

The Reading habits of Algerian University Students: A case Study of a Random Sample from the Department of Arabic Language and Literature.

*ROUABHIA Halima

M'hamed Bougara University – Boumerdès (Algeria)

h.rouabhia@univ-boumerdes.dz

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Abstract:

Reading is a crucial indicator of the maturity of human societies and reflects the overall well-being of any society or educational institution. However, the rapid advancements in media and communication technologies have led to a gradual decline in reading.

This study aims to assess the reading habits of Algerian university students. To accomplish this, a questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 50 students from the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at Boumerdes University. The results indicate a significant aversion to reading and studying, which poses considerable risks to our universities and students amid ongoing transformations and global challenges. Additionally, this research paper presents conclusions based on a series of suggestions and recommendations aimed at fostering a culture of reading both at the university level and within the broader community.

Keywords:books, readership, university students, reading.



1.Introduction:

Reading is a vital means of acquiring knowledge and information across various fields and subjects. It serves as a key avenue through which individuals gain insights into human thought throughout different eras. By facilitating understanding of both ancient and contemporary cultures, reading promotes dialogue and the exchange of ideas. Consequently, it symbolizes progress and cultural engagement, guiding nations toward knowledge advancement and the prosperity of their people and lands. Reading is thus a common practice in the daily lives of individuals, transcending specific groups.

With the significant evolution of modern technology, the concept of reading has broadened through various approaches and methods. Nevertheless, this expansion does not diminish the fact that books remain an indispensable cultural instrument, providing intellectual nourishment and spiritual sustenance. They are vessels of knowledge and mediums for cultural expression, forming the foundation of all human understanding and serving as cornerstones for dialogue

*ROUABHIA Halima. h.rouabhia@univ-boumerdes.dz

between cultures and civilizations. Books nourish both the mind and the soul and continue to be one of the most enduring means of communication.

Reading is recognized as a vital aspect of intellectual engagement in both individual and community life. It is an essential tool for acquiring knowledge, culture, and fostering communication among individuals. In contemporary society, reading not only facilitates daily living but also serves as the most dependable method for enhancing cognitive, linguistic, and expressive abilities. Additionally, it broadens mental horizons and improves communication, social, professional, and cultural skills. Furthermore, reading is a crucial driver of innovation, creativity, and development. Reading is a scientific, intellectual, and logical process designed to acquire knowledge, enhance education, develop individual skills, and foster cultural awareness on specific subjects or various topics. However, this practice is not evident among our university students. Although universities are recognized as strategic sectors and an essential environment for regular and extensive reading, students rarely engage in reading outside of libraries or during times when they require specific references for assignments or their graduation theses. Their reading habits appear to be temporary and dictated by particular academic circumstances.

The university possesses unique qualities, playing a significant role in fostering enlightened awareness. This encompasses not only academic knowledge but also the holistic development of students' character. However, personal observations indicate a notable deficiency in mechanisms that promote continuous reading, thinking, and creativity as integral cultural phenomena. This observation underscores the necessity of establishing and solidifying traditions of readership as a fundamental priority within the university. To achieve this, it is essential to investigate the underlying reasons for the reluctance to read and to examine the social, economic, cultural, and psychological factors that encourage university students to incorporate reading into their daily routines, rather than viewing it as a transient activity that quickly diminishes with changing circumstances.

The students at our Algerian university dedicate significant time to academic pursuits, ultimately earning a qualification that will enable them to secure a job and achieve a decent standard of living. In this manner, they serve as constructive elements within society rather than instruments of destruction. In today's competitive environment, it is vital for university students to distinguish themselves, which can primarily be accomplished through extensive reading within their chosen fields. This necessity is particularly pronounced in the context of post-pandemic higher education in our country, which has begun to integrate both in-person and online learning modalities, each offering distinct tools, techniques, and benefits.

1.1. Study Objectives:

This research paper aims to establish a foundational understanding of the general reluctance among university students—specifically those in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature—toward reading and study. It will explore the strengths and weaknesses associated with reading, which is essential for intellectual development. Approaching this issue from a fresh perspective is crucial for assessing its significance. Thus, the objective of this research is to address the complex challenge of reading among Arabic language students at Mohamed Bougara University, Boumerdes.

