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University Drop-outs and Disparities: What's the Relationship?

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Abstract: Dropping out of school has been a major concern at the Moroccan university for several years and is apparent in several university reports. 28% to 30% of students drop out in their first year. The risk factors for dropping out are numerous. The risk of dropping out of school is higher for a student from a disadvantageous social background than for those from a privileged background, with identical academic skills.

Research shows that many factors, such as anxiety, uncertainty, Lack of guidance, isolation or alienation, academic difficulties, teaching methods and the teachers' attitude are key determinants of students' disengagement from their studies. Actions have been taken by the Moroccan government to reduce this phenomenon; particularly in the form of the "Programmed'Urgence" launched by the Ministry (2008-2012), but the situation has not improved significantly.

This publication reports the results of a research conducted at the Cadi Ayyad University since 2015. The tool used to run this investigation is a questionnaire while withdrawing their baccalaureate's degree from the student affairs service, canceling their registration.

Keywords: *school drop-out; university; survey.*

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1. Introduction

The university is facing the challenge of influencing its local, national and international environment by forming an elite force capable of creating human and economic development. It is the leadership's mission at the level of education and training through research, to design and qualify human resources through knowledge. The stakes are high, since the conceptual advances have proven social repercussions. The human capital available to the labor market depends on the quality of education and the value of diplomas (Viger, 2007).

The university's performance in the implementation of the role assigned to it is tarnished by the phenomenon of dropping out. The ambition to ensure education for all has generated a massification of numbers, which in its turn, has led to a selection by failure (Demuynck, 2011), or based on social inequalities (Beaud, 2003).

Giving up or dropping out of university is a global phenomenon. It is causing an increasing concern in the academic community and organizations involved in the educational system.

The social cost of this phenomenon is very restrictive. It manifests itself in the debacle of students, the disappointment of their parents and the questioning of the entire educational system. For the person who drops out, the repercussion could be serious, as dropping out of school without a diploma drastically reduces the chances of being able to get a qualified job (Sauvé et al., 2006).

The seriousness of this phenomenon is mentioned by all the involved or concerned parties: students, researchers, educational leaders, parents, politicians, etc. However, a clear lack of data and accurate statistics is noticed. In Quebec, researchers (Tardif and Deschenaux, 2014) estimate that "drop-out rates for university studies are poorly documented".

Higher education in Morocco also suffers from dropping out and the precise studies concerning it are still non-existent.

2. Conceptual framework

The definition of a university dropout is currently precise and normative. A drop-out is a student who leaves higher education without having obtained a diploma (Demuynck and Pécresse 2011).

This definition has limits, as it does not associate the generating factors of the phenomenon, which are multiple, irregular and complex. Dropout is a polysemic and generic notion because its use covers other

phenomena such as: failure, abandonment, school curriculum, reorientation, age, gender, origin, socio-economic level, etc... (Réveillé, 2013).

According to David and Melnick-Olive (2014), dropout is not an individual fact. It is an Institutional and Structural problem of framing and education. These same authors report the non-convergence of the objectives of the individual and the institution.

Two terms are used to name the state where the student interrupts his / her studies before graduation: drop out and abandonment. If the effect of drop out is unique, its forms can be multiple. Grayson (2003) identifies several forms: the student can leave and inform the school, leave without reporting it, interrupt his studies for a year, change school or be forced to leave the institution following an institutional decision.

3. Dropping out in Numbers

The issue of dropping out draws its importance from the size of the figures put forward by different countries. The international bibliographic review is rich in data, which are often not comparable because of the variety of calculation methods, the definition of dropping out or the educational system, considering certain factors such as the age or the scholar level (Pelerin, 2014). Nevertheless, some US, Canadian and European international data were reported by Scellos in 2014 and confirm the magnitude of the problem (Scellos, 2014). Canada has a regional disparity and a difference between girls and boys. Between 2000 and 2008, scores range from 22% to 30%. In the US, the National Center for Education Statistics - NCES, shows a rate that fell from 27.2% in 1960 to 8% in 2008. As for France, between 2007 and 2009, 120.000 young people left the educational system without obtaining at least a general or an upper secondary cycle diploma (17 to 18% of the 700000 courses combined).

