The Impact of Cultural and Socioeconomic Background on University Student Learning Autonomy in Morocco

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Abstract

This research examines the role that culture and the social environment play in the growth of autonomous learning among students in Moroccan high learning institutions. Learning autonomy which is the extent to which students take charge of their learning and are able to self-study is essential in both academics and in everyday life. The use of a mixed-methods triangulation design enables the study to use both quantitative survey data as well as qualitative interview data in determining the impact of cultural including, family obligations, and socio-economic status on learners' ability to be self-directed. The study demonstrates that affirming cultural tenets like collectivism, insistency from parents, and traditional stick in the head students to teachers systems restrict students' freedom but ready access to equipment like phones and internet as well as money greatly promotes it. The statistical analysis of survey data addresses the issue of availability of resources among students of differing socioeconomic status and the challenges lower class students face in squeezing into the society's academic ladder. Along with these internalized limits exist external ones presented by the society, and those are ethnical and financial all together. The above have been addressed at different levels including improved facilitation of learning, provision and availability of resources, financial assistance and promotion of diversity. The study recommends that improving these conditions can create a situation in higher education in Morocco where every student, irrespective of his/her background can efficiently flourish as a self-dependent learner.

Keywords: Learning autonomy, Moroccan university students, cultural factors, socioeconomic status, independent learning, self-directed study.

Introduction

As universities becoming more excellence oriented by developing independent learners, learning autonomy has been one the key components of success in higher education. It means that students undertake responsibility for their own learning, set up objectives for individual study and are self-directed in their approaches to studying (Boudraa, 2021; Ghanem, 2020). And this skill, while necessary for performing university but also for developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as a habit of ongoing self-education such characteristics are needed even more in the global job market. As such, promoting learning autonomy is a primary goal for educational systems worldwide, including in Morocco.

In the Moroccan context, learning autonomy partly influenced by some complex and intertwined factors such as cultural, family and socioeconomic. These often-intersecting factors interact with each other to impact how much students feel able to customize their own learning path and choices in school that connect with their interests and career goals. The family and community value system in Morocco, which often outweighs the individual want or need, both fosters independent learning and inhibits it. Just like race, your socioeconomic status (SES) affects you so much in terms of shaping students' access to resources and opportunities that are essential for autonomous learning.

Review of Literature

Due to its essential role in independent, lifelong learning, researchers have focused on student learning autonomy extensively in higher education. Learning autonomy has been described by scholars as the ability of students to manage their learning, establish goals for themselves, track and monitor how they are progressing and self-study (Boudraa, 2021). These factors become a part of the practice to develop autonomy within students, either favouring or restricting student readiness to have agency in Morocco context.

Cultural Influence: In Morocco, cultural norms and family expectations significantly influence students' approach to academic work. Moroccan society values collectivism and respect for authority, which also puts pressure on students to meet their families' expectations to follow a specific career or score well while studying (Ghanem, 2020). Some pursue fields that their families dictate especially in professional courses like law, medicine and engineering when their interest lies elsewhere. This cultural pressure may hinder the maturation of learning autonomy, as students prioritize meeting external expectations over pursuing personal academic goals (Boudraa, 2021).

Socioeconomic Influence: Students from higher SES families often have greater access to resources including technology, tutoring services, and other forms of academic support giving them more opportunities for self-directed learning (Bouzidi, 2019). On the other hand, those who are lower on the SES scale can have each of these tools significantly blocked such as for personal computers, internet connection and private tutoring services they may need to use in order to learn from a distance which greatly limits their independence (Sahraoui & Abdelkader, 2022). Financial pressures, such as the need to work part-time to support themselves or their families, further limit the time available for independent study (Lamrani & Rachidi, 2023).

Intersection of Culture and SES: Cultural and socioeconomic factors play a role in learning for Moroccan students, creating an interesting mix. Such as the cultural baggage or lack of resources provided to students from low-income families, in their upper secondary education career. Such an amalgamation of circumstances can immensely cripple their potential to possess self-paced learning (Zerhouni & Assem, 2020). In contrast, the students from privileged backgrounds who have access to more resources (including access to time and money) are generally able to cope with the family expectations more easily and be independent (Ghanem, 2020).

