



THE ROLE OF READING IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS IN THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT¹

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Summary

This article aims to analyze the impacts of reading on academic performance, highlighting how this skill influences academic performance and the comprehensive education of students. The bibliographic research carried out based on repositories such as SciELO.org investigates how critical reading contributes to the development of essential skills, including analysis, argumentation and communication, necessary both in the academic environment and in future professional careers. The results showed that, although academic reading is important, many students face difficulties due to technical terminology and the lack of previously developed reading skills. To address these challenges, the study suggests the implementation of supportive pedagogical policies and practices, such as reading workshops, peer tutoring and support for text production, in addition to an inclusive approach that values the diversity of student profiles. Promoting reading from basic education is recommended as a means of better preparing students for higher education and the job market.

Keywords:Reading. Academics. Higher Education. Literacy and Reading Skills.

Abstract

This article aims to analyze the impacts of reading on academic performance, highlighting how this skill influences academic performance and the integral formation of students. The bibliographic research carried out based on repositories such as SciELO.org investigates how critical reading contributes to the development of essential skills, including analysis, argumentation and communication necessary, both in the academic environment and in the future professional career. The results showed that, although academic reading is important, many students face difficulties due to technical terminology and the lack of previously developed reading skills. To address these challenges, the study suggests the implementation of supportive pedagogical policies and practices, such as reading workshops, peer tutoring, and support for textual production, as well as an inclusive approach that values the diversity of student profiles. The promotion of reading from basic education is recommended as a means of better preparing students for higher education and the job market.

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1 Introduction

Reading significantly contributes to students' critical and general development, especially in terms of understanding the teaching materials used in the classroom. The learning process at university requires reading a variety of texts, both those recommended by teachers and those that are complementary. By dedicating themselves to these readings, students become familiar with the topics to be discussed in class, preparing themselves to actively participate by asking questions and contributing to the discussions. Furthermore, reading allows the development of skills that transcend the educational environment, encompassing social practices, work relationships, and interpersonal relationships.

In this context, the central problem of this research is to understand how the practice of reading affects the academic performance of university students and how the difficulties faced in understanding academic texts influence their development. Reading, which goes beyond simple decoding and textual interpretation, involves the ability to "read the world", that is, to understand the messages and codes that permeate reality. The concept of "reading the world" is based on Freirean thought, which encourages reflection on the awareness of belonging and the transformation of the individual in his or her environment.

The objective of this study is to analyze the importance of reading practice in the university environment, analyzing how this practice influences students' academic performance and identifying the main challenges faced in the process of reading academic texts. In addition, it aims to evaluate the strategies that can be used to promote reading among students and facilitate their understanding of the content.

The justification for conducting this research is the growing demand for critical reading skills in the academic environment, especially in light of technological and social transformations that affect the ways in which we interact with texts. Technological revolutions have significantly altered reading behaviors, and understanding how these changes impact the education of university students is essential to promoting more effective teaching that is adapted to new realities. Furthermore, mastery of academic reading is an essential factor not only for success in the university environment, but also for preparing students for their future professional careers, improving their analytical, argumentative, and communication skills.

According to Freire (2003), reading involves the critical analysis of reality and facing transformations in a universe marked by disparities. For him, interpreting is modifying the reality in which one is inserted, motivating the human being to stop being a simple receiver of ideas and become a transforming agent, capable of interpreting and reinventing the world in search of freedom. It is not enough to simply understand what is written or deduce linguistic symbols; it is crucial to understand how ideological dimensions shape the reality in which the individual is inserted. Furthermore, the technical language present in academic texts can make comprehension difficult and make reading more challenging.

Thus, mastering academic requirements is essential for success in university life, as it enables in-depth understanding and critical engagement with the content of the subjects, in addition to improving analytical and argumentative skills. Furthermore, mastering reading is an indispensable criterion for effective communication and success in future professional careers.

2 Methodological aspects

This article was carried out through a bibliographical research that, as mentioned by Severino (2010, p. 122), is conducted "[...] based on available records from previous studies, contained in printed documents, such as books, articles, theses, among others." It is important to emphasize that the investigation of this research took place in the SciELO.org repository.⁴ This source was selected because it is widely recognized as a tool for scientific dissemination.

Bibliographic studies or investigations play a significant role, as they enable the collection of information and theoretical concepts that have already been developed, which serve to support new research. Therefore, between July and September 2024, documents were selected from the aforementioned repository that had the following themes: "reading, academics, higher education, literacy and reading skills". Thus, when conducting the research in the repository, the initial keywords – reading, academic literacy, university – were combined, assuming the function of registration units according to the methodological approach adopted.