In Morocco, dropping out is widespread at all levels of education. It appears from primary school. Compared to other Arab countries at almost the same level, Morocco's dropout rates during primary school is extremely high, as it is second only after Mauritania (Chedati, 2004). The state of education in Morocco is debatable, complex and ambiguous. On one hand, the education dynamics of children are rising in a satisfactory fashion and without distinction based on gender. Indeed, the rate of access to school at age 6 increased from 37% in 1997/98 to 89% in 2003/2004. On the other hand, it is accompanied by a higher drop-out rate in rural areas (more than 26% in 2003) more so for girls than for boys.

What is the state of play at the Moroccan university?

The gross enrollment rate in the higher educational system has accelerated between 2001 and 2013, where the number of enrolled students has doubled. The total number of students nowadays exceeds 800 000 for a population of about 34.5 million.

However, Moroccan students dropping out of the university is a worrying phenomenon that has grown in the past decade.

The first is the increase in the number of students, especially in open-access schools, because of a voluntarist policy, launched in the late 1990s, to promote the generalization of education. The second is the pedagogical reform carried out in 2003, which consisted of the adoption of the LMD system, with what this requires in terms of changing the teaching supervision and the organization of teaching. Since then, this LMD system has evolved with respect to its construction, the study regime and the introduction of transversal modules such as language teaching, computer science and entrepreneurship. To counteract this phenomenon, measures have been adopted, in particular as part of the emergency program launched by the ministry in 2009. In this regard, tutoring that has been tested in some universities. Actions have been taken by certain groups to facilitate integration into the university for new graduates and thus reduce drop-out. Despite this, the university has not yet been able to cope with this scourge and the various actors are not sufficiently informed about the causes of this phenomenon because we still lack local data to understand it and identify the factors that determine it.

At the Semlalia Faculty of Science, an open access institution of the Cadi Ayyad University, the dropout reached an average of 33% between 2013 and 2016. Note also that this takes place mainly in the 1st cycle of the faculty since about 90% of dropouts were enrolled in the freshmen year.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research target population

The target population consists of students from the Cadi Ayyad University who dropped out of their studies academic year. In accordance with the operational definition adopted for a dropout, the target audience for this survey is students who have canceled their registration by withdrawing their bachelor's degree from the Student Affairs Department in order to leave the university; whatever the reason that pushed them to do it.

4.2. Research tool

The tool used for this survey is a five-part questionnaire consisting of closed questions, semi-closed questions and open questions.

The first part is devoted to general and socio-economic data concerning the student: the gender, the parents' profession and their level of education, the student's place of residence, the means of transportation used to get to the university, the number of years spent in high school, etc.

The second part consists of a single question about the reasons for choosing the institution (the Faculty of Science).

The third part examines the progress of studies in the faculty: the reasons and rate of absence of the student, the spaces used for personal work, the difficulties encountered, the practice of extracurricular activities, etc.

The fourth part of the questionnaire deals with the reasons for leaving the faculty: are they related to inadequate orientation, lack of information about university studies, language difficulties, scientific pre-requisites, etc.

The fifth part of the questionnaire consists of the perspectives that students plan by leaving the faculty.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Dropouts' Profiles

5.1.1. Composition of the Study Group.

The study group is made up of 208 students from the Semlalia Faculty of Science in Marrakech, of whom 43.6% are girls (see Table 1). It appears that gender has no effect since the percentage of girls among enrolled students is around 41%.

Table 1: the study group Composition

	Number	Percentage
Males	115	56.4
Females	89	43.6

They are enrolled in the Science of Physical Matter and Chemistry (SMPC), Science of Life, Earth and Universe (SVTU) and Mathematical Sciences (SMA). They were chosen randomly. The questionnaire was offered to them when they canceled their registration by withdrawing their baccalaureate's degree from Student Affairs Services.

