
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating Moroccan High School Students' Attitudes Towards Leisure Reading

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| ABSTRACT

The present study investigated Moroccan high school students' attitudes towards leisure reading. The primary objective was to examine how students perceive and approach leisure reading in Moroccan high schools. Adolescent reading behaviour is a frequent focus of research. Hence, this study has helped fill the gap in research on adolescents' reading behaviour and attitudes in Morocco. Data for this study were collected through a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was administered to 97 randomly selected participants. After collecting the quantitative data, it was analysed using SPSS. The study's findings revealed that students hold highly positive hedonistic and utilitarian attitudes towards reading, suggesting that they recognise both its enjoyment and its practical value. Despite these favourable attitudes, most students do not actively seek opportunities to read by borrowing, renting, or purchasing books, largely because they have not developed a strong reading culture or love of reading. Reading for leisure is uncommon among most students, who primarily limit their reading to the textbooks prescribed in the school curriculum in Arabic and French. Furthermore, few students engage with novels or storybooks, relying instead almost exclusively on the required academic materials.

| KEYWORDS

Leisure reading; reading attitudes; reading behaviour; reading culture; Moroccan high school students; adolescents; secondary education.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

This study delves into adolescents' attitudes and perceptions towards leisure reading, specifically examining how young individuals in Morocco view and experience reading in their free time. For the purposes of this research, leisure reading is explicitly defined as any reading activity that is not associated with academic or professional obligations. This concept encompasses the time dedicated to reading for enjoyment outside the confines of work or school responsibilities. In this context, "reading" refers to the voluntary engagement in literature that secondary school students partake in during their spare time. Recognising the importance of leisure reading is vital, as it plays a significant role in influencing students' overall success and academic development. The research aims to uncover the reading habits and preferences of secondary school students across Morocco, providing valuable insights into how these habits may correlate with their educational outcomes.

The term "reading for pleasure," as utilised in this study, refers to reading undertaken during leisure hours and encompasses the various genres and types of literature that individuals engage with across diverse settings and moments. Importantly, this form of reading is distinct from school assignments: it is an extracurricular pursuit that individuals choose to partake in of their own accord, highlighting the intrinsic motivation behind such activity. In line with this concept, Nell (1988) describes reading for pleasure as an inherently playful endeavour, offering individuals the opportunity to traverse different realms through their imagination. However, the significance of reading for enjoyment extends far beyond mere entertainment, fantasy, or escapism. It serves not only as a

recreational activity but also as a means for readers to engage with and connect deeply with the material they consume. This study seeks to explore these dimensions of leisure reading, shedding light on how Moroccan adolescents navigate their reading choices and the implications these choices have for their broader educational experiences, as Pullman (2004) articulates:

Consider the nature of what happens when we read a book.... It isn't like a lecture: it's like a conversation. There's a back-and-forthness about it. The book proposes, the reader questions, the book responds, the reader considers. And we are active about the process... We can skim or we can read it slowly; we can read every word, or we can skip long passages; we can read it in the order it presents itself, or we can read it in any order we please; we can look at the last page first, or decide to wait for it; we can put the book down and ... we can assent or we can disagree.

The quotation presented above illustrates that reading for pleasure transcends mere escapism or imaginative wandering. It's important to understand that a reader does not simply lose themselves in a fictional world as a passive consumer, absorbing the narrative without engagement. Instead, reading for enjoyment creates a unique and enriching opportunity for individuals to become active participants in the literary experience. In this active-reading state, the reader becomes a communicator and collaborator with the text. This interaction involves the reader contemplating and questioning the narrative, characters, and themes presented within the story. As these inquiries arise, the text becomes an entity that responds to the reader's thoughts, prompting reflection, discussion, and even dissent. Such engagement encourages readers to critically analyse and interpret the story's responses, leading them to either accept or challenge the narrative's perspectives. Consequently, this dynamic process highlights that readers are never merely passive spectators; they are consistently active agents in their reading journeys. This active engagement fosters a deeper understanding of the text and enhances the overall pleasure derived from the reading experience, allowing readers to explore their own thoughts and feelings while forming a more personal connection to the stories they encounter. (Pullman, 2004)