1.2. Study Problem Statement:

The alarming decline in reading has resulted in significant linguistic challenges. It is evident that Modern Standard Arabic in Algerian universities is deteriorating daily, with what can be accurately termed linguistic pollution permeating even the basic communication between professors and students. This troubling trend has unfortunately affected the majority of our universities. Instead of graduating competent and proficient students who excel in their mother tongue, these institutions are producing graduates with inadequate Arabic skills, prioritizing quantity over quality. This issue is unsurprising, considering that these students enter higher education already lacking proficiency, having come from secondary education in a weak state, and similarly from intermediate and primary education.

We acknowledge the authorities' efforts to establish a cultural project designed to achieve specific objectives aimed at reviving national culture. These initiatives include promoting reading, fostering a national identity that is independent of foreign influences, and reflecting the unique civilizational and social reality of this ancient nation. Such culture acts as a mirror to the daily lives of Algerians and the broader cultural and civilizational development of society, with particular emphasis on reading. One notable initiative is the "My Country's Pens" competition, among other events, through which the Algerian state aims to enhance this cultural and civilizational aspect by popularizing reading and establishing it as a valued tradition within society.

The transformation and advancement of societies are closely tied to their capacity to invest in knowledge and science while purposefully applying these investments to enhance human life across scientific, social, cultural, and psychological dimensions. This approach fosters positive interactions with the environment and helps societies establish a sovereign reputation on the global stage. Societies that continuously seek improved conditions through technological innovations and the effective use of inventions for growth and development can only thrive by ensuring comprehensive learning opportunities for all community members. Achieving this requires the development of proficient reading skills, which encompass recognition, understanding, interaction, and application. De-

spite the critical importance of reading for both individuals and society, the topic remains sensitive in our community. We are a nation that struggles with reading, as a significant portion of the population does not engage with literature in its intended capacity.

The transformation and advancement of societies are closely linked to their capacity to invest in knowledge and sciences and to utilize these effectively to enhance human life across scientific, social, cultural, and psychological dimensions. This approach ensures positive interactions with the environment, allowing societies to establish a sovereign reputation and exert influence on a global scale. Societies that continually seek improved alternatives to their current realities through technological advancements and the application of innovations can achieve growth and development only by promoting effective learning among all community members. This process hinges on the acquisition of proficient and fluent reading skills, which encompass recognition, understanding, interaction, and application. Despite the critical role of reading for individuals and society as a whole, the subject of reading and literature remains sensitive within our community; we are a nation that largely disengages with reading, with the majority not participating in it in its most meaningful sense.

- What is the actual state of reading habits among university students, specifically those in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature?
- Why do university students fail to incorporate reading into their daily routines?
- What types of reading material do university students prefer?
- What factors contribute to university students' reluctance to read and engage with literature?
- What strategies and resources should be implemented to encourage university students to adopt reading as a daily habit?

1.3. Study Hypotheses:

This study is grounded in the following hypotheses:

1. The cultural environment among university students in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature may lack mechanisms to promote effective reading and study habits.
2. Students in this department may prioritize reading materials that address their academic challenges over integrating reading as a daily habit and an essential aspect of their culture.
3. To foster a culture of daily reading within the student community, it is crucial to establish mechanisms such as motivation and practical training in reading skills and book utilization, which will assist students in developing consistent reading habits.

1.4. Study Methodology :

In this study, we employed a descriptive approach, encompassing all its stages, including problem formulation and hypothesis development, alongside a statistical exploratory analysis. A questionnaire comprising 24 questions was administered to 50 students from the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Boumerdes, aimed at examining and analyzing the current state of reading habits and proposing essential solutions.

2.Theoretical study:

2.1. The difference between voluntary reading and academic reading practices:

Opinions have varied, and definitions have differed among researchers working in the field of readability and its concept. The concepts have multiplied according to the scientific and practical angles from which they originate; yet, they all converge in meaning while differing in structure. Readability, in a terminological sense, is defined as the degree of ease or difficulty in understanding and comprehending written material by the reader. This is influenced by the interaction and alignment of the reader's characteristics, such as their inclinations, motivations, age, and intellectual level, as well as the nature of the text in terms of both form and content, including its level of simplicity, clarity, and style. Therefore, the fundamental importance of readability lies in its role as a tool for learning and education; it is the key to knowledge.