5.1.2. High school and baccalaureate among dropouts.

The high schools' history shows that 49.52% of students obtained their baccalaureate in Marrakech, the city where the university is located. Overall, most of these students graduated from high school smoothly. In fact, 71.5% did not retain a year in high school (3 years), 17% retained once (4 years) and 11.05% retained twice and spent 5 years in high school (Figure 1).

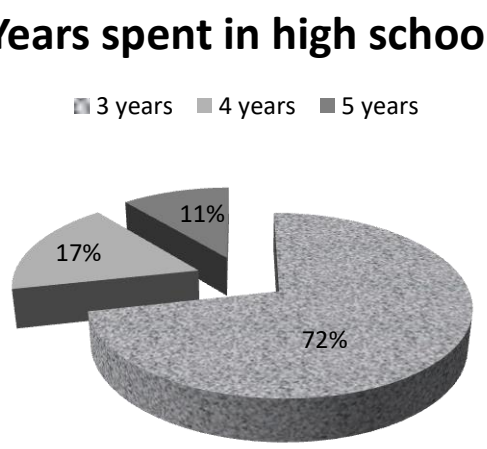


Figure 1: Number of years spent in high school

About 40% of students had a baccalaureate's degree with a score superior to 12/20 (Table 2). 60.6% didn't graduate with honors. For the most part, they are average students and their path in high school does not predict dropping out of the university.

Table2: Percentage of honors obtained at the baccalaureate level among dropout students

	Very Good	Good	Average	Acceptable
Number of students	2	13	54	106
% per honors	1.1%	7.4%	30.9%	60.6%

5.1.3. Journey at the Semlalia Faculty of Science.

• Years spent in the faculty

Table 3 shows that 50% of dropouts spent 1 year at the faculty and 24.6% spent 2 years there. This result, which shows that this phenomenon appears mainly in the first and second year of the student's career, reveals that students drop out late into their journey (after 2 and 3 years) for 37% of dropouts, of whom the majority are still enrolled in the first year. This denotes a lack of support and is a great loss for the student and the institution.

Table 3: dropout compared to the year of first registration at the faculty.

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
Number	71	35	18	10	6	2
%	**50.00%**	**24.65%**	12.68%	7.04%	4.23%	1.41%

The results do not show that the choice of the Major intervenes as a dropout factor. The dropouts are proportional to the number of enrollers per major. The SMA mathematics major, which receives some of the best students, also has a high dropout rate.

• Socio-economic conditions during the studies in university

Most surveyed students live with their families (63.5%). They had their baccalaureate in Marrakech and continued to live at home (Figure 2); or come from distant cities and live with relatives. Very few live on campus because the accommodations offered by the university are limited and living conditions are difficult. Indeed, Marrakech welcomes 60 000 students and the university campus can only accommodate about 1000 beds. To optimize the number, the administration of the university campus puts 6 students in rooms originally designed for 4.

