

The Impact of Social Influences on Independent Reading of Egyptian University Students

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The purpose of this study was to explore the differences between undergraduate students' practices of reading independently according to their socioeconomic status. SES was measured by three variables namely, student residence, parents' educational level, and their economic level. Five hypotheses and three mediation models were postulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance to the impact of SES on students' motivation and their families' encouragement on independent reading. A total number of 432 students at Fayoum university were enrolled in this study. The data was analysed by Pearson correlation indicators and multiple regressions analysis. A positive correlation was measured between this encouragement and family economic level. However, the students' self-motivation wasn't affected significantly by these variables. Two of the mediating effects hypotheses were rejected, while the effect of the mediation model of parents' educational level on the relationship between students' residence and family encouragement on reading was fully supported.

Key words: *Independent Reading, Socioeconomic Status, Reading Motivation.*

Introduction

Independent reading significantly helps children, adolescents, adults, and even seniors to conduct their personal lives. This importance increases rapidly in critical periods of the life cycle based on different educational and social conditions. It has been argued that young people must read more than at any other stages of life due to digitisation requirements (Kaplan, 2008). In the educational context, the independent reading of students refers to a habit of choosing their own material to be read for general information or pleasure (Cullinan, 2000). Many researchers refer to recreational, voluntary, leisure time reading, reading outside of school, and self-selected reading, as descriptions of this type of personal motivation to choose one's

material, time, and place for reading (Krashen, 2004). In other words, it is choosing what one wants to read, and reading widely from a variety of sources, not just books (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007). The current study adopted the term "independent reading" to demonstrate the skills of reading independently as one of the required skills for university students, and essential outcomes of many educational programs in higher education. Given its purpose, independent reading offers significant benefits for cognitive flexibility, attention, and empathy (Merga, 2016). Numerous studies have also shown the positive impacts of leisure time reading, especially between university students in languages, soft skills, and creativity (Wang, 2012; Loertscher, 2017; Mareque, Creo, & Gonzalez-Sanchez, 2019).

Earlier studies analysed the impact of social conditions on independent reading habits by including wide samples and a variety of factors. Merga and Moon (2016) argued that a significant positive correlation was measured between parents of high school students' reading frequency and their attitudes toward recreational reading practices (Merga & Moon, 2016). The study suggested that parents can play a valuable role in continuing to support their children's recreational book reading into adolescence. Studies on the influences on Austrian adolescents' recreational reading show that social variables like age, gender, place of residence, and mothers' educational background are potential influences on the extent of their reading engagement. This study showed that gender and age show the strongest association, although, a sizable proportion of younger teenagers – especially girls and urban dwellers exhibited only moderate or light reading engagement (Rutherford, 2018).

In Arab regions, research on the independent reading of gulf youth showed that 70% of the study sample were influenced by their social and family activities in their unwillingness of recreational reading. Moreover, 63% reported that they were not encouraged by their communities to read (Al-Hajji, 2003). Findings of students' attitudes at the American University of Madaba (Jordan) towards independent reading showed an arithmetic average of reading rate decreased among students by 3.49. It also concluded that the biggest obstacles to independent reading are the stress of studying, negligence of the media to encourage reading, and the complicated procedures in borrowing books from the University's library (Al-Shweihat, 2016). A study on high school students in KSA showed positive impacts of using electronic forums and blogs on students' independent reading practices; their reading speed was reported to be 38% and 52% respectively (Al-Mahoos, 2009). In addition, by giving students the option to read a digital text, it allows not only the choice but also helps them to connect with common in-school and out-of-school practices, which helps students to see themselves as readers.

Social Influences on the Independent Reading Habits of Undergraduates

Many dimensions were explored to examine university students' practices towards independent reading like the impact of age, technology, parents, teachers, and friends. The significant effects of age on adolescents' affirming motivations were established in earlier studies (van Steensel, van Oostdam, & Gelderen, 2019), which argued that older students were more reticent to reading. A study on independent and digital reading habits among undergraduates in Mauritius University has shown that gender, reading motivation, and the time spent reading are significant predictors for independent reading. The study also found many factors of reading motivation among students namely, lifestyle, faculty belonging, and internet connection on students' mobile devices (Rabaud, Khan, & Rampat, 2018).

