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## The Perceived Permeability of the Labor Market among Moroccan Students

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### ABSTRACT

This research discusses the results of a questionnaire survey conducted with a sample of more than 1000 students belonging to the Mohamed V University of Rabat. The study examines how students perceive the permeability of the labor market borders according to certain individual characteristics. To achieve this objective, multi-factor analyzes of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. Findings support significant associations between perceived permeability, on the one hand, and the type of establishment (open or selective access), the follow-up or not of training in Soft Skills, and the realization or not of student jobs, on the other hand. On the contrary, the sex of the student, the university level, and the follow-up or not of training in job search techniques do not maintain a relationship with perceived permeability.

### INTRODUCTION

Although they have not yet experienced it, unemployment is a problem that increasingly preoccupies the cognitive and emotional experience of students in higher education institutions. Concerns increase as the student progresses in his university course. Indeed, according to the Statistics Department of the High Commission for Planning, in 2021, the unemployment rate was around 4.6% among the category of non-graduates and 15.9% among those of average level, while it rose to 25.9% in the category with higher-level diploma. Thus, students advancing in their university course develop various representations and perceptions of the world of work, and therefore, they are led to position themselves in an anticipatory way to a specific social group.

This study refers to the contributions of the Theory of Social Identity developed by Tajfel (1971). This theory stands out for its focus on intergroup relations rather than those between individuals. In the context of work, two major social groups can be distinguished: the group of the unemployed and the group of employees. In general, social identity refers to the emotional meaning resulting from the individual's knowledge of his membership in a specific social group (Tajfel, 1981; 1986). In the quest to identify with a socially valued group (Deschamps & Devos, 1998; Herman, 1999) compared to other less socially recognized groups, individuals are thus obliged to develop (individual or collective) defense strategies in order to maintain a positive image of themselves (Jourdan & Herman, 2005).

Such strategies depend, among others, on the perceived permeability of the borders between groups. Permeability in this context refers to the perceptions of disadvantaged group members regarding accessibility to a more advantaged group (Herman & Van Ypersele, 1998). The more the student perceives that it is possible

to leave a social group (for example, the group of the unemployed) to integrate with another (for example, the group of employees), the more the borders are considered permeable. Otherwise, when the work world is seen as closed, the borders are said to be impermeable. The interest of these perceptions lies in the idea that depending on the permeability of the borders between the group of the unemployed and the employees, the degree of identification of individuals with such or such social group is determined, and consequently their perceptions about the importance given to work and their attitudes.

Thus, in the university context, various factors can intervene to determine the perceptions of the students. We could therefore ask to what extent the perceived permeability of the labor market could be influenced by some individual characteristics of students. Thus, the aim of the present article is to study the interrelationships that may exist between permeability as perceived by university students and their socio-demographic characteristics. To identify this objective, a study was conducted among students at Mohamed V University through a questionnaire. Not having conclusive information particularly in the Moroccan context, this question is treated on an exploratory basis. The reason why no hypothesis is put forward a priori.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Participants and Procedure

Data was collected towards the end of the 2022/2023 academic year from students from various institutions of Mohamed V University. The students were asked to complete a questionnaire, which was sent together to all students at their institutional addresses. To guarantee completeness in sending, we have used the University's IT department. All levels of study and all establishments

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of the University have been targeted. We have given ourselves three weeks to collect the responses. Such a procedure made it easier for us to obtain many usable questionnaires. In the end, our sample consists of 1010 students, 646 of them are women and 364 are men. Regarding their university levels, 631 of the participants are in bachelor's degree, 342 in master's degree and 37 are doctoral students. Most Mohamed V University establishments are represented in this sample: 882 of the students come from open access establishments, against 128 who come from selective access establishments.

**Measures**

Perceived permeability was measured using an index representing the average score obtained on two items adapted from Bourguignon and Herman (2005) I have the impression that I, personally, will be able to find work, and 2) For someone like me, finding a job will be very difficult. On a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "Totally disagree" to "Totally agree", these two items measure the students' perception of the degree of permeability of the boundaries of the world of work.

The internal consistency of this index, measured by a Cronbach's alpha, which is around 0,71, is satisfactory (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The individual characteristics of each student were also questioned: sex (Woman =1, Man = 2), type of establishment (open access = 1, selective access = 2), having followed training in research techniques employment (Yes = 1, No = 2), having followed a training course in Soft Skills (Yes = 1, No = 2) and the fact or not of doing student jobs (Yes = 1, No = 2).