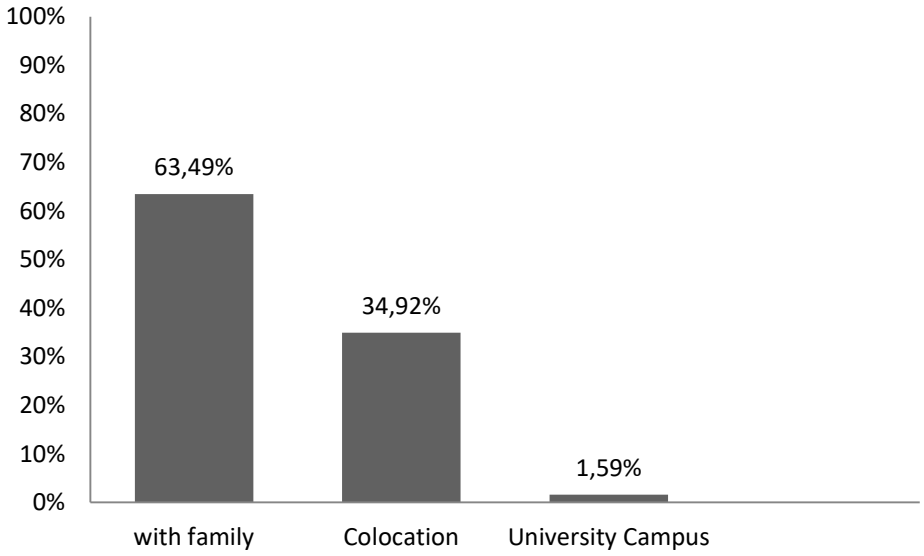


Figure 2: Housing of dropout students

Figure 3 shows that 38% of students use public transportation including the bus. As a touristic city; Marrakech has experienced a great expansion for the past ten years. But Public transportation did not follow. The map shows their concentration in the old Medina; with Very few direct lines connecting distant areas to the university.

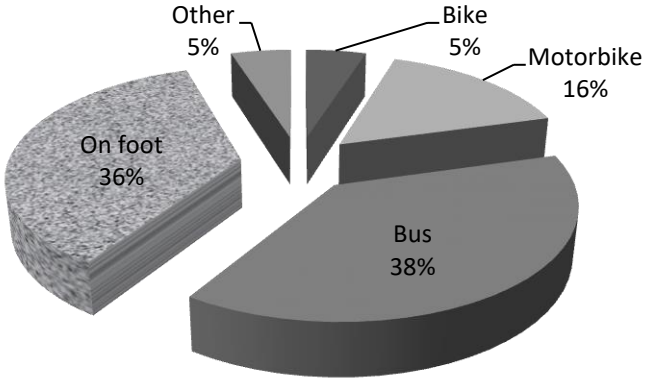


Figure 3: Means of transport

5.2. Orientation and choice of major.

Why did these students choose this institution?

The Faculty of Science is an open-access institution with no prior selection; it offers almost no job opportunities for its graduates, making it a very unattractive institution for freshmen. Figure 4 shows that 53% thought they would obtain an initial degree, to enable them to choose another institution afterwards.so the faculty of science is just a simple passage for them. Figure 4 also shows that only 11% have a professional project on the side and for 22% of dropouts, it was just a last resort, which implies that 33% do not have any personal or professional projects.

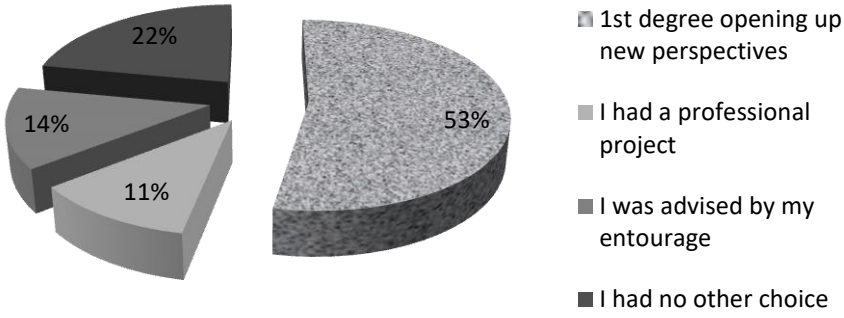


Figure 4: Reasons the students chose the Faculty of Science

At least, about 25% didn't have any perspective while enrolling the faculty. This result confirms the dropouts' lack of motivation, thing that will affect their perception of studies and their integration into the university. According to Tinto (1993), the student's integration depends on several factors including his/her perception of positively developing on an intellectual level, their conviction of the correctness of the choice of studies they made and the importance it attaches to graduation.

5.3. Students' studies course.

In this arc, we focused on absenteeism and work methodology.Table 4 shows that 52% of dropouts report being absent at more than 30% of courses. The reasons for their Absenteeism are multiple (Figure 5).