In addition to the above factors, the influence of students' socioeconomic status (SES) on their motivation to read independently was investigated by numerous studies which have shown the correlation and mediation effects between social factors and reading ability. Many studies have indicated the correlation coefficient of SES and reading ability, and a direct effect of SES on reading ability occupied a larger percentage of the total effect than the indirect effect (Chen, Kong, Gao, & Mo, 2018). While it is clear that the influence of social factors on increasing students' engagement and motivation to read is important, it is a constant struggle between many elements – such as using technology, the educational system, and family or friends' interactions. However, there are disagreements about the effectiveness of these factors - positive or negative, on reading habits.

The impact of using electronic forums or blogs on developing independent reading practices has shown a positive effect of 38 % for high school students (Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2009). Moreover, social interactions around the reading of interactive digital texts are important to naturally unfold and teaching to be responsive to student interests. In this context, the main disagreements among researchers are that the internet makes things more efficient for people by freeing up additional time for socialising and other activities. On the other hand, internet use is a potentially isolating activity that competes with, rather than complements, social time (Mitchell, 2018; Brown, 2016; Mokhtari et al. 2009).

The same controversial issue appears when we analyse the impact of family, friends, and social interactions on the efficiency and displacement of these factors on independent reading habits of students, especially in primary school. In studying the role of parents in supporting recreational book reading, Margaret Merga (2014) suggested that parents who maintain encouragement beyond their child's acquisition of independent reading skills can influence their children to become life-long readers. The findings of Klauda's review supported that many, but certainly not all, avid adolescent readers share a reading connection and discuss books or articles about mutual interests with their parents, as well as with other family members

and friends (Klauda, 2009). The main factor of this efficiency is providing a strong sense of the mutuality of reading, and a context for shared spaces, physical contact, emotional connection, intimacy, and appreciation of the worlds of others (Love & Hamston, 2003).

Conversely, these social factors have created a shift in students' allocation of time during the day; for instance, more time on their family activities equals less time on other activities. This is particularly important for economically disadvantaged students who often have to work to improve their financial conditions (Fisher, 2004). The place of residence also offers an added resource, which makes students more efficient and results in more time spent on independent reading. In this context, previous research shows the need to bridge the gaps in reading culture between different regions for developing a great reading nation (Lone, 2011).

Design of the Study

Study Questions and Aim

The main premise of the current study is that many factors affect, positively or negatively, the independent reading habits of Egyptian university students. As such, the purpose of the study is to contribute to a more complete understanding of how social influences relate to the independent reading practices of Egyptian university students. This study thus addressed the following three questions:

1. To what extent is the place of student residence (rural or urban) related to reading independently?
2. To what extent is the socioeconomic status of students related to self-motivation?
3. To what extent is parents' educational level related to students' engagement in reading?

Producers of the Study

A quantitative design was employed in this study as it is suitable for its purposes. A quantitative component provides helpful data in analysing Egyptian university students and their reading behaviours, and provides insights into social influences on, and the consequences of independent reading behaviours. The study used a questionnaire to collect data from university students at Fayoum University in Egypt. The questionnaire was divided into two affect parts: a basic information section (college, gender, place of residence, educational level of father and mother), and second section which consisted of 18 items to collate students' independent reading practices during their university life on a 4-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 - strongly disagree to 4 - strongly agree. Of the 18 items, students' own 'self-motivation' factor was compiled from 10 items (measures students' attitudes towards independent reading), and 'family encouragement' factor used 8 items (analysing family practices to support students' independent reading).

Participants

A total of 432 students from the College of Education, Fayoum University (Egypt), participated in a survey by completing a questionnaire manually and electronically. There were more female students (85.6 %) than male participants in the quantitative component of the study. This may be due to a higher percentage of female undergraduate students in the college of education in Egyptian Higher Education. Table 1 shows some characteristics of participants based on study variables:

Table 1: Sample Characterisation by Residence, Economic Level, and Parents' Educational Level

Residence	Rural N (%)	Urban N (%)		
%age of students?	314 (72.7%)	118 (27.3%)		
Economic level	Low N (%)	Middle N (%)	High N (%)	
%age of students?	20 (4.6%)	378 (87.5%)	34 (7.9%)	
Father educational level	University Level N (%)	Middle Level N (%)	Read & Write N (%)	Illiterate N (%)
%age of students?	104 (24.1%)	178 (41.2 %)	82 (19%)	68 (15.7%)
Mother educational level	University Level N (%)	Medium Level N (%)	Read & Write N (%)	Illiterate N (%)
%age of students?	60 (13.9 %)	152 (35.2 %)	122 (28.2%)	98 (22.7%)

It can be observed from Table 1 that there are ranges of educational levels of students' parents. In terms of the economic status of the students' families, the majority of them were identified as medium (87.5%). In terms of residence, 72.7% (314) lived in rural areas and 27.3% (118) live in urban cities.