There is ample convincing evidence that reading for pleasure is beneficial, (Catherine Sheldrick Ross, 2006) not only for increasing literacy skills but also because the information encountered by the reader during recreational reading informs them about the world they live in and about themselves. (Ross, 2000) Reading for enjoyment has been linked to creativity and improved academic performance. Some argue that reading literature achieves many of the goals of a liberal education: and can have a profound impact on individuals' lives. (B.Kneipp, 2009)

The skill of reading is typically utilized in university years to convey information more deeply than what can be accomplished in the classroom or to provide exposure to essential foundational literature in a given field. Often, students need assistance in learning how to engage in close or deep analytical reading. In the field of literary studies, learning to read fictional literature critically often involves overcoming common and entrenched reading practices. Critical reading requires avoiding immersion in a story—which is one of the greatest pleasures of the reading experience—because this emotional engagement hinders analysis. (Nell, 1988)

Critical reading means understanding how a story is constructed and connecting one text to another through thematic or temporal links. Although careful reading can provide the enjoyment of discovery that accompanies it.

Some others who study literature in colleges believe that the practice of popular reading can be examined in classrooms, (Hall, 2003) or that the various types of reading undertaken by book clubs may offer insights that could be beneficial for literature teachers. (Barstow, 2003) Meanwhile, others have focused their research entirely on reading that occurs outside of academic environments, such as Janice Radway's study of romance readers and Elizabeth Long's research on women's book groups. (Long, 2003) However, unskilled readers tend to concentrate on what happens to the characters and must actively resist the temptation to be captivated by the story in order to read well. "Only trained readers possess the skills necessary to negotiate back and forth the relationship between fictional texts and their lofty fictional construction." (al, 2001) One of its educational goals is to transform naive readers into advanced readers, teaching them to move beyond discussing the plot to focus on how the story works.

Reading also holds significance at both the individual and societal levels, as it is utilized as an effective therapeutic method under the supervision of a doctor, psychologist, or social worker. It is referred to as bibliotherapy or reading therapy. Reading serves as a cure and treatment for many psychological and social ailments, as it reduces anxiety and depression, combating negative thoughts and minor nerve disorders such as headaches and insomnia.

It greatly contributes to shaping aware individuals who are active in their communities, achieving significant growth and development. Although the importance of reading in the educational and academic fields is primarily confined to improving academic performance and good educational attainment, students often read only books relevant to their specializations, which sometimes serves as a substitute for attending classes in person.

The readability here leads to self-learning, better retention, and retrieval of what has been learned (feedback), aiding in the development of the habit of speed reading. Additionally, the importance of readability may also manifest as a means to practice reading accuracy, language correctness, speech quality, and performance. Through it, one discovers pronunciation errors and reading flaws, and subsequently works to rectify them, thus acquiring a set of skills, the most important of which are: the skill of word recognition and reading comprehension, consulting and activating reading comprehension motivations, and other skills. From an emotional standpoint, its significance lies in helping teachers adapt their teaching methods to the reading and cognitive abilities of learners, selecting topics that spark interest, inclinations, and the need for learning, and instilling confidence in learners, enabling them to face others, as it presents an opportunity to boost individuals' morale among their peers by giving them a chance to assert themselves.

2.2.Abandonment of Reading and Weak Literacy in the Academic Environment:

Abandonment of reading is both a psychological and personal state, referring to the lack of desire to read or a disinclination towards reading, alongside the choice of other interests and methods to avoid reading, such as relying on electronic sources, including the internet as a means of research. This is a negative phenomenon characterized by individuals and society distancing themselves from the practice of reading and literature, whether through traditional or modern methods.