These results suggest that learning autonomy is uniquely determined in Morocco by both cultural norms and socioeconomic status such that cultural values may inhibit students from taking initiative while on the other hand, economy sets the scene for good or bad development of this endeavor. Our results point to the need for targeting culture-based and socioeconomic factors in promoting learning autonomy among Moroccan students at university.

The method

in this particular work, the learning autonomy of students from Moroccan universities is analyzed in consideration of their cultural and socioeconomic background through a mixed-method approach. The study combines qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys in an effort to give an adequate understanding of the relation of these factors with students' autonomy in higher learning. The methodology has been developed in such a way so as to reflect the multifaceted unique experiences of the learners and the statistical associations between the culture of the students and their socioeconomic status.

Participants

This study includes the 120 students of the English Department at Moulay Ismail University who have been chosen to represent a broad scale of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds in an attempt to gain a sample that exhibits diversity. Stratified sampling will be employed to ensure representation of major subgroups (e.g., income, parental education) along with cultural characteristics (e.g., rural and urban backgrounds). Lastly, purposive sampling will be used in the qualitative interviews based on the survey responses to further analyse the trends found.

Data Collection

Participants will be recruited via online advertisements, and data collection comprises repeated quantitative surveys as well as qualitative interviews that clearly outline the ways in which cultural or socioeconomic factors impact students' learning autonomy. The quantitative part collects data through structured questionnaire regarding demographic characteristics (age, gender, income and education of parents); cultural factors (values and traditions influencing learning process), and independent learning characteristics (self-regulation and goal-setting) with Likert-scale items measuring attitudes and behaviors. The qualitative aspect consists of semi-structured interviews that aim to explore students' lived experiences by focusing on cultural influences on learning behaviours, socioeconomic obstacles or assets in accessing resources, and perceptions of agency within school systems. Based on interesting trends (like extremes of learning autonomy), about 15-20 participants are interview to give more contextualisation insights.

Research Questions

1. How do cultural factors influence university students' learning autonomy in Morocco?
2. How does socioeconomic status impact students' ability to engage in autonomous learning?
3. What is the interaction between cultural norms and socioeconomic conditions in shaping learning autonomy?
4. How do students perceive the barriers and enablers to their learning autonomy in a Moroccan higher education context?

Hypotheses

1. Students from families emphasizing collective decision-making are less likely to exhibit high levels of learning autonomy.
2. Higher socioeconomic status is positively associated with greater access to resources, leading to increased learning autonomy.
3. The intersection of low socioeconomic status and high cultural pressure significantly reduces students'

ability to engage in autonomous learning.
4. Students perceive lack of resources and family pressures as the main barriers to learning autonomy, while supportive environments enhance their independence.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The data analysis and discussion section examines the impact of cultural and socioeconomic factors on the learning autonomy of Moroccan university students. Through quantitative and qualitative data, including statistical tables and in-depth interviews, the analysis provides insights into how family expectations, traditional educational practices, and financial constraints shape students' academic behaviors and ability to engage in independent learning.

Cultural Influence on Learning Autonomy

Cultural norms and values are deeply embedded in the educational experiences of Moroccan university students. In a society where collectivism and respect for authority are emphasized, students often face pressures that influence their academic behavior and attitudes toward independent learning.

Table 1: Influence of Family Expectations on Learning Autonomy

Cultural Factor	High Influence	Moderate Influence	Low Influence
Parents' Expectations of Academic Performance	65%	25%	10%
Importance of Family Approval in Career Choices	60%	30%	10%
Preference for Structured Learning (Teacher-Centered)	55%	35%	10%

Results in table 1 indicate the significant impact of family expectations on learning autonomy Significant effect of family expectation on learning autonomy was found, with arabic standardized estimate $=-0$. Parental expectations had a strong impact on 65% of students with family approval in career choices having an effect on 60%. Furthermore, 55% favored structured teacher-centered learning environments, which mirrors a cultural dependency on authority figures rather than free academic inquiry. Cultural values stressing collectivism and respect for authority This suggests that self-directed learning.

