

## Women's Empowerment Through Adult Literacy: A Comparative Case Study of School-Based and Mosque-Based Literacy Programs in Béni-Mellal, Morocco

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### **Abstract:**

Literacy is seen as a means of empowerment for women who constitute most of the world's illiterates. Article XIII of the Moroccan constitution states that "all citizens shall have equal rights in seeking education" (1996). However, majority of women in Morocco are still deprived of this right and hence are less empowered to initiate full social change. Since its independence in 1956, Morocco has devoted its efforts to the development of national literacy that aims to reduce the illiteracy rate and make education accessible for both children and adults. Many reform policies and educational campaigns have been developed and undertaken by different Moroccan governments to combat illiteracy, but a major turning point in the history of adult literacy efforts in Morocco took place when His Majesty King Mohammed VI declared October 13, 2003, a National Literacy Day, and launched a large-scale literacy campaign to eradicate illiteracy. Through this initiative, literacy programs have been established to help adults acquire basic reading and writing skills. Today, two major Moroccan government entities that oversee the adult literacy programs known in Arabic as "Mahw al-Omiyya" are the National Agency for the Fight against Illiteracy (ANLCA), and the Ministry Habous and Islamic Affairs. These literacy programs target illiterate adult men and women, but women represent women make up 83% of those benefiting from these programs. Despite the work done so far to abolish illiteracy, the problem remains an alarming danger for Moroccan society.

This paper presents an empirical case study comparing a school-based literacy program and mosque-based program in the region of Béni Mellal-Khénifra in Morocco. It aims to demonstrate how these two adult literacy programs go beyond the acquisition of literacy skills to benefit positively women personal and public lives by fostering their participation in the society and in their families' social welfare, improving their self-image, increasing their mobility, and making them more engaged in the social life. These additional benefits that extend into the sphere of self-identity, self-empowerment, family dynamics and social participation are what current research in female literacy

refers to as empowering. It also intends to propose pedagogical practices and recommendations that best support literacy programs and educational achievement of women literacy learners based on the findings. The theoretical framework of this study is New Literacy Studies (NLS), which considers literacy as more than reading and writing but as a social practice and emphasizes the social meaning of literacy that is, the roles which the abilities and skills of reading and writing play in social life. This empirical case study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the motivations and reasons for adult women to enroll in literacy program?
2. In what area(s) do women use their literacy?
3. What are the impacts of literacy on women's personal, familial and social lives?
4. To what extent does literacy contribute to women empowerment?

To answer these questions, a survey questionnaire conducted in Moroccan Arabic is used for data collection. The data will be coded and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations for improvement of adult literacy programs, increasing their efficiency, and accommodating women's needs will be suggested.