Where studies conducted on the reading practices of university students are limited, they indicate that students perceive voluntary reading and mandatory reading in completely different ways. A survey conducted in 1991 on over 300 final-year students at a small public liberal arts institution found that 88% of them engaged in reading for pleasure, favoring literature and current events as study subjects. (al C. B., 1991) A more recent study involving 539 students who completed surveys about their graduation theses found that "internet usage" is more common among students than reading; however, it seems that internet usage has not replaced reading as an activity. (Kouider Mokhtari, 2009) However, watching television is more common than reading, as students were more likely to watch TV daily than to read. Instead of focusing on developing precise reading skills, the emphasis is on literary traditions that have been highlighted in numerous forums and conferences to a greater extent, with the aim of building community, transitioning to university, exploring personal values, and studying social issues.

The issue of reading constantly remains at hand, and the matter of literacy is ever-present, both old and new at the same time. What remains constant in this equation is that books are not widely distributed, and even when they are, few know anything about them due to their high prices and scarcity of sales points. However, the data demonstrated by reality and experience repeatedly show that libraries in general are also diminishing, with many regions in our country lacking any library presence. Even the goodwill of individuals and associations has contracted into a self-restriction, reminiscent of a pathological condition stemming from a sense of futility regarding any effort. (Joliffe, 2008) Both the book and the reader face a series of discouragements and obstacles in our country.

The discourse on reading in Algeria provokes extensive debate, particularly among the educated elite. This topic merits thorough examination, especially given the lack of accurate studies or statistics that assess and illustrate the state of reading and literary consumption in the country.

The reluctance to engage in reading is a multifaceted issue affecting Algerian society as a whole, with university students being particularly impacted. Reading rates represent a central concept that enriches the theoretical and methodological discussions in scientific and academic research. These inquiries aim to uncover the underlying reasons for the low levels of reading and its manifestations within the broader social and cultural contexts. Reading is essential for eva-

luating the readability of university and educational texts, enhancing students' reading abilities, and addressing their deficiencies in line with the required standards.

3. Exploratory Survey Study:

The data were entered into a computer and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A descriptive analytical approach was employed, utilizing frequencies and percentages to identify the characteristics of the respondents and their reading experiences, including trends, motivations, fields of interest, and challenges. The researcher refrained from using experimental cross-tabulations, as the primary objective was to describe and diagnose the reading habits of students in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature.

To gain insights into the reading habits of Algerian university students, a questionnaire was employed for its effectiveness in data collection. A purposive sample of 50 students from the Department of Arabic Language and Literature was selected, specifically from the third year and the two specializations: General Linguistics and Criticism and Methodology. The questionnaire was initially written in Arabic and subsequently translated into English to correspond with the language of the study sample.

3.1.Presentation and analysis of the study results:

Table No. (01): Social and demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable		Frequency	percentage
Gender	Male	01	2%
	Female	49	98%
	Total	50	100%
Age	22-19	40	80%
	22-26	06	12%
	More then 26	04	8%
	Total	50	100%
Specialty	Linguistic Studies	27	54%
	Critical Studies	23	46%
	Total	50	100%

3.1.1.Type: Gender is a significant socio-demographic factor that has garnered considerable attention in social sciences. The table below highlights this trend: the male-to-female ratio among researchers stands at 98%, which may account for the disparity in female representation in other fields, primarily attributed to early academic attrition among males.

3.1.2.Age: Table (01) indicates that the 19-22 age group constitutes the largest proportion among all age categories, with 80% falling within the younger demographic.

3.1.3.Educational Level and Specialization: A study revealed that individuals with varying academic levels (one year and three years of Bachelor's degrees) and different specializations can hold both positive and negative perspectives on a topic, influenced by their experiences and values in science. Public linguistics students represent the largest segment, accounting for approximately 54%, while the remaining students, who express higher levels of criticism regarding the curriculum, comprise about 46%.

By revealing the questions from the questionnaire administered to the study sample and the corresponding proportions, we aim to illustrate the experiences of Algerian students in relation to their reading practices.