2. Value of Leisure Reading

In today's fast-paced world, leisure reading is increasingly acknowledged as a crucial factor in both personal and societal development. Engaging in recreational reading enables individuals to immerse themselves in a variety of genres and perspectives, thereby enhancing critical thinking and vocabulary. As readers navigate through different narratives, they also nurture their imagination and emotional intelligence, which are essential components of effective communication and empathy. Furthermore, the benefits of reading extend well beyond personal enrichment; they significantly influence academic success. Students who regularly read for pleasure often exhibit improved writing skills and a deeper understanding of complex concepts in their studies. At home, families that value reading foster enriched environments that support lifelong learning. (Bandura, 1986)

In the professional realm, enthusiastic readers typically possess enhanced problem-solving abilities and adaptability, both vital skills in today's ever-changing job market. Moreover, from a broader societal perspective, encouraging leisure reading can cultivate a more informed and engaged citizenry, contributing to a culture of knowledge and meaningful discourse. In summary, the simple act of reading for enjoyment has far-reaching implications that can greatly enrich our collective well-being (Bandura, 1986; Krashen, 1993).

3. Reading Behaviour and School Success

Engaging in recreational reading is crucial to teenagers' academic performance and an effective way to enhance their educational capabilities. Krashen (1993, p. 85) emphasises the importance of recreational reading, noting that it enables young people to develop essential language skills subconsciously. Through reading, children become proficient, improve their comprehension, learn to use complex grammatical structures, refine their writing style, and expand their vocabulary and spelling. Consequently, reading for pleasure is vital for academic success, as it significantly enhances children's literacy skills. In addition, voluntary reading provides considerable advantages. It enhances children's reading comprehension, making challenging academic texts more accessible and easier to understand. Additionally, students see improvements in their writing styles, which allows them to produce a wide range of prose and compositions recognised by prestigious educational institutions, professional organisations, and the scientific community. Likewise, their vocabulary, spelling, and grammar develop at a pace that outstrips traditional instruction focused solely on these skills (Krashen, 1993).

Beyond the skill-building advantages associated with leisure reading, Gold (1990) identifies further benefits that he describes as “the life-altering potential of reading for pleasure.” For example, reading for enjoyment allows adolescents to explore their identities and gain insights into their emotions, concerns, frustrations, and preferences. Moreover, engaging with fiction can influence and reshape students' cognitive processes and perceptions as they absorb narrative themes and integrate their own insights into their understanding of the material. Reading fiction is a powerful catalyst for positive personal development and enhanced creativity.

4. Leisure Reading and the 21st Century Requirements

Holden (2004) highlights the vital role that reading for enjoyment plays in enriching various aspects of life, including personal, social, economic, and civic dimensions. Indeed, reading forms the cornerstone of individual growth and societal progress. It is essential, therefore, for adolescents to develop their reading skills, particularly those that foster enjoyment, as these young individuals will ultimately shape the future of their communities and nations. The International Reading Association supports this notion, asserting that strong reading skills are not merely beneficial but imperative for adolescents to meet societal demands and effectively navigate the complexities of the 21st century.

Similarly, Moore et al. (1999) underscore the urgency of teenagers immersing themselves in reading and writing more than ever before. This is critically important as they prepare to adapt to the adult world that lies ahead. The increasing intricacy of modern life necessitates higher literacy levels among young people, equipping them to handle their personal and professional obligations with confidence and skill. Enhanced literacy not only empowers adolescents to sift through the overwhelming influx of information available today but also helps them manage their households and personal affairs.