The results shed light on the role of cultural norms in influencing academic behavior among students in Morocco. Expectations from the family emphasize broader world or familial goals to individual interests and do not allow a meaningful establishment of an autonomous self. For instance, students follow the career paths considered to be prestigious by the family rather than their own aspiration. In addition, since teacher-centered learning is given preference, students become passive and do not rely on themselves for self-regulation. To tackle these challenges; Cultivating a state culture shift to appreciate uniqueness and supporting pedagogical approaches that encourage critical thinking and active learning.

Impact of Traditional Teacher-Student Relationships

With professors still often viewed as the supreme arbiter of classroom discussion, many Moroccan univer-

sities retain a more traditional top-down teacher-student dynamic. This cycle helps quash independent thought and initiative because students are rarely motivated to question, critique, or diverge from the predetermined syllabus. According to a survey done at several universities in Morocco:

- **40% of students** reported that they rarely engage in discussions or ask questions during lectures, feeling that their role is primarily to listen.
- **35% of students** expressed a desire for more interactive or student-centered learning approaches.
- **25% of students** reported a preference for the traditional lecture-style teaching method, which requires less engagement from students.

Socioeconomic Factors and Learning Autonomy

Although we know from research that SES has a strong correlation with students' ability to now self-directed their own learning. More affluent students also have more access to resources, technology, academic support programs, and extracurricular belonging opportunities that foster autonomous learning. However, lower-income students encounter a myriad of challenges, which may restrict learner autonomy.

Table 2: Access to Educational Resources by Socioeconomic Status

Resource	High SES Students	Middle SES Students	Low SES Students
Access to Personal Computer/Internet	85%	60%	30%
Availability of Private Tutors	70%	40%	15%
Participation in Extracurricular Learning Activities	60%	45%	20%

Table 2 highlights disparities in access to educational resources between students from various socioeconomic strata. High SES students get huge help, with 85% having a personal computer and regular internet as opposed to only 30% of low SES students. For example, 70% of high SES students received help from a private tutor while only 15% of low SES students received this kind of private help. And participation in extracurriculars essential to skill building was also higher with high SES students (60%) than low SES students (20%). These disparities underline the pivotal role of SES in determining resource accessibility and learning opportunities.

The socioeconomic divide profoundly impacts students' capacity to engage in autonomous learning. High SES students, with greater access to technology, tutoring, and extracurricular activities, are better positioned to develop critical skills for independent learning. In contrast, low SES students face compounded disadvantages, lacking both essential resources and opportunities for academic and personal growth. Addressing these inequities requires targeted interventions, such as providing free or subsidized access to technology and academic support services, to ensure that all students, regardless of SES, can fully participate in autonomous learning practices.

Table 3: Financial Challenges and Their Impact on Learning Autonomy

Financial Stress Level	High	Moderate	Low
Likelihood of Holding a Part-Time Job	75%	40%	10%
Impact on Study Time (Hours/Week)	10 hours	20 hours	30 hours

Self-Directed Learning Time (Hours/Week)	2 hours	5 hours	7 hours

Table 3 bears out negative effects of financial stress on students' study and independence. Another interesting observation was that around 75% students who were under the high financial burden were found working part-time, which resulted in only 10 hours a week for studies among these students whereas students with low financial stress spent as much as 30 hours in study. In comparison, self-directed learning for high-stress students was just 2 hours a week versus 7 hours for low-stress ones. These findings demonstrate the critical role of financial stability in enabling students to allocate sufficient time for autonomous academic pursuits.

Students from low-income backgrounds face a unique dual burden of insecurity, both financial and academic. The need to hold a part-time job for their own needs or those of the family decreases their potential for self-learning and favors instructor-led, structured education. It creates an endless cycle of financial distress constraining academia and peculiar bringing us up. This is something universities must work on, introducing financial aid, scholarship and work-study programs with a minimal financial burden.

The Intersection of Cultural Values and Socioeconomic Factors in Shaping Students' Learning Behaviors

Cultural values and socioeconomic status (SES) are interconnected in Moroccan society, as well as in many others (or at least culturally linked societies), which jointly affect students' learning behaviors and autonomy. Not only do these elements intersect but they also work together in ways that support or detract from a students' ability to learn autonomously. There is a need to elaborate how these components complicate education for the students of more advantageous backgrounds and what kind of educational experiences are imposed on those who have little, by virtue of cultural expectation.