Table No. (02): Reading obstacles to university students

Obstacles	I agree	To some extent	I disagree	Total	
				Frequency	percentage
In the vacuum period, is reading an important activity?	28%	%12	%60	50	100%
The electronic book is better than the paper book.	%88	%0	%12	50	100%
I do not read because I am working in my leisure time.	%18	%56	%26	50	100%
I do not read because my family does not encourage me.	%7	%20	%73	50	100%
I do not read it because of the high price of the book and the difficulty of purchasing it.	%60	%30	%10	50	100%
Study requirements occupy all my time	%74	%26	%0	50	100%
I do not want to read because of the influence of friends.	%40	%35	%25	50	100%
I love listening more than reading.	%48	%32	%20	50	100%

The lifestyle changes and its smile quickly.	%50	%35	%15	50	100%
Ease of relying on modern media as an alternative to reading.	%65	%25	%10	50	100%

Using the results of a questionnaire, the current problem of the Algerian university student who was reluctant to read, and the factors that could have provoked his reluctance to read, and the mechanisms that must be introduced to encourage him to read in exchange, was investigated by the students of the Arabic Language Department and its literature of the University of Boumerdes:

- Many students exhibit a resistance to reading, attributing it to the high cost of books and the difficulties of maintaining a robust library amid limited resources, which fosters a sense of disenchantment within the student body. Consequently, they are unable to allocate a portion of their grant funds for purchasing books essential for their academic pursuits.
- The universities that serve as reference points often generate the content; however, the resulting ideas frequently lack creativity and initiative, hindering the adoption of positive behavioral practices.
- There is a neglect regarding the beliefs about the role and significance of reading in fostering self-esteem, which emphasizes the importance of self-conception.
- Students inhabit an environment overwhelmed by the distractions of university life and prevailing cultural beliefs and practices, where time is squandered on trivialities, and the absence of a structured schedule diminishes the enjoyment of their assignments.
- Despite their common usage, the appeal of physical books has declined due to the time and effort savings offered by the Internet, particularly through mechanical copying (Copier - Collier).
- There is a lack of adequate references published by educators, highlighting school programs and the scarcity of ideas derived from universities.

4.Conclusion:

In conclusion, the phenomenon of reading among university students represents a complex research issue that requires a thorough analytical approach. Data suggest that this phenomenon is shaped by various factors, including rising academic pressures, the prevalence of digital distractions, and the difficulties in creating a supportive reading environment. Despite these challenges, reading remains essential for developing students' knowledge, enhancing their higher-order thinking skills, and deepening their understanding of diverse scientific and humanities disciplines.

The responsibility for enhancing reading levels transcends university students; it necessitates the collaborative involvement of all stakeholders. Educational institutions, through their libraries, curricula, and faculty, are crucial in fostering a culture of reading and providing essential resources. Families also play a significant role by establishing a supportive reading environment from an early age. Moreover, the community, through its cultural and media institutions, is instrumental in promoting the intrinsic value of reading within society.

Investing in the development of reading skills among university students is a strategic enhancement of human capital and is essential for advancing knowledge and sustainable development. Proficient readers are fundamental to intellectual growth, actively contributing to the formation of a knowledge-based society and adapting to the rapidly evolving demands of the digital age. Consequently, the formulation of integrated and sustainable strategies to promote reading within the university environment is not merely an academic luxury; it is an urgent necessity driven by the imperatives of civilizational and national progress.

5. Advice and Ideas:

To transform the student community from one that does not engage with reading into a culturally elite society that values literature, a comprehensive approach is required. This necessitates a fundamental shift in students' perceptions of reading through the following measures:

- Liberating the trade of books and scientific journals from prejudice and monopoly.
- Supporting books, particularly university textbooks, as they serve to uplift society.
- Promoting academic publishing by establishing standards and programs for the publication of periodicals and books that align with the university curriculum.
- Prioritizing literacy in media, associations, and educational institutions.
- Encouraging educators to inspire students to read and assist them in selecting and utilizing appropriate materials.
- Integrating students from the Department of Arabic Language and Literature into research laboratories and scholarly events.
- Developing a strategy to foster a culture of reading that engages all stakeholders, from primary education through to university level.
- Students should not rely exclusively on research for their work; instead, prioritizing the use of books in their research is crucial, as practical thinking encourages students to recognize the importance of results in evaluations, albeit sometimes reluctantly.
- It is essential to train students in research methodology, while providing guidance on selecting and effectively utilizing books is even more critical.

- It is important to guide students to shift from random reading to purposeful and goal-oriented reading practices.

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