Furthermore, literacy serves as a catalyst for creativity, encouraging individuals to think critically and devise innovative solutions to complex problems. As such, cultivating a strong foundation in literacy is paramount for adolescents, enabling them to make meaningful contributions to society and fostering a brighter future for all. Given the numerous advantages of leisure reading, it is crucial to instill a love of literature in adolescents, enabling them to tap into these benefits for their own growth and the enrichment of their communities.

To this end, it is necessary to nurture proficient readers who are prepared to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. This section will delve into strategies to motivate adolescents to engage more deeply with reading. (Moore et al. 1999)

5. Motivating Students to Read

Motivation is a critical factor influencing adolescents' attitudes toward leisure reading. It can either engage them in the reading process, thereby fostering greater interest in reading, or deter them, resulting in disinterest during leisure time. Two principal types of motivation exist: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation arises from within the individual, as the reader's personal interests and goals drive their desire to read. In contrast, extrinsic motivation originates from external sources, where various influences, such as parents, siblings, friends, or educators, incentivise individuals to engage in reading. Consequently, motivation serves as a fundamental determinant of literacy among adolescents.

Despite the compelling rationale for adolescents to engage in leisure reading, many teenagers do not make time for it. Therefore, it is imperative for experts, educators, teachers, and parents to enhance adolescents' awareness of the importance of leisure reading. These stakeholders must address the issue by focusing on three critical components to encourage adolescents to participate in recreational reading: selection, accessibility, and duration. First, students should be granted the opportunity to select their reading materials. Cope (1997:22) asserts that to support children's development as readers and cultivate a lasting passion for reading, it is essential to empower them to choose materials that motivate them to engage in extensive reading. When students have the autonomy to select their preferred books, they exhibit greater motivation and accountability in their reading choices. This autonomy fosters greater engagement with the reading material. (Cope, 1997)

The second factor that can promote students' reading during their free time is the accessibility of reading materials. Providing students with an abundance of books is a rational approach to encourage adolescents to perceive reading as a recreational activity. Enhanced reading occurs when classrooms, libraries, and homes are rich in accessible printed resources. Lastly, time is a significant factor that motivates adolescents to engage in leisure reading. Many secondary school students lack adequate leisure time to read outside academic responsibilities due to the substantial demands of schoolwork and assignments. Hence, time is a critical component contributing to the decline of free reading during adolescence. To mitigate the impact of limited time for leisure

reading, it is advisable for educators and curriculum developers to incorporate designated free reading periods within the school curriculum and timetable (Krashen, 1993).

6. Causes of Reading Apathy

In recent years, there has been a notable decline in adolescents' engagement in leisure reading, a pastime crucial to both academic achievement and holistic personal development. This waning interest in reading can be attributed to a variety of interconnected factors that shape the experiences of modern adolescents.

One significant element influencing this trend is the social environment surrounding young readers. In many educational settings, teachers frequently overlook the value of recreational reading and fail to advocate for its importance in students' lives. Similarly, when parents do not demonstrate a love of reading themselves, their children are less likely to develop a genuine interest in reading. Without role models to inspire them, adolescents often miss the opportunity to cultivate a reading habit or embrace a culture that celebrates literature and storytelling. Furthermore, the academic system itself is overwhelmingly demanding, monopolising students' time and attention. As they navigate through a barrage of daily classes and a myriad of assignments, the space for independent exploration and personal reading is drastically curtailed, making it challenging for them to engage with books for pleasure (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

In addition to these social and systemic factors, the advancing technological landscape has dramatically reshaped how teenagers consume information and entertainment, further contributing to their declining interest in reading. With the proliferation of computers and digital devices, adolescents are provided with personalised learning experiences that cater to their unique needs and pace. These technologies often serve as convenient substitutes for traditional reading, occasionally offering interactive features that can enhance comprehension and engagement. In this digital age, many students may find themselves opting for screens over pages, drawn to the immediate gratification and dynamic nature of online content (Common Sense Media, 2019).