Hypotheses and Method of Analysis

This study adopts an integrated approach to provide insight into the relationship between the various study variables: students' residence, economic level of students, the parents' educational level self-motivation, and social awareness of independent reading among Egyptian undergraduates. Based on the study questions and goals, this study explored the effects of social variables on independent reading practices among university students. It is

proposed that the Egyptian university students' place of residence has a positive impact on encouraging students to read independently and it mediates the relationship between other social variables. In other words, students who live in urban areas are more motivated to read independently than their peers who live in rural areas. In addition, the economic level of students' families and their parents' educational levels have the same positive effects. Consequently, the following hypotheses have been proposed for testing:

Hypothesis 1: Family encouragement to read independently is significantly related to students' place of residence.

Hypothesis 2: Self-motivation to read independently is significantly related to students' place of residence.

Hypothesis 3: Family encouragement to read independently is significantly related to the economic level of the family.

Hypothesis 4: Self-motivation to read independently is significantly related to the economic level of the family.

Accordingly, this study examines the combined effect of students' place of residence and their economic level on predicting self-motivation and family encouragement on independent reading. It also examines the mediating effects of students' residence on the above relationship. Mediating models were used to test the mediating role of student residence and parents' educational level on self-motivation and family encouragement on reading independently. Therefore, this study proposed three models of mediation according to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5: Student residence mediates the relationship between economic level and family encouragement.

Hypothesis 6: Student residence mediates the relationship between parents' educational level and self-motivation to read independently.

According to hypotheses 5, 6 and mediation models (Figures 1 and 2), there are three required criteria that have to be established in order to confirm the mediating effects of student residence and parents' educational level on self-motivation and family encouragement for independent reading habits. The first criterion is that the independent variables of hypotheses 5, 6 (economic level of student's family, and parents' educational level, path a5 and a6, respectively) should be related to student residence as a mediator. The second is that the student residence should be

related to the dependent variables of hypotheses 5, 6 (family encouragement and self-motivation of reading independently, path b5 and b6 respectively). And finally, the third criterion is that the significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables (path C'5 & C'6) will be decreased with the introduction of the mediating variable (student residence).

Hypothesis 7: Parents' educational level mediates the relationship between student residence and family encouragement on reading.

In order to test the educational level of students' parents as a mediator between student residence and family encouragement on reading - three criteria and paths have to be established for hypothesis 7 (as shown in Figure 3) using the same processes for other hypotheses.

Findings and Discussion

When analysing the data, several correlations were striking according to the study's hypotheses and based on students' responses to the questionnaire statements. Statistical analyses were performed to determine if there was a significant correlation between students' residence, family's economic level, parents' educational level, and two indicators of independent reading practices: self-motivation and family encouragement. Table 2 presents the correlation between students' residence and the average of the questionnaire items which measured self-motivation and family encouragement:

Table 2: Correlation between Students' Residence and Family Encouragement

Correlation (Pearson Correlation)			
		Family Encouragement	Self-motivation
Students Residence^(a)	Pearson Correlation	.153**	.074
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.131
	N	432	432
Correlation (T-Test)			
	Urban	Rural	
N	118	314	
Mean	19.60	18.25	
Std. Deviation	4.11	3.92	
Levene's Test			
F	1.52		

Sig	.217	
df	430	
t	3.209	
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
Mean Difference	1.37	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

(a) 1= rural , 2 = urban

The results showed that the students who live in urban areas (N= 118) were associated with their families' encouragement on independent reading M= 19.60 (SD = 4.11). In contrast, the students who live in rural areas (N= 314) were associated with a numerically smaller encouragement from their families M = 18.25 (SD = 3.92). To test the hypothesis (1 & 2) that the place of students' residence has a positive impact on encouraging students to read independently, an independent samples t-test was performed. The distribution of the students who live in urban and rural areas were sufficiently normal for the purposes of conducting a t-test (skew < 2.0; kurtosis <9). In addition, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene's F-test, F (430) =1.52, p=0.217. As can be seen in Table 2, the independent sample t-test was associated with a statistically significant effect, t (430) = 3.20, p = 0.001. Moreover, a positive correlation was measured by 0.152 between the student's residence (1=rural, 2=urban) and family encouragement, which indicates support for hypothesis 1. There was no significant correlation between the student's residence and self-motivation to independent reading (Pearson correlation factor = .073), which indicates that hypothesis 2 was rejected.