The research result generated 21 articles on the SciELO platform. The following were then eliminated:

⁴ Available at: <https://scielo.org/>. Accessed on: October 25, 2024.

articles that addressed only reading or literacy. In addition, texts that dealt with reading practices not related to higher education were removed. In the end, 8 articles remained that discussed only reading, academics, higher education, academic literacy, which were used as a theoretical basis in the theoretical review of this article.

3 The Practice of Reading in Higher Education

Reading is an essential activity for all students, as it provides access to a wide range of information and knowledge. In higher education, this practice is not limited to academic texts; it is essential to explore different textual genres. By reading different genres, students have the opportunity to observe different writing styles, argumentative structures and argumentation techniques.

Brazilian author Ana Maria Machado highlighted, in an interview with *The Globe*, that reading “enhances the capacity for written expression” (Machado, 2020). Thus, reading in higher education contributes not only to the acquisition of specific knowledge, but also to improving written communication, expanding vocabulary and developing critical thinking. Several authors approach this issue from different perspectives, highlighting the importance of reading for academic success.

However, Brazil has lost more than 4.6 million readers in the last four years, according to the Retratos da Leitura no Brasil survey. Between 2015 and 2019, the percentage of readers in the country fell from 56% to 52%. Non-readers – Brazilians over the age of five who have not read any book, not even partially, in the last three months – represent 48% of the population, or approximately 93 million people. The biggest drops in the percentage of readers occurred among those with higher education, which fell from 82% in 2015 to 68% in 2019, and among class A, where reading fell from 76% to 67% (Torkania, 2020).

Expanding vocabulary is essential for producing more elaborate scientific texts and for efficient communication in the university environment. By reading different texts and perspectives, academics are encouraged to reflect and question knowledge in greater depth. In an interview with *Sao Paulo Newspaper*, Brazilian author Milton Hatoum emphasizes that reading “allows us to analyze and interpret facts critically” (Hatoum, 2018). However, for academics to develop this critical capacity and develop well-founded arguments, it is essential that the habit of reading is cultivated from childhood.

According to Evaristo (2016), in *Memory Alleys*, reading is a “habit that is built through access to books from childhood”. Therefore, it is vital that educational institutions encourage the practice of reading from the earliest school years, offering access to libraries and promoting activities that stimulate this habit. Developing this behavior throughout school life is essential to ensure that students arrive at higher education with solid reading skills capable of supporting their academic and professional development.

3.1 Importance of Reading for the Academic and Professional Development of University Students

The university is a privileged space for the development of cultural, literary, linguistic and textual. However, when teaching the practice of reading in this academic context, the teacher must offer methodologies that allow for effective communication with students, both in person and virtually. It is essential that the teacher introduces topics that allow for direct interaction with students, in addition to using technological resources to assess them appropriately. In higher education, it is common to find academics who have gaps in their training and arrive at university with limited general and linguistic knowledge (Vian, 2006).

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According to Tourinho (2011), most university students in Brazil tend to underestimate the importance of reading as a source of entertainment, information and personal development, limiting themselves, to a large extent, to reading materials directly related to the subjects, such as activities, textbooks and texts recommended by teachers.

According to Cunha and Santos (2007), higher education institutions face the challenge of training students who are proficient in reading, and it is essential that everyone involved in the educational process recognizes the importance of this practice for the individual's social and cultural development (Oliveira, 2011).

Amorim and Farago (2015) point out that the lack of reading habits can lead to difficulties in understanding texts by academics, which negatively impacts both their academic trajectory

as their future professional career. The lower the student's confidence in their ability to read comprehension, the greater the difficulties in writing, resulting in a university performance below expectations (Vian, 2006).

In view of this, each teacher must seek ways to integrate various technologies and effective methods into the teaching process, expanding the means of interpersonal, group and audiovisual communication. However, it is essential that teachers establish clear communication to achieve their teaching-learning objectives, in addition to encouraging students to develop a more ambitious and engaged attitude in order to improve their learning. Diversifying teaching methods, combined with carrying out differentiated activities and assessments, makes a difference in this educational context in a broad way.

3.3 Reading and Academic Literacy in Higher Education: Challenges and possibilities in academic life

Reading and literacy skills in academic settings are one of the main challenges faced by university students, especially in a scenario like Brazil, where there is a wide variety of admission profiles. Many students who enter universities face serious difficulties in these skills.

Adapting to the academic environment and improving reading and writing activities that include critical interpretation and scientific textual production are intricate processes that require students not only to have good language skills, but also the ability to interpret, question and assimilate information in a critical and autonomous manner (Rojo, 2009).