7. Methodology

This section offers a comprehensive overview of the research methodology utilised to explore the identified research gap. It outlines the study's systematic approach, including participant selection, data collection methods, and analytical strategies. By employing qualitative methods, the study aims to gather diverse perspectives and obtain a well-rounded understanding of the topic.

7.1. Research design

This study employs a comprehensive quantitative research design, using a structured questionnaire as the primary data-collection tool. According to Merton (2009), quantitative research design is characterised by its ability to measure variables in a manner that allows for statistical analysis and quantification (p. 3). This approach focuses on systematically examining the outcomes of an experience, allowing researchers to draw conclusions based on numerical data. The validity and reliability of this quantitative technique depend heavily on the accuracy and integrity of the numerical data collected. As highlighted by Bryman (2004), ensuring high-quality data is essential for the robustness of the findings. The questionnaire, specifically designed for this study, included a range of questions to capture relevant information from participants, enabling a thorough exploration of the research topic. Once the data was collected, it was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, a powerful statistical software that facilitates the computation of response percentages and other relevant statistical measures. This analysis was crucial for interpreting the results and drawing meaningful conclusions from the data collected. Given that this study employs a quantitative approach, the use of a questionnaire as a research instrument not only streamlined data collection but also enhanced the precision of the study's findings.

7.2. Research variables

In this study, in addition to the primary variables, several other important factors were considered to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The focal point of the research is reading behaviour, the dependent variable. This behaviour encompasses adolescents' reading habits and practices. In contrast, the independent variables explored in this investigation include reading attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. Reading attitude refers to the feelings and perceptions individuals hold towards reading, which can significantly shape their engagement with texts. Subjective norm refers to the social pressures or expectations adolescents perceive from their peers and family regarding reading, which influence their motivation to read. Lastly, perceived behavioural control encompasses adolescents' beliefs about their ability to engage in reading activities,

taking into account the resources and opportunities available to them. The aim of this study is to delve into how these three independent variables, reading attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control, interact and impact the reading behaviour of adolescents in Morocco, ultimately revealing the dynamics that drive their engagement with reading.

7.3. Sample

Given the specific focus of this research, it was essential to gather a representative sample of Moroccan adolescents to conduct a thorough and nuanced examination of their attitudes towards leisure reading. The target demographic for this study consisted of high school students. To facilitate this research, questionnaires were distributed to 97 secondary school students at Ahmed Rachidi High School in Ksar el Kebir. The selection of respondents was conducted using a random sampling method to ensure a diverse and unbiased representation of the student body, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the varying perspectives on leisure reading in this age group. The following chart illustrates the age of the students who participated in filling out the questionnaires:

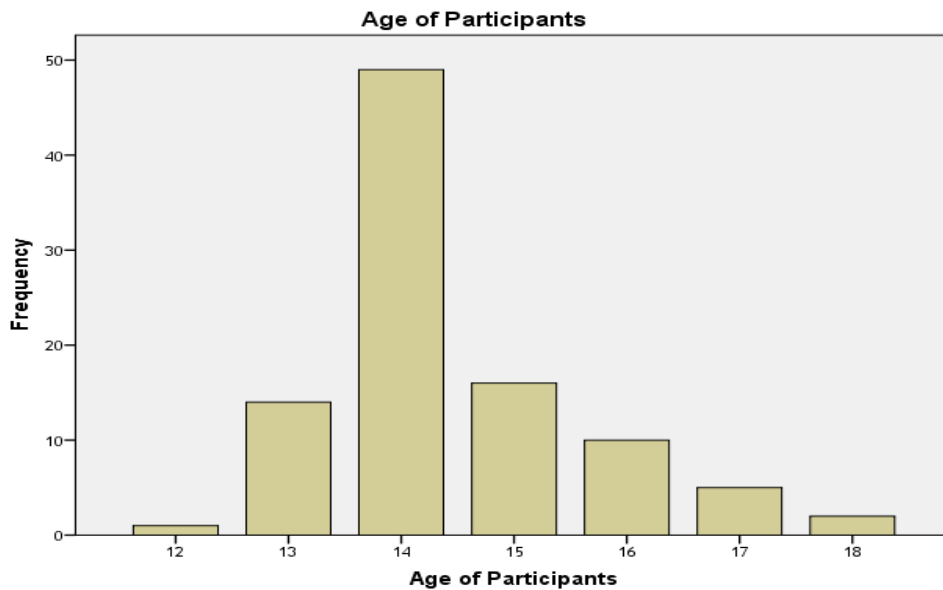


Figure 1: Age of Participants

Figure 1 shows that the participants' ages range from 12 to 18 years. The percentage of each age range is as follows:

Age of participant	Frequency	Percent	
Valid	12	1	1.0 %
	13	14	14.4 %
	14	49	50.5 %
	15	16	16.5 %
	16	10	10.3 %
	17	5	5.2 %
	18	2	2.1 %
Total	97	100.0 %	

Table 1: Age frequency and percentage

As for the gender of participants, the questionnaire involved both males and females as it shows in the following chart:

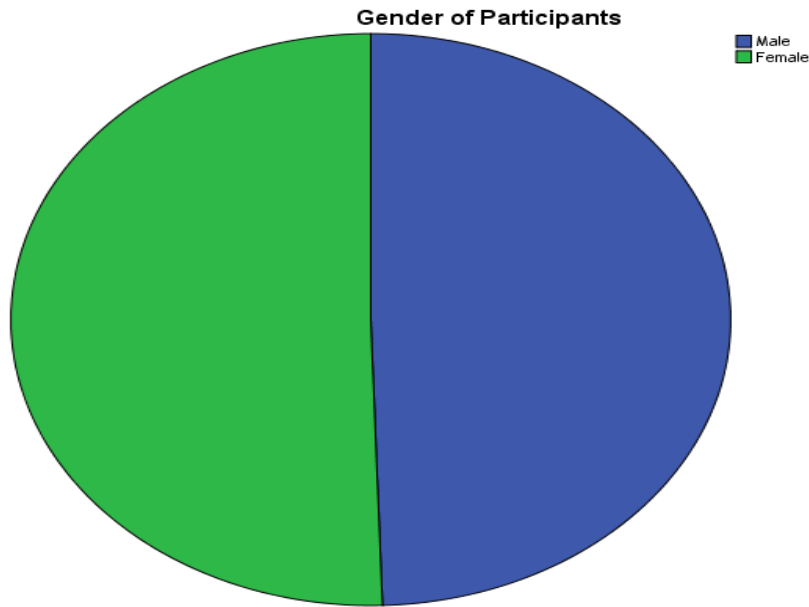


Figure 2: Gender of Participants

The pie chart above shows that the number of male and female participants in the study is nearly equal. There are 48 male and 49 female respondents, for a total of 97 participants. This means that 49.5% of respondents are male and 50.5% are female.

The educational levels of the students' parents were assessed by asking the students about their father's and mother's education. The findings are presented in the table below:

		Educational Level of Father			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	doctoral degree or higher	14	14.4	14.4	14.4
	master degree	11	11.3	11.3	25.8
	bachelor degree	18	18.6	18.6	44.3
	junior college graduate	22	22.7	22.7	67.0
	secondary education or lower	32	33.0	33.0	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

		Educational Level of Mother			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	doctoral degree or higher	5	5.2	5.2	5.2
	master degree	4	4.1	4.1	9.3
	bachelor degree	11	11.3	11.3	20.6
	junior college graduate	27	27.8	27.8	48.5
	secondary education or lower	50	51.5	51.5	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: The Educational Level of Parents

7.4. Research questions

To test the hypothesis, the study aimed to answer questions that helped uncover Moroccan adolescents' attitudes and behaviours towards reading.

RQ 1: How much do Moroccan school students read?