**Statistical Analyses**

To examine the existence - or not - of significant differences in perceptions of permeability according to the above-mentioned individual characteristics, analyzes of variance were carried out. Analyzes of homogeneity of variance (the equality of variances between groups) using Levene's statistic were also needed to identify the relevant index to examine these differences.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The following table presents the results of the above analyses.

**Table 1:** Associations between permeability and the individual characteristics under study

		Average	Average difference	Homogeneity		Index F*	Sig.
				Levene Statistic	Sig.		
Sex	Women	2,72	-0,05	1,367	.243	1,129	.288
	Men	2,67					
Establishment	Open	2,67	- 0,28	7,161	.008	20,41	,000
	Selective	2,95					
Job search techniques	Yes	2,79	-0,1	0,634	.426	2,245	.134
	No	2,69					
Soft Skills Training	Yes	2,82	-0,19	0,824	.364	17,752	.000
	No	2,63					
Academic level	License	2,68	-	0,015	.98	1,236	.291
	Master	2,74					
	PhD	2,79					
The realization of student jobs	Yes	2,76	- 0,1	1,505	.220	4,932	.027
	No	2,66					

*\*In the case of the homogeneity of the variance, the values of this column designate the Fisher index, whereas when the variance is heterogeneous this one designates the Welch statistic*

The analyses of variance indicate that perceived permeability maintains significant associations with three individual characteristics, namely the type of establishment ( $F(1, 1008) = 20.41, p < 0.001$ ), the fact of having followed training in Soft Skills or not ( $F(1, 1008) = 17.752, p < 0.001$ ) and whether or not performing student jobs ( $F(1, 1008) = 4.932, p < 0.027$ ). On the other hand, non-significant differences were found in the average scores of the permeability index between the groups formed according to sex ( $F(1, 1008) = 1.129, p < 0.288$ ), the university level ( $F(2, 1007) = 1.236, p < 0.291$ ) and whether or not they had received training in job search techniques ( $F(1, 1008) = 2.245, p < 0.134$ ). The type of establishment, the follow-up or not of

a training in Soft Skills and the realization or not of student jobs seem to play a central role in understanding students' perceptions of the permeability of labor market borders. The results appear to be in line with those from previous studies confirming the existence of different student profiles in terms of their perceptions of the world of work (Bonnard, 2020; Boudrenghien *et al.* 2009; Tomlinson, 2007). Indeed, students belonging to institutions with selective access seem more confident about their diplomas and perceive the labor market as more permeable compared to their peers who attend open access institutions. Possible differences due to the duality of the higher education system can be expected, particularly when it is accepted that selective

establishments receive students who have obtained the best marks in the baccalaureate. Bonnard (2020) has shown that these differences in confidence linked to the nature of the diploma vary, moreover, according to the disciplines of the students.

Similarly, students who have already taken Soft Skills training perceive the labor market as more open than those who have never taken this type of training. Soft Skills, which are transferable skills, are now crucial resources for enhancing an individual's employability. We highlight the importance of socio-emotional skills (emotional regulation, collaboration, open-mindedness, engagement with others and performance in the task) that education systems should take into account (Abrahams *et al.*, 2019; Chernyshenko *et al.*, 2018; Kankaraš, 2017).

Finally, students who have never experienced student employment see the labor market as more closed than students who have already had this experience. These results agree with previous research in other contexts (Boudrenghien *et al.*, 2009) arguing that the latter identify more by anticipation with the group of employees. The differences relating to these last two characteristics can be explained by the fact that this student profile expects this type of training to constitute a comparative advantage insofar as it allows them to acquire the new skills required by the labor market.

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#### CONCLUSION

Based on the premises of the Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel (1981; 1986), this research aimed to identify the individual characteristics likely to predict students' perceptions of the permeability of the boundaries between the unemployed group and the employed group. The analyses show that certain characteristics are more linked to a positive perception of the possibility of integrating the labor market. These are the type of institution, the fact of having followed or not a Soft Skills training and the realization or not of student jobs.

We wish through this study to better account for the issues relating to the employability of Moroccan students. The concept of employability, although it emphasizes the active role of the student in the development of his skills, universities are expected to follow the demands of the labor market by integrating employability skills into their study programs. The results of this research open up promising perspectives. We recommend the integration of other individual characteristics, particularly those reflecting the socioeconomic environment of the student. Interventions targeting the malleability of students' perceptions of the labor market could also be useful.

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