These results are consistent with findings of previous research (Lone, 2011), which analysed the reading habits of rural and urban college students of the 21st century. It concluded that the culture of reading is more developed in urban students than their rural counterparts. Also, the region-wise break up of data showed that parents of the urban students play a better role in developing reading habits of their children than the parents of rural students.

To test the correlation between the economic level of student's family and independent reading, a Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between the family income (1=low, 2=Medium, 3=High), family encouragement and self-motivation and independent reading habits. Scale scores were computed by the average of responses on questions in each variable. The mean for family encouragement indicator was 2.33 (SD = 0.50) and the mean for self-motivation was 2.75 (SD= 0.32).

As shown in Table 3, it is clear that family encouragement (r = 0.136, p=0.05) had a positive and significant relationship with the economic level of student's family, which indicates support for hypothesis 3. These results are consistent with findings by Chen et al. (2018) which

show a significant relevance between reading ability and the effects of family socioeconomic status of students (SES), which was measured by parents' education level, parents' occupational prestige, and family property (Chen et al., 2018). On the other hand, a Pearson correlation coefficient revealed no significant relationship between family income and the self-motivation of students to read independently ($r = 0.059$, $p = 0.224$), which indicates a rejection for hypothesis 4.

Table 3: Correlation between Economic Level of Student and Family Encouragement, $n=432$

		Family Encouragement	Self-motivation
Economic level of student's family	Pearson Correlation	.136**	.059
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.224

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In this context, a previous study (Gottfried, 1990) indicated that the economic status of students may influence the reading-motivation relationship and hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated that socioeconomic status differences predicted differences in reading motivation. However, as Morgan and Fuchs (2007) mentioned, Gottfried didn't assess whether their reading skill remained a significant predictor of motivation after controlling the socioeconomic status of students (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). The findings of another study pointed to a potentially important difference in students' self-reported reading and motivation scores, which shows a mild trend toward higher-income students reporting higher motivation, especially for the highest income groups for each ethnicity of American students: White, Black, and Hispanic (Whitney & Bergin, 2018). Taking into consideration that the research samples comprised of elementary or high school students, this indicates that students' age is an important factor in establishing the relationship between students' socioeconomic status and their reading practice.

Mediating Effects of Student Residence and Parents' Educational Level

As aptly put by this study on the mediation model for hypothesis 5 (Figure 1), three required criteria have been tested in order to confirm the mediating effects of student residence on family encouragement on reading independently and the economic level of their family. As shown in Table 4, the first construct of the variable (Path C5), family encouragement on reading indicated contribution to variance ($R^2 = .02$, $F(1,430) = 8.14$, $p = .005$), with the economic level of family significant at $B = .136$, $t = 2.853$, $.000 < .005$. The second criteria was tested (Path b5), and showed that student residence is related significantly ($B = .153$, $t = 3.209$, $.000 < .001$) to family encouragement on reading independently, but after conducting a multiple regression analysis with the economic level of family and student residence predicting family encouragement on reading variables, the significant relationship between the economic level

of family and family encouragement (Path C'5) was still significant at ($B = .127, t = 2.686, .000 < .008$) with the introduction of student residence as a mediator. These findings support a partial mediation of the relationship between the economic level of students and their family encouragement, but it provided evidence that hypothesis 5 was rejected.