Students from Lower-Income Backgrounds: Constrained by Socioeconomic and Cultural Pressures

Yet the barriers to accessing resources in a system already rigged against them culturally are even higher for students on less money. These students carry a double burden: they might not have the most basic tools to fully engage with their courses (such as if they do not have access to the internet, books or even a quiet place to work), while also facing cultural pressure that upholds traditional, collective family values, thus hindering their independence in academics and/or activities.

Socioeconomic Limitations

- **Financial Strain:** Many students from low-income families also face the pressure of financial insecurity, which can force them to prioritize earning money through part-time jobs or family support over their academic work. As shown in **Table 3**, students with high financial stress (often from lower SES backgrounds) report spending significantly less time on self-directed learning often just a few hours per week. With limited time and resources to devote to academic exploration, these students may find it more difficult to develop the habits of independent learning that are essential for academic success and intellectual growth.

Cultural Expectations:

- **Family Pressure:** In Morocco, family expectations have a fundamental role in any academic path of school children. Expectations in the case of students of lower-income families are relatively more pronounced. Families allow job security to prevail over academic passion for often a student who is a

breadwinner. Such reasons may include pressure to enter safe and status-oriented professions: law, medicine, or engineering, which may, in turn, suppress a student's intended field of aesthetics. External pressures may inhibit the student from freely deciding his or her future career and academic considerations.

- **Respect for Authority:** Moroccan culture values respect for authority, including teachers, elders, and parents. In schools, this often leads to students being passive in learning, meaning they do not question their professors or delve into topics beyond what is taught. For students facing financial and academic challenges, this cultural respect can make it harder for them to take initiative or look for chances to learn on their own.

Strategies for Fostering Learning Autonomy

Given the impact of cultural and socioeconomic factors on learning autonomy, several strategies could be implemented to support students in Morocco:

1. **Promote Active Learning**: Universities should shift from traditional lecture-based teaching to more interactive and student-centered approaches. This includes group discussions, case studies, and project-based learning that encourage students to take ownership of their education.
2. **Increase Access to Educational Resources**: Providing students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with access to technology, books, and academic support services will help level the playing field and enable them to engage in autonomous learning.
3. **Encourage Parental and Cultural Awareness**: Initiatives to educate parents about the importance of fostering learning autonomy could reduce the cultural pressure to prioritize conformity. Universities can also provide workshops on the value of independent learning and academic exploration.
4. **Financial Aid and Support Programs**: To reduce the financial burden on students, offering scholarships, grants, and low-interest loans can ensure that students from all socioeconomic backgrounds have equal opportunities to develop their autonomy.

Conclusion

The backgrounds of Moroccan university students, both cultural and socioeconomic, affect how well they can learn independently, which is crucial for doing well in school and learning throughout life. In Morocco, cultural norms like collectivism, respect for authority, and strong family expectations can restrict students' ability to make their own academic choices and seek out self-directed learning. Such influences emphasize the need for external approval and fitting in rather than personal discovery and independence, making it hard for students who want to control their educational paths.

Socioeconomic factors make these limitations worse by influencing what learning resources students can get. Students with low socioeconomic status encounter many obstacles, such as not having enough technology, poor academic help, and financial stress that requires them to work part-time, all of which reduces their ability to study on their own. On the other hand, students from wealthier families have better access to educational resources, private tutoring, and extra activities, allowing them to build more independent learning abilities.

To mitigate these challenges, Moroccan universities must implement targeted interventions that address both cultural and socioeconomic barriers. Promoting active and student-centered learning methodologies can help counter traditional teacher-centered practices, encouraging students to take initiative in their educational journey. Providing access to technology and academic resources for underprivileged students

can bridge the gap in resource disparities, while financial aid programs can alleviate the burden of economic stress. Additionally, awareness campaigns aimed at families can emphasize the value of learning autonomy, encouraging parents to support their children's academic independence.

By creating a supportive and equitable learning environment, Moroccan universities can empower all students, regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic background, to develop the skills necessary for independent learning. Such efforts not only enhance individual academic success but also contribute to the broader development of critical thinkers and lifelong learners who are well-prepared to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving global landscape.

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