RQ 2: How do they feel about reading for leisure?

7.5. Research hypothesis

This study operates on the premise that Moroccan adolescents often do not prioritise reading for pleasure, maybe because of their upbringing in an oral culture that does not foster a love for reading, a lack of awareness about the benefits of reading, or the influence of social agents who fail to encourage or motivate them to engage with books.

8. Data analysis & interpretation

It was very clear that students were very highly motivated to study the storybook. This is because storybooks are compulsory at the institute where the questionnaire was administered, since teachers assign novels for students to read at home. Therefore, we can always shape students' attitudes by motivating them and providing them with materials. Whereas many teachers report that students, especially in public schools, do not read storybooks for reasons that may differ from student to student.

According to the data collected, reading books is a very good way for students not only to develop language and thinking skills but also to develop their personality, character, and education. Reading books during leisure time also provides readers with a good opportunity to learn about literary genres in general. So, reading books is regarded as the best thing students can do in their spare time, for it enriches their minds with vocabulary, information, and ideas. In this way, students can enjoy reading in their leisure time.

As for the general opinion of Moroccan students towards leisure-time reading, many acknowledge its importance and are well aware that reading outside the classroom is a valuable source of knowledge. Furthermore, students know that reading storybooks is very beneficial at the personal and professional level, but it is not pleasurable for some students, or not as pleasurable as, for example, chatting on the internet, for others. In addition, most students find it boring because they lack the patience to start a book and read it to the end, either due to a lack of reading habit or a lack of time to read on their own. Hence, students do not think of reading in their leisure time.

Generally speaking, students have very high positive hedonistic and utilitarian attitudes towards reading, as shown in the following figure.