Figure 1. Student residence as a mediator between economic level and family encouragement

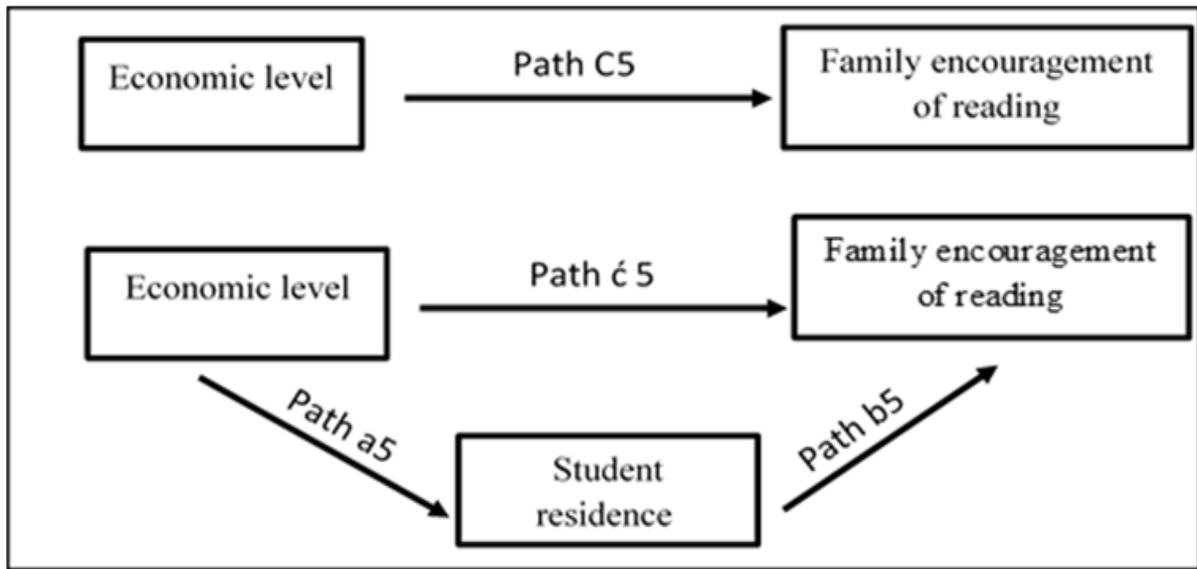


Table 4: Mediating Effects of Student Residence between Economic Level and Family Encouragement on Reading

Testing Paths (Figure 1)	β (Unstandardised)	Std. Error	95% CI	β
Path C5: DV= Family encouragement on reading				
$R^2 = 0.02, F(1,430) = 8.14, p = 0.005^*$				
IV= Economic level	1.56	0.50	0.48, 2.62	0.136
Path A5: DV= Student residence				
$R^2 = 0.004, F(1,430) = 1.63, p = 0.20$				
IV= Economic level	0.08	0.06	-0.42, 0.19	0.062
Path B5 and c'5: DV= Family encouragement on reading				
$R^2 = 0.04, F(2,429) = 8.8, p = 0.000^*$				
IV= Economic level (c'5)	1.45	0.54	0.39, 2.52	0.127
IV= Student residence(b5)	1.31	0.43	0.47, 2.15	0.145
Total (a) * (b)				0.028

As hypothesis 6 (Figure 2) uses the same criteria, self-motivation of reading indicated contribution to the explain variance ($R^2 = .01$, $F(1,430) = 4.4$, $p = .037$) with the educational level of students' parents, the relationship is significant at ($B = .101$, $t = 2.098$, $.000 < .037$). As shown in Table 5, the second criteria (Path b6) indicates that the relationship between student residence and self-motivation of reading is not related significantly ($B = .153$, $t = 3.209$, $.000 < .001$), even given that the relationship between parents' educational level and self-motivation of reading is no longer significant when student residence is controlled at ($R^2 = .012$, $F(1,430) = 2.618$, $p = .074$). Thus, the mediation role of student residence between self-motivation of students for reading independently and their parents' educational level was rejected.

Figure 2. Student residence as a mediator between parents' educational level and self-motivation