For most students who begin college without a solid grasp of reading and literacy skills, adapting to academic practices can cause a feeling of disconnection and, in some situations, doubts about their ability to keep up with the necessary pace. Kleiman (2005) emphasizes that the difficulties faced in reading academic texts can lead to low self-esteem in an academic context, as students face challenges in meeting the demands of interpretation and textual creation required by their subjects.

The author suggests that the academic literacy process needs institutional support that offers guidance and support to students, aiming to reduce these challenges and facilitate the adaptation and integration of students into the academic environment.

Morosini (2003) highlights that when students do not have solid reading skills, they tend to create compensation strategies, such as relying on ready-made summaries or performing superficial readings, which compromises their learning and makes it difficult to develop a critical and reflective perspective on the material studied. He emphasizes that, although these adaptations may be useful in the short term, they limit the improvement of essential skills for understanding and analyzing more complex texts, which are crucial for both academic success and future professional development.

Oliveira (2010) emphasizes that reading in an academic context goes beyond simply decoding words; it requires interpretation skills and a deeper analysis of the ideas presented. The lack of these skills leads many students to avoid more complex readings, preferring alternatives that require less mental effort. According to Oliveira, this choice culminates in a restricted academic experience, where the student ends up assimilating only fragments of information, without being able to establish critical relationships between the topics covered, which impairs the quality of learning and the ability to produce elaborate academic texts.

To address these obstacles, higher education institutions in Brazil have adopted targeted pedagogical approaches to foster students' academic literacy. Initiatives such as writing workshops, reading support, and peer tutoring programs have been some of the measures implemented to help students improve the reading and writing skills necessary for their academic journey.

academic and future career (Soares, 1998).

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According to Soares, academic literacy requires continuous and targeted practice, where students can not only become accustomed to the different textual genres present in academia, but also develop a critical view in relation to texts.

For many students, initial difficulties with reading in an academic environment result in a development process in which they gradually gain more self-confidence and independence. Rojo (2009) highlights that academic literacy represents a form of intellectual socialization, where students learn to exchange meanings and interact with different points of view, essential skills for their formation as critical and competent professionals. As students receive support

To meet academic demands, many begin to adopt personal reading techniques, such as taking notes and reflective summaries, which allow them to access and understand texts more effectively and meaningfully.

However, Oliveira (2010) emphasizes the importance of developing these actions in an inclusive manner, taking into account the diversity of student profiles. According to him, promoting a fairer and more accessible education requires an academic literacy approach that takes into account students' varying levels of preparation and experiences. In this way, ensuring that all students have the chance to improve their reading and literacy skills not only reduces disparities in the university context, but also helps to develop critical and conscientious citizens.

4 Results and Discussion

This study demonstrated the importance of reading in the university context, not only as a means of acquiring knowledge, but as a fundamental practice for the development of critical and interpretative skills that impact academic performance and the student's overall education. Reading allows students to go beyond the classroom, developing essential skills for professional life and the exercise of citizenship.

However, it was found that many students face barriers that hinder their full use of academic reading, such as the technical language of the texts and the lack of consolidated reading skills, highlighted by authors such as Kleiman (2005) and Oliveira (2010). Overcoming these challenges requires, in addition to individual effort, the creation of an institutional support structure that provides continuous support to the student throughout their academic trajectory.

The research highlights the need for pedagogical policies and practices aimed at encouraging reading, with emphasis on workshops, peer tutoring and support for text production. Furthermore, it is considered essential that the approach to academic literacy be inclusive, recognizing the diversity of students' profiles and experiences and adopting practices that value this plurality.

Finally, by encouraging the practice of reading from basic education onwards, it is possible to contribute to a more solid education and prepare students to face the academic and professional demands they will encounter in the future with more confidence and autonomy.

Final Considerations

This study highlights the importance of reading in the university environment, not only as a source of knowledge, but as an essential activity for the development of critical and interpretative skills. These skills, in turn, directly influence the academic performance and comprehensive education of students. Reading allows students to expand their learning beyond the classroom, cultivating fundamental skills for their future professional career.

However, many students face obstacles that compromise their ability to fully utilize reading in an academic context, such as specialized terminology in texts and a lack of previously developed reading skills, as pointed out by authors such as Kleiman (2005) and Oliveira (2010). Overcoming these difficulties requires, in addition to individual effort, an institutional infrastructure that offers continuous support to students throughout their academic trajectory.

The study emphasizes the need for educational policies and strategies that encourage reading, highlighting the relevance of workshops, peer tutoring and support for writing. Furthermore, it is crucial that the approach to academic literacy is inclusive, considering the diverse experiences and profiles of students and adopting practices that respect and value this diversity.

By promoting reading from the earliest years of schooling, it becomes possible to build a more solid educational foundation, enabling students to face future academic and professional challenges with greater confidence and autonomy.

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