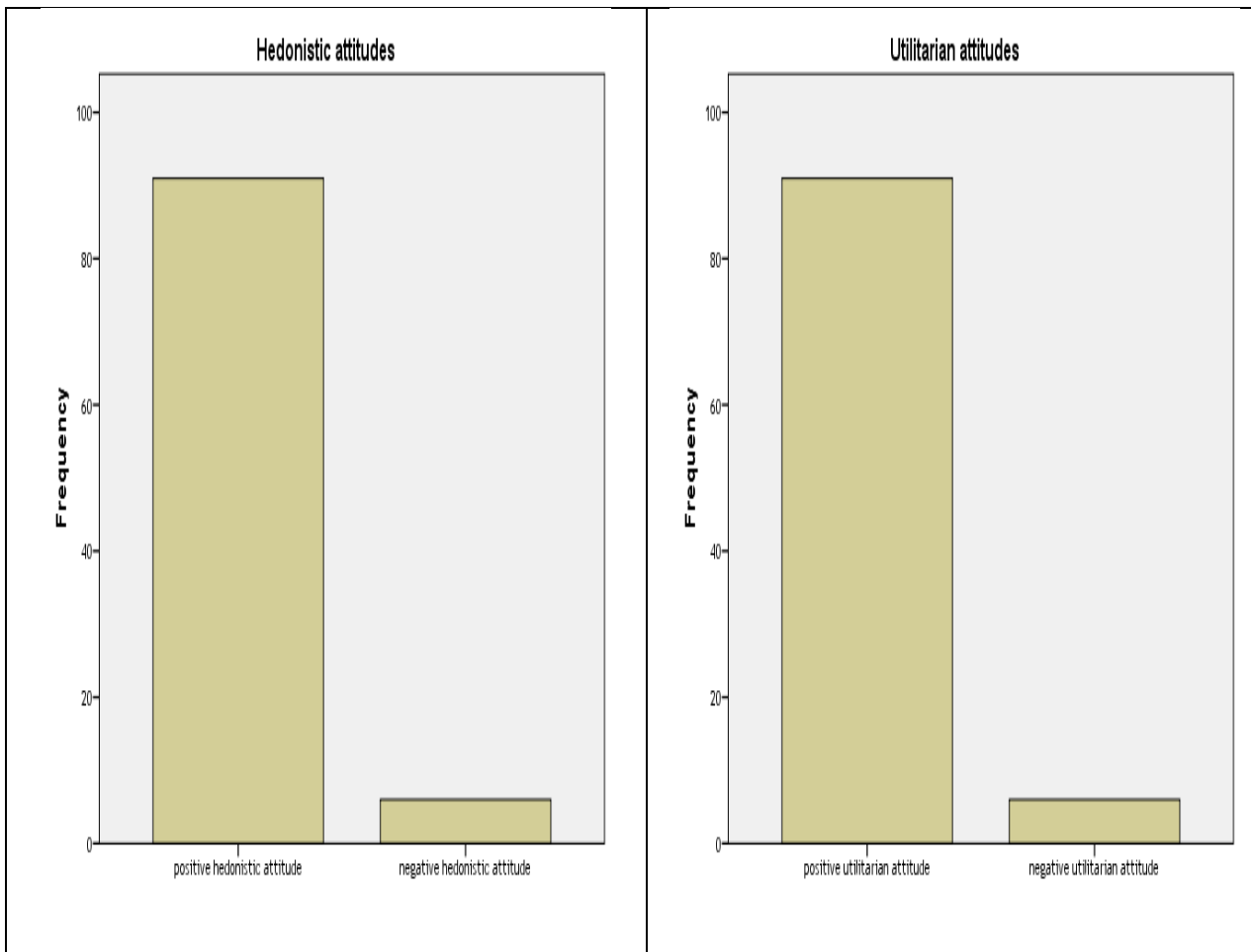


Figure 3: Hedonistic and Utilitarian Attitudes of Students towards Reading

However, students do not take the initiative to read, rent or hire books because they are not educated to love reading. The majority of students do not read for leisure. They read only the books officially assigned at school in Arabic and French, and most of them do not read novels and storybooks at all. They read only the programme books. The fact that students do not read much in their spare time is due to several reasons: books are not available to students; there are no school libraries; students are not motivated to learn; students do not have time for leisure reading; rather, they have to complete heavy burdens of school tasks and assignments; their parents do not read; their teachers do not read, and their friends do not read either. The following table provides an overview of the reading frequency of adolescents in Morocco:

	Frequency	Percent
How often do you read storybooks in your leisure time?		
almost every day	9	9.3
at intervals of a few days	24	24.7
at intervals of a week	28	28.9
at intervals of a month	11	11.3
at intervals of a few months	8	8.2
at intervals of 6 months or more	17	17.5
Total	97	100.0
	Frequency	Percent
When did you last read a storybook (not books for school)?		
1 week ago or less	59	60.8

2 - 3 weeks ago	26	26.8
about 1 month ago	2	2.1
about 2 - 3 months ago	1	1.0
more than 6 months ago	9	9.3
Total	97	100.0

Table 3: Reading Frequency of Students

Table 3 shows that the reading behaviour of students in Ksar el Kebir city, Morocco, is not infrequent but almost frequent. That is to say, it is not done almost every day; the high percentage, 28.9%, is "at intervals of a week". The table also shows that 60% of the students report having read a storybook within the past week.

As for the reading quantity of Moroccan students - the case of Ksar el Kebir city-, it can be reported by the following table:

How many storybooks do you read in your spare time?	Frequency	Percent
1 or more books a week	43	44.3
1 book every 2 - 3 weeks	18	18.6
1 book a month	11	11.3
1 book every 2 - 3 months	9	9.3
1 book every 4 - 6 months	3	3.1
less than 1 book every 6 months	13	13.4
Total	97	100.0
How much time did you spend reading storybooks last week	Frequency	Percent
I spent no time reading storybooks	12	12.4
½ hour or less	10	10.3
½ hour - 1 hour	18	18.6
1 hour - 1½ hours	28	28.9
1½ hours - 3 hours	14	14.4
3 - 5 hours	2	2.1
more than 5 hours	13	13.4
Total	97	100.0

Table 4: Reading Quantity of Students

Table 4 shows that students also report a high level of reading behaviour. 44.3% of students report reading one or more books every week. Besides, 18.6% of the students report reading one book every 2–3 weeks. However, students report that they did not spend much time reading books last week because the highest percentage, 28.6% of the students, say that they spent 1 hour - 1½ hours reading storybooks in the previous week. Meanwhile, the next-highest percentage (18.6%) of students report spending only ½ to 1 hour reading storybooks last week.

9. Discussion and Implications

Based on the data collected, adolescents in Morocco exhibit a notably low rate of reading. This trend appears influenced by a variety of underlying factors. Interestingly, students report engaging in a considerable amount of reading overall, despite indicating they spent little time on books the week prior. This suggests that while their reading frequency may be moderate, the total volume of material they read is unexpectedly high.

When considering students' attitudes towards reading, it is clear that they hold strong positive feelings, characterised by both hedonistic and utilitarian perspectives. Moroccan students genuinely appreciate and enjoy reading fiction during their leisure time, often gravitating towards storybooks that captivate their imagination. Furthermore, there is a correlation between their reading habits and academic performance; students tend to achieve better academic results when they dedicate time to reading for pleasure. This relationship highlights the dual benefits of reading: not only does it provide enjoyment, but it also contributes to their educational success.

10. Recommendations for Further Research

In-depth research into the attitudes of Moroccan adolescents towards leisure-time reading indicates that it is a significant area for academic inquiry and societal development. Recognising the fundamental importance of literacy, it becomes clear that enhancing literacy rates is crucial for fostering individual competence, imagination, innovation, and creativity. Literacy plays a pivotal role in equipping young people with the skills they need to navigate an increasingly complex world.

To cultivate a love for reading among students, it is essential to implement strategies that encourage them to engage with literature during their free time. This not only helps to boost their literacy levels but also contributes to their overall personal development and critical thinking abilities.

In light of these findings, it is highly recommended that this research be expanded to examine the factors influencing adolescents' leisure-time reading habits. Moreover, it is crucial to involve the broader Moroccan community and society in this endeavour. By fostering a collective approach, we can create a supportive environment that values and promotes reading as a key component of lifelong learning and cultural enrichment.

11. Conclusion

The current study provides a comprehensive investigation of the leisure reading attitudes of Moroccan high school students during adolescence, a critical developmental phase. The primary aim of this research was to examine the behaviours and attitudes these students exhibit towards reading storybooks in their free time. Understanding how adolescents in Morocco perceive reading is essential, as it offers valuable insights into their attitudes and behaviours toward reading, particularly in a leisure context. Given the importance of cultivating a reading culture, this research highlights the need for further studies to explore Moroccans' reading attitudes more broadly. Such an exploration is fundamental, as leisure reading is recognised as a pivotal element for the sustainable development of nations.

The findings of this study substantiate the initial claims established in the introductory section of the research hypothesis. It is evident that reading for pleasure plays a critical role in the educational success of adolescents. This practice not only enhances individual academic achievement but is also instrumental in raising overall educational standards. Engaging with literature beyond educational requirements enriches students' intellectual and emotional growth.

The conclusions drawn from this research carry substantial theoretical implications for a diverse array of stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, educators, curriculum designers, textbook publishers, government officials, and the broader community. It is crucial for all these groups to recognize the intrinsic value of leisure reading. An emphasis on fostering reading habits is imperative, not only among students but also across society at large, irrespective of individuals' professional roles or responsibilities. By prioritising reading as a communal value, Morocco can position itself as a leader in embracing the challenges and demands of the 21st century and navigating the complexities of the advanced technological era. Encouraging leisure reading can significantly contribute to the development of a knowledgeable and informed society, ultimately leading to a brighter future for all citizens.

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