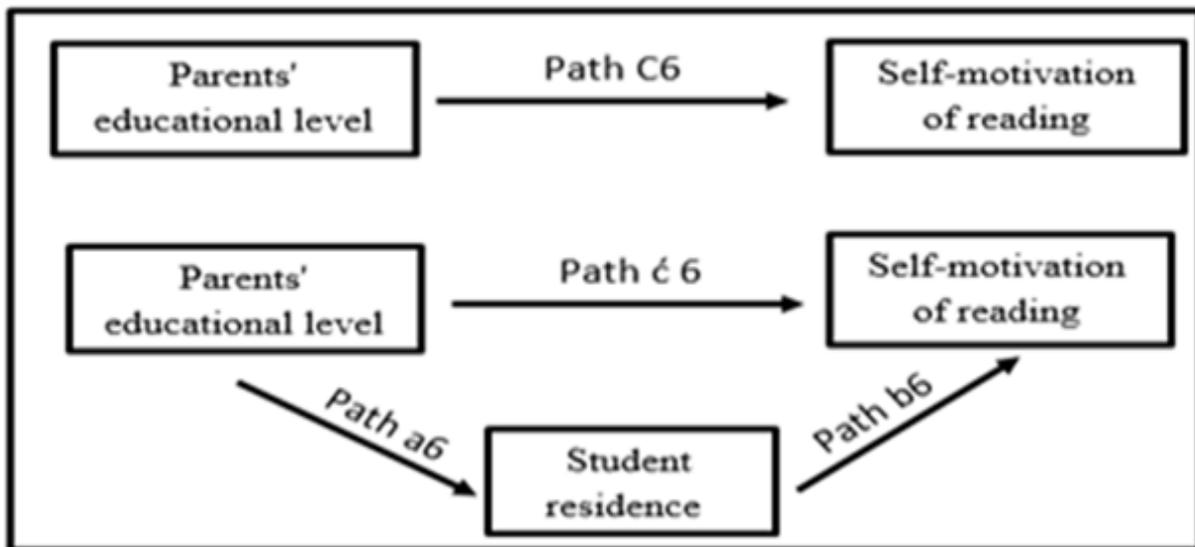


Table 5: Mediating Effects of Student Residence between Parents' Educational Level and Self-motivation of Reading

Testing Paths (Figure 2)	β (Unstandardised)	Std. Error	95% CI	β
Path C6: DV= self-motivation of reading				
$R^2 = 0.010$, $F(1,430) = 4.4$, $p = 0.037^*$				
IV= Parents' educational level	0.359	0.171	0.023, 0.696	0.101
Path A6: DV= Student residence				
$R^2 = 0.108$, $F(1,430) = 51.80$, $p = 0.000^*$				
IV= Parents' educational level	0.662	0.092	0.481, 0.843	0.328

Path B6 and c'6: DV= self-motivation of reading				
R ² = 0.012, F (2,429) =2.618, p=0.074				
IV= Parents' educational level (c'6)	0.305	0.181	-0.052, 0.661	0.085
IV= Student residence(b6)	0.335	0.366	-0.384, 1.055	0.046
Total (a) * (b)				0.003

The mediating effect of parents' educational level between students' residence and family encouragement on reading independently (Hypothesis 7) was fully supported. According to the mediation model (Figure 3) and its paths, closer scrutiny of regression was analysed to test three required criteria (refer to Table 6). The first construct of the variable (Path C7), family encouragement on reading, indicated contribution to the explain variance (R²= .023, F(1,430)= 10.30, p<0.05), with student residence (B=0.153, t=3.209, p=.001) and parents' educational level significant at B=0.292, t= 6.02 , p=.000. Moreover, the relationship between students' residence and parents' educational level was also significant at B= 0.328, t= 7.19, p=.000. A multiple regression analysis indicated that the relationship between family encouragement on reading and student residence is no longer significant when the parents' educational level became a mediator; it was decreased to insignificance at B= .057, t= 1.18, p=.239.

Figure 3. Parents' educational level as a mediator between students' residence and family encouragement

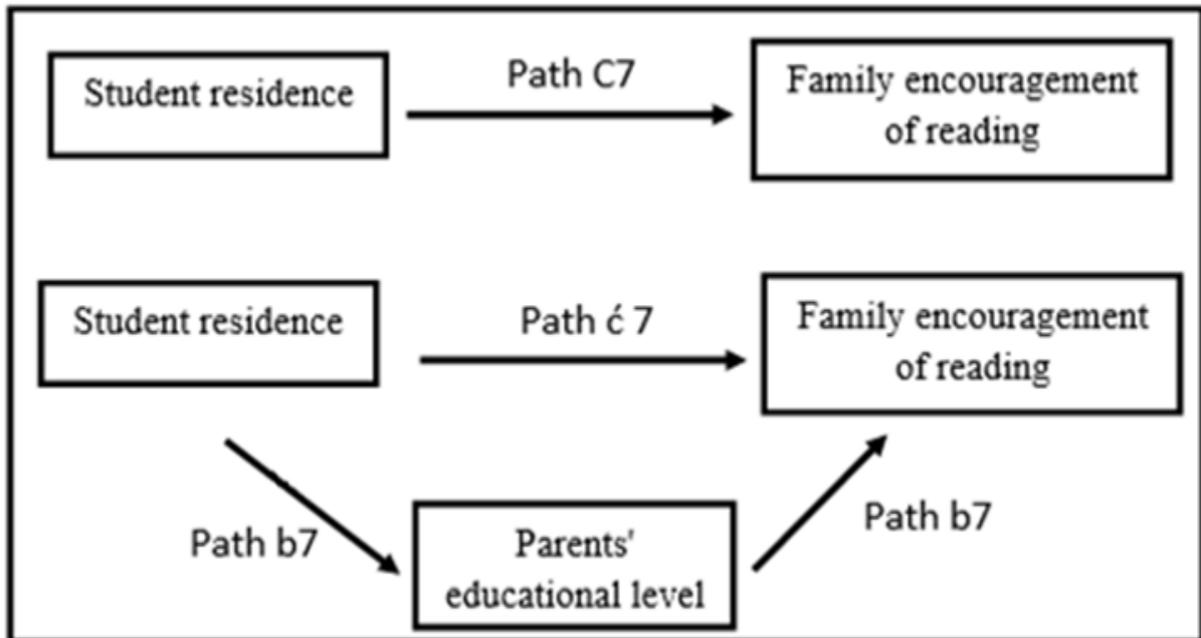


Table 6: Mediating Effects of Parents' Educational Level between Students' Residence and Family Encouragement on Reading

Testing Paths (Figure 3)	β (Unstandardised)	Std. Error	95% CI	β
Path C7: DV= Family encouragement on reading				
R ² = 0.023, F (1,430) = 10.300, p=0.001*				
IV= student residence	1.379	0.430	0.534, 2.223	0.153
Path A7: DV= Parents' educational level				
R ² =0.108, F (1,430) =51.80, p=0.000*				
IV= student residence	0.662	0.092	0.481, 0.843	0.328
Path B7 and c'7: DV= Family encouragement on reading				
R ² = 0.099, F (2,429) =23.695, p=0.000				
IV= Student residence (c'7)	0.516	0.437	-0.344, 1.375	0.057
IV= Parents' educational level (b7)	1.303	0.216	0.878, 1.728	0.292
Total (a) * (b)				0.017

These findings of the mediating effects indicated that the influence of social and economic factors is significant on family encouragements for reading independently, but it hasn't the same effect on self-motivation, especially for university students. The results are in agreement with previous research (Chen et al., 2018), which pointed out the effect of socioeconomic status not only on reading motivation, but also on reading ability for retrieving and inferencing, integrating and interpreting, and evaluating and reflecting. The results also showed that this effect was mediated by the parent-child relationship.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated the effect of socioeconomic predictors on independent reading, namely, student residence, parents' educational level and economic status. It showed that socioeconomic factors have an important effect on family encouragement of reading independently. A positive relationship was found between family encouragement and both the students' residence and family economic level. In particular, students who live in urban regions, or have high economic status, were supported by their families more than their peers who live in rural regions or have low economic status. However, these social factors weren't determinant factors when students' motivation to read independently was analysed. Three hypotheses were analysed to illustrate the mediating effects of student residence and parents'



educational level between other variables; two of these hypotheses were rejected, while the study's findings demonstrated that parents' educational level mediates the relationship between students' residence and family encouragement to reading. Understanding the influences on family encouragement on reading practices for university students is of considerable importance, given the benefits of shared spaces, emotional connection, and the sharing of concerns with parents, which reflects their educational and cultural level.

The findings also help to inform researchers about potentially important differences, between the effects of self-motivation and family encouragement on reading independently, especially for undergraduates based on their age characteristics. The study's findings could be used to foster independent reading of undergraduate students to invest in their self-motivation of reading, regardless of their socioeconomic status or their families encouragement. Moreover, this study has provided a preliminary understanding of how the educational level of parents controls the influence of students' residence on independent reading habits, which mirrors the reciprocal relationships found in previous studies between social factors and reading practice. The author acknowledges the limitations of the current study. First, the study was limited to one campus from Egyptian students, hence, the findings may not be generalisable as a whole. Second, the study employed a self-analysis of reading practices through a survey, it might not have been able to provide in-depth reading practices. Finally, the socioeconomic status of students was classified by their own responses on survey items which means it may not be a specific and accurate classification.

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