Table 4: Absenteeism

	No absence	Up to 30% of absence	More than 30% of Absence
Number	19	32	55
%	17.92%	30.19%	51.89%

Figure 5 shows the causes of students' absenteeism. In the first order, they have raised the issue of transportation (35.2%), followed by a comprehension and assimilation of the courses (19%), conflict with the professors (15.5%), the lack of motivation (14.8%) and health problems (10%). The problems caused by the failure of public transportation system only confirm the hypothesis that the city's extension does not take into account the university needs, thing that also appears in the lack of accommodations on campus, while in parallel, Marrakech has increased its accommodation capacity three-fold, from 18.696 beds in 2000 to 64.587 in 2013. Lack of transportation and accommodation on the university's campus is an organizational failure related to political choices.

The reasons of absenteeism related to learning conditions arise for almost 40% of cases. 19% have problems of comprehension and do not have the necessary prerequisites to allow them to assimilate their studies at the faculty. The discomfort related to comprehension could also arise from language related problems. In fact, the peculiarity of the educational system in Morocco is that the language of instruction of science subjects is Arabic from the first grade to the baccalaureate. At the Faculty of Science, all courses are in French.

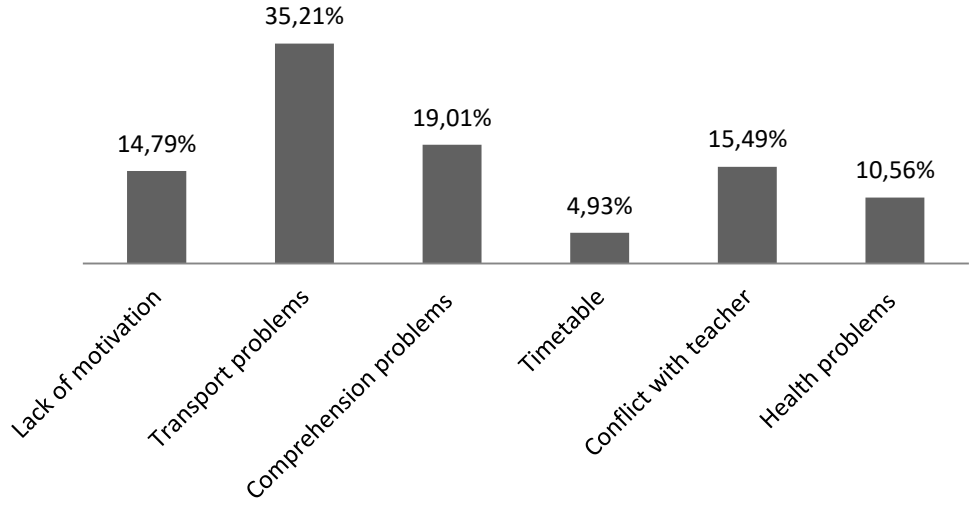


Figure 5: absenteeism reasons raised by students

15% of students have had conflicts with teachers and almost as many suffer from a lack of motivation; the consequences are inherent to the context of studies.

Most dropouts did not take advantage of the study rooms to overcome their difficulties they are facing and to carry out the personal work necessary for the assimilation of the lessons they were taught. Table 6 shows that only 12% worked at the library compared to 54% at home and 33% away from academic or domestic settings. This result also confirms the multiple origins of the difficulty of integration that could develop dropping out factors.

Table 6: Personal work Location

	Library	Home	Other
Number	16	70	43
%	12.40%	54.26%	33.33%

Sauvé et al. (2006) differentiate six types of factors that influence the student's integration (1) Personal factors (2) Learning factors (including the motivation) (3) Interpersonal factors (4) Institutional factors: type and size of the institution, number of students and difficulty of adaptation to the institutional environment (5) Domestic factors (6) environmental factors: belonging to an ethnic minority, socio-economic level, ...

In France, the dysfunctions of the educational system have been reported as factors of the drop-out phenomenon and failure in higher education (Beaupere, Chalumeau, Gury&Hugree, 2007). It is the same for the massification of higher education for certain university courses (Millet, 2012).

5.4. Dropping out Reasons

When answering the question: "Why do you leave the faculty?" 69% said that the major didn't correlate to their previous training (Figure 6), which suggests a problem of orientation or insufficient training in high school.

Also, 80% of dropouts said that they have suffered from a lack of information regarding the educational regime adopted by the institution (22%), programs (30%) and the educational system (48%) (Figure 7).

The program density isn't left behind, since 55% of dropouts find it very loaded. This partly suggests difficulties in working methodology.

55% of the instruction's language is an obstacle to enduring studies at the Faculty of Science.

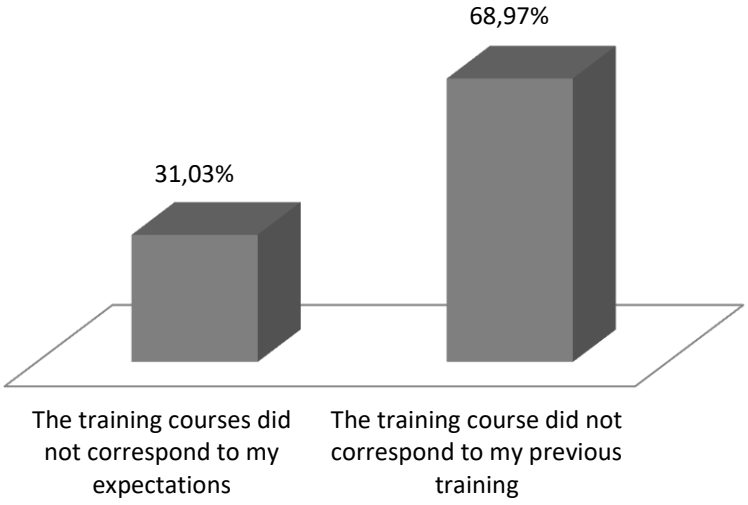


Figure 6: Orientation Issues

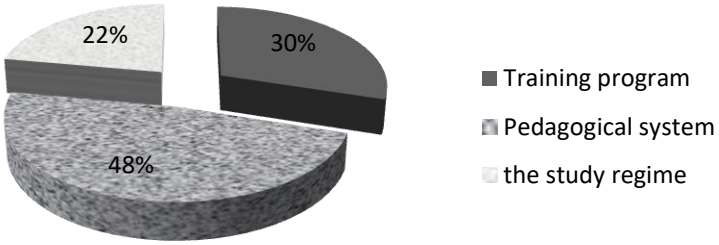


Figure 7: Information issues raised by dropouts

6. Interpretation of the results and conclusion of the research

The Moroccan university has two types of public institutions: those with an open access and those with a regulated access. High school graduates from wealthy families mostly enroll in institutions with a regulated access, if they have the required baccalaureate mark, in private institutions or integrate foreign universities. Graduates from low-income families mostly enter open-access schools. To study the drop-out phenomenon and its link to inequalities, we have chosen an open access institution. It turns out that

most dropouts are from low-income backgrounds, with fathers practicing jobs with an average income and where 91 % of the are housewives. The survey showed that the phenomenon is due to multiple and interconnected factors. The factors related to learning conditions certainly have a huge impact, however, despite all the measures taken to improve those conditions; this phenomenon was not countered properly.

In fact, the survey exhibited that the socio-economic factors are a primary reason to drop-out, which is consequently linked to inequalities. The latter have a direct and/or indirect impact on the student's career, mainly in the absence of measures to link the university to the city. For example, it turns out that the transportation problem is one of the main sources of absenteeism, which emphasizes on the assimilation difficulties encountered by students. The personal work which is essential for success is mainly done in unfitting conditions outside the university, knowing that these dropouts are mainly from modest backgrounds. The problems of integration and orientation, the linguistic difficulties noted and those related to the work methodology adopted by the university are also highlighted by social inequalities.

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