reading materials, participants frequently described digital environments as sources of distraction competing with sustained reading. Social media, video streaming, and

gaming were consistently identified as more immediately gratifying alternatives to reading, particularly for students lacking strong reading habits. However, a subset of participants successfully integrated digital reading into their practices, accessing e-books, online articles, and educational resources unavailable in physical format. These findings suggest that technology's influence on reading culture depends significantly on how students are guided to navigate digital environments and whether educational systems leverage digital tools to promote rather than compete with reading engagement.

Implications for Educational Practice and Policy

The research findings carry significant implications for educational stakeholders seeking to enhance academic achievement through reading culture promotion. First, schools must recognize reading as central to learning across all subjects rather than solely the language arts domain. This requires curricular integration where teachers across disciplines explicitly incorporate reading strategies, provide time for voluntary reading, and model reading as valuable practice. Professional development initiatives should equip teachers with strategies for promoting reading engagement while addressing the reality of examination pressures. As one interviewed teacher acknowledged, balancing curriculum coverage with reading promotion requires intentional planning and institutional support that currently remains inconsistent across Moroccan schools.

Library development and resource allocation represent critical policy priorities emerging from this research. The substantial achievement gaps associated with reading access underscore the urgency of ensuring all students, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic background, can access diverse, culturally relevant reading materials. This necessitates increased educational budgets directed toward library development, mobile library programs for underserved areas, and partnerships with publishers to make materials more affordable and accessible. Digital libraries offer promising solutions, particularly for remote areas, but require accompanying infrastructure investments in internet connectivity and devices alongside digital literacy instruction to ensure equitable access.

Language policy considerations emerge as particularly salient in the Moroccan context. Educational planners must address how multilingualism can be leveraged as an asset rather than barrier to reading development. This includes ensuring availability of high-quality reading materials in Arabic, French, English, and Tamazight appropriate for various proficiency levels and interests. Additionally, pedagogical approaches should help students view their multilingualism as enriching their reading experiences rather than creating confusion or cognitive burden. Teacher education programs must prepare educators to support reading development across languages while being sensitive to students' varying linguistic backgrounds and preferences.

Finally, fostering reading culture requires addressing broader societal attitudes toward reading and literacy. Community engagement initiatives involving parents,

local leaders, and cultural figures can elevate reading's status and create supportive environments beyond school walls. Reading campaigns, author visits, book clubs, and community libraries can complement school-based interventions. The research suggests that when students perceive reading as valued by their communities and see reading modeled by respected figures, they are more likely to develop sustained reading habits. Therefore, promoting reading culture transcends educational institutions to encompass society-wide commitment to literacy as foundational to individual development and collective progress. These multilevel interventions, addressing individual motivation, institutional practices, and societal values, offer the most promising pathways toward establishing robust reading cultures that enhance academic achievement for all Moroccan secondary students.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that reading culture significantly influences academic achievement among Moroccan secondary students, with frequent readers consistently outperforming their peers across multiple academic domains. The research identified both individual and systemic factors shaping reading engagement, including access to materials, time constraints, language complexities, and educational system priorities. While Moroccan students demonstrate motivation to read, substantial barriers prevent many from developing robust reading habits, creating achievement gaps that reinforce existing educational inequalities. The findings underscore the necessity for comprehensive interventions addressing resource allocation, pedagogical practices, language policies, and societal attitudes toward reading. By prioritizing reading culture development through coordinated efforts among educators, policymakers, families, and communities, Morocco can enhance educational outcomes while fostering the critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning dispositions essential for individual success and national development. Future research should examine longitudinal effects of specific interventions and explore how emerging digital technologies can be harnessed to promote rather than undermine reading engagement in evolving educational